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LOGO OR NO LOGO?

THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF BRANDING

'The old merchant used to tote about commodities; the new one creates values … He takes something that isn't worth anything – or something that isn't particularly worth anything, and he makes it worth something.'

(Ewart, in H.G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay* (1997: 169))

Building upon previous discussion of the aestheticisation of commodities, this chapter examines the semiotics of advertising, and more specifically the poetics and politics of brand, brand image and logo. Like the character in H.G. Wells's novel of 1909 we depart from the idea of the 'commodity' as material entity, instead concentrating on immaterial 'values' that become associated with the commodity through judicious marketing. Following the logic of the logo, the history of marketing starts from tangible commodities and ends with intangible values. Nike's infamous 'swoosh' is a dynamic, globalised and instantly recognisable example, a visual icon that involves other associations and connotations (see Barthes (1999) on the difference between 'denotation' and 'connotation'). For some, brands and logos help us articulate a sense of freedom through consumer choice, and express our sense of identity. The main focus here will be the functioning of the logo and the brand within a globalised sign-system. Later, the analysis of logos, brands and advertisements, along with ironic strategies of reading them, will tease out implications concerning representations of ethnicity and gender.

Particular advertisements for branded commodities show contradictory tendencies, for example, the flattening out of difference, as the same commodity becomes marketed across different cultures, and at the same time the counter-tendency, the celebration or fetishisation of racial difference. This is to proceed from Marx's commodity fetishism, discussed in the first chapter, to 'commodity racism', and the performances of authenticity and ethnic identity through the consumption and therefore display of goods.

Bringing things satisfyingly full circle, we return to those definitions of consumption, as *consumere* (to use up, destroy) and *consumare* (to bring to completion, fulfilment). Firstly, consumption as fulfilment or creation is perhaps the flipside of commodity fetishism. There is a *poetics* (the Greek word *poesis* means creation) of the brand and the brand image, seeing how logos have become iconic in status, and how they became part of the fabric of everyday experience. The poetics of aspect involves the ability to be creative, to be playful, to establish new imaginative metaphors or signs that work as intermediaries between producers and consumers. Secondly, consumption as destruction, as using up, is very much concerned with the *politics* of the brand. Consumption as an activity of everyday life largely relies on commodity fetishism, thereby masking the more troubling aspects of unequal labour relations. But it also obscures the issue of sustainability, the depletion of the Earth's resources for our own ends in a consumer society.

Structurally the chapter follows this logic, so is split accordingly between poetics and politics. 'Poetics' starts with the history of brands and logos, beginning in the nineteenth century but accelerating after the Second World War. The rise of the brand and its symbolic visual cousin the logo to internationally recognisable prominence is charted in the section 'From material manufacture to immaterial brand'. The formation of a brand or logo necessarily involves a dynamism and creativity, and this is specifically addressed. However, while the created brand is historically part of the arts of persuasion, splitting the seducers (marketing and advertising) and the seduced (consumers), we will see how increasingly sophisticated use of social research techniques in the 1950s onwards involved seducer and seduced in more of a feedback loop. 'Politics' considers brands and logos primarily as the clash of first and third worlds. Brands lie at the interface of first and third worlds in terms of commodity fetishism, which should be familiar at this stage,

but also in what McClintock (1995) terms 'commodity racism'. In recent decades, and riding on geographically specific race relations mostly concentrated in western Europe and the USA, brands and brand imaging have relied on white fetishisation of blackness, where inner-city black culture becomes the epitome of cool. But, as Klein (2001) has shown, this relies on a black fetishisation of white wealth and taste, too.

Soap features several times within the chapter, as the first branded commodity in 1884, as a marker of civilisation and the fetishisation of cleanliness as whiteness and therefore the validation of Empire, and in terms of the bonding of advertising and the media in soap operas, where daytime melodramas on radio and television featured advertisements for household soaps and cleaning products. "Soap is civilization" is the slogan of Unilever (in McClintock 1995: 207). Soap also features in the film *Fight Club* (1999), where the character Tyler Durden (who also claims: "Soap – the yardstick of civilization") manufactures soap out of human body fat – a potent symbol of the excesses of consumerism. It would be entirely possible to weave a story concerning everyday consumption of global brands and logos through soap alone. However, the case of Nike's infamous logo and brand image is too interesting a history and too pervasive an influence to ignore completely, and so will be examined as an exemplar of both the poetics and the politics of the brand image and logo.

POETICS

From material manufacture to immaterial brand: a brief history of branding

Brands migrated from household products to retail to service to corporations themselves, and the media migrated with them so that now brands have become – whether we like it or not – part of the very air we breathe.

(Olins 2004: 62)

Let us start with clarification. Advertising, branding and the logo are distinct but interrelated. Perhaps the difference between *strategy* and

tactics is useful once again, as raised by De Certeau (1984). For a corporation to deploy a longer-term strategy of building a brand or a brand image, it must utilise various tactics, short-term actions or methods. Those tactics will invariably include advertising specific products, yet the actual product range will alter over time. Or we could follow Klein: "Think of the brand as the core meaning of the modern corporation, and of the advertisement as one vehicle used to convey that meaning to the world" (2001: 5). From this, we could think of the logo as the extension of advertising, a symbol rather than a vehicle, which becomes deployed across a diverse range of media, communicating the bare minimum of information within the fastest time. A great deal of this chapter will consider the role of brands and logos as meaning-generating devices, as pushers of information, as signs and symbols working within a larger sign system. These are not neutral signs. The information is not value-free. The intent of such efforts, of course, is to alter the purchasing behaviour of the consumer, or to build brand awareness and brand loyalty, and this factor should be borne in mind. There are irrational affinities to brands, and any meaning delivery system builds upon such feelings, no longer needing to stress rational choice but attempting to evoke warmth, loyalty, friendliness and even love, as if the brand is a person (Lury 2004: 84). The personification happens literally (Aunt Jemima's pancake mix, Uncle Ben's rice) or in the abstract (Orange having "connotations of hope, fun and freedom", according to Lury (2004: 83)). Extending the analogy, the brand personification persuades, influences, even seduces. Walter Olins, a brand consultant who has worked for BT, Prudential and even the Polish government eager to rebrand its national image, argues that branding, advertising and marketing are all about "persuading, seducing and trying to manipulate people into buying products and services. In companies that seduce, the brand is the focus of corporate life" (in Sutcliffe 2003).

In order to contextualise the rise of branding and the logo, a brief history of advertising and marketing shows the increasing importance of primarily visual and symbolic forms of information delivery within the newly emerging media and its conventions. With newly audio-visual media available, the emphasis shifted from presenting the product to promoting a brand image. Photography and design in magazines, for example, allowed innovations in associations between products and qualities, helping to constitute and consolidate a distinct 'brand image',

the perception of the brand by the consumer. An early pioneer of television advertising, David Ogilvy developed a series of techniques for filming advertisements in this newly dynamic visual medium. Were it not for the brand image, he argued, most consumers would simply not be able to discern a difference between products. In his classic 1983 book *Ogilvy on Advertising*, for example, he declared that most consumers cannot tell the difference between their own, supposedly 'favourite' whiskey and the closest two competitors':

> Have they tried all three and compared the taste? Don't make me laugh. The reality is that these three brands have different images which appeal to different kinds of people. It isn't the whiskey they choose, it's the image. The brand image is ninety percent of what the distiller has to sell.

> (2003: 14)

To understand the power of the brand, the brand image and the rise of the logo, the history of advertising reflects some of the theoretical concerns of rationality and emotion, the psychological profiling of consumers, over many years. It also mutates from static printed form to more dynamic audio and – increasingly – visual form, adapting its techniques to whatever media works best. Time and again, the history of marketing and advertising since its inception in the 1870s is separated between a 'rational' stage, an 'irrational' stage, and then a synthesis of the two. In the first stage, corresponding roughly from 1870–1910, consumers were thought to be essentially rational and not easily persuaded by gimmickry. Leiss *et al.* term this stage the 'Rationalistic Image of Human Nature' (2000: 246). A product's worth was gauged by such straightforward factors as price, function, craftsmanship and durability. Any advertising of products must speak to those concerns of rational utility, with price being of paramount consideration. This first great surge of branding in the 1870s and 1880s, according to Olins, occurred through the standardisation of products and prices, and commodities began to be advertised in newspapers for the urban working classes. William Hesketh Lever saw the standard of living in England rise to the extent that eggs and butter were regularly bought. But soap was sold as an undifferentiated commodity in inconsistent grey bars. In 1874, Lever launched Lever's Pure Honey soap, and soon Sunlight, as

separately packaged, consistent and branded products (Olins 2004: 53). By the 1890s, the Coca-Cola Company had become the biggest single advertiser in the US, and its advertising had changed tack. From being one of many patent medicines that appealed to the public's need for health tonics, Coca-Cola became simply a refreshing drink (Olins 2004: 50). The second phase, from 1910 to 1930, Leiss *et al.* term as the 'Irrational Conception of Human Nature' (2000: 247). Consumers were seen to be more irrational than rational, and so techniques were used to appeal to nonrational impulses rather than rational considerations:

> Advertising operated by suggestion, pictures, attention-gathering stimuli, and playing on human sympathy to persuade the consumer to buy the product. Campaigns were based on 'appeals' and imputed motives, and sales would depend on how well the advertiser could take advantage of peoples' competitiveness, shame, desire for approval or need for reward for achievement.
>
> (2000: 247)

The third stage began with the Great Depression in the 1920s onwards. It corresponds with the rise of the behavioural sciences, including marketing and social research, when Dr Gallup from Northwestern University in Chicago was recruited to use scientific methods to gather information about consumers. This stage is characterised as the synthesis of the previous two stages, the rational and irrational views of human nature, being merged and modified according to the psychology of the time (Leiss *et al.* 2000: 247). As Curti explains, this also involved the recognition of emotional responses to symbols, as advertising learnt from psychologists "that whatever decision we make, however purely rational it may seem, is deeply influenced by emotional forces, conscious, subconscious or unconscious. Of special importance was the increasing recognition of symbols in invoking emotional responses" (1967, in Leiss *et al.* 2000: 247). From 1925–1945 especially, the direct address to the consumer through a rational appeal to the qualities of the object or its uses shifted towards "non-rational or symbolic grounding of consumption based on the notion of appeals or motives" (Leiss *et al.* 2000: 250). As such, products were presented as 'resonating' with qualities desired by consumers such as status, glamour, reduction of anxiety and a happy family unit. Within this symbolic stage, depictions of ficti-

tious families advertising products in newspapers appeared, and radio soap operas commenced with 'The Smith Family' in 1925 (Swasy 1994: 58). These episodic dramas had advertisements targeted to housewives, mostly for soap powders and cleaning products, consolidating associations and building brand image, and referring to a social context for consumption rather than the pure functionality of the product. At the same time, domestic appliance manufacturers were beginning to sell products, and were beginning to adopt the branding techniques that had worked so well for household consumables (or Fast-Moving Consumer Goods, in marketingspeak).

From 1945 to 1965, Leiss *et al.* identify a tendency of 'Personalization' in marketing strategy and advertising styles, revolving "around the idea of a prototypical mass consumer accessible through television, the quintessential mass medium, and characterized by a limited set of traits (interest in convenience, fascination with technology and science, desire for glamour)" (2000: 251). This prototypical mass consumer is little more than an easily recognised stereotype in current advertising, an observation which shows two things. Firstly, how advertising constructs the consumer in recognisable or stereotypical ways, as valid after 1945 as now. The forms of address within advertisements have not changed, since we often recognise appeals to glamour or convenience in current advertising. Secondly, how these forms of address are not continually reinvented according to the medium, but are present in various forms despite the possibilities of new media and the differentiation of the population. Computers are pitched now to those with an interest in new technologies, and detergents are still pitched predominantly to housewives, whether in print, on the radio, on television, or on the internet. New forms of address and innovative uses of media do occur, of course, with the ability to target groups of consumers more selectively (so-called "market segmentation", occurring from 1965–1985 according to Leiss *et al.* (2000: 251)). But the fact that stereotypical constructions of mass consumers are recognisable even now means they still persist throughout different media forms. The traces of the past history of advertising, in other words, are present in contemporary forms.

According to Olins, there was an explosion of branding in the 1970s, and branding moved from mostly household products to become a much larger commercial and cultural phenomenon (2004: 63), and in

the 1990s branding was applicable to services as well as tangible commodities, so that Ford are able to make more profit on financing arrangements than on the cars themselves (Lury 2004: 3). But the proliferation of branding and the rise in market research from the 1970s onwards started to have negative consequences. Consumers started to realise that increasing use of scientific consumer research and the broad-based demographic targeting of advertising was too blunt a tool, and marketing companies realised some immunity amongst consumers was developing. From this realisation we can broadly identify another phase, based around much more individually defined affinities and aspirations. For example, Jim Schroer, executive marketing director at Ford, summarises this shift from broad-brush *demographics* to more individually focused *psychographics*: "It's smarter to think about emotions and attitudes, which all go under the term 'psychographics'—those things that can transcend demographic groups" (in Rushkoff 2000: 177). This involves an appeal to consumers' images of themselves. Psychographics are based on more qualitative than quantitative methods of researching consumer behaviour, trying to understand the causal links between feelings, self-image and purchases. Previously broad-brush demographics, racial or gendered stereotypes were ditched, and more personality-based values and aspirations were singled out. Brand image starts to explore more emotional themes, and so we will speak of the 'passionate consumer' later in the chapter. These psychographic tendencies are certainly successful, feeding on the status anxiety that the endless pursuit of distinction and appeals to self-image engender, and will be explored in the following section.

The brand image

With changes in the spaces of consumption and therefore the transformation of the shopping experience (discussed in Chapter 7), traditional shopkeepers were no longer necessary. Measuring out bulk commodities like rice and sugar, kept in vats that were potentially unhygienic and often adulterated in order to eke out their profits, the role of friendly shopkeeper was increasingly replaced by packaging. Rachel Bowlby describes the rise of packaging and elementary marketing as the replacement of the shopkeeper by the "silent salesman" in the 1920s and

1930s. Unlike the human shopkeeper, "No packet ever turned to the potential buyer with a smile of welcome, genuine or otherwise; but at the same time, nothing prevents a buyer from seeing a package as having a nice personality" (2000: 40–41). The transference of personality from human to packaging is an entry point into brands, as the nonhuman interface between producer and consumer:

> Familiar personalities such as Dr. Brown, Uncle Ben, Aunt Jemima, and old Grand-Dad came to replace the shopkeeper, who was traditionally measuring bulk foods for customers and acting as an advocate for products … a nationwide vocabulary for brand names replaced the small local shopkeeper as the interface between consumer and product.
>
> (Lupton and Abbott Miller, in Klein 2001: 6)

The rise of the global brand connects with what has been discussed in previous chapters: our ideas about identity, taste and lifestyle. Any analysis of consumer *choice* also entails connecting up with the arrival of the 'brand', and the consumer's ability to read the brand image. Mass-produced items such as biscuits, rice or bread needed to have a unique identity, to stand out for the consumer. In England in 1884, soap was sold for the first time as a packaged commodity and marketed as distinctive through the use of signatures or brands such as Pears or Monkey Brand (McClintock 1995: 211). Similarly, a generic product like rice becomes Uncle Ben's Rice in the 1940s. The white president of the company that was to become Uncle Ben's Converted Rice placed the friendly face of a black farmer from Houston, known for the quality of his rice crops, on the packaging (Kern-Foxworth 1994: 49). This helped to communicate a sense of homeliness, friendliness, and non-threatening familiarity to the middle-class shopper. As identified above, the building of brand awareness arose by cultivating associations between the brand (Uncle Ben's, Aunt Jemima) and intangible values (homeliness, friendliness). But racism is never far away, as Kern-Foxworth shows, since the appellation 'Uncle' or 'Aunt' in the southern United States was used for older enslaved peoples, who were denied use of their courtesy titles. Some more implications of commodity racism will be examined in the section on 'Politics', below.

Proceeding from the personalisation of the goods through packaging, marketing techniques soon caught on to the way that particular prod-

ucts could give expression to consumers' self-perception of personality. In much the same way as the narrator in *Fight Club* asks, "What kind of plates define me as a person?" (see Chapter 2), different makes and models of products like cars show a different notion of 'personalisation'. Egocentric and based on one's own perceived qualities, certain brands of commodities are seen as giving voice or expression, helping the consumer to define themselves by their relation to objects:

> The conservative, in choosing and using a car, wishes to convey such ideas as dignity, reserve, maturity, seriousness … Another definite series of automotive personalities is selected by the people wanting to make known their middle-of-the-road moderation, their being fashionable … Further along the range of personalities are the innovators and ultramoderns.
>
> (Martinau, in Baudrillard 2000: 235)

Martinau was writing in 1957, and there is something quaint and nostalgic in the construction of the consumer as a result. Yet the picture remains instantly recognisable, since stereotype remains a recurrent form of addressing, and seeking recognition from, the consumer, as noted in the previous section. Compare this with a recent book on brands, where the real competition between brands such as BMW, Audi and Mercedes is "about emotion as much as function", according to Olins:

> All three brands are good, they all perform well, although they have rather different personalities, and model for model cost about the same. In practical terms there isn't that much to choose between them, although they do feel a bit different from each other when you drive them. But it isn't so much how the cars perform, because the differences in performance are marginal although not insignificant; it's what they stand for that increasingly matters … Even in [macho car magazines] the brand is recognized as an extension of the individual's identity. Which car suits my image best?
>
> (2004: 38)

These comments echo Ogilvy's on three types of whiskey written almost twenty years earlier. In an early essay concerning consumption and signification, Baudrillard's concern was to ask if the "object/advertising system",

the system of consumer goods and their marketing, constituted a new 'language' as such. His answer is negative; it is not technically a language but a system of classification, a "gamut of distinguishing criteria more or less arbitrarily indexed on a gamut of stereotyped personalities" (2000: 235). That is, the recognition of certain brands of products helps to reinforce stereotypes, an assurance of one's social position or status based on almost arbitrary criteria. While Mercedes-Benz is more self-assuredly conservative than BMW, for example, in fact these are merely markers or signs that became fixed at some historical juncture, and from thenceforth simply bolster stereotypes and form self-selective status groups that share similar tastes and affinities. Baudrillard's concern in the essay is not with the way each commodity is actually used or appropriated, but is almost structurally determined by the object/advertising system which throws up false needs and satisfactions, and which settles categories of consumers and particular objects into these status groups. The commodity has become so abstract that there only remains a set of signs, and the 'needs' we express through the marketplace are "simply a way of conceptualising our participation in the symbolic system", as Heath and Potter (2005: 107) summarise. Comparable to Bourdieu, therefore, Baudrillard's Marxist influence is evident, and the centrality of a deep structure entails a fairly reductive analysis of consumption. Nevertheless, there are two aspects of his analysis that are worthy of consideration here. Firstly, the emphasis on the sign-system, so that the 'brand' as a sign first raises the possibility of consumption as a potential 'language'. Even if the language analogy is negated in favour of a hierarchical gamut of objects and commodities, the semiotic content of advertising remains considerable, so that

> The concept of 'brand,' the principal concept of advertising, summarizes well the possibilities of a 'language' of consumption. All products (except perishable foods) are offered today as a specific acronym: each product 'worthy of the name' has a brand name (which at times is substituted for the thing itself: Frigidaire or Xerox). The function of the brand name is to signal the product; its secondary function is to mobilize connotations of affect.
>
> (2000: 236)

Secondly, and corresponding to Baudrillard's secondary function of the brand name, the "connotations of affect", the ability to engender feelings,

affections and loyalties to particular brands is part of an ongoing relationship with the consumer that one-off transactions cannot have. Brand loyalty is the cultivation of emotional attachments not simply to particular commodities or objects but to a known and familiar brand, so that the product range may regularly alter or be updated, while the affective link remains. A double articulation, of sign (signal, image) and affect (emotional content, reaction), the most valuable brands evoke strong feelings as a coordinated assemblage. For example, the word 'Orange' and its conjunction with the particular shade of orange used for the mobile telephone company is supposedly "warm and friendly as opposed to the cold, blue tones of [other] telecommunication companies and banks", according to a Wolff Olins agency executive (in Lury 2004: 84). If the agency does its job well, it is the service provider, via the interface of the brand, with whom we enter into an affective relationship, and not the particular phone or manufacturer.

The conjunction of signal and affect in this way forms an elementary group of word-objects based on certain psychological factors; it is a "basic lexicon, which covers walls and haunts consciences", according to Baudrillard, familiar to us now through part-words, trademarks, logos sprawling onto billboards, television, magazines, other peoples' apparel and even videogames. A lexicon is a group of words, not a fully formed language. Utterances in brand-lexicon or 'logoese' will be broken, stuttered, incomplete; like children, based on repetition, or the mentally troubled character in Peter Schaffer's play *Equus* (filmed in 1977), compelled to repeat advertising jingles and half-nonsense phrases. Or, as Baudrillard puts it,

> It is an erratic lexicon where one brand devours the other, each living for its own endless repetition. This is undoubtedly the most impoverished of languages: full of signification and empty meaning. It is a language of signals. And the 'loyalty' to a brand name is nothing more than the conditioned reflex of a controlled affect.
>
> (2000: 236)

Here we depart from Baudrillard, as there are overtones of manipulation and the Frankfurt School's admonishing attitude to 'false needs' (see Chapter 1), or the debate (in Chapter 6) concerning consumers as knowing or duped, sucker or savvy. Instead, over the following few sections, the cultivation of a brand image is examined through the focus just raised of

'sign' and 'affect': firstly, through building up associations with the brand (often affective); and secondly, through the design and implementation of a logo (a sign or symbol). We will address these in reverse order.

The logo: icon and iconicity

The icon is a simple sign, logo or visual depiction that represents a whole story, an experience or even a whole way of seeing. We are familiar with icons for computer operating systems, but icons were originally small religious paintings that were displayed in churches or cathedrals, and within a small pictorial space they represented a larger story from the Bible. Thus, a more complex context of interpretation is necessary for the small visual depiction to make sense. The art historian Erwin Panofsky termed the linking of artistic motifs with themes, concepts or conventional meaning "iconography". But another level of analysis exists, since the conventions or themes must emerge from somewhere. The intrinsic meaning or content of the work was apprehended through "iconology", which looks at the deeper cultural context (Panofsky 1970: 40ff.). So we might think of this when looking at logos that brands employ, for there is an instant recognisability that logos communicate, based on learned contexts, which because of their reduction to reproducible image slip easily through global media networks, proliferating relentlessly. This is complicated by the diverse channels through which the brand is communicated. For example, with Nike there is more than one mark that makes up its logo:

>   the graphic marks 'Swoosh' (the familiar tick image) and 'Jumpman' (Michael Jordan silhouette in jumping pose)
>   the words 'Nike' and 'Swoosh'
>   associated words and acronyms including Just Do It, Total Body Conditioning, Zoom-Air Conditioning, P.L.A.Y., NIKEF.I.T., etc.

THE *LOGOS* OF LOGO

The word 'logo' is derived from the Greek word meaning 'reason' or 'word', and hence 'logic'. So what is the reasoning behind the logo? What explains its power and immediacy? Less about the words as such,

it is increasingly about typography (the instantly recognisable fonts that The Gap or Microsoft use, for example) or pure image, pure sign, the mark (Nike's infamous Swoosh). Like Simmel's notion of neurasthenia, the increasing speed of perception within urban modernity (see Chapter 2), the immediacy of the logo's recognition similarly depends on the increasing speed of perception, its ability to be mobilised into different media (billboards, newspapers, television) and hence achieve ubiquity. "Each mark operates in multiple registers, moving in diverse media, and directing the movements of the bodies of both producers and consumers", says Lury (1999: 499–500). Its ability to migrate almost virally across diverse media and to proliferate so successfully is partly due to the speed of perception that the visual, and iconicity, allows. When browsing in a supermarket, picking out Uncle Ben's beaming, friendly face on packets of easy-cook rice is easier than reading captions or explanations. For pure economy of expression, Nike's Swoosh is hard to beat – endlessly reproducible in whatever media, yet instantly recognisable. Interestingly, the history of Nike's logo goes through progressive abstraction, starting with the tick and various combinations of lettering, and ending up purely with the tick. This simplified Swoosh – the chunky tick – was apparently recognisable enough to denote the brand (Goldman and Papson 1998: 17). The immediacy of nonverbal communication is enhanced, and interpretations are nondiscursive, so there is no need for textual explanation. Instead, the economy of expression is admirable, and its effectiveness transpires from immediate visual interpretation and subsequent brand recognition. Lury's interpretations of the Nike logos cut right into this emphasis on visuality:

> This use of the visual is especially important because so much of peoples' use of things is nonverbal, bodily, habitual, unreflective.
>
> (Lury 1999: 500)

Thus, part of the poetics of the logo is this ability to plug into the almost primal components of affective, bodily perception. The Swoosh graphic's ability to connote movement and dynamicism instantly and across cultures, through whichever media, is premised on a person's "bodily, affective memory and the cultural history of the perceptual mechanics of motion" (Lury 1999: 500). This is the other type of brand 'image', where the logo as visual component, especially in the case of the

Swoosh, draws on the notion of "image in general", as "mobile material, as universal variation, the identity of matter with movement and light" (Lury 2004: 75). The Swoosh does not represent anything as much as connotes or implies movement and dynamicism, and because of its brand image, therefore those other Nike values of competitiveness, determination and so on. Similarly, the silhouetted depiction of Michael Jordan in the Jumpman logo, like the Swoosh, connotes the idea of dynamism, competitiveness: "As a symbol, the Jumpman signals not a specific movement but imaginary movement, movement in abstraction" (Lury 1999: 516). These symbolic values also hold for Nike's competitor Reebok, whose logo is known as the 'vector' (Goldman and Papson 1998: 18) – also a movement-image.

LOGOPHILIA: PASSIONATE CONSUMERS

By 18 months babies can recognise logos […] By two they ask for products by their brand name. During their nursery-school years, children will request an average of 25 products a day. By the time they enter primary school, the average child can identify 200 logos and children between the ages of six and twelve spend more time shopping than reading, attending youth groups, playing outdoors or spending time in household conversation.

(Schor, in Bowditch 2005: 21)

Logos and branding illustrate another consumer paradox (see also Miles 1998). We wish to accommodate brands and buy into the system, with anxieties that drive us to show people that we are a smart Lexus person with inscrutable good taste, or a happy, friendly Disney person. But simultaneously we have a longing for the 'real', for the 'authentic', for the expression of individuality, our 'true' selves. The two are sometimes, but not always, reconcilable. In effect, we are sufferers of *logophilia*, defined as the irrational love of logos or brands, and we have difficulty coming to terms with it. *Elle* magazine described logophilia as "I am who I wear" (in Boyle 2004: 19). The viral proliferation of logos and brands into whatever spaces are available, in advertising, media spaces, and increasingly more public spaces like churches, streets and schools, is an attempt to make us all succumb to logophilia.

A worrying aspect of marketing techniques based on emotional appeal and status anxiety designed for adults, who base their brand choices on 'taste' and 'distinction' (Bourdieu's (1984) terms, examined in Chapter 2), is their extension to younger groups of consumers. In her book *Born to Buy*, Juliet Schor argues that 'tweens' and teens are explicitly targeted by advertisers and have emerged as "the most brand-orientated, consumer-involved, and materialistic generation in history" (in Bowditch 2005: 21). Partly this is due to a phenomenon she terms "age compression", where adults, teenagers and tweens can all be marketed various 'youth' products (see Chapter 6). By the end of her sociological study on advertisers' targeting of children she concluded that: "Involvement in consumer culture causes dysfunction in the forms of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and psychosomatic complaints" (quoted in Bowditch 2005: 21). One component of bullying in schools is the fiercely competitive social groupings based on particular branded clothing, with a sense of rejection and exclusion if those brands are not displayed. This is the flipside of the cosy sense of community cultivated by brand image, since those who cannot display the requisite labels are not admitted into the fold. In a BBC *Panorama* documentary ('Meet the Tweens', 21 November 2004), one tweenager confessed to being uncomfortable wearing non-branded clothing ('Nicky no-names') and feared being made unpopular and even bullied as a result. Asked if she would even be friends with someone who wore non-branded clothing, she said: "I'd still be their friend, but I wouldn't hang around with them as much because you're just going to get bullied with them." Further negative aspects of branding will be examined in the 'Politics' section, below.

ilove iPod The irrational desire for particular brands, and the perceived necessity to display logos that best define us within a social grouping, certainly has alarming implications. But attachment, loyalty and an ongoing relationship to particular brands might also be symptomatic of what Brady *et al.*, in an article ranking the 100 most valued brands for *Business Week*, abstracted into a new phenomenon: the information-savvy "passionate consumer" (2004: 64). In fact, one of the words that recurs throughout this chapter and much of the literature on brands is "irrational" or "nonrational". Saatchi and Saatchi executive Kevin Roberts, whose book *Lovemarks* celebrates this irra-

tionality, argues that successful brands inspire consumers who are "loyal beyond reason" (2004: 123). He thereby stresses the emotional connection that brands may have, and suggests the next stage after trademarks is 'lovemarks'. But brands have often inspired irrational feelings of attachment or loyalty, as we have seen. If logophilia is an irrational love of logos and branded commodities, the feelings can go either way, either love or hate. One example that both Brady *et al.* (2004) and Roberts (2004) identify is the case of Apple, whose computers have offered a real alternative to Microsoft. From a design and usability perspective, Apple computers have long attracted fierce loyalty amongst consumers. The release of the iPod, a masterpiece of design in terms of looks, packaging and simplicity of operation, has boosted Apple's share price and influenced the design of other consumer electronics. But when an avid Apple devotee and iPod owner found that the battery was irreplaceable and lasted only eighteen months, he set up a protest website with his brother and made a short film. Nevertheless, the protest was an "act of love" (Brady *et al.* 2004: 64). This example demonstrates a number of things. Firstly, the ongoing emotional connection that consumers have with brands, clearly identified as inspiring the "passionate consumer" or "loyalty beyond reason". Secondly, that brands are vulnerable and subject to harsh scrutiny by consumers, who can break a previously solid brand, and can flip logophilia into logophobia. Thirdly, access to greater networks of information concerning consumer products entails consumers are not just savvy bargain-hunters but potential whistle-blowers or critics of brands. Consumers become not just media literate but "market literate", able to position their own consumption in terms of marketing practices (Lury 2004: 43). With an ironic twist, both protest website and film were made with Apple computers.

ASSOCIATIONS

Celia Lury elsewhere terms the cultivation of the logo a "specular/speculative device" which magnifies sets of associations, personalising the product and therefore cementing the affective relations between the brand and consumers (2004: 12). Accordingly, it is through the cultivation of associations that brand positioning – the placement of the

logo, its management in various media – is effected. This is how brand image arises. The Swoosh logo was initially received poorly by CEO Phil Knight, and was devoid of meaning. But the Swoosh *acquired* meaning purely through repeated associations with Michael Jordan (Goldman and Papson 1998: 17). Like a halo effect, the Swoosh attained its meaning through pure brand positioning, repeated associations with other culturally meaningful symbols and situations. Thus the Nike brand image melds an empty logo with the personality of Michael Jordan, and consequently has the association of sports, determination and competitiveness.

Another example is the growth of Starbucks, whose CEO Howard Schulz built a global brand from a small chain of coffee shops, transforming coffee "from a commodity ('something to be bagged and sent home with the groceries') into a branded offering that consumers associated with (consistent) quality, service and community" (quoted in Lury 2004: 28). What is offered through such associations is, according to a Starbucks annual report, "coffee … community … camaraderie … connection" (in Klein 2001: 135). Of course, what I have earlier described as the Starbucks Effect™ in Chapter 3 is not simply down to the cultivation of associations, but also the result of aggressive business practices and the controversial method of 'clustering' new franchises around already existing independent coffee shops (Klein 2001: 135ff.).

Marx discussed the commodity fetish as the erasure or forgetting of the manufacturing process, the material properties of a commodity and its history, in order to make it appear magically shiny and new. We can make a similar argument about the recognisability of and responses to the brand (e.g. Nike), the brand image and the logo (e.g. Swoosh). These similarly erase the histories of the production and have a magical, almost totemic quality. The *materiality* of production – that is, the actual material and its shaping into commodities like shoes, plus the conditions of production (factories, sweatshops, tax breaks), plus the relations between workers and employers and the state-sponsored, legally empowered institutions that make this possible – are all obscured and become *immaterial* as the brand becomes more prominent. Lury shows that "the brand is now one of the most significant ways in which the objective properties of things are constituted" (1999: 499).

POLITICS

'When deep space exploitation ramps up, it will be corporations that name everything. The IBM Stellar Sphere. The Philip Morris Galaxy. Planet Starbucks.'

(Narrator, *Fight Club*, 1999)

It is important to remember that, just like the fact that consumption is simultaneously a creating or fulfilment *at the same time* that it is destroying or using up, the issues of the poetics and the ethics of consumption are intrinsically related. The bigger the brand, the more it is recognised on a global scale, the more creative it has to be to ride the whims and desires of consumers in capitalist society, plugging into diverse areas of interest and being visible in a number of different media realms. And as the brand diversifies, becomes spread into so many areas, the material value of the commodity – the actual trainers or clothes themselves – becomes decreasingly important, shifted to the back of our consciousness, as the brand and the iconic logo remain at the forefront. But it is the actual material manufacturing performed in sweatshops and Temporary Export Zones that perpetuates the whole structure: without this increased systematic exploitation, the multi-million-dollar fees of Michael Jordan cannot be paid and the ludicrously expensive advertising airtime around the world cannot be bought. This is why the issue of ethics is intrinsic to the discussion in this chapter, not made supplementary or parenthetic. In a rare, ethically reflective moment, brand consultant Wally Olins states the problem:

> Brands are amoral in their lust to outsource at the lowest cost and sell at the highest price. They are intent on becoming ubiquitous as they move from one country and one continent to another, ignoring or overwhelming venerable ethnic, cultural and religious traditions. Brands are increasingly disingenuous and duplicitous in their relentless pursuit of our money and they will stop at nothing in their overwhelming imperative to manipulate us.

> (Olins 2004: 216)

Let us look briefly at some historical and economic reasons for this.

Nike: post-Fordism, lifestyle and the 'brand'

We have charted one reorganisation of capitalism, from Fordism to post-Fordism, in Chapters 1 and 3. In Fordism, because of standardisation and mass production, along with higher wages, the workers could start to afford the commodities they produced. In post-Fordism, the problems of high wages and increasingly global movements of capital, plus the need to make more individually tailored products, meant a shift from domestic manufacture and production to abroad, and the result was a shift in domestic employment to more leisure-based or service industries. As a continuation of this, we see another, more ruthless shift in capitalism that arises because of our love affair with the brand, and capitalism's insatiable need for profit. Along the same logic of post-Fordism, to be able to shift production to wherever the wages are lowest means it no longer makes sense to actually own any factories. If all production is outsourced, the only thing that you 'own' is the brand, and the rest is pure profit (and pure exploitation). The actual manufacturing of commodities can be someone else's problem. We go from the logic of the material commodity (the shoe, the shirt) to the logic of the immaterial brand (Nike, The Gap) and then the immaterial logo (the Swoosh).

Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (2001) charts the rise of brands such as Nike, which started off as an importer of cheap Japanese clothing, but which reinvented itself as a 'lifestyle company', selling a lifestyle rather than particular physical or material products. It is a truism now, but the most successful 'lifestyle' companies no longer make anything; brands like Tommy Hilfiger and Nike outsource their manufacturing, meaning the real dirty work of actually stitching, folding, cutting on the production line is performed by nameless labourers in different countries; as soon as the tax laws change, or the wages become too high, it is simply cheaper to shift the factories and exploit another third-world labour force on the edge of starvation. Klein powerfully argues that global brands have resulted in the exploitation of third-world workers, increased domestic unemployment, reduced domestic wages, and the continual erosion of workers' rights.

This leaves such companies to concentrate on brand ubiquity, using diverse media channels. Encouraging consumers to buy products that work as advertisements for the brand itself, effectively turning ourselves into 'walking billboards', is only the start. There are numerous examples

of innovative and invasive forms of advertising, a trend that increasingly occupies public spaces; Levi's repaints an entire street to promote its SilverTab jeans, and music festivals and sporting events are sponsored, co-opted by beer companies. Then there is the phenomenon of the 'logo police', as observed at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta by journalist Bob Baum, writing for the *Chicago Tribune*:

> logo cops prowl the sidelines in the NFL [National Football League], protecting a $3 billion licensing business by making sure everyone is wearing the right cap. A player caught wearing the wrong logo faces a $5,000 fine, $100,000 if he does it in the Super Bowl.
>
> (in Goldman and Papson 1998: 18)

More worryingly, these public spaces include educational institutions, where in the USA and Canada especially, Coke is the 'official soft drink' of some universities, school lesson plans come courtesy of McDonalds, mega-brands have their logos on textbooks and toilet cubicles, and university departments are wholly reliant on corporate sponsorship (Klein 2001; Boyle 2004). Just like the 'logo police' in operation in Atlanta, one student at a high school in Georgia dared to be different, wearing a Pepsi T-shirt to the school's 'Coke Day', and was suspended (Boyle 2004: 31). Even the human body is susceptible to branding, with the Nike Swoosh being the most popular request in tattoo parlours across the US, and the very recent trend for renting headspace: shaving the hair to advertise various products, as Boyle (2004: 29) identifies.

According to Nikebiz.com, which reveals the inside story of the phenomenal success of Nike, the Swoosh design was purchased from a graphic design student in 1971 for $35 (Nikebiz.com n.d.). Nike is a $10 billion company, with CEO Phil Knight himself worth $4.5 billion in 2003 according to ESPN. To put this into perspective, an article by Sue Collins states that in 1992 Michael Jordan earned $20 million to put his name, 'creativity' and 'final touches' on Nike shoes. "His pay amounted to more than the total wages of the women in South East Asia who actually made the shoes" (Collins 2001). Jordan's name on the product, pure (immaterial) brand image, outweighs the actual (material, physical) labour and manufacture of the commodities themselves. The brand is perhaps the most elevated example of the commodity fetish; an insubstantial graphic mark obscures the whole history of its production,

the human labour and exploitative relations involved therein. Remembering Bourdieu's distinction (in Chapter 2) between *economic capital* and *cultural capital*, it is no surprise that a large economic investment is required to build up cultural capital, and this works as much for the individual, for taste and lifestyle, as for a brand. The surprise lies in just how much economic capital is required; how much more than the labour and materials involved.

Summarising the shift from material commodity to immaterial brand, of how highly desirable branded logos no longer signify 'product', but are metaphors for dynamism and movement, the very things that exemplify athletic prowess or positive character traits, Varda Burstyn reminds us that

> no matter how appealing shoes and jackets may appear to be, it is the idea of the athlete the equipment represents, not the equipment itself, that is so passionately emulated and identified with, and so carefully cultivated by the mass media.

> (1999: 145)

The clash of first and third worlds

After a series of investigative reports of sweatshop labour practices that peppered the internet and news broadcasts in the mid- to late 1990s, and which looked at such companies as Nike, The Gap, and more recently Kathy Lee Gifford, it is increasingly clear that the two worlds of production and consumption, of third-world sweatshop labour and first-world mass consumption, cannot remain so separate for so long. By keeping the worlds separate and concentrating on everydayness, of shopping as just 'something we do', we are perpetuating commodity fetishism and therefore the inherently exploitative relations of capitalism – but this time, and in a way Marx predicted but was not alive to see, on a massively global scale.

It is not difficult to find an example of the two worlds being brought together. We should not become inoculated to this clash of culture and capital, first world and third world. One example is through Walt Disney-branded T-shirts. In an open letter to Walt Disney, for example, Charles Kernaghan disclosed to the third-world workers making

Pocahontas shirts how much they are sold for in the US, and hence illustrates the alienation of the worker from the work produced. In doing so he shows how separate the worlds actually are:

> it was only when I translated the $10.97 into the local currency – 178.26 gourdes – that, all at once, the workers screamed with shock, disbelief, anger, and a mixture of pain and sadness, as their eyes remained fixed on the Pocahontas shirts [...] In effect, each worker assembles fifty Disney shirts in a day, which at $10.97 each, would sell for a total of $548.50 in the US. For her eight hours of work sewing these shirts, the [factory] employee earns just $2.22!
>
> (1997: 101)

A straightforward way of showing the clash of first and third worlds through the brand, a slew of commentators on consumerism examine sweatshops and the exploitation of third-world labour, both abroad (e.g. Klein 2001; Hertz 2002) and closer to home through immigrant communities in New York and LA (e.g. Bakan 2004). The following section deals with this clash in terms of production and consumption in colonial history.

Commodity racism

At this stage it might seem unusual to return to colonial history, but the current existence of the brand is inseparable from the clash of first and third worlds. This clash also occurs in the production of commodities from Britain's colonies and dominions for consumption back home, and so is illustrative of the way that race enters into the discussion of commodity fetishism. In this section I wish to look at the role of brands in the fetishisation of whiteness and blackness, both in colonial history and in recent times, to make a final point about the racial politics of brands and brand image.

Buying into whiteness

"The first step toward lightening the white man's burden is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness", ran an 1899 advertisement for Pears' soap. The image depicted is of an old colonial Englishman, labouring to

maintain cleanliness in one of the far-flung corners of Empire. This advertisement and others are symptomatic of what Anne McClintock calls 'commodity racism' in her book *Imperial Leather* (1995). "Pears' soap is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances", goes the advertisement (1995: 32). English soap and its aggressive marketing in the late nineteenth century was a potent symbol of "scientific rationality and spiritual advance … the lesson of imperial progress and capitalist civilization", she argues (1995: 32). Perhaps the most obvious and uncomfortable example of soap as a signifier of white imperial superiority is another, undated Pears advertisement, in which a white-aproned white boy poises over a black boy sitting in a washtub. In a second frame, only the boy's head and hair remain black, while the parts of his body previously submerged in the water have become 'clean'. McClintock later argues that these advertisements were a visible manifestation of a rewriting of racial history, so that the white man took his place at the apex of civilisation, with female and non-white constituents of the human species fixed in inferior positions. This she calls the "White family of man" (1995: 207ff.). Thus "the magical fetish of soap promises that the commodity can regenerate the Family of Man by washing from the skin the very stigma of racial and class degeneration" (1995: 214). Through consumption the natural order of whiteness can be re-established, and by no means is this limited to soap.

There are numerous other examples of domesticated imperial images, such as biscuit tins featuring "tea time in the jungle". Advertisements such as these found their zenith in the Empire Marketing Board, set up by the British government between 1926 and 1933, encouraging people to buy products from the colonies. In the memorable words of a 1926 advertisement, British people were encouraged to "Buy Empire Every Day". By buying commodities that originated in the British colonies and dominions, they were buying into colonial ideology, and the favourable trade terms and tariffs between coloniser and colonised – a parasitic economics of interdependency – could be maintained. But these spectacles of imperial conquest were commodified not only in consumables such as fruit and golden syrup, but also in boys' own adventure novels such as H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She* (1887), or English zoos and museums filled with exotic plunder, and elaborate public displays of Britain and her Empire such as the Great Exhibition of 1851, with the Queen as Empress over all. Commodity racism, in other words, arose at the historical juncture

of capitalism and colonialism, with the need to forge and maintain mutually beneficial trade networks of commodities, along with an explicit and undisputed assumption of white racial superiority. The colonies found their mediation back home through trade and an association with exoticism and adventure, and such mediations enforced separations between whiteness and blackness, cleanliness and dirtiness, purity and danger, home and away. These separations were rigidly enforced by the fetishisation of the colonies, as they became the blank slate onto which were projected fantasies of adventure and desire. The Pears' and Monkey Brand soaps worked as a double movement, allowing the danger and fetishisation of the dark, savage (and dirty) corners of the earth, while retaining the civilisation (and cleanliness) that a trusted brand affords.

Buying into blackness

We need only revisit the more recent history of the 1990s for an example of how commodity racism persists, but is now complicated by hip-hop's aspiration for 'living it large', the seduction of the 'bling bling', and the quite different assumption that young urban black men are the stylistic innovators which other youth, especially suburban white males, must follow. Recollecting the forms of social emulation that Veblen identified at the beginning of the twentieth century, within the twenty-first century these mechanisms are now more often reversed. Instead of the landed aristocracy setting trends that other social groups, from the *nouveaus riches* and downwards, would follow, in recent years it is the disinherited, the disenfranchised that are emulated by other youth groups across a range of ethnic origins. In investigating some of the shocking stories of exploitation and sweatshop labour that lie behind iconic and globally recognised brands, Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (2001) is salutary. Along the way she charts some disturbing methods used by marketing departments that ensure certain brands are hot, that set the trends, even if this means infiltrating the ghetto. This practice is called 'cool hunting', and if the elusive prey is found the rewards are potentially vast.

One example Klein describes is that of clothes brand Tommy Hilfiger, which started off life as "white-preppy wear in the tradition of Ralph Lauren and Lacoste" (2001: 76). In other words, a brand of clothing worn by white youth with expensive tastes, decidedly far from the cutting edge of cool.

What subsequently occurred was a transformation, a synergetic movement that capitalised on social and economic aspirations, yet which validated a brand of clothing across the board. As the poor ghetto kids aspired to an affluent lifestyle far beyond their means in order to obtain respect amongst their peers, including such bastions of white wealth as skiing, golfing, and yachting, they wore the apparel associated with these activities as part of their urban fantasy, their fetishisation of another, more affluent, lifestyle. Noticing this tendency, Hilfiger advertised his clothing line in these leisure settings with their associations of affluence and the good life, while also redesigning the clothes to conform to a more 'hip-hop aesthetic', and furnishing prominent rap artists such as Snoop Dogg with freebies. The seed was sown. No longer limited to the young black urban poor, the association of the Hilfiger brand with the height of inner-city cool virally spread to far larger and more profitable Asian and white markets. Thus we see an alternative commodity racism coming into effect. As Klein says,

> Like so much of cool hunting, Hilfiger's marketing journey feeds off the alienation at the heart of America's race relations: selling white youth on their fetishization of black style, and black youth on their fetishization of white wealth.

> (2001: 76)

Grand theft black stereotype

Commodity racism is also evident in another more recent franchise of videogames, namely *Grand Theft Auto*. While various incarnations have celebrated Italian-American gangster stereotypes, the latest version, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (2004), one of the biggest-selling videogames so far, has a young, urban, black man as protagonist, freshly released from jail and living in an unambiguously depicted impoverished neighbourhood. With a thumping rap soundtrack, white fetishisation of black urban cool and of violent gangster life has never been so blatant, with the ability to choose the branded trainers or clothes of your character. White suburban males dressing up and playing with virtual black gangsters, carjacking and performing drive-by shootings and wearing fashionable, branded apparel – an interesting, multi-layered take on commodity racism and urban alienation.

Finally, to reconnect videogame brand obsession and logophilia into actual bodies, Lury (1999: 517) says of Jordan and the Jumpman symbol: the brand as slave-owner's mark persists. That other form of branding from an earlier clash of first and third worlds.