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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book began as a conference by the same name held at the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University on May 8 and 9, 2009. Our goal was to bring together a diverse group of scholars whose work we had admired and whose ideas touched on what we saw as a growing body of critical thinking around issues of promotional culture.

To say the conference was productive would be an understatement. The striking parallels we noted among our colleagues' research findings as well as the phenomenal interest the conference generated among both participants and audience members convinced us of the usefulness of putting together an edited volume to crystallize these elements of a rapidly developing and dynamic area of research and scholarship.

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# Blowing Up the Brand

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### "New Branded World" Redux

Only about a decade ago, popular understanding of brands and branding was largely confined to the products and practices of the corporate enterprise. When journalist and cultural critic Naomi Klein wrote the bestseller *No Logo* in 2000, a searing critique of the "new branded world" (3) of industrial influence, the focus of her attack was on how corporations' transnational reach, predatory methods, and tools of exploitation, exclusion, and censorship had impacted a wide range of social and political activities and institutions. The instant recognition and global penetration of "the swoosh, the shell and the arches" (Ch. 16) underlined Klein's account of the creeping corporate encroachment of personal, public, and mental space. Aiming to chart the anticorporate activism on the rise to resist and transform these practices, *No Logo* fed a worldwide movement to foster awareness of "the brand bullies" and challenge their dominance of the status quo.

Even while this consciousness was on the rise, however, other forms of "brand awareness" were taking place. First, and surely disappointing for its author, *No Logo* came to serve not only as a bible for social justice movements, labor rights activists, and environmentalists, but also as a reference point for marketing and branding agencies themselves.[1] Second, in a striking reversal of *No Logo*'s lessons, many anticorporate activists and their causes themselves became "brands," taking the rationalized logic of brand management to the heart of their organization (du Gay 1996; and, e.g., Bob 2002, 2005).[2]

This process mirrored a more general shift toward entrepreneurial forms of governance by a wide range of institutions starting in the 1970s. Transformations in the perceived requirements of organizations at the urban, regional, and national levels to be faster paced, more systematized, and globally competitive began to demand new forms of authority that were

more familiar with the requirements of the market (Harvey 2001: Ch. 16; Keating 2003). Crises of legitimacy and relevance in the public sector were met with claims of expertise and tried-and-tested solutions from the private realm. In this context adopting a brand was seen as a symbolic shorthand for market savvy, business acumen, and global competitiveness—whether for urban centers, transnational governance institutions, or nation-states. *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman put it bluntly: "As we move into a world where everyone has the same hardware and everybody is being forced to get the same software to go with it, a country's brand, and the unique bond it can build with its foreign investors, becomes even more important" (1999: 244). In an article titled, "No Logo, No Future," brand strategists Fiona Gilmore and Rebecca Rumens decried government aid to developing countries, advocating "brand surgery" instead—the transfer of brand-based training and skills to encourage more entrepreneurial approaches. "We must ask not only what our government can do to alleviate poverty in Africa," they conclude, "but ask what our employers or favorite brands can do" (Gilmore and Rumens 2005; see also Anholt 2005). Overall, it came to seem as though the structures of private ownership and strategic management developed to capitalize products and services in the corporate world increasingly resonated with the renewed aims of a broad range of public, private, and governance institutions; even those hitherto immune from—or at least inured against—the requirements of global capital.

At present we are no longer surprised to hear the term "brand" applied to multiple forms of political, social, and cultural expression and organization: the professional identities of individuals and families—from Tiger Woods to Tyra Banks, Stephen King to LonelyGirl18, the Kardashians to the Novogratzes (Green 2009); politicians and political parties of every affiliation and stripe (Klein 2010; Greenberg 2008; Pasotti 2009); arts, civil society, and advocacy organizations (Wallace 2006; Stallabrass 2006); geographical spaces at multiple scales (Aronczyk 2007; Donald et al. 2008; Jansen 2008); ethnic and kinship groups (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009); philanthropies and charities (Bishop and Green 2008; King 2006; Stole 2008); sports teams and other large-scale entertainments and franchises (Rein et al. 2006); movements for social justice and human rights (Bob 2005); educational and healthcare facilities (Gould 2003; Waldby and Mitchell 2006); privacy and security regimes[3]; the military (Helmus et al. 2007); and religious groups (Einstein 2007). Aesthetic styles, from fashion to music to typography, claim their own brands.[4] Branding is on the agenda

of policy centers, transnational agencies, and think tanks, alternately investigated as a strategy for international diplomacy, a matter of public policy, and a source of institutional funding. In university settings it has spilled out of business departments and into the social sciences and media and cultural studies as both a course subject and a self-reflexive planning objective.

What has given rise to *these* new branded worlds? At one level, we can see this sudden brand mania merely as recent public awareness of changes that had been building in the corporate sector for decades. Brand managers, marketing professors, and other members of the professional "persuasional" class have for some time argued for the relevance of brand strategy to other aspects of large-scale organization (e.g., Kotler and Levy 1969; Olins 1979). In its insistence on "effectiveness," "efficiency," and "discipline," branding is advocated as cure for the ailments of a vast range of groups and individuals, whether the ailments stem from financial, structural, or communicational complaints (e.g., Clifton 2003; Anholt 2005; Holt 2004). In a competitive global economy characterized by surfeits of information and hypermediation, and corresponding deficits of time and attention, brands are heralded as the "imaginative genre" (Poovey 2008) that can simplify, differentiate, and narrate a wide range of economic and social values. In the contemporary context, Klein's portrayal of the "international rule of the brands" (2000: 446) resonates at an even greater frequency.

To apply the logic of the brand to these previously unbranded organizations, sites, and forms of subjectivity is not merely to call attention to the thorough marketization and commodification of everyday life. We suggest that the globalized, self-reflexive use of brands and branding to describe and structure these multiple and varied spheres is both symptom and cause of a series of shifts in how social relations, subject positions, and political programs are organized, governed, and articulated.

*Blowing Up the Brand* represents an attempt to account for these shifts. The fourteen chapters in this volume do not seek to make epochal claims but rather to draw examples from a variety of sites to magnify the ways in which brands have become structuring elements of our everyday lives. Its authors address the contradictory character of brands as forms of self-expression; the "utility of fiction" in political branding; the rise of a "brand-managerial" class of cultural experts, entrepreneurs, and intermediaries; and the extension of brand models along previously unbranded horizons, whether geographic, conceptual, moral, or biopolitical. In this introductory chapter we try to account for some of the changes that have taken place to

create these newer contexts of organization and expression. To "blow up" the brand in this book is not necessarily to explode or destroy its structuring logics—though our tools of inquiry are purposively sharp. Rather our aim, as the subtitle of the book suggests, is to develop an arsenal of critical perspectives that can target what is at work in these branded contexts.

We call the ensemble of these contexts *promotional culture,* building in many respects on the insights developed by Andrew Wernick in his seminal volume, *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression* (1991). For Wernick, promotional culture resulted from an environment in which capitalist forms of exchange came to dominate all other forms of exchange; and in which a widening range of cultural phenomena whose primary function was to communicate a promotional message had become "virtually coextensive with our produced symbolic world" (182). These phenomena extend far beyond the obvious category of advertising to encompass 1) "the whole universe of commercially manufactured objects (and services), in so far as these are imaged to sell" (182); 2) the systems of commercial media which constantly link nonpromotional to promotional messages (akin to Raymond Williams' ([1974] 1990) notion of television "flow"); 3) all other communicative activities of not only private but also public institutions, either due to their commodification (as in the case of higher education) or to their analogous relationship to the market form (as in the case of electoral politics); and 4) the commodification of labor power, which engenders "dramaturgical" behavior by individuals via self-promotion and careerism. To this last category Wernick adds related phenomena such as the promotional function of consumption more generally (per Veblen's observations about consumption and status over a century ago); and the strategies of self-presentation and promotion that accompany the "mate/companion/friendship market"—a prescient observation in 1991, before the emergence of the MySpaces, YouTubes, and Facebooks of this world. The circulation of these promotional phenomena over deeper and broader terrain resulted, for Wernick, in a set of historical conditions by which promotionalism infected "all the circuits of social life," becoming the dominant symbolic language, the "communicative substance," of contemporary capitalism (1991: 188).

Though these features are clearly still in play twenty years on, it is equally clear that there have been a number of modifications of these phenomena that require renewed attention if we are to account for the current phase of promotional culture as well as the role of the brand as its emblematic cul-

tural form and structuring element. In what follows we attempt to identify and describe some of these changes as well as account for and integrate recent critical attempts to define the boundaries of the brand.

## Putting Communication to Work: Reputation, Value, and the Fact/Fiction Continuum

Though the imaging of commodities for promotion and sale has arguably been part of industrial capitalism since its beginnings (Wernick 1991; Moor 2007) and though scholars have long recognized the role of consumption in meaning-making as well as status, class, and identity formation (and contestation) (Veblen [1899] 1994; Cohen 2003; Fox and Lears 1983; Liechty 2003), the increasingly central role of brands in contemporary culture considerably alters established relationships between identification, commodification, and acts of consumption.

A key change underlying these new relationships lies in the realm of brand valuation. In the late 1970s, corporate brand owners began to seek ways to account for their brands as assets on their balance sheets, over and above the physical assets of the company (Lindemann 2003; Madden et al. 2006). The recognition that the value of such "intangible" or "reputational" capital could match or even exceed the value of material and territorial capital was made poignantly clear by the "zero-risk globalization" maneuvers of corporate firms in the 1980s and 1990s: outsourcing, downsizing, and other strategies of vertical disintegration which encouraged organizations to divest themselves of accountability for their products and forms of production while focusing on their brand images and marketing efforts (Klein 2000). This understanding has become especially relevant in the contemporary context of finance capital, characterized largely by dematerialized, deterritorialized, speculative units of exchange. Among the flexible accumulation strategies of postindustrial capital, in which labor processes, markets, products, and consumption patterns are subject to constant commercial, technological, and organizational change, brands emerge as the ideal rhetorical device to smooth and soften the impact of such change. In the context of market volatility, product failure, or other forms of risk, the brand can be "leveraged" or repositioned to maintain its image and equity among consumers.

In this light it is perhaps not surprising to observe the expansion of branding models to a wide range of previously noncorporatized institutional

forms. As several chapters in this volume attest, public institutions have been increasingly adopting the "conceptual apparatus" of neoliberalism and its practices of economic liberalization, privatization, and stabilization (Buck-Morss 2002; Harvey 2005). This has led to new kinds of governance strategies: the rise of public-private partnerships; the replacement of Keynesian welfare-state policies with models of innovation and enterprise; coalitions of academic, government, and business institutions to foster so-called creative economies; and other initiatives that privilege the public purse over the public good. In this context public institutions seek both to maintain a stable identity and to limit the crises of accountability that might follow from such dramatic ideological and material shifts. In the absence of productive activity or, more contentious, the implementation of unpopular policies or practices, the purpose of the brand is to be buoyant enough to float above and beyond its actual practices (Klein 2000; Lury 2004). As Miriam Greenberg describes in her account of New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's urban renewal campaign, for example (chapter 6 in this volume), the "co-branding" of politician, place, and policies reveals the now inextricable relationship of image marketing, economic development, and political power. Despite clear opposition to Bloomberg's activities as well as obvious contradictions within his party strategies during his first two terms in office, his third-term reelection was widely seen as inevitable. Similarly, Gabriele Cosentino and Waddick Doyle (chapter 10) chart the rise and rise of Italian prime minister and media mogul Silvio Berlusconi, whose political brand remains steady despite a variety of provocations and scandals, expertly managed as it is through his television network, his advertising agencies, and his soccer team.

As other authors in this volume observe, these tendencies are not limited to government but extend to a variety of forms of organizational identity. Graham Knight (chapter 8) explores the adoption of brand rationalities by social movement and activist groups, who conclude that the strategic communication of brand management has become the only possible means by which to advance their causes; while Alison Hearn (chapter 9) shows how the increasing drive by universities to attract entrepreneurial students and faculty, accumulate high rankings, and promote "market-ready, industry-driven" education has led to a surprising proportion of university budgets being spent on the engineering and marketing of a distinctive brand.

What these examples suggest is that to understand the role of brands and branding in contemporary life is a matter of addressing not merely the

commodification and marketization of institutional practices, but the commodification of public discourse itself. The notion that public discourse can become a source of economic value is not new; nor is it unique to the logic of the brand. From the late nineteenth century, Gabriel Tarde (1969: 313) noted the role of public opinion in establishing and standardizing economic value (see also Arvidsson 2006). Mid-twentieth-century concerns about the rise of advertising as the "idiom" and "style" of an increasingly industrialized culture (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 1972) also spoke to the marketization of communication, though with considerably less optimism. In 1973, Daniel Bell's prescient forecast of a "knowledge society," in which human capital replaced physical capital as the primary source of economic value, and information, communication, and technology functioned as axiomatic principles of postindustrial capitalism, laid the conceptual foundations for the current setting (see Garnham 2005).

What is specific to contemporary brand logic is the way in which the brand functions in the new media environment, where information and communication are prime sources of capital. From Adam Arvidsson's (2006) perspective, brands are themselves a form of informational capital which produce, govern, and evaluate information and communication. As a form of production, brands are no longer simply promotional devices for products but facilitators of contexts or "platforms" (Lury 2004; Schmitt 2010) for interaction, as the relationship between consumers and brands becomes less about the consumption of a product than about the social relations, experiences, and lifestyles such consumption enables. As a form of governance, brand owners manage these aspects of the social by collecting and harnessing information provided by consumers (for example, via marketing tools such as customized databases, search-engine advertising, and biometric identification; see Turow 2006) and use them to strengthen the relationships between brands and their consumers as well as further determine the range of "acceptable" (because productive of further brand capital) social positions and patterns. As a form of evaluation, brands work both as economic "goodwill" (i.e., intangible capital) and as relational devices to establish, on an ongoing basis, compatibility with existing social values. The brand therefore operates as a source of value in both the moral and the market sense: it simultaneously mediates subjective qualities, tastes, and norms; and it mediates objective financial worth—promoted and protected by legal regimes of intellectual property, trademarks, and copyright (Coombe 1998, 2004, 2005).

The expansion of the brand from its prior role in the promotion of commercial goods and services to its ability to represent and financialize social qualities underlines its productivity as a form of both "fictionalization" and "factualization," in Mary Poovey's (1998, 2008) terms. In *Genres of the Credit Economy,* her treatment of paper credit instruments as genres that mediated value in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, Poovey demonstrates the importance of fictionalization to the construction of value systems. Forms of representation (such as paper money instead of gold coins) and forms of writing that "embodied, interpreted, or made (what counted as) value comprehensible" mediated value in ways that naturalized and normalized new financial arrangements (2008: 90).

Processes of fictionalization are also at work in the contemporary branding paradigm, as Celia Lury and Liz Moor show in their contribution to this volume (chapter 2). Looking at the current valuation techniques employed by brand consultants and firms, Lury and Moor reveal how such techniques do not only measure but also *create* forms of value for the brand.[5] This is achieved in at least two ways: by adopting creative accounting strategies which admit hitherto unquantifiable social values onto balance sheets—for example, monetizing public goods such as a corporation's environmental impact or corporate social responsibility efforts, known as "triple bottom-line" initiatives; or by using new techniques such as "open-source branding" or "consumer cocreation," where consumers are encouraged to create ads for a brand or otherwise record their brand consumption activities, which can then be absorbed into the valuation process. Such "qualculation" (Callon and Law 2003; Lury 2004) is intrinsic to the brand's ongoing relevance in social settings.

It is not only the fictionalization of capital that enchants and structures credit economies but also its "factualization." That is, the construction of *facts* in the economic realm is a crucial characteristic of the creation of financial systems (Poovey 2008). In Poovey's account of this process in eighteenth-century Britain, developing the necessary conditions of objectivity and belief in the workings of the new financial system necessitated "additional social measures":

> Among these was the creation of the epistemological and social categories…of expert knowledge and the knowledge expert or specialist. The transformation of the previously suspect (because self-interested) merchant into the (disinterested) economic expert was, in part at least, a function of new, authoritative genres by which financial information could be conveyed. Paradoxically, these new genres, including

political economy itself, were both modeled on and intended to reinforce the ever-elusive distinction between valid and invalid monetary forms (80).

If branding is the genre of the contemporary political economic era, those fluent in the language—branding consultants, market researchers, creative gurus, industrial designers, and ad agencies—have become the experts, and their expert knowledge the frame of reference. Indeed, such "promotional intermediaries" (Moor 2008; Davis 2006) have increasingly manifested their ability to determine the validity or invalidity of both economic and cultural forms. In the process of transforming *values* into *value*, promotional intermediaries displace the work of accountants and others formerly charged with the "monopoly of asset recognition" to create a "social facticity" of their own (see Lury and Moor in this volume). Thus self-styled nation branding consultants like Simon Anholt (2007) create brand indices for cities and countries, where attributes of place such as "levels of immigration," "governance," and "culture" can be measured and ranked against those of other nations; urban-planner-turned-creativity-guru Richard Florida (2002) can chart the "gay index" of urban regions and suggest that a higher proportion of homosexuality in a city indicates its creative and economic potential; and social researchers like Elizabeth Currid and Sarah Williams (2010) can measure the "buzz" or "hype" surrounding cultural events, to ultimately show how this hype can translate into financial returns for the event organizers. Such measures create value not only for their clients but also for the promotional intermediaries themselves (Harvey 2001), whose legitimacy depends on their ability to use their promotional discourse to build and maintain their own reputations. John Corner (chapter 3 in this volume) addresses this last point by offering another perspective along the "fact–fiction continuum" (Poovey 2008: 90), focusing on the "utility of fiction"—that is, the naturalization of deceit—in the communicative practices of the political realm. Drawing on historical examples from Athenian democracy to Arendtian notions of "organized lying" and more recent discussions of political hypocrisy, Corner questions the potential for public action in a political environment embedded in promotional culture.

The act of putting communication "to work"—whether for commercial, political, or other gain—has inspired some theorists to bring renewed attention to the performativity of discourse in capitalist realms. For some, this attention has consisted in expanding the notion of performativity from its origin in speech acts (Austin 1962) to the spaces or contexts where certain discourses take place.[6] Nigel Thrift (2005), for example, describes a "cul-

tural circuit of capitalism," in which professional-managerial rhetoric advocating new management techniques is enacted, promoted, and circulated internationally through spaces of visualization (e.g., business magazines), spaces of embodiment (e.g., management training seminars), and spaces of circulation (e.g., business travel networks or online collaborative work sites). Hongmei Li's chapter in this volume (chapter 7) offers a remarkable account of the cultural circuit of capitalism as it makes its way into Chinese society. By documenting the discursive shift from *chengfen* (family origin or class status) to *shenjia* (personal assets and brand worth) as the primary measure of an individual's rank in society, Li shows how promotional culture is embraced in China and perpetuated in media reports, sport regimes, and celebrity worship.

Other theorists have widened the concept of performativity to accommodate the act of circulation itself. As Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma point out, the notion of performativity has traditionally been tied to meaning-making, while circulation and exchange have been set aside as "processes that *transmit* meanings, rather than as constitutive acts in themselves" (2002: 192). Bringing circulation under the rubric of performativity allows Lee and LiPuma to demonstrate how it is the *circulation* of cultural activities, from reading books to the global movement of financial derivatives, that creates "imagined communities" (Anderson 1993) with their own forms of interpretation and evaluation.

The capacity of brands to "perform" a sense of community through the creation and circulation of meaning has been heralded by promotional experts and intermediaries (MacInnis et al. 2009). Marketers argue that the very purpose of nation branding, for instance, is to inspire a sense of collective belonging to the nation-state. As such the brand identity must not only be representative of particular ways of being but actually *lived*—embraced and embodied—by the country's citizens if it is to be effective as a modern version of nationality (Aronczyk 2008).

This is what Arvidsson means when he refers to brands as informational capital: Just as valuation techniques create economic value for the brand, so do the communicative exchanges consumers have about the brand—either face to face or via online networks. This is apparent not only on "brand fan" websites or at clubs for BMW aficionados but also on online platforms that are built specifically to use the social communication of consumers as sources of economic value. Think of travel websites whose "expert" information about where to stay and what to do is provided by the posts of fre-

quent travelers, or computer hardware and software sites where trouble-shooting about the product is performed by users, or retail sites that solicit and implement consumers' ideas for new products and services (Schmitt 2010). The properties of new media increase opportunities for collaboration, contribution, and innovation of informational content (Lury 2004; Kember and Zylinska 2010), all of which redounds to the economic value of the brand. Moreover, by communicating with others about the importance of the brand to their lives, *consumers become promotional intermediaries themselves,* working in the service of the brand yet without the financial remuneration that its owners enjoy.

At least two important conclusions can be drawn from this brand logic. First, if the brand's value is determined in circulation, we must recognize that a growing variety of circulating discourses can be mobilized in the service of the brand: all kinds of media attention, whether in the form of product reviews, news stories, or consumer-generated content; word of mouth; and rumor, to name only a few examples (Muniz and O'Guinn 2009; Coombe 1997). Though technically such information is "valuable" to brand users, its economic value accrues primarily to the owners and other financial stakeholders of the brand. The brand therefore remains a controlled and controlling device that limits social and political potential for participation. We discuss this matter in more detail below.

Second, the brand must be seen in its capacity to occupy a particular spatial and temporal zone. The brand's coordinates plot a discursive space that is maintained by a series of relationships—not only between individual consumers and producers but also between them and the product or service itself; the communities of brand users; and a variety of institutions, including the media, retailers, equity markets, government, and nongovernmental organizations (Muniz and O'Guinn 2009). This discursive space is, as we have seen, not determined immediately in the process of production but rather via the brand's circulation throughout these discursive realms. As such the brand is predicated on the future; a brand is, as the multinational branding firm Interbrand puts it, "the promise" of an experience, the making of relationships that "create and secure future earnings by growing customer preference and loyalty" (Interbrand 2007: 14; see also Lury and Moor in this volume). Indeed, as Wernick writes, promotion in general is performative, a "complex of significations which at once represents (moves in place of), advocates (moves on behalf of) and anticipates (moves ahead of) the circulating entity to which it refers" (Wernick 1991: 182).

In this optic the brand works as a "chronotope" (Bakhtin 1981)—a set of temporal and spatial relationships that are intrinsically connected and aesthetically expressed. Mikhail Bakhtin used the concept of the chronotope to describe a literary setting in which space "becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84). The chronotope defines not only genre but the very "image of man [sic] in literature," because, following Kant, cognition requires the elementary perceptions and representations of space and time in order to be seen and understood (85). The concept of the chronotope was introduced by Einstein as part of his theory of relativity; and its origin in mathematics is relevant here, as Lury and Moor explain in the second part of their chapter in this volume. Topology is the study of "the properties of…surfaces that are 'spaces in themselves.'" For Lury and Moor, brands operate in a "topological culture"—a "multidimensional space of (future) possibility." It is multidimensional because of the sheer scale and scope of its relations as well as its ability to develop nonstandard and proprietary forms of economic measurement; and it is a "future" space due to its ability to continually discount present value. The new space created, Lury and Moor argue, "is that of the 'ideal, risk-free brand'" (p. 47 in this volume).

In creating a spatial and temporal setting in which the brand can operate "risk-free," we might ask what role we, as consumers, users, and citizens, are expected to occupy in this new setting. If our ability to communicate in a promotional culture is managed by contemporary systems of informational capitalism, are our public identities—the ones we share on Facebook and retail sites, the ones we use in our professional lives, the ones we put out to the world—now given over to the production of capital? Has the public subject become a promotional subject? It is to this question that we now turn.

## Branded (in) Public: Performing Authenticity

> What makes figures of publicity attractive to people?…This question does not ask simply how people are seduced or manipulated. It asks what kind of identifications are required or allowed in the discourse of publicity (Warner 2005: 176).

The notion of "publicity"—the quality of being in public; the rights and obligations that constitute public life—has a long and complex history, as Western political thought of the last four centuries has revealed (Taylor 2002; Warner 2005). For Charles Taylor (2002), the distinctive character

and status of publicity in modern life has emerged via three "social imaginaries" by which individuals conceive of themselves as members of a collective society: the public sphere, the citizen state, and the market economy.

In the popular imaginary of the present, it seems the term "publicity" has come to stand less often for the first two pillars Taylor identified and more often for the third, as the quality of public interactions appears increasingly oriented around self-interested economic gain. In this vision of publicity, being in public takes on a distinct cast, one in which the industries and symbolic systems of commercial promotion are not merely discursive analogues to forms of belonging, behaving, and relating in public, but also actual structuring forces for these actions, as public communication is overwhelmingly mediated by institutions which are sponsored by these industries. In this view the idealized aim of public communication is no longer to circulate vital information, reach reasoned ("rational-critical") consensus, or ensure democratic participation; it is to provide settings for presentation, promotion, and persuasion, with the ultimate goal of economic advantage.[7]

This perspective has dominated theories and critiques since the mid-1940s, when Horkheimer and Adorno ([1944] 1972) famously decried the instrumentalization of culture amid the rise of mass production. Rather than being liberated by mass culture, they argued, we have become dominated by it. Lash and Lury summarize their view:

> Culture took on the same principle of accumulation already widespread in the capitalist economy…now culture, previously associated with the development of human subjectivity, became objective like any other commodity (2007: 3).

Similar currents of thought emerged in the writings of other postwar thinkers: Erich Fromm decried the "marketing orientation" of the bureaucratized individual (1990); his colleague C. Wright Mills worried about the rise of the "competitive personality" (1970). As culture became industry, personhood became personality, and advertising overtook sociality, society was subjected to repression and control, while confectionery distractions and desires functioned as unconscious tools of seduction and manipulation.

While it is impossible to deny the legacy of this current of thought, we find labels of "manipulation" and "seduction" (as well as their frequent partners "propaganda" and "spin") to be unproductive concepts in accounting for the function and impact of promotional paradigms in the current social, political, economic, and technological context. As Warner's above quote suggests, understanding the appeal of publicity in its second-order

sense might rather reside in the kinds of identifications and subject positions that are *required* or *allowed* in the contemporary context.

One way to think about subjectivity in the context of contemporary publicity is to consider the increasingly imbricated relationship between culture and the economy. It is not just that culture has been thoroughly commodified, but also that the economy has been culturalized in a variety of ways (du Gay and Pryke 2002; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). Some theorists have explained the new culture–economy nexus by pointing to the "cultural turn" in studies of economic and organizational life. Such studies demonstrate how the objects of economic analysis—markets, firms, institutions—are inextricable from the analysis itself; that is, the economy is a product of the discourses that constitute, frame, and perform it. In this perspective, aspects of the economy are seen less as rational, objective entities than as cultural forms in their own right (Callon 1998; Callon and Law 2003; du Gay and Pryke 2002).

Another way to think about the renewed relationship between culture and the economy is in terms of the "creative industries," an increasingly popular concept in institutional, urban, and national governance. Creative industry refers to the way creative activities of all kinds—from work in the cultural sector to online networks of collaborative knowledge and information sharing to individual notions of craft—can now be used for economic gain. While we may do these kinds of work *not* as a means to an end but ostensibly for our own personal development, the role of the creative economy is to find ways to monetize such activities. Maurice Lazzarato calls the ensemble of such economically viable creative activities "immaterial labor," a term which expands beyond knowledge and information transfer to encompass "the kinds of activities involved in defining and creating cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and more strategically, public opinion" (qtd. in Read 2003: 127; see also Lury 2004; Arvidsson 2006).

The origins of the creative economy paradigm are frequently attributed to changes in governance strategies in the United Kingdom. In 1998, a Creative Industries Taskforce was formed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport under then-prime minister Tony Blair. The taskforce prepared a report on the role and potential of the creative industries, defined as "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (Creative

Industries Mapping Document 1998).[8] In addition to the already under-written categories of cultural expression such as the visual and performing arts, music, publishing, film/video, TV, and radio, the government also deemed creative industries to include advertising, architecture, computer and video games, software, design, and fashion.[9] Establishing the terms of the creative economy therefore involved not only the commodification of cultural practices typically held to be outside the purview of the market but also the expansion of the category of culture itself, to accommodate more technologically oriented and economically productive activities.[10]

Newly entrepreneurialized public institutions around the world have rushed to adopt the creative economy model.[11] This renewed spirit of enter-prise demonstrates the "culture of the new capitalism" (Sennett 2006), where temporary work, downsizing, and other "flexible" labor and market conditions have been converted from a liability into a potential breeding ground for cultural liberation and individual growth. Amid the disappear-ance of bureaucratic corporate structures, the argument goes, one can al-ways go into business for oneself.

It is in this context that the figure of the "cultural entrepreneur" has emerged—or rather, been "semantically recharged" (Corner and Harvey 1991)—to meet the new terms of this creative economy. Taking American street-graffiti artist Shepard Fairey as the ne plus ultra prototype of the cul-tural entrepreneur, Sarah Banet-Weiser and Marita Sturken (chapter 12) deftly show how the combination of artistic production and self-promotion blurs the boundaries of creativity and commerce. As they explain, "creative autonomy, long considered historically to be in opposition to (and thus threatened by) market forces, is, within this economy, effectively organized and managed by market forces" (p. 269 in this volume).

While a growing number of institutions and individuals celebrate the creative economy and its new possibilities for self-identification, critical theorists are far less optimistic. Angela McRobbie calls creative workers "agents of the neoliberal order," while Andrew Ross calls them the "pre-cariat," arguing that the rise of a "creative class" (Florida 2002) does not represent a new version of autonomy but rather operates as "the post-Fordist successor to the proletariat," subject to the same vagaries of labor exploitation (Ross 2009: 6). As Banet-Weiser and Sturken suggest, even creativity itself has become a brand, "reified and transformed into an object that is marketed, distributed, and exchanged within the contemporary

economy, and takes on a particular 'value' as a lifestyle, policy or set of politics" (p. 270 in this volume).

As promotional intermediaries and entrepreneurs become the central actors of contemporary culture, concerns over authenticity have come to the fore. As Jeff Pooley reminds (chapter 4 in this volume), the notion of authenticity as an individual, moral ideal has been examined in depth by a wealth of writers over the course of the twentieth century. In the context of modern life, especially the rise of atomizing work environments, advertising culture and entertainment media, and "the gospel of self-fulfillment," writers like Philip Rieff, Christopher Lasch, and Warren Susman worried about the decline of authentic sources of experience. Faced with this unhappy dilemma, some thinkers conceived of authenticity as a means to the end of promotionalism, a way to overcome the superficiality of the personality market and the pressures of publicity images. Others, however, offered a middle ground, one in which the performative character of authenticity (or as Pooley puts it, "being instrumental about authenticity") might yield a modicum of sincerity.

John L. and Jean Comaroff (2009) take this position to the extreme, documenting a variety of ways in which the branding and marketing of ethnic group identities has productively contributed to new and rich forms of consciousness and empowerment. Genealogical tourism, heritage marketing, the sale of ethnic knowledge, rites, and rituals: such "ethno-preneurialism," they argue, reinforces rather than denies the social constitution of authenticity. "Against the telos of both classical and critical theory," they write, "the rise of ethno-commerce in the age of mass consumerism is having counterintuitive effects on human subjects, cultural objects, and the connection between them" (28):

> It is the case that the intensive marketing of ethnic identity may well involve a Faustian bargain of sorts, leading to self-parody and devaluation. But…it also appears to (re)fashion identity, to (re)animate cultural subjectivity, to (re)charge collective self-awareness, to forge new patterns of sociality, all within the marketplace (26).

Where to situate the sources of the self in all of this? "Enterprise culture" leads to a particular conception of the individual; one which, as Nikolas Rose argues:

> …links up a seductive ethics of the self, a powerful critique of contemporary institutional and political reality, and an apparently coherent design for the radical transformation of contemporary social arrangements. In the writings of "neoliberals" like

> Hayek and Friedman, the well-being of both political and social existence is to be ensured not by centralized planning and bureaucracy, but through the "enterprising" activities and choices of autonomous entities—businesses, organizations, persons—each striving to maximize its own advantage by inventing and promoting new projects by means of individual and local calculations of strategies and tactics, costs and benefits (1998: 153).

If such "technologies of the self" (Rose 1998) appear in some respects to require and allow greater autonomy, flexibility, and potential for self-discovery, the other side of the coin is more tarnished. Interpellating citizens as consumers or users, kinship groups as "ethno-preneurs," and so on entails a kind of subjectivity in which individuals can no longer assume the entitlements formerly granted by their designation as "citizen," "resident," or "group member" but must now take on personal responsibility to secure their life benefits, advantages, and goals. We can witness this transformation in the marketization of public services, where the outsourcing, downsizing, and technologizing of staff and service provision has been engineered in tandem with an outlook of the citizen as active "user" who, according to market logic, is supposed to inform and educate herself and then demand or "choose" the goods and services she requires (see Moor 2009). A more uncomfortable instance of this process is examined by Mary Ebeling (chapter 11 in this volume): In the pharmaceutical industry, not only does drug branding encourage a patient to become an active consumer who can advocate for the marketed benefits of the branded drug to her doctor; but the branding of medical devices that must be surgically implanted transforms the human body itself into a productive site of financial value. By intervening in the relationship between patient and doctor, branded communications "recruit" patients to influence their doctor's medical judgement. "How, exactly," Ebeling asks, "would a patient enact the brand identity of the defibrillator implanted into her heart?" (p. 244).

As Rose explains, the job of the contemporary categories of experts such as the entrepreneur or the intermediary is to reconcile, or at least smooth over, the inherently contradictory aspects of promotional life:

> For the new experts of the psyche promise that modes of life that appear philosophically opposed—business success and personal growth, image management and authenticity—can be brought into alignment and achieve translatability through the ethics of the autonomous, choosing, psychological self (Rose 1998: 157).

In the shift of address from patient to choosy consumer, citizen to active and autonomous user, body to source of "biovalue," the terrain of promotional culture appears logical, inevitable, and desirable. As the self becomes

thoroughly instrumentalized, so do we increase our promotional capital to meet and respond to such instrumentalization. By performing our promotional selves we convert moral values into market value and back again. We allow a singular vision of success to dominate the conversation. And overlaying all of these shifts is the stable narrative of the brand, blown up and extending in all directions to contain, qualify, and erase its multiple contradictions.

## Towards a New Media Literacy

The title of this book thus signifies not only the expanded space the brand has come to occupy in contemporary life—an expansion that acquires potency as branding continues to naturalize its presence within a wide range of domains. It also speaks to our belief that by magnifying the work of the brand, we might better perceive its intricacies. The critical perspectives presented within these chapters are in effect both examples of and strategies for such an approach, intended to showcase the increased scope of promotional culture as well as offer tactics with which to interrogate it.

The versatile capabilities of the brand—to frame relationships both economic and social; to represent, communicate, and circulate forms of value; and to create and capture modes of attention—make for striking parallels with the digital technologies that currently dominate and assimilate the mediated environment. Not only does the impact of the brand rely on the technological changes that have destabilized and converged mediated communications, especially over the last decade; the brand is also itself a technology of communication and a product of that changed environment. This is what Lury intends when she identifies the brand as a "new media object," a multifaceted entity that "[is comprised of] a mode of production, a technical or physical support, and a set of conventions that articulate or work on that support" (2004: 6); in other words, the brand functions at once as hardware, software, and protocol (Manovich 2001; Galloway 2004).

Though an array of recent technologies coexist under the label new media—including but not limited to computers, the Internet and World Wide Web, mobile telephony, and social networks—their ability to blend previously distinct media forms, transform methods of distribution, and create new opportunities for sociability renders them similar in their effects. *Interactivity* lies at the core of the revolutionary potential identified for such media, a value that is frequently lauded for its ability to foster peer production

and collaboration, enhance democracy and participatory culture, and generate "collective intelligence" (Benkler 2006; Jenkins 2006; Levy 1997). Though the brand per se is not traditionally included in the conception of new media's interactivity in this fashion, it is certainly an interactive site, where consumers maintain social connections, foster identification, and create meaning that not only benefits the brand but also themselves (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Bengsston and Firat 2006).

It therefore is not our intention to deny the possibility of meaningful sociality enacted through branded environments nor to discount the potential for productive changes to result within them. Yet a narrow focus on the benefits of interactivity, coupled with uncritical celebration of the media that inspire it, cause us to lose sight of more troubling outcomes. As Lury explains, to the extent that the brand is a point of contact between production and consumption, it can be conceived as "a frame that organizes the two-way exchange of information." But "interactivity" is not the same as "interaction" (Lury 2004: 7): between these two terms lie ongoing power relations between producers and consumers. Moreover, interactivity may be employed as a "strategy for deferring critical reflection" (Andrejevic 2009: 43), standing in for relations that might prove more meaningful or impactful, if less convenient or tidy. This belief is especially consequential in the political realm where, as Dean (2005) argues, it "relieves top-level actors…from the obligation to respond." Interactivity tends to replace the difficult work of politics. It is in this environment that promotional communication—such as joining a Facebook group, wearing a sloganified T-shirt, or staying "on message"—is taken as a political end in itself, whether or not it results in material effects. As Dean (2005) writes, "The circulation of communication is depoliticizing, not because people don't care or don't want to be involved, but because we do!" (see also Barney 2008).

Interactivity may defer critical reflection not only by surrogacy, but also through distraction. Put another way, interactivity can shroud the purpose of interaction, encouraging users to click, play, and share before considering what, how, or why. This is precisely the strategy of emerging practices such as sonic branding, as Devon Powers (chapter 13 in this volume) observes. In applying their expertise to the aural environment, sonic branding professionals frame the immersive nature of sound as a way to integrate consumers into a brand's identity, working under the assumption that musical sound preempts critical reflection. Sound, in this case, becomes elemental to the

interface of the brand, an attempt to both solicit consumer response and delimit and depoliticize the territory and range of sensory experience.

One important byproduct of interactivity is feedback, often in the form of valuable consumer information. Consumers may be only vaguely aware of their participation in this process and prohibited from learning what companies know about them or how the information is being put to use (Turow 2006). Andrejevic calls this "the work of being watched"— the labor consumers perform that facilitates their own surveillance (Andrejevic 2002). In later work, Andrejevic makes a more forceful claim, linking monitoring and "feedback-based forms of control" to early cybernetics theories (2009: 43). He warns that "the modality of control can itself shift, in ways that incorporate the very forms of critique that once sought to challenge it by undermining and deconstructing it" (2009: 37).

Such observations highlight the continuing importance of analyzing power relations, which often remain intact even as unidirectional, centralized media forms give way to decentralized, user-oriented ones. Yet they also present us with the difficult challenge of rethinking the purpose of critique itself. This difficulty arises not because critique can lose its hard edge, suffer co-optation or, only slightly better, come to exist as just one perspective among the many on offer (Andrejevic 2009: 39; Dean 2005). Instead, the more pressing concern is *the propensity for critique itself to become promotional;* that is, where critique becomes imagined as an end in itself.

In a context where longstanding separations—between control and feedback, production and consumption, "top down" and "bottom up"—no longer hold, where can we locate the potential for critical reflection? Thinking of the brand as a new media object, in Lury's terms, challenges us to develop innovative tactics of media literacy. In the world of the brand—where consumption is imbricated into production, where the audience becomes the text, where meaning itself is a source of economic and social value—what some call the "holy trinity" of media studies (industry, audience, and text) thoroughly collapses. Media literacy, understood as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms" (Hobbs 1998), must therefore become "new," not only by focusing on new media objects, but also by merging insights and methods from various camps of media literacy practice, such as media production, textual analysis, and political economy—not despite the conflicts within these camps, but precisely because of these conflicts (see Hobbs 1998; Lewis and Jhally 1998). What happens, for instance, if we abandon perspectives that

understand consumption as either governed by the all-encompassing struc-
ture of capitalism or resisted by the cunning agency of consumers? As Arlene
Davila demonstrates in her ethnography of Puerto Rican shopping malls
(chapter 5 in this volume), what emerges is a more faithful, if less easily ca-
tegorizable, understanding of consumerism's diverse meanings. Her analysis
contrasts the political, economic, and discursive acts that allow the island to
be covered with shopping malls with the realities of how consumers navigate
these acts for individual and varied needs.

Similarly, we might consider allowing those products that are often con-
sidered peripheral to our inquiries to take center stage, as Jonathan Gray
does in his inquiry into the promotional texts of film and television (chapter
14). In arguing that "paratexts" such as trailers, toys, promos, and fan-
produced content enhance the meaning of the texts on which they are based
as well as establish narrative worlds in their own right, Gray critiques the
efforts of media literacy which, in focusing narrowly on commodification,
voids them of artistic potential and mistakenly divorces the processes of me-
dia production from audience interpretation—a practice that contradicts
new media's trend toward convergence of these practices.

Our goal is neither to lament this new branded world nor cheer it. The
speed with which these dynamics continue to change means that we cannot
anticipate their full impact. What's more, we might not yet have adequate
analytic tools at our disposal. That promotional culture creates some oppor-
tunities for engagement as well as forecloses upon others is certain. What is
possible, and what we hope this volume achieves, is a recognition of both
these opportunities and foreclosures, along with the willingness to examine
the potential of new forms of critique, and the drive to envision new possi-
bilities for our own work.

## Notes

1. A European brand strategy firm puts *No Logo* on its recommended reading list, calling it
   one of several "quick, easy-to-read books that will change the way you think about com-
   pany and corporate logos and more specifically how effective corporate branding can be"
   (http://www.e-creation.eu/logo-development-and-branding.aspx) (accessed 7 January
   2010). *No Logo* won the Canadian National Business Book Award in 2000, a prize spon-
   sored by PriceWaterHouseCoopers and the Bank of Montreal. Klein was none too
   pleased about the prize, saying *No Logo* was not a business book but an "antibusiness
   book" (Posner 2001).
2. Marketing professors Muniz and O'Guinn propose that even political statements can
   draw community support when expressed in the language of brands: "Revolutionary pol-
   itics are enacted not through choices of consuming or not consuming, but in identifica-

tion, group sanctioning, and community championing of brands that are deemed by the collective to be the best vessels of the group's 'alternative' politics" (2009: 16).

3. See, for example, the European Commission-funded program, "Privacy Awareness through Security Organization Branding," which since July 2009 has been using brand management techniques to develop and promote privacy standards for certain security organizations. Accessed at http://pats-project.eu/.

4. On typography and brands, see the symposium organized by Concordia University professor Matt Soar: www.logocities.org.

5. Indeed the current slogan for Interbrand, a multinational branding firm, is "Creating and Managing Brand Value."

6. Though as Judith Butler has explained, speech acts *require* a context, "a venue of power by which its performative effects might be materialized" (1997: 12).

7. The ambiguity of the term "publicity" in its capacity to refer either to "publicness" or "persuasion" is not, of course, limited to the activities of the present. As John Corner writes, "the notion has made a long journey from its eighteenth-century use by Kant to indicate the new, enabling possibilities for the exercising of public reason and for the wider 'visibility' of public opinion that followed from the increased circulation of printed publications, through to its present use in many contexts as a synonym for 'hype.' We can see the deformation of the idea of publicity within the institutional contingencies and power relations of modern politics as absolutely central to the problem of modern public communications" (p. 68 in this volume).

8. The relationship of the creative economy to the law is especially acute. The expansion of legal claims to culture in the form of greater protection for "publicly circulating forms of signifying property" (Coombe 1998: 56; see also Garnham 2005; Lury 2004: Ch. 5) has engendered new kinds of authority and authorship in the regime of the brand. Trademarks, patents and copyright laws give brand owners both new terrains of expression and new realms for compensation.

9. See www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/creative_industries/default.aspx.

10. In keeping with Daniel Bell's (1973) prognosis, information technologies are increasingly seen as central to innovation and creativity, allowing government funding to be redirected to organizations which aim to develop ICT capacity (National Research Council 2003: 24).

11. See, for example: In Canada: Conf. Bd. of Canada (2008); in South Africa: ulf.gov.za/documents/the-creative-industries-in-south-africa; in Australia: cultureand-creation.gov.au/research-documents/cics.

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