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Your Ad Here: The Cool Sell of Guerrilla Marketing

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Your Ad Here: The Cool Sell of Guerrilla Marketing

Abstract

This dissertation examines the development of guerrilla marketing strategies and techniques. At the dawn of the 21st century, as the traditional advertising model evolves thanks to changes in technology, markets, commercial clutter, and audience cynicism, marketers are increasingly exploring new and re-imagining old ways of communicating brand messages and managing consumers. By studying the practice of guerrilla marketing – the umbrella term here for an assortment of product placement, outdoor alternative-ambient, word-of-mouth, and consumer-generated approaches – we can better understand an emergent media environment where cultural producers like advertisers strategize and experiment with the dissemination of information and the application of persuasion through covert and outsourced flows. Their creative license is remarkable not only in terms of content but equally that of context: expansively reconfiguring the space typically partitioned for commercial petition. As befitting a public relations mindset, the guerrilla message they seek to seed travels bottom-up, through invisible relay, or from decentralized corners so as to subtly engage audiences in seemingly serendipitous ways. Through a close examination of emblematic campaign examples, trade press coverage, and in-depth interviews with prominent practitioners, this project peels back the curtain on a form of cultural production that reworks the conventional archetype of mass communication and rethinks how consumers might be managed. Drawing upon Foucauldian theory that conceptualizes an active subject rather than a form of domination that has often defined the use of power, I argue that this is a regime of casual, if not "invisible" consumer governance that accommodates yet structures participatory agency; self-effaces its own authority and intent through disinterested spaces and anti-establishment formats; opens up the brand-text as a more flexible form; and democratizes in favor of heterarchical collaboration. It is, in short, advertising that tries not to seem like advertising. By studying the inspirations, machinations, and designs behind these campaigns to uncover and map the institutional discourse and cultural logic at work, I identify and analyze common themes of power and practice that animate otherwise disparate advertising executions and help redefine media industries.

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YOUR AD HERE:

THE COOL SELL OF GUERRILLA MARKETING

Michael Serazio

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ABSTRACT

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Michael Serazio

Barbie Zelizer

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Introduction:

Buying Into the Cool Sell

"Cool is the opiate of our time." – Kalle Lasn (1999, p. 113)

For much of the 20th century, advertisers relied upon the conventional weaponry of the mass media to deliver their commercial payload: newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and billboards structured that information environment and routinely provided the primary venues for the placement of paid advertising. Within that environment, advertisers often jockeyed for attention in predictable, delimited contexts through persuasive campaigns that could be clearly and openly identified as such, even as public relations, a related field with similarly persuasive designs, pursued a very different course of action upon others' actions.

At the dawn of the 21st century, however, in response to changes in technology, markets, commercial clutter and audience cynicism, that traditional model of advertising continues to evolve and blur with its industrial cousin. Given those challenges and linkages, the premium placed on generating publicity through alternative means, and the broader theoretical struggle between power and agency, various sectors of the advertising industry have explored new and re-imagined old techniques of communicating their messages and managing consumer audiences – and in doing so, bleeding out promotion from what are typically more confined, readily apparent media spaces. These innovations and reinventions – many reflecting that ethos of public relations – proffer a solution to an

industry in turmoil by deploying crafty commercial appeals often intended to slide "under the radar" of unsuspecting audiences.

This dissertation examines this most recent environment through a host of evolving strategies for crafting the advertising message. It targets techniques so as to uncover and map the institutional discourse and cultural logic that make newer patterns in "invisible" consumer governance a necessary part of paid advertising: that is, the *subtle* way in which desire is managed, consumption is activated, and subjects are disciplined to shop has become, more than ever, an integral, concocted part of the commercial payload. Because such governance is inescapably fraught with uncertainty and must be reactive to subjects resistant to those invocations, the abstracted strategy of logic buttressing these marketers' efforts is emblematic of a Gramscian (1971) conception of power: "the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups" such that the advertising project comes across as disinterested, solicitous and responsive rather than an obvious attempt at manipulation (p. 182).

By exploring the practice of guerrilla marketing – the umbrella term I appropriate to categorize an assortment of product placement, alternative ambient, word-of-mouth, and consumer-generated approaches – we can better understand a contemporary media environment where cultural producers like advertisers strategize and experiment with the dissemination of information and the application of persuasion through increasingly covert and outsourced flows. As befitting a public relations mindset, the guerrilla message they seek to "seed" travels bottom-up, through invisible relay, or from decentralized corners so as to subtly engage audiences in seemingly serendipitous ways.

Ultimately, the "regime of engagement" that is orchestrated through such strategies reflects a Foucauldian (2000a) mode of consumer management in which "the exercise of power is a conduct of conducts and a management of possibilities" without the appearance of force, intervention, or determination in managing that conduct (p. 341). Thus, this is a regime that accommodates yet structures participatory agency; self-effaces its own authority and intent through objective spaces and anti-establishment formats; opens up the brand-text as a more flexible form; and democratizes and decentralizes in favor of collaboration. It is, in short, advertising that tries not to seem like advertising.

Audiences can be governed differently in a networked media world: their agency – or, to some, "immaterial labor" in certain contexts – can be presupposed and coordinated as part of the formula of cultural production (Lazzarato, 1996). The exercise of "push" media addresses audiences comparatively imperiously, while "pull" media strategically accords liberty and complies with the interactive choice that ensues. Advertising based on that invitation (i.e., pull) rather than interruption (i.e., push) regards the capacities of a "free subject" who can choose between "a possible field of action" more conspicuously and structures an occasion for their productive usage (Foucault, 2000a, pp. 341, 342). Moreover, this arrangement affords a mode of address that further disaggregates the "mass" in "mass media" – valuable, for cultural reasons, because whatever remains of that mass audience carries with it an inherently "mainstream" connotation that the guerrilla advertiser often tries to avoid by opting for channels that exude a more underground ethos (Thornton, 1996).

Before proceeding any further, I ought to clarify and defend my use of a term that will be central to this analysis. "Guerrilla marketing," admittedly, has a relatively narrow use within the advertising industry and practitioners would most commonly recognize it as the label for the variety of outdoor stunts that I describe in chapter 3.[1] Nonetheless, I believe that by expanding the scope of this label to encompass a range of marketing phenomena not typically considered "guerrilla" (e.g., product placement, word-of-mouth, consumer-generated), we can better appreciate the philosophy of governance that accompanies the deployment of such promotional tactics. For this broader range of approaches examined in the project equally merit conceptual claim to the "guerrilla" label, particularly given the militarized etymology of this term, and by studying the inspirations, machinations, and designs behind these campaigns, we can identify and analyze common themes of power and practice that animate otherwise disparate advertising executions. This can, moreover, assist in understanding the ongoing redefinition and reinvention of the industry itself.

A broad characterization might hold that "guerrilla marketing" serves here as the label for nontraditional communications between advertisers and audiences that rely on an element of surprise or surreptitiousness in the intermediary itself. It is advertising, in other words, through unexpected, usually outdoor, online and interpersonal avenues – unconventional, literally, in its choice of "media" platforms (i.e., engaging a medium beyond the traditional television commercial or newspaper advertisement). Its creative

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[1] The term itself appears to originate in the title of Jay Conrad Levinson's (1984) bestselling book, *Guerrilla Marketing*. However, Levinson coins the phrase to encompass a more general strategic philosophy for scrappy small-business entrepreneurs as opposed to the more narrow advertising-oriented use here.

license is remarkable not only in terms of content but equally that of context: expansively reconfiguring the space typically partitioned for commercial petition. Despite the wide-ranging terminology that has sprung up recently to describe the techniques under consideration here, they share a fundamental allegiance to this organizing principle: *an unconventional space or channel that seeks to engineer a regime of engagement through cool sell tactics*. Again, as is befitting of PR rationality, the guerrilla marketing effort is a project of persuasion that cloaks itself casually and sometimes invisibly to consumer targets and attempts to engineer "discovery" as the constitutive experience of those audiences; it is a mode of governance set upon the *active* subject, not a form of *domination* that has often defined the application of power.

While no research has yet exhaustively analyzed how and why this form of marketing communication has grown of late as a means of reaching consumers, these methods fit within a historical trajectory stretching back nearly a century and this inquiry can be situated within and build upon related scholarly discussions at the intersection of advertising, audiences, governmentality, hegemony, public relations, new media, and the creative industries. Through a close examination of emblematic campaign examples, trade discourse, and in-depth interviews with prominent practitioners, this project peels back the curtain on a particular form of cultural production that reworks the conventional archetype of mass communication and re-conceptualizes consumer governance through themes and practices of participation, populism, heterarchicality, decentralization, and freedom. At stake is no less than the structure by which the media environment is underwritten, the waning spaces in which one can avoid commercial assault, and the

potential for devaluing, contaminating or even burning out the "original institution[s]" hosting the promotional forms (McAllister, 1996, p. 251).

Media theory, not unlike advertising, has long taken for granted certain organizing principles about the mass communication process. As a starting point, take, for example, Morris Janowitz's classic definition: "Mass communications comprise the institutions and techniques by which specialized groups employ technological devices (press, radio, films, etc.) to disseminate symbolic content to large, heterogeneous and widely dispersed audiences" (as cited in McQuail & Windahl, 1993, p. 6). This characterization tends to assume that the content is standardized, the context is delimited, and that messages start from a structural center and work their way to a social periphery. Most of all, it seems to imply an *obviousness* – an intrinsic visibility – about the mass communication process, whether it be news, entertainment or, indeed, advertising. Paid commercial forms often, though certainly not exclusively, appeared in familiar places (during the programming break on TV, surrounding the editorial content in a magazine, or across banners atop a webpage) where advertisers, audiences, and media scholars have come to expect them. *Broad*-casting meant just that: a patent, top-down, one-to-many, centrifugal model that provides the backbone of much media inquiry.

If traditional advertising fit snugly within that rubric, the challenges posed and opportunities raised by interactivity as an operating mechanism offer insight into a different philosophy of consumer governance. Guerrilla tactics demonstrate a decidedly more flexible, niche-seeking, ambiguous, and even imperceptible bent than Janowitz's definition accommodates – and, indeed, one that is reflective of the ambitions and

executions of public relations practice. Denis McQuail and Sven Windahl (1993), whose

index of models was last revised at the start of the internet era, acknowledge that roles

like sender and receiver are blurring and that content is less stable than before: "The

'ideal' type of a centralized broadcasting or publishing organization sending out the same

content to large and stable audiences is less and less appropriate" (p. 10).

This media evolution comports with a larger post-Fordist shift in advanced

capitalism. Don Slater (1997) notes that in recent decades the Fordist assembly line –

emblematic of large-scale, standardized mass production in the 20th century – has given

way to more flexible, unique, cost-effective industrial output:

> The rigorously hierarchical chain of command of the Fordist system is rendered
> unnecessary by distributed information networks, while smaller, more
> autonomous work units compromising flexibly trained workers rather than
> Taylorized machine-tenders respond quickly and creatively and more in keeping
> with the new technologies themselves… Flexibilization is associated with a move
> from standardized products that are sold to homogenous mass markets to
> customized products that are sold to segmented markets. (p. 190)

Much in the same way, guerrilla advertising breaks from the standardized content mass-

produced and disseminated by centralized broadcasters in favor of smaller-scale

flexibility more beholden to heterarchical patterns of information flow. This flexibility –

being negotiable and improvised, again, like public relations' aspirations – attests to a

Gramscian fluidity in the exercise of producer power: working with the agency (and, as

needed, the contested exchange) of autonomous networks, spaces, and outputs.

Indeed, it is not broadcasting so much as the network that perhaps best represents

"the core organizing principle of this [new] communicative environment;" a network

being a model, fittingly, where agency is built into structure (Bruns, 2008, p. 14). One

finds here that guerrilla advertising often strives to accommodate such an evolving media ecology – in some cases, trying to coordinate and capitalize on a more latent, many-to-many, centripetal model of content distribution. If mass marketing was born of the need – post-Industrial Revolution – to sell mass produced goods, the "informational revolutionary forces" determining "the shift from push to pull [media]" perhaps now require adaptively tailored messages rather than monolithically Taylorized messages (Jaffe, 2005, pp. 7, 29, italics original).

Thus, some guerrilla marketing (particularly word-of-mouth and consumer-generated) presents itself as a form of capitalist crowd-sourcing – one that is both enabled technologically (networked infrastructure makes it now more possible than ever) and advantageous culturally (trickling up from the underground semiotically trumps fanning out from the mainstream). In another Gramscian move, this collaboration also enables an egalitarian image of "brand democratization," thought to be capable of equivocating the exercise of marketer power over consumer subjects. Such a project would, in turn, foreground "conviviality" rather than "transmission" as the "prevailing model of communication," as Christine Spurgeon (2008) proposes – a move that, I would add, suggests a different form and logic of governance through which advertising might operate (p. 9).

Theory's Struggle with Power and Agency

Central to the logic of governance is a contest over the primacy and locus of agency within the project of power. The tension between and debates over structure and

agency color one of the long-standing struggles in both social theory writ large as well as media studies more particularly – a tension which, at its least productive (certainly for these purposes), has often played out as a zero-sum game. Major thinkers across the ideological spectrum have wrestled with how to reconcile the potential for autonomous individual choice against macro-level exigencies and machinations. The fulcrum for this complex negotiation rests upon the theorization of the agent who, at once, seems to act as well as be acted upon. Advertising represents a fruitful site in which to situate these tensions because, in a "free" market, advertising has to pragmatically reconcile much the same challenges: to attempt to determine the participation of what is, ultimately, a self-determining subject. This puts "agency" at the forefront of that management, yet after years worth of commercial incantations – and in the midst of significant changes in media ecology – consumers seem ever resistive to governance in the usual manner. Guerrilla marketing, as a philosophy and in practice, suggests a potential resolution to that conundrum – a resolution that accentuates agency above all and projects influence by self-effacing it. Such a project represents a sophisticated instrumentalization of governance, wherein conduct is both shaped and validated as autonomous through freedom and action.

Two central figures informing this conceptualization of power and agency are Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault. Articulating the complex relationship between dominant and subordinate classes, Gramsci (1971) provided a key pivot from the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism that charts the fluid accommodations of authority that forestall outright revolution and, by according the theoretical space for

agency, thereby softens – even "naturalizes" – the application of power. His formula for

"hegemony" was, of course, essential to distinguishing this subtle exercise of leadership

rather than coercion thusly:

> The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'… A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power… [I]t subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds firmly in its grasp, it must continue to lead as well… The 'normal' exercise of hegemony… is characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. (pp. 57-58)

Foucault (2000a) further leavened (and diffused) the exercise of power and

strongly echoes Gramsci in this regard in his explication of "conduct": "To 'conduct' is at

the same time to 'lead' others (according to mechanisms of coercion that are, to varying

degrees, strict)… Power is less a confrontation between two adversaries… than a

question of 'government'" (p. 341). "Government" is indeed the central question here –

not just as a viable and constructive theoretical frame for the analysis of advertising (and,

guerrilla marketing, here more particularly) but for the complexity it introduces into that

continuum of power and agency. Seeking to understand a "practice – or a succession of

practices – animated, justified, and enabled by a specific rationality" (Gordon, 2000, p.

xxiii), Foucault (2000b) defined government as "a right manner of disposing things so as

to lead to… an end that is 'convenient' for each of the things that are to be governed" and

as "employing tactics rather than laws… to arrange things in such a way that, through a

certain number of means, such-and-such ends may be achieved" (p. 211).

Two key motifs emerge from this characterization: a willingness to think expansively about the territory or spheres of life in which governance takes place and a decidedly obliging approach to articulating the agency of the subject of that governance. Therefore, governance, as illuminated in the broadest sense as intended by Foucault, functions as an enterprise by which the "[disposition]" of a subject or subjects is patterned, molded, or impressed – a mode of activity that could busy itself at the level of the self, a community, an institution, or a nation. It represents the application of power to "the conduct of others' conduct" in circumstances large and small: a parent's governance of a child's manners; a boss's governance of an employee's labor; a ruler's governance of a citizen's dealings (Foucault, 1997a, p. 203). In each of these scenarios, the subject simultaneously acts and is acted upon – a subject conceived as fundamentally sovereign, yet operating within larger, sometimes less visible operations (in this case, guerrilla marketing) that pursue that "management of possibilities" (Foucault, 2000a, p. 341). This lends itself to a soft, subtle, and sophisticated rendering of "power" that will be useful for my own purposes, for it is a conceptualization of power permanently beholden to neither producer nor consumer but has to be constantly negotiated and revised. In other words:

> What defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately upon others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions… The exercise of power… operates on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of active subjects is able to inscribe itself… It is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action… [Government] covered not only the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, that were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other

people. *To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others.* (Foucault, 2000a, pp. 340, 341, italics added)

Importantly, both Foucault and Gramsci amply account for "resistance" in their respective schemas: this represents the (often unanticipated) means by which the agent asserts herself as an autonomous and, if necessary, antithetical participant with or against the project of power. Foucault (2007), cycling through various terms to use for this mode of opposition (including "revolt" and "dissidence"), lands on "counter-conducts" as an expression of "the sense of struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others" (p. 201); elsewhere, he acknowledges, "In power relations, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance… there would be no power relations at all" (Foucault, 1997b, p. 292). Resistance therefore represents the key corollary in this diagram of power and registers, vis-à-vis consumption, at varying degrees of obstinacy: from the consumer subject who fails to be persuaded by a marketer's entreaty to the consumer subject who actively avoids that appeal (e.g., by way of TiVo) to the consumer subject who openly challenges the structure of governance enacted through advertising (e.g., by way of culture jamming).

Gramsci made space for much the same provocative (in the sense of "provoking" power) "recalcitrance of the will" and "intransigence of freedom" that Foucault (2000a) identified in subjects (p. 342).[2] As interpreted and applied by a generation of cultural

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[2] Despite the aforementioned parallels, one key difference between Foucault and Gramsci that should be registered is the width of their analytic aperture; whereas Gramsci's concept of hegemony feels all-encompassing, Foucault routinely opted for particularity in place of universality (a caveat that put him at odds with the Marxist ethos). For instance, he (2000a) cautioned, "It may not be wise to take as a whole the rationalization of society or of culture but to analyze such a process in several fields, each with reference to a fundamental experience… We have to… analyze specific rationalities" (p. 329). Hegemony

studies theorists (i.e., Bennett, 1986), his notion of hegemony came to serve as the template for how pop culture can function as a site of contestation – a "compromise equilibrium" perched somewhere between coercion and consent that, by definition, accommodates agency – as "hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised" (p. 161).

Marketing represents just such a "compromise equilibrium" in concurrently governing consumers and adapting to their agency: that is, in conducting *and* responding to their conduct as needed. Indeed, in subsequent chapters, I will expressly highlight how guerrilla marketing – as a Gramscian terrain of "exchange and negotiation," "a 'negotiated' mix of intentions and counter-intentions; both from 'above' and from 'below', both 'commercial' and 'authentic'" – flexibly incorporates both that outright resistance to advertising as well as alternate, improvised articulations of the brand in ways that Dick Hebdige (1979) earlier mapped of music subculture (Storey, 2006, pp. 11, 106). In fact, many of the strategies illuminated here – and their attendant logics of governance – embody a fundamental, even systematic, flexibility on the part of power (true to public relations expertise as well); for any project steeped in participation, populism, heterarchicality, decentralization, and freedom, as I earlier summarized, must be lithe at heart.

This "compromise equilibrium" reworks and refines the opportunity for agency in sophisticated ways. It was, in fact, Foucault's insistence upon differentiating power from

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is, on the other hand, far more comfortable in totalizing than governmentality (or, more appropriately, *governmentalities*).

domination – retrieving the former as "power relations… thus mobile, reversible and unstable… [and] possible only insofar as the subjects are free" and extraditing the latter as when "power relations, instead of being mobile, allowing the various participants to adopt strategies modifying them, remain blocked, frozen [such that…] the practices of freedom do not exist or exist only unilaterally or are extremely constrained and limited" – that both marks a revised focus on agency from earlier thinking and comports with Gramsci's own parsing of consent and coercion (Foucault, 1997b, pp. 283, 292).

For it is in his later lectures and interviews, working at the frontier of this logic of governmentality, that Foucault appeared to clarify these nuances of "power relations" vis-à-vis the implication that emerges from, say, *Discipline and Punish*, in which (panoptic) power seems to dominate the (prisoner) subject absolutely (Gordon, 1991, p. 5). Indeed, the intellectual arc of Foucault's career might be mapped from a self-described change in "problematic" that proceeds from the analysis of more "passive, constrained" subjects like the ill or insane to a more "politically active," self-governing subject of power – a spectrum that corresponds with the increasing sophistication of agency charted here in which the subject, as audience member and consumer target, can be suitably located (Foucault, 1997b, p. 291; Rabinow, 1984, p. 11).

Discipline and Punish, which surveyed the historical trends in penal-reform thought and the techniques of discipline and supervision that emerged from them, is, of course, notable for its illumination of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon as a "general formula" of power that "spread throughout the social body" by virtue of its capacity for outsourcing surveillance and inducing "a state of conscious and permanent visibility"

and, hence, self-government in subjects that "assures the automatic functioning of power"

(Foucault, 1977, pp. 201, 207, 209). In later chapters, I draw upon Foucault's rendering

of the panopticon to frame certain market research techniques, but here it would seem

relevant to briefly distinguish the subtle gradations of difference between panopticism

and governmentality as Foucault conceives of them: both do represent techniques of

power, but the latter regards subjects slightly less disciplinarily and accentuates more

transparently "the forces and capacities of living individuals… as resources to be

fostered, to be used, and to be optimized" (i.e., the productivity of *agency*) (Dean, 2010,

p. 29). Put simply, *Discipline*'s panopticon, apropos of its prison etymology, allows for

few if any "ways out" – opportunities to escape the normalizing gaze of centralized

omniscience – whereas the "governance" articulated in Foucault's later work seems to

emphasize, to a greater degree, the authentic existence of and operational utility in the

subject's freedom. "Power," Foucault (2000a) again clarifies, "is exercised only over

free subjects… who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of

conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are possible" (p. 342).

Thus, my earlier articulation of consumer governance – as "the subtle way in

which desire is managed, consumption is activated and subjects are disciplined to shop" –

should not be understood to preclude the agency that Foucault attributes to subjects in his

broader scheme of governance (or, for that matter, that Gramsci accords to subordinate

groups within hegemony). Although I rely upon the native language of disciplinary

power (e.g., terms like "manage") to define consumer governance here and throughout,

shoppers are, to be certain, not simply automatons of marketer will. (The countless

failures of commercial start-ups testify to this, as does the at-times desperate uncertainty that marks the advertiser's project.) And even if marketers must innately relate to consumers as "subjects" of their governance, when it comes to guerrilla advertising, the trade discourse rarely discloses this and in fact seems to idealize practices that obfuscate that "conduct of conduct." Moreover, when it comes to consumption, that latter "conduct" – that is, agency – is also animated and constrained by the experience of social structures, which invites the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Sarah Thornton into focus.

The Uses of Subcultural Capital

Bourdieu's theory was motivated by much the same impulse as Gramsci and Foucault, in that he sought to bridge, reconcile, and overcome the unproductive polarities of individual free will and structural determination. Bourdieu wrestled with an account of agency that could fit perceptions, intentions and actions within one's position in a preexisting social space that tends to foreordain certain perceptions, intentions and actions. His foundational concepts like "field" and "habitus" and his foremost explication (1984) of the relationship between social structure and cultural differentiation, wherein taste functions as both a product of and a resource for legitimizing stratification and establishing one's own position (and, hence, "disposition") within a classificatory order are devoted to this tension. As both a "structuring" structure as well as a "structured" structure – "a dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality," in his terms, habitus represents a sophisticated template for that struggle over the placement of agency: coordinates of preference that

are internalized yet not determining (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 77). Since the habitus "merely 'suggests' what people should think and what they should choose to do," it, too, resembles a Foucauldian scheme of governance, wherein the "possible field of action" is structured yet not a foregone conclusion; habitus, that is, doesn't act directly upon action, but upon a potential set of actions (Ritzer, 2008, p. 406).

Essential to the operations of agency within Bourdieu's theory – and especially applicable to the practices of guerrilla marketing – is his (2001) typology of "capital," which extracts the term from a narrowly financial context and which, again, both accommodates an inherited position of power and socialization (or lack thereof) as well as articulates the means by which agency can be exercised independently based upon the following levels:

> As *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility. (pp. 97, 98)

The convertibility of these capitals will be in evidence throughout the chapters that follow: hip-hop artists and graffiti writers who utilize their "street aesthetic" versatility (i.e., "embodied" cultural capital) to become marketers themselves and retail the merchandise of cool using their "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (chapter 2 and 3); buzz agents who capitalize on their own "possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (i.e., "social capital") (chapter 4); and Web 2.0 social entrepreneurs who

operationalize both cultural and social capital in creating marketer-inspired online content

for their networked followings (chapter 5) (Bourdieu, 2001, pp. 98, 102-103).

Because Bourdieu's typology can be assumed inextricable from a formal and

informal education in the hierarchy of taste values, and often through family socialization

at that, and because guerrilla marketing is used less to pitch highbrow culture than its

underground counterpart, Sarah Thornton's (1996) adapted category ("subcultural

capital") perhaps more productively anticipates the logic of consumer governance

elucidated here. She proposes that the taste hierarchies of youth (and specifically club)

cultures – so coveted by corporations that often employ guerrilla tactics to impress them

– can be evaluated across three distinctions: "the authentic versus the phoney, the 'hip'

versus the 'mainstream', and the 'underground' versus 'the media'" (p. 4). In each

frame, the former expresses an ethos of or space for agency – asserted against a

prevailing perceived structure or system of values represented by the latter.

For in the subcultures Thornton examines, the "mainstream" represents a social

construction endemic to "the masses," and "the media" serve as their "co-opting" force,

ever threatening to divulge exclusive taste-knowledges and thereby laying waste to the

accumulation of credibility and the function of status conferral within those

"underground" fields (pp. 6, 117). Thornton further suggests that "subcultural capital is

embodied in the form of being 'in the know', using (but not over-using) current slang and

looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles" and that "a variety of

occupations and incomes can be gained as a result of [this] 'hipness'" (pp. 11-12).

Again, a variety of instances in the pages that follow – rappers corporatizing slang, cool

hunters excavating trends, and pop fans assisting in viral promotion – exemplify this convertibility of subcultural capital into economic capital. Malcolm Gladwell (1997), reporting on this excavation of subcultural capital for commercial purposes – this "trickle-up" reversal of fashion diffusion, a topic given full treatment in chapter 3 – notes the delicacy with which hipness has to be plumbed for fear of it taking flight in response to hegemonic incorporation (and hence the frustrating uncertainty of exercising marketer power over that consumer agency): "The better coolhunters become at bringing the mainstream close to the cutting edge, the more elusive the cutting edge becomes" (p. 78).

Guerrilla advertising similarly contrasts itself with traditional advertising across Thornton's axes: While the latter is thought to be phony and mainstream in its ham-handed, "lowest-common-denominator" pursuit of "the masses" – a socially-constructed "Other" that guerrilla marketers, like youth subcultures, often subscribe to – the former tries to simulate something more flexible, hip, underground, and authentic. Authenticity may seem a hypocritical ideal to include here, given, as I will demonstrate, guerrilla marketing's propensity to falsify its own pretenses – chief among them that there is a marketing effort even taking place. And yet authenticity is essential to a subculture's positioning as underground (and not "mass mediated" in an explicit way) and authenticity ever represents the elusive ideal in a field of practice (i.e., advertising) intrinsically marked by contrivance. To that end, "authentication" is part of the project of outsourcing the promotional message to creatively disinterested (i.e., characteristic of branded content), anti-establishment (i.e., alternative ambient), flexibly vernacular (i.e., word-of-mouth), or democratically viral (i.e., consumer-generated) interlocutions. Just as

Thornton identifies that "the general accessibility of broadcasting… too widely distributes the raw materials of youth subcultural capitals," so, too, do the efforts of guerrilla marketers showcased here endeavor to work through those same subcultural capitals (p. 123).

In some ways, then, Thornton's theorization extends the Gramscian schematic first discussed: resistance is a *source of* – as much as a *response to* – the real power here. For as Thornton demonstrates, countercultures (a product of Foucault's "counter-conducts") are valuable market segments in their own right – valuable because they operate, semantically and spatially, amongst the "underground," furthest from the appearance of "top-down" power, and thus showcase, exhibitionistically, agency as an autonomous force: "Their definition of cool is," as Gladwell (1997) identifies, "doing something that nobody else is doing" (i.e., resisting) (p. 84). It is in this "field" in which inaccessibility is a badge of honor – a mark of power – fortified against the impurities of commercialization and incorporation. If "hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised," those groups – and their cultural practices – that momentarily defy assimilation (like Thornton's club cultures) are perhaps exercising the most authentic form of free will at that frontier of agency (Gramsci, 1971, p. 161). Naturally, then, it is to this "leading edge" of the underground (a deliberately ironic phrase and frame that, simultaneously, confirms and complicates Gramsci) that marketers would proceed – the site at which agency is articulated most forcefully through individual expression rather than mediated modeling and the productivity of the "bottom-up" is most apparent. Again, guerrilla

marketing is, in particular, evidence of this effort by the cultural producer to situate the

appeal to governance in such a manner that exudes a sophisticated execution of "power"

and a full-scale embrace of agency.

The Cool Sell and the Regime of Engagement

Within theoretical discussions of media ecology, the issue of the medium itself

operating in a determinant manner vis-à-vis the degree of sovereign action that can be

accorded to subjects based upon their participation can also be situated at the forefront of

a struggle between power and agency. And, from that vantage point, the recourse to

guerrilla marketing might be considered the ascent of the cool sell over the hot sell.

These terms tweak, rather coyly, Marshall McLuhan's (1994) "hot" to "cold" media

continuum. McLuhan defines "cool" media as those which are low in resolution and high

in audience participation (and therefore "conduct" audiences through ambiguity and

agency); "hot" media, by contrast, are high definition, low engagement (and therefore

"conduct" audiences through lucidity and submission). As usual, McLuhan's theory in

this regard was better elucidated by an intellectual descendent:

> The crux of hot and cool is that media which are loud, bright, clear, fixed ('hot' or
> high-definition) evoke less involvement from perceivers than media whose
> presentations are soft, shadowy, blurred and changeable. The psychological logic
> of this distinction is that we are obliged and seduced to work harder – get more
> involved – to fill in the gaps with the lower profile, less complete media. (P.
> Levinson, 2001, p. 9)

This "obligation" or "seduction" to participate more fully in the presentation – put

differently, the requisition of agency – illustrates an ambition I have identified and will

try to express in the phrase, "regime of engagement." While McLuhan's taxonomy was intended literally, I appropriate it here more metaphorically: That is, relative to the "hot," "top-down," explicit advertisements through the conventional means of the mass media, the "bottom-up," "cool" sell of guerrilla marketing tends to generate enigma toward engagement, necessitating, as McLuhan observes, "completion by the audience" (p. 23). This kind of collaboration tacitly acknowledges that marketers lack the full control over brand "meaning" as they once boasted – a long-standing concession of and point of departure for public relations – and models the *re*-modeling of not just the advertising industry but perhaps other creative industries writ large.

If the hot sell was about the assured delivery of a commercial message through obvious channels, the cool sell is about the (seemingly) accidental discovery of it through less visible ones. If the hot sell prefers proclamation to reach audiences, the cool sell stages surprise and serendipity. If the hot sell is overt and mass mediated, the cool sell is covert and niche-oriented – and involves sneaking up on the consumer in ways ranging from pleasantly interactive to downright deceptive. If the hot sell was about "aggressively shouting to everybody at the same time," the cool sell "tends to whisper occasionally to a few individuals" (A. M. Kaikati & J. G. Kaikati, 2004, p. 6). If the hot sell told you what to buy, the cool sell "lets" you figure it out for yourself. If the hot sell betrayed marketer determinism, the cool sell embraces consumer agency.

Thus, the cool sell also demonstrates a progression in advertising industry metrics and values. Advertisers have long used "impressions" (i.e., the number of people who simply saw a campaign) as the crucible for determining success. In the past decade, the

industry has become more and more obsessed with "engagement" (i.e., user interactivity) as a better measure of effectiveness (Stewart & Pavlou, 2009); indeed, one recent report from Cannes calls it "the new holy grail of advertising" (Petrecca, 2007). This shift corresponds, not coincidentally, to the period in which the internet has rapidly altered the traditional information environment, though not all techniques to mobilize engagement necessarily appear online. Thus, I will be arguing throughout the coming pages for a kind of "regime of engagement" that I believe has taken hold in guerrilla marketing thought and taken shape in the strategy that informs its practice.

At one level, as noted, this "regime" speaks to the increasing valuation that clients and agencies seem to place upon "engagement" rather than mere "impressions" as an index of the depth of participation with a particular advertising program. But the concept is also meant to signify how marketers are accommodating interactive communication ecology and the opportunities and challenges that "pull" rather than "push" media afford. And, more abstractly, the regime of engagement is also intended to speak to a particular mode of governance whereby brands seek to establish themselves in more flexible, open, and ambiguous ways so as to anticipate the collaborative agency of promotional interlocutors and consumer subjects. By utilizing a "cool sell" approach, brand management seeks to stage a process of commercial discovery, engineer participation, and achieve persuasion that unfolds in a "naturalized," even invisible way to that subject because the advertiser is avoiding a position of didactic disciplinary authority that might be otherwise typical of much traditional, paid, display advertising.

Moreover, I find "regime" to be a useful term to borrow here given its Foucauldian lineage. In trying to communicate the mentalities of government – the organization of producing knowledge and utilizing that knowledge to substantiate action – Foucault (2000c) drew upon the phrase "regimes of practices;" by this he meant "places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and taken-for-granted meet and interconnect" (p. 225). "Regime" therefore offers an analytic tool for understanding this movement of rationality through to practice – this sequence of thought to implementation – which I will be pursuing here; this "regime" specifically possesses its "own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence and 'reason'" oriented toward "engagement," as I have elucidated above, with an emphasis, above all, on *agency* as the "prescriptive effects regarding what is to be done" (p. 225). To appreciate how this abstract philosophy of communication management plays out in discursive terms, let me offer one brief, initial example drawn from the trade pages.

Jonathan Ressler, a former guerrilla marketing CEO whose work is covered in detail in chapter 4, explains to *Promo* magazine the ideology of his operation thusly: "As marketers, you can't choose the target. The target has to choose you. We have to find a way to put a brand in front of the target *in a way that will make them choose*" (Hanover, 2001, italics added). This excerpt should begin to hint at how marketers structure agency and govern the freedom of the consumer subject through a "regime of engagement," while underscoring the obvious contradictory tensions of passivity and activity inherent to such a branding philosophy: the "choice" – that is, agency – has to feel genuine even as it is "[made]" (i.e., governed) by Ressler. Part of the task of guerrilla advertising, as

deconstructed in this dissertation, is to stage an experience of empowerment in the promotional process, be it small or large, and to produce an apparatus that instrumentalizes audiences in useful ways. Through this lens, consumers are conceived as far from the stereotypical "couch potatoes" of old, but they are neither the fully autonomous agents of new; rather, that positioning of agency is "gamed," for lack of a better word, along a continuum, within commercial programs intent on persuading without appearing to persuade. *Adweek* summarizes these scenarios in a similarly paradoxical way that nonetheless illuminates the complexities of consumer governance involved: "[They] are designed to *make consumers willing participants* of marketing rather than passive observers" (M. Anderson, 2004, italics added).

Through these non-traditional strategies, marketers are pursuing a deeper level of engagement than they have typically demanded. And although this often means exercising less control over the particularities of a given message, it actually signals the pursuit of greater reach, resonance, and hence "power," because the flexibility of that approach enables the infiltration of otherwise commercially dormant zones in less interruptive (i.e., "push") ways. When consumers are "[made into] willing participants," they are shown to be subjects of governmental power as Foucault enunciated theoretically; a cool sell stratagem is thought to position subjects optimally toward this goal by "obliging and seducing" their participation, by "disposing" their "willingness."

For as David Stewart and Paul Pavlou (2009) note, echoing Herbert Simon (1957), "a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention," which appears to be precisely the guerrilla logic governing the cool sell turn; amidst a noisy, busy media

landscape full of *obvious* appeals, less can actually mean more (p. 389). Conversely, agencies that specialize in and clients that patronize guerrilla marketing's strategy of consumer governance presume that a "laundry list" of "interruptive" ad messages – located in an environment already overloaded with information – renders few effective (Bond & Kirshenbaum, 1998, p. 2). But by baiting audiences who are thought to be otherwise ad-weary and media literate with more collaborative, indirect, and even clandestine campaigns, guerrilla marketers can claim to be responding to contemporary technological developments as well as cultural conditions.

For theorists who have wrestled with how to situate and track agency against the project of power – be it hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971), governmental (Foucault, 2000a, 2000b), socially structured (Bourdieu, 1984), or mediated (McLuhan, 1994; Thornton, 1996) – the "invisibility" of the guerrilla marketing ethos represents a practical vindication of this struggle: to the consumer subject, agency still *feels* within reach, because the disciplinary force historically endemic to marketing is located in flows and spaces atypical of its techniques of power.

Public Relations: Guerrilla Marketing's "Unseen" Precursor

While innovative, those marketing techniques under examination in this dissertation are not without philosophical and empirical precedence. And although the work discussed here is characterized largely by an advertising label within the industry (and, more specifically, a "guerrilla" tag for these purposes, as justified earlier and further elucidated in a later section), the practice of public relations over the past century looms

large as a historical precursor. Reviewing the intellectual roots and pioneering executions of public relations through to its modern-day amorphous personages reveals tellingly similar patterns and mindsets to guerrilla strategy and casts earlier theoretical discussions about hegemony and governmentality in a relevant light as well. For to understand the logic of consumer governance when it comes to guerrilla marketing, public relations needs to be contextualized as a tactical forbearer – even if the practitioner participants I spoke with rarely acknowledged the legacy by name.

A paramount figure in the maturation of the industry and, according to some – including, as befitting a promoter, himself – "the father of public relations" was Edward Bernays, whose *Crystallizing Public Opinion* and *Propaganda* textbooks helped defined the field for better or for worse (Cutlip, 1994, pp. 108, 159). Given my characterization of guerrilla marketing's management ethos as "governance without feeling like governance," Bernays (1928) should perhaps be identified as the intellectual progenitor, what with his claim that "propaganda is the executive arm of the invisible government" (p. 20) and his emphasis on the "invisibility with which public relations experts must, ideally, perform their handiwork" (Ewen, 1996, p. 15).

"Invisibility" is not, however, a motif limited to Bernays' admonitions when it comes to public relations' philosophy of governance. Take, for example, the industry's "unwritten slogan" ("the best PR is never noticed") (Stauber & Rampton, 1995, p. 2); the title of Scott Cutlip's (1994) tome on pioneering PR practitioners (*The Unseen Power*); Cutlip's characterization of successful work ("generally the public moves along unaware of the influence of the practitioner") (p. 529); or that of a PR executive ("you never know

when a PR agency is being effective; you'll just find your views slowly shifting")
(Stauber & Rampton, 1995, p. 14). "To influence the public," Bernays (1947)
summarized, "the engineering of consent works with and through group leaders and
opinion molders on every level" (p. 117).

The 1947 essay this quote is drawn from, "The Engineering of Consent," provides
a compelling glimpse into how Bernays conceptualized the exercise of power: cynically
couching "the ongoing necessity – in an outwardly democratic society – to manufacture
the imprimatur of 'popular support' to validate the decision-making activities of elites"
such that "democracy could be managed from above" (Ewen, 1996, pp. 377, 381). The
Gramscian logic at work here should emerge explicitly in the following passage:

> We expect our elected government officials to try to engineer our consent –
> through the network of communications open to them – for the measures they
> propose. We reject government authoritarianism or regimentation, but we are
> willing to take action suggested to us by the written or spoken word. (Bernays,
> 1947, p. 114)

Gramsci (1971) had identified a similar reasoning of rule in his theorization of
hegemony, where the ruling class "leads" rather than dominates and where "the attempt is
always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority,
expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion" (pp. 57, 80). In many ways, the
"compromise equilibrium" between the hegemonic and subaltern class is aptly
summarized in this calibration of power through public relations that Bernays diagrams
(p. 161); like PR, the theoretical exercise of hegemonic forces necessitate flexibility for
the maintenance of power (or "order," in Bernays' terms) and "alter their content as
social and cultural conditions change: they are improvised and negotiable" (During,

1999, p. 4). Indeed, upon closer inspection, the parallels are striking: at a turn-of-the-century juncture when the "masses" (again, Bernays' term) were emboldened and making new demands on the powerful, the public relations industry emerged to offer "strategies for [justifying] social rule" and "managing democratic appetites," so as to "bring about a successful negotiation between the chaos of popular aspirations and exigencies of elite power;" likewise, Ivy Lee, another key "compliance professional" (a fittingly Gramscian label) influential in the early industry, "argued that it was imperative for men of business to manufacture a commonality of interests between them and an often censorious public" (Ewen, 1996, pp. 13, 20, 34, 75, 299).

Thus, at that time, Roland Marchand (1998) notes, "Corporate leaders acquired a new awareness of the import of public opinion, of the vulnerability of their operations" (p. 41). The proposal that hegemonic forces ought to work with and through – rather than against – resistance is vocalized by Bernays' (1928) "give-and-take" conclusion: "The public has its own standards and demands and habits. You may modify them, but you dare not run counter to them" (p. 66). Thus, public relations also exemplifies Foucault's (1997b) characterization of "power relations [as…] strategic games between liberties" (p. 299): Just as the PR professional advises a client's organization to "present itself 'through the eyes of the public'" (Ewen, 1996, p. 93), so, too, does Foucault (2000b) recommend that "a governor should only govern in such a way that he thinks and acts as though he were in the service of those who were governed" (p. 212). Moreover, the early mission established for public relations – to "humanize" faceless, "soulless" corporations weathering a "crisis of [social] legitimacy" by "rising above mere commercialism and

removing the taint the taint of selfishness" – broadly overlaps with advertising's longtime

tactics of branding (Marchand, 1998, p. 2).

Public relations is, therefore, essentially a "management function," as Scott Cutlip

(1994) concludes (p. 761); yet it is a management function, much like guerrilla

marketing, with subtlety – indeed, "invisible governance" – as its imprimatur.

Fundamentally, the two categories seem to share a similar disposition of power and

regard for the subjects of their governance:

> The old-fashioned propagandist, using almost exclusively the appeal of the
> printed word, tried to persuade the individual reader to buy a definite article,
> immediately. This approach is exemplified in a type of advertisement which used
> to be considered ideal from the point of view of effectiveness and directness:
> 'YOU (perhaps with a finger pointing at the reader) *buy O'Leary's rubber heels* –
> NOW.'… Instead of assaulting sales resistance by direct attack, [the new
> salesman] is interested in removing sales resistance… Under the old salesmanship
> the manufacturer said to the prospective purchaser, 'Please buy a piano.' The
> new salesmanship has reversed the process and caused the prospective purchaser
> to say to the manufacturer, 'Please sell me a piano.' (Bernays, 1928, pp. 54, 56)

Bernays dichotomization here of the distinction between "old-fashioned" approaches to

persuasion and his "new" breakthrough tactics offers language almost identical to the "let

them say yes" framing of governance that I introduce in chapter 2 and continue to

highlight throughout. And the logic of power and the channeling of agency that Bernays

evokes is equally in line with the Foucauldian discipline earlier discussed: it is oblique

rather than unswerving; subtle rather than imposing; it reverses the flow of governance in

a way that "does not act directly and immediately upon others" but instead seeks to

"structure the possible field of action" such that the desired behavior unfolds rather than

acquiesces (Foucault, 2000a, pp. 340, 341).

For just as I've argued for parallels in the rationality of governance that informs both public relations and guerrilla advertising – logics of both invisibility and flexibility in line with earlier theoretical reflections – so, too, has the connection between public relations and guerrilla advertising manifested itself tangibly over the years through particular expressions. Take, as one example, Standard Oil's PR attempt to "anthropomorphize" its image as "human, being likeable, being generous and honest," through a "branded entertainment" strategy (as it would be termed today) commissioning a full-length motion picture (*Louisiana Story*) from filmmaker Robert Flaherty that "did not openly promote the corporation": "The objective was not to sell oil, but to present the company in human terms, to evoke a silent identity of interests between [Standard Oil] and ordinary Americans" (Ewen, 1996, pp. 382, 384). Such a disavowal of the salesmanship component of corporate communications – be they advertising or public relations – will be echoed again and again in the chapters that follow; it is a tactical recourse to govern the subject less explicitly and more casually by generating ambience that cultivates the brand.

In addition to forays into branded entertainment, public relations has also had a hand in pioneering buzz practices. During the first World War, George Creel's Committee on Public Information mobilized "Four-Minute Men" opinion leaders around the country to sermonize for war support and "provide guidance for conversation" among their neighboring communities ("in a manner calculated to suggest spontaneity" not unlike the "serendipitous" ethos that informs guerrilla marketing); these "bellwethers of local thinking" acted as distant forerunners to the word-of-mouth advertising industry

specifically dedicated to the craft that has grown sharply in the past decade (Cutlip, 1994, p. 106; Ewen, 1996, p. 117). Indeed, the "Four-Minute Man Bulletin" newsletter, with its suggested talking points, sounds very much like the antecedent of the "BzzGuide" and the "Junior Four-Minute Men" youth group holds unmistakable historical parallels with the Girls Intelligence Agency (both discussed in chapter 4).

Later, Bernays, who honed his craft while working for the CPI, would test out his own seminal efforts to persuade *indirectly* through the intermediary of "third party authorities" and, hence, "casualizing" the moment of "action upon others' actions" – like promoting Beech Nut bacon not by "reiterating [the message] innumerable times in full-page advertisements" (think: hot sell), but rather by coaxing thousands of physicians into recommending bacon to *their* patients (Bernays, 1928, pp. 34, 53; Cutlip, 1994, p. 196; Stauber & Rampton, 1995, p. 23). With these endeavors, "every moment of human interaction became a suitable venue for publicity," Stuart Ewen (1996) concludes. "Public relations was moving beyond the borders of journalistic press agentry, attempting to encompass the ether of human relations itself" (pp. 118, 119). Guerrilla marketing might equally be understood as moving public relations beyond the borders of *its* usual bailiwick – writing press releases, issuing media kits, staging photo opportunities, and handling crisis management – to take on responsibilities where advertising has grown frustrated with the form and "[disposition]" of traditional consumer governance. Given the enduring frustrations the industry has to contend with (that are outlined in the next section) and in light of perennial tensions and balances with structure and agency, public

relations represents a strategic antecedent to draw upon in re-envisioning the field of practice.

It is, moreover, instructive to pause and take note of the gendered legacy of public relations and, more particularly, buzz marketing. As the project of assuaging a corporation's outward image at its turn-of-the-century advent, public relations nurtured a shift from a then-dominant, "serious, 'masculine,' production-oriented sense of independence" to "new, more 'feminine,' practices, consciously catering to public opinion, adopting show-business techniques of display and publicity" (Marchand, 1998, p. 4). Marchand identifies a "frequent pattern" of "masculine contempt for policies for emotionality of softness" – "pandering" policies disdained as irrelevant and superfluous to aggressive, rational, bottom-line entrepreneurialism – to the point that "public relations was gendered female in the male business world" (pp. 25, 44). This stereotype from self-ascribed "no-nonsense" business types about pruning a corporate image, currying favor with the "masses," or indulging trivial displays of showmanship was perhaps crystallized in AT&T's choice, in 1915, of "Ma Bell" as the emblem of a "nurturing aura" and "feminine ambience" meant to cultivate female consumers thought to be a ripe market for the telephone because of their (apparently) more inherent "sociability" and "culturally ascribed role as the sustainer's of the family's social networks" (pp. 69, 72).

It would not be the last time business recognized the potential in female social networks and feminized modes of salespersonship. Bernays (1928) attested that "women to-day occupy a much more important position, from the standpoint of their influence, in their organized groups than from the standpoint of the leadership they have acquired in

actual political positions or in actual office holding" in a chapter from *Propaganda*

devoted to working through "non-political fields" of female leadership (p. 118).

Although the "Four-Minute Man" and the physician shills for Beech Nut bacon were

predictably male – no doubt a product of the fact that the public sphere and medical

power have long represented a privileged position for masculine participation and

influence – the California Perfume Company (or CPC, which later changed its name to

Avon) and the Tupper Corporation were, around the same time, experimenting with a

"profound and gendered change in direct sales practice" (Clarke, 1999, p. 83). As means

of distinguishing his representatives from consumer suspicions of the itinerant, door-to-

door (male) huckster, CPC founder David McConnell consciously recruited an all-female

sales force, which deliberately relied on "the social skills of the representative [and] her

community reputation" to gain entry to homes whose doors might otherwise be shut in

the face of "out-of-town peddlers" (Manko, 1997, pp. 9, 10).

Decades later, the interactivity of guerrilla marketing broadly (and the

advantageous familiarity of buzz agents specifically) posits much the contrast with "one-

size-fits-all," aggressive, untrustworthy commercial appeals through traditional media

channels; indeed, given this gendered legacy, the "hot" sell – with its blunt, disciplinary

insistence – might be coded conventionally "masculine" in contrast to the more socially

pliant and structurally reciprocal accommodation of the "cool" sell, whose temperamental

inheritance is from the historically "feminized" sphere of public relations. McConnell's

encouragement that representatives should "make business an integral part of their

personal lives by incorporating their families, friends, and even their churches, into their

selling activities… to make their social networks serve their business" represents an early

example of word-of-mouth's strategic conversion of social capital into economic capital,

at a moment of financially and politically limited potential for women (Bourdieu, 2001;

Manko, 1997, p. 11). Alison Clarke (1997) charts much the strategy invoked in

Tupperware's ground-breaking "party plan" for "informal salesmanship (sic), networking

and 'friend-finding,'" in which "women were dissuaded from adopting a corporate image

and encouraged to use their own social skills to 'create incentive or change excuses into a

positive party date'" (p. 142). (Unlike most of the contemporary word-of-mouth firms,

Tupperware's vendor guide apparently actually scripted dialogue scenarios.) The hostess

party, so reliant on "strong female networks and kinship structures," was equally an

"antidote" to "the stigma attached to unscrupulous, masculine, door-to-door sales

practices":

> The amicable social gatherings of the party plan totally overturned the notion of
> direct selling as the practice of the overzealous salesman, one foot in the door,
> armed with numerous hard-sell techniques designed to deceive the gullible
> housewife. Indeed the hostess party effectively inverted conventional sales
> wisdom, which posited the woman as a passive receptor of newly marketed
> merchandise. Instead it acknowledged housewives as capable sales recruits and
> discerning, powerful consumers, keen to explore an expanding array of modern
> consumer goods. As it operated through distinct social networks it also addressed
> social and ethnic groups precluded from the images and copy of an increasingly
> sophisticated and stereotyped mainstream advertising industry. (Clarke, 1999, pp.
> 83, 85)

The logic here – of the "discerning, powerful" consumer reachable through

uniquely tailored modes of address – endures in contemporary guerrilla advertising

discourse and not just that of buzz marketing. For public relations, like advertising, has

long defined itself, at least partly, as a surveillance apparatus – that is, closely monitoring

popular thought so as to "interpret the client to the public and… the public to the client" (Cutlip, 1994, p. 178). Bernays famously framed public relations as, ideally, a "two-way street" – the phrase evoking the current veneration in advertising of "dialogue," as I discuss in chapter 4. This "two-way street" analogy represented the hegemonic means by which the public relations professional absorbs and mediates the vicissitudes of constituents (i.e., agency) and obligations to clients (i.e., power) – acting as the "lubricant of democratic reciprocity" (Ewen, 1996, pp. 186-190). Bernays' (1928) own counsel to PR aspirants to "maintain constant vigilance" for fear of "inadequate information" parallels the ceaseless market research obligation that advertising has long assigned itself – and that shows up in newer emanations like the "cool hunting" practices and databases of chapter 3 (p. 43).

Today, organizationally, nearly every major Madison Avenue agency either holds or is conjoined to (under a conglomerate banner) a public relations firm and various trends – many in evidence here – are further "hastening the crumbling of walls that supposedly separate… advertising and PR" (Stauber & Rampton, 1995, pp. 5, 193). Madison Avenue veteran Al Ries (2002) co-authored a bestselling trade book earlier in the decade in which he and daughter Laura proclaimed that because of advertising's "credibility" gap, "Wherever we look, we see a dramatic shift from advertising-oriented marketing to public-relations-oriented marketing" (p. xi). In 2009, the Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival added a public relations category to recognize this increasing blur. And Siva Balasubramanian (1994), in an influential *Journal of Advertising* piece, traces this "phenomenal" growing genre of "hybrid messages" – that

is, "all paid attempts to influence audiences for commercial benefit that project a non-commercial character" by "covertly or overtly [disguising] their commercial origins" to accentuate credibility – which draw from both advertising and public relations advantages and principles (including, as he cites it, product placement in both "established" and "emergent" forms, as I will detail in chapter 2) (p. 30).

Having laid out a structure for identifying parallels between the mentality and devices of public relations and guerrilla marketing, I should clarify some of the differences between the two, for they are not fully coterminous and indistinguishable. Ivy Lee's early definition of the former ("the organized and deliberate effort to enlist the support of the public for an idea, sponsored by any given group for any given purpose") implicitly betrays public relations' historic allegiance to politics as much as consumer products (which is, primarily, the province of guerrilla marketing) as well as the subtle difference in intended outcomes ("support… for an idea" as opposed to "persuade… to take some action") (Cutlip, 1994, p. 109; Richards & Curran, 2002). Moreover, the usual binary of advertising trafficking in tangible "paid media" and PR in intangible "free media" is likely too facile to be upheld as a productive designation of territory and the guerrilla forms analyzed here seem to blur this dichotomization in full – indicative that this project is partly a study of the redefinition of advertising (Stauber & Rampton, 1995, p. 3). But most of all, the contemptuousness of Bernays for the self-determination of the subject seems to neither square with the theoretical architecture of "governance," vis-à-vis Foucault, nor the practical application of this logic as seen in the guerrilla examples here: "In some departments of our daily life, in which we imagine ourselves free agents,"

Bernays (1928) writes, "we are ruled by dictators exercising great power" (p. 34). To understand why certain advertisers would take this approach in rethinking the medium for communication – positioning the evolution of advertising as, partly, a product of its debt to public relations – we have to begin by charting the enduring cultural, technological and institutional crises in the industry.

The Enduring Crises of Advertising Media

More than a decade ago, Ronald Rust and Richard Oliver (1994) pronounced the death of advertising. When they issued their provocative eulogy in the *Journal of Advertising*, the authors pointed to a fast-approaching horizon where new technologies empowered the consumer to skip advertising and kaleidoscopic patterns of media fragmentation confirmed the segmentation of and narrowcasting to a long-since-diced "mass" audience. Moreover, they cast a narrative arc oft-repeated (though perhaps less substantiated) within the business:

> In advertising's prime, producers held virtually all of the power in the marketplace. This was true in part because their agents, the advertising agencies, controlled the then very powerful mass media. Producers controlled the products, terms and conditions of sale, and the communications environment. Power has been steadily shifting toward the consumer. (p. 74)

This myth is heard throughout the advertising literature and the perception – or, more accurately, construction – of an empowered audience gives marketers license to react desperately and defensively given their self-ascribed "feeble" position of influence; put differently, retailers' rhetoric about savvy shoppers provides "the justification and the initiative to find ways to gain advantage over consumers" (Turow, 2006, p. 165). One

recurring theme, for example, over the course of my interviews was to hear guerrilla marketers describe their target populations as increasingly "in control" of their "communications environment," as Rust and Oliver would phrase it, and therefore well-capable of resisting marketer discipline through conventional channels. A "regime of government" that produces knowledge about audiences in this way (i.e., as empowered, even indomitable) lends itself to a rationalization of programs that can address subjects so as to "conduct their conduct" adequately in light of that empowerment. (For example, one prominent response, given that set of truths, is to "democratize" dialogue with the consumer, as will be dissected in later chapters.)

To be certain, however, such industrial myths are not simply plucked out of thin air; evidence can be and, in fact, is drawn from a particular set of verifiable trends that can be shaped into a "death of advertising" narrative – a narrative that, importantly, elevates certain (guerrilla) practices and media over others. Specifically, four problematic conditions seem to be often cited as plaguing the advertising industry and rationalize an impetus for developing alternative means of communication. First, audiences are described as emboldened to avoid advertising through technological advances and display a peripatetic mobility in the places they do encounter promotion. Second, the long march of mediated and societal fragmentation has meant smaller segments of the audience pie for advertisers to divvy up. Third, within the contemporary information environment, an overload of semiotic clutter continues to rise seemingly unabated. And, finally, even if the commercial message makes it past the ad-skipping device, somehow reaches a broad swath of the population, and manages to gain notice

within a crowded marketplace, the sender faces a supposedly suspicious, media literate

receiver whose cynicism seems to leave her fundamentally allergic to any overtures of

consumer governance. To better contextualize the circumstances in which guerrilla

marketing situates its claims to efficacy, I now offer a closer look at these conditions;

subsequent strategies can be read as a consequence of and response to these various

patterns.

Audience Empowerment

Almost since the birth of their modern industry in the late 1800s, marketers have

fretted about the efficacy of their consumer governance just as audiences have long been

capable of ad-avoidance even without today's sophisticated technological augmentation.

Take, for instance, the amusing reported anecdote of water pressure in one Midwestern

city dropping precipitously when viewers simultaneously flushed toilets during

commercial breaks in Milton Berle's early 1950s' TV program (Turow, 2006, pp. 22, 36).

Nonetheless, for much of the 20th century, "marketers believed that knowledge and

control were generally on their side," often taking it on faith that they were, indeed,

addressing a reachable audience member.

In recent decades, however, advertisers have been confronted more evidently with

one ad-zapping defense mechanism after another: from the VCR and the remote control

to newer digital apparatus like TiVo (60% of which are used to avoid advertising), pop-

up blockers, and spam filters (employed by 81% of broadband subscribers) (Garfield,

2009, p. 44). Today, at a time when one survey finds that almost three-quarters of

Americans are eager to "block, skip, or opt out of advertising," Joseph Turow (2006)

seems correct to declare, "The verities of twentieth century advertising seemed to be

crumbling" (p. 44). As advertisers take steps to restore the balance of power – and "as

new media raise the ghost of large-scale audience unpredictability and unresponsiveness"

– guerrilla marketing presents a possible recourse to cope with continuing volatility and

indifference (p. 22). One marketing consultant, Joseph Jaffe (2005), frames this

challenge and opportunity boldly:

> Google, TiVo and iPod empower the end user to retrieve, navigate, and
> manipulate content, and to do so in ways that are aligned with his or her passions
> and interests. In this new relationship, the consumer chooses if, when, and how to
> interact with the content. The manufacturers, distributors, advertisers, and
> publishers can no longer dictate these experiences. They can only search for new
> ways to give the end user '*godlike power*' over his or her environment. (p. 171,
> italics added)

Such a prescription represents a notable turnabout. Matthew McAllister (1996)

argues that because a sense of "control" sits at the heart of advertiser worry, those

supposedly empowered audiences necessitate inventive avenues for communication:

"either exploring new social locations for [promotion], or tightening control over

established, already exploited, advertising locations" (p. 7). Historically, what are known

as "place-based" practices (as opposed to "home-based" like TV and radio) flourished

during periods of advertiser frustration. While this place-based strategy receded with the

introduction of centralized broadcasting in the 1920s, it appeared to be on the rise again

in the 1990s (pp. 65-66). Indeed, for marketers, part of the allure of place-based

techniques is that they "help *disempower* the viewer (and, by extension, re-empower the

advertiser) by taking away the viewer's time-shifting, grazing, zapping and zipping

technological choices" and "[recapture] the glories of advertising past when broadcasting offered limited choices" (p. 78, italics added). While some of the place-based practices that McAllister inventories (e.g., ads showing up on airsickness bags and floor tiles) do share the "serendipitous encounter" component of guerrilla marketing as I explicate it here, many lack the kind of "invisible relay" concealing their sponsorship sources or self-effacing their commercial nature that is endemic to the cool sell and descended from public relations principles.

For advertisers, the "problem" of audience empowerment is one that Foucault identified as "counter-conduct": that "sense of struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others" (Foucault, 2007, p. 201). The consumer subject, who has traditionally been governed by a particular interruptive force (i.e., conventional advertising), is – through TiVo, pop-up blockers, and spam filters – reasserting agency, opting out of the program that has been established for structuring her field of action, and introducing volatility in what had been a more routine exercise of power (not so much in guaranteeing conduct, but at least assuming *exposure* to that program established for conducting conduct). This subject who is determined to hold "godlike power," in the hyperbolic characterization above, preordains a certain rationality and hence necessitates a certain response from marketer governors who, in turn, cozy up to that assertion of agency rather than seeking to confront "resistance, refusal, or revolt" head-on (p. 200). This, then, is the hegemonic logic of guerrilla advertising in light of recent technological developments (and embodied, for example, in search engine-based advertising): it fluidly accommodates rather than dominates; rather than "dictate," as Jaffe puts it, and risk being

turned aside, it arranges the conditions so that marketer power is solicited; rather than tell

the prospective purchaser, "Please buy a piano," as in Bernays' (1928) terms, it engineers

agency so that the prospective purchaser asks, "Please sell me a piano" (p. 56).

Market Fragmentation

Raymond Williams once famously declared: "There are no masses; there are only

ways of seeing people as masses" (cited in J. Eldridge & L. Eldridge, 1994, p. 63). Of

late, however, there seem to be fewer and fewer ways of even *seeing* people as masses.

The notion of a "mass" market was born alongside "mass" circulation periodicals in the

late 19th century and "mass" audience radio programming in the early 20th century.

Thanks to television's ascendance in the 1950s, the three major networks could still claim

to reach 90% of the nation during primetime even up till the late 1970s; given that legacy,

Rust and Oliver (1994) summarize the mid-century advertiser's perspective thusly: "Mass

media created a mass audience for mass-produced products" (p. 73).

Yet even at television's supposedly monolithic height, Lizabeth Cohen (2003)

charts the postwar stirrings toward market segmentation that included "a receptivity to

'narrowcasting,' or targeting programs at demographically specific audiences" (p. 302).

She highlights a "landmark" article in the *Journal of Marketing* in 1956 that proposed the

approach (p. 295); Pepsi's 1960s youth-segment fusillade on Coke's mass market

dominance (p. 319); and a 1970 suggestion by one Harvard Business School textbook

that 80 percent of a small-market segment could generate more revenue than 10 percent

of its mass-market counterpart (p. 296) – all evidence for *Business Week*'s claim, by the

early seventies, that "the terms 'mass market' and 'mass media' have almost become misnomers" (p. 298). Since Cohen's account, the further explosion of media options – from that of a comparatively limited mid-century media environment to our contemporary digital media kaleidoscope of satellite, internet, DVD and video games – inevitably prefigured boundless variety and thinning slices of the audience pie.

Now, in a decade when cable, after years of eroding network viewership (and thereby "exacerbat[ing] the carving up of television programming and audiences into market niches, and mov[ing] segmentation to a whole new level"), for the first time collectively outstripped network share, some of the most powerful figures in media, advertising and consumer businesses are pointedly addressing the consequences and potentials of fragmentation (Cohen, 2003, p. 304; Jenkins, 2006, p. 60). As early as 1994 – the moment at which media stood on the precipice of the internet era – the chairman of Proctor & Gamble, America's biggest advertiser, famously nudged those gathered at a national advertising conference to look beyond the 30-spot of broadcast television to sell his "four hundred million boxes of Tide" (Turow, 2006, p. 73). Some ten years later, P & G's global marketing officer announced to the same conference gathering, "There is no 'mass' in mass media anymore" (Keller, 2005). And Larry Light, the global chief marketing officer for McDonalds, similarly declared in a *Business Week* interview: "We're not a mass marketer… What has changed is technology has facilitated our ability to reach people on a more customized, more personalized basis. That's a revolution" (cited in Deuze, 2007, p. 128).

Thus, "interactivity" and "customization" (themselves, terms inherently antithetical to the notion and operationalization of "mass-ness") are much touted as panacea for the advertising woes and trends of technological empowerment and fragmented markets and contribute to key practices within the regime of engagement. The *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, for example, launched its inaugural issue with auspicious edicts from the CEOs of Young & Rubicam and Euro RSCG Worldwide that interactivity could resuscitate an industry that Rust and Oliver had pronounced dead (alongside "mass" media) six years earlier (Leckenby & Li, 2000). Indeed, Ronald Rust – a marketing professor who had earlier administered those last rites to the industry – also predicted that interactive media might prove to be the miracle cure. The advent of two-way channels made possible by the internet would produce "a stark contrast to the mass-communication model wherein marketers conduct 'monologues' with nameless, faceless individuals" (Rust & Varki, 1996, p. 173). Interactivity is a necessary but insufficient component to understand the kinds of guerrilla strategy employed in corralling and "engaging" elusive consumers. Chapter 4 will make clear the implications of this shift to idealizing "dialogue" that interactivity presupposes as a means of governance (and I will place it more clearly in lineage with the "two-way street" logic of public relations).

Yet even as advertisers place faith in the interactive potential of new media ecology – today often romanticized as "Web 2.0" – there seems little hope of putting the Humpty Dumpty of contemporary American niches back together again (Turow, 1997). It is within this complex, segmented environment that, James Twitchell (1997) observes, "Ad execs wistfully recall the 1950s and 1960s when 93 percent of homes using

television were watching the networks and an advertiser could reach two-thirds of all homes by buying space in *Life*, *Look*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*" (p. 247).

If advertising once bought and sold audiences in "tonnage" bulk – and, moreover, if "it seemed logical to use media vehicles to mass-produce customers in the same way that the factories mass-produced the merchandise," not unlike Rust and Oliver's (1994) conceptualization above – the new conditions rationalize a more nimble and inventive commercial alternative and the work exhibited in the chapters that follow is constructed with that impetus in mind (Turow, 2005, pp. 108-109). As Deuze (2007a) sums up, "As more and more people immerse themselves in all kinds of networked, portable and personalized media, the consensus in the advertising industry is that the age of mass advertising is over" (p. 126).

A shift to increasingly interactive, personalized media from mass advertising is further emblematic of the Gramscian (1971) "compromise equilibrium" (p. 161). Such an approach presupposes agency on the part of the subject of governance and customizes the mode of address rather than issuing a flat, homogeneous decree. Moreover, for corporations seeking to bestow "subcultural capital" and an underground ethos upon their products – more than a few of which turn to guerrilla means – "mass" channels squander this potential through their inherently "mainstream" connotation that accompanies diffuse and therefore indiscriminate popularization (Thornton, 1996).

Semiotic Clutter

As far back as the 18th century, clutter has been a source of nuisance: "Advertisements are now so numerous that they are very negligently perused, and it is therefore necessary to gain attention by magnificence of promises," one observer noted in 1758 (Williams, 2000). More recently, a critic complained:

> What distinguishes modern advertising is that it has jumped from the human voice and printed posters to anything that can carry it. Almost every physical object now carries advertising, almost every human environment is suffused with advertising, almost every moment of time is calibrated by advertising. (Twitchell, 1997, p. 56)

In the mid-1980s, one estimate held that the average person was assaulted by 1,600 advertisements daily but only responded to 12 of them (cited in Neuman, 1991, p. 91). A decade later, that figure had nearly doubled to more than 3,000 – and, yet, still only a dozen supposedly pierce our filters to generate some sort of reaction (cited in Twitchell, 1997, p. 3). By the turn of the millennium, a figure of 3,500 was being kicked around and all signs seem to indicate the commercial clutter will only grow with the adoption of each new screen in the consumer's life (cell phone, PDA, MP3 player, etc.) (Richards & Curran, 2002).[3] What these statistics illuminate is expressed pithily by James Twitchell (1997): "The history of American media is the history of a Darwinian struggle for attention" (p. 50).

That fierce struggle has littered the conventional "battlefield" (i.e., media and information environment) with the carcasses of advertising campaigns past; indeed, because semiotic clutter has so choked the contemporary landscape, guerrilla marketers

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[3] The precision of these estimates is, of course, less than assured; a recent study by Forrester research, for instance, pegged this figure at around 2,000 ads per day. Even if the ballpark figure is significantly different, few observers dispute that the number is large and growing.

hype their capacity to stage campaigns in unconventional spaces that might capture the audience's attention. Thus, one of the most frequent complaints from agencies, clients and consumers is about that commercial clutter relentlessly piling up (p. 17).[4] A 2004 survey, for example, found that 61% of consumers claimed that the amount of marketing and advertising had "gotten out of control" and another 45% said that the clutter "detracts from their experience of everyday life" (Sanders, 2004).

Because of this, we may have arrived at what some call a "mature sign economy" (Goldman & Papson, 1996, p. 8). Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson (1996) diagram the contours and consequences of living through this "Hobbesian war" among brand images:

> Advertisers routinely raid cultural formations for the raw materials they need to construct new, more valuable signs… When advertisers tap into, extract, and appropriate new cultural styles and images for the purpose of placing them in association with their commodities, they also risk a hemorrhaging of meaning… The circulation of signs accelerates, driving a compulsive and reckless search for unoccupied cultural spaces and more spectacular signifying styles in order to be noticed. The turnover of ad campaigns quickens, the half-life of sign values shrinks, the clutter of images accumulates, and a new kind of cultural junk heap has taken shape. (p. vi)

Guerrilla marketing proposes two rejoinders to this cultural and institutional exhaustion. On one hand, it is dexterously intertextual, absorbing and appropriating from the cluttered existing symbolic economy as needed (this will be clear from examples of "graffadi" in chapter 3); on the other hand, in its capacity for seeking "unoccupied cultural spaces," it runs an end route around that "junk heap" pile-up, positioning itself in

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[4] See William Leiss, Stephen Kline, Sut Jhally, and Jacqueline Botterill (2005) for a review of the state of contemporary advertising clutter and its impact on effectiveness (pp. 352-356).

unexpected contexts that clutter has yet to despoil (e.g., a conversation between friends, as word-of-mouth reveals in chapter 4).

In response to that clutter, Goldman and Papson (1996) observed in the late 1980s an avant-garde aesthetic turn within TV commercials that featured narratives "more abbreviated, oblique and ambiguous" (i.e., earlier attempts at the cool sell within a traditional medium): "Where advertisers once sought to maximize the transparency of the framework, they now try to jar viewers into interpretive quandaries as a way of keeping them engaged in the ads" (p. 4). Similarly, guerrilla advertising takes this impulse of ambiguity toward interpretive engagement and extracts it from conventional channels (e.g., the TV commercial) for spaces less traditional (e.g., online, outdoor or interpersonal). Goldman and Papson (1994) suggest that such tinkering is "designed to deny the existence of pre-digested meanings and create a hunt for meaning;" the cool sell, as we will see in its various forms here, seeks to do much the same (p. 26).

Consumer Cynicism

Given such a onslaught of clutter, Marian Friestad and Peter Wright (1994, 1995) argue for the existence of an "advertising schema" (cited in Dahlén & Edenius, 2007, p. 33). This represents the "mental shortcuts" audiences employ to process the ubiquity of commercial appeals surrounding them; it is the automated skepticism activated in the presence of communication perceived as advertising. Industry practitioners have their own slang for this frustrating impediment: Bond and Kirshenbaum (1998) refer to it as the "impenetrable, mollusk-like shell that's hardened after years of ad abuse" (p. ix);

Jaffe (2005) calls it the "BS [blocker] to prioritize, sanction, and weed out the attention invaders from the welcome guests" (p. 47).

Because coping with this exhausting abundance of advertising seems to be one of our main chores as consumers, we construct this schema to "identify how, when and why marketers try to influence us" (Dahlén & Edenius, 2007, p. 34). The more obvious their effort to influence, the more we screen out their messages: Jens Nordfalt (2005) found the stronger a person perceived this "hot sell" – that is, an explicit indication of persuasive objectives – the less he or she was likely to pay attention to the advertisement, unconsciously filtering out the overture.

In short, consumers have been found to be ever suspicious of and vigilant against commercial management within familiar contexts. But to keep the system proceeding apace, consumption still needs to be activated; governance, therefore, must be executed through alternative means: different strategies of address conducted through different channels. In the late 1980s, TV advertising began to incorporate that skepticism into content with a wink-wink, postmodern self-reflexivity that sought to flatter viewer savvy. Yet because "each passing round of advertisements contributes to creating audiences who are increasingly media-literate, cynical, and alienated," a main factor in the cultural production of advertising today seems to be "the advertiser's perception of the alienated spectator" (Goldman & Papson, 1996, p. 83). This certainly seems to hold true in the case of guerrilla marketing and frequently the trade discourse makes reference to audience cynicism as a major factor in choosing to deploy unconventional methods; that is, again, the industry logic that perpetuates a certain body of knowledge about audiences

(i.e., in this case, as "cynical") lends itself to a particular set of strategies and practices of governance.

Marketing research by Micael Dahlen (2005), along with his work with Mats Edenius (2007), has begun to probe these nontraditional alternatives as a solution to this crisis of credibility. Dahlen (2005) suggests that using a creative context to situate an advertisement – outside the mass media as is befitting the guerrilla approach explored here – could appeal to the consumer or at least de-activate her filter. Dahlen tested precisely this possibility and discovered that the same advertisements for an insurance company and an energy drink placed in unexpected (i.e., guerrilla) locations – respectively, on an egg's shell inside its grocery store carton and on an elevator panel of buttons – were rated more highly than the same advertisements in traditional media. Channeling McLuhan, Dahlen claimed the results support the possibility that "the medium may in fact *be* the message" when traits of the brand and the medium match and the content and the context blur (p. 95, italics original). Dahlen and Edenius (2007) followed up this work by showing how placing advertisements in these nontraditional settings makes it difficult to even identify the appeal as advertising, thus disabling the advertising schema, and cultivating favorability – the ultimate goal of guerrilla marketing and the essence of the "invisible governance" earlier elaborated.

"Traditional media," Dahlen and Edenius write, "provide an easily recognizable topography" and trigger instant mistrust of commercial appeals located there (p. 35). Reducing that immediate contrast with the non-advertising content and blending into the surroundings – Che Guevara's (2006) admonition for guerrilla warriors – holds potential

for the guerrilla marketer bold enough to chart unusual topography (an eggshell, a pop song, a street performance, a conversation between friends, someone's Twitter stream). To be certain, though, guerrilla tactics can still operate subversively within some realm of the traditional mass media world while trying to overcome the cynicism attendant to conventional advertisements there.[5] One business professor touted product placement as a way of slipping past the advertising schema in this capacity: "When advertising is labeled advertising… your guard is up. But in the movies you can have the hero or heroine implicitly or even explicitly endorse the product. It's quite effective" (cited in Turow, 2006, p. 58).

Similarly, advertorials and infomercials are "dressed up" to "camouflage themselves" as part of the editorial and programming content they are adjacent to and embedded within (Twitchell, 1997, p. 16). To achieve the goal of "making people *forget* that they are watching an ad," these tactics co-opt the media context around them, "leech their credibility, like a parasite, from the media content" and prevent us from "seeing advertising's guiding hand" (McAllister, 1996, pp. 106, 128, 125, italics original). Public relations campaigns, an industry precursor to guerrilla marketing as noted, likewise try to insinuate their message into news coverage so as to lend it "a legitimacy that advertising does not have" (Schudson, 1986, p. 101). These pursuits, though still executed over the broadcast airwaves or in daily newsprint, bespeak a guerrilla ethos of sneaking under the radar or self-effacing true intentions in attempt to "conduct [others] conduct" (Foucault, 1997a, p. 203).

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[5] McAllister (1996) tracks this in detail throughout history (McAllister, 1996, pp. 104-130).

And yet, as evidenced by Dahlen and Edenius (2007), we are witnessing commercial experimentation that foregoes a conventional context altogether in favor of the invisible relay and serendipitous engagement of alternative channels. Walter Carl (2006), who has studied word-of-mouth marketing's "corporate colonization of the life world," sees this as a sign of efforts to reach consumer audiences where they can't "'tune out' or 'turn off'" the promotional appeal (p. 603). What this heralds, of course, is a world without escape from commercialism. McAllister (1996) came to a similar conclusion:

> Advertising is… geographically imperialistic, looking for new territories it has not yet conquered. When it finds such a territory, it fills it with ads – at least until this new place, like traditional media, has so many ads that it becomes cluttered and is no longer effective as an ad medium. (p. 85)

Just as Foucault and Gramsci accounted for the exercise of resistance against the project of power, the "advertising schema" schema discussed here – and the consumer cynicism for which it stands – operates in opposition to the marketer's program for consumer governance. Subjects show themselves to be "alienated" from and skeptical of – if not hostile to – these calculations to conduct their disposition; if, then, management and discipline are felt to be anathema, guerrilla marketing suggests not coming across as trying to manage or discipline anything. Yet such a formula for power would, paradoxically, visibly try to "undo" the very project that it is, invisibly, trying to accomplish.

Rethinking Advertising

Thus, "a rough composite emerges of a wary, jaded, and recalcitrant postmodern consumer who has been variously described as unmanageable… vigilant… and reflexively defiant" (Rumbo, 2002, p. 132). Yet advertising has *always* been burdened with "unmanageable" subjects in its efforts to conduct consumer governance – subjects that assert their agency in the face of persuasive action. Liz McFall (2004) tracks this advertiser anxiety as far back as the 1920s, when marketers fretted about environmental clutter and consumer cynicism. In 1966, Mary Wells, a partner at Wells, Rich, Greene, an influential creative agency, remarked (in language that was closely echoed in my own conversations with practitioners):

> People have seen so many promotions and big ideas and new products and new advertising campaigns and new packaging gimmicks, and they've heard so many lies and so many meaningless slogans and so many commercialized holy truths that it's getting harder and harder to get their attention, let alone their trust. (Frank, 1997, p. 126)

And "unease" was the focal point – and subtitle – of Michael Schudson's (1986) inquiry into advertising's dubious claims to efficacy. Even if, however, today's marketer apprehension is not entirely new, the pressures illustrated here – ranging from technological advances and thinning niches to cluttered environments and jaundiced viewers – remain "real" enough to the industry and represent a threat to some of the institutional model that has long been held in place.

Various figures seem to bear this out: A 2003 survey of marketers found that 90% believed that advertising's influence on consumers had declined in recent years and the same vast majority thought it would continue to do so (even as the same group thought guerrilla, PR, sponsorship and other alternatives would become more important) (Curtis,

2003). A 2006 survey of consumers found that 63% of respondents felt there were too

many ads in mass media; 47% said that ads "spoil" the pleasure of watching or reading

content; and 48% believed it's their "right to decide whether or not to receive" those ad

messages (Garfield, 2009, pp. 44, 46). The proportion of the average media plan devoted

to TV buys was expected to drop from two-thirds to one-half by the close of 2010

(Verklin & Kanner, 2007, p. 7). In the second half of the last decade, newspaper

advertising revenues plummeted by 44% from a peak of $49 billion in 2005 to a recent

nadir of $28 billion (Sass, 2010). Online, a mere 2% of consumers actually trust banner

ads, giving way to pitiful click-through rates barely registering much less worth

depending on (Garfield, 2009, p. 44).

In that context, huge multinationals like General Motors and Proctor & Gamble

are shifting ad dollars toward "new media experiments and branded entertainment" like

the work explored here (Bond & Kirshenbaum, 1998, p. 65; Walker, 2008, p. 126). PQ

Media research finds that "alternative media spending" – which includes 18 digital and

non-traditional segments like consumer-generated, videogame advertising, word-of-

mouth, and product placement, among others – grew 22% annually between 2002 and

2007 to reach sums of $73 billion and was forecast to represent 26% of total U.S.

advertising and marketing spending by 2012 (*Alternative media spending*, 2008).

Veronis Suhler Stevenson, which publishes the "Communication Industry Forecast,"

projects this "alternative advertising" to grow to 32% of all ad spending by 2013 – a leap

from its 6% market share just 10 years earlier (Ward, 2009).

Thus, the *definition* of advertising itself seems up for debate as an industry in perpetual crisis sets out to rethink itself through the techniques explored in the chapters that follow. The earliest textbook definition from 1923 ("selling in print") reflects, for example, how advertising has always articulated itself in relation to the ascendant medium (newspapers at that time). Part of the work of this research is to understand how the strategies and practices under consideration here serve to redefine the role that advertising plays in governing contemporary consumers.

Similarly, Ronald Rust and Sajeev Varki (1996) cast about for a new definition that could accommodate interactive trends. They point out that the American Marketing Association's classic definition ("a nonpersonal, paid form of communication paid for by an identified sponsor"), born alongside TV in 1948, seems less accurate today (p. 176). A few years later, Jef Richards and Catherine Curran (2002) convened a focus group of high-level advertising practitioners and industry experts to rechristen the field. They noted that, throughout history, with each epoch of technological change, so, too, did the definition of advertising change (and the techniques found to be ideally applicable). Yet the conclusion of Richards and Curran's focus group – cutting "nonpersonal" and "mass" – produced a definition ("a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future") that still fails to incorporate examples of guerrilla marketing, primarily because what was once "identifiable" is increasingly elided or obscured and that "persuasion" act is itself designed to be obfuscated or denied (p. 74). As Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1997) point out:

> What was most affected by the emergence of new means of communication was the 'shape' of advertising or the design strategy rather than the volume. As new media brought new styles and approaches to the tasks of mass communication, advertisers adapted them to the special requirements of persuasion. The selling message was altered by the communications environment. (p. 119)

In the following section, I will take a closer look at the features of that ecology to begin to appraise what it might signal for an industry that has, historically, always had to adapt to changes in the information environment – foregrounding the technological potential for governance that comes with incorporating audience agency into the exercise of marketer power.

A Changing Media Ecosystem

In 2006, *The Economist* issued what it termed "the gazillion-dollar question": "What is a media company?" The issue is relevant if we are to appreciate how certain forms of alternative marketing navigate a fluid, participatory, networked media world where, more and more, popular communication often seems to follow "guerrilla" paths when trends and memes rise to cultural prominence. Through this examination, the overall information environment (and attendant social patterns of two-way media ecology) can be mapped from the perspective of cultural producers trying to redefine their power and relevance in executing consumer governance, given those changing conditions.

To understand advertising at any given point in history, one must first make sense of the media landscape through which consumers are engaged; for as Deuze (2007) notes, "Technology is the skeleton around which advertising has formed, linking contemporary

technological developments to transformations of advertising and marketing practices"

(p. 124). In this section, I examine more closely that "skeleton" of technology itself that

is shaping media and, in turn, reshaping advertising methods. The overlapping

buzzwords of social networking, self-publishing, crowd-sourcing, user-generated content,

citizen media and Web 2.0 (much of this is considered in detail in chapters 4 and 5)

herald an ecology of memes rather than "mass" – a bottom-up tectonic shift in terms of

communicative experience that advertisers are, quite naturally, attempting to comprehend

and capitalize on from the top-down.

In other words, agency is, once again, at the forefront of struggle here, but it is a

question of agency in an explicitly technological context: Although many theorists are

wont to view new media innovation as a harbinger of democratic participation, others

take a more dim view and surmise labor exploitation. As befitting a Gramscian

conception of power, the former need not preclude the latter; indeed, for guerrilla

marketing, participation is a means of exploiting the opportunities for more sophisticated

(i.e., outsourced) governance in which agency can be inscribed.

In the past decade, a host of scholarship has attempted to grapple with

contemporary patterns of information flow (Benkler, 2006; Bruns, 2008; Burgess &

Green, 2009; Castells, 2000; Deuze, 2007a; Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2008). The

proliferation of internet use is, of course, the prime catalyst behind these explorations –

and, more specifically, the recent bloom of amateur participants creating and populating

cyberspace with massive amounts of personal and remixed material. Deuze, along with

other scholars reviewed here, has initiated a cartography of how "the mass media

(broadcast) system is gradually giving way to a more interactive, narrowcast or multicast media ecology" – "an environment where consuming media increasingly includes some kind of producing media, and where our media behavior always seems to include some level of participation, co-creation and collaboration" – and, moreover, queries what these implications might hold for traditional producers of cultural content (pp. 246, 247).

For when it comes to information and media, corporations find themselves engaged with publicly "active" audiences – audiences whose "agency" can be counted on and factored into production. This propels what Deuze terms a "supercharged" blur of late in terms of the boundaries between those who make and those who consume media. Because, as noted in the opening section, the network now represents the "core organizing principle of this communicative environment" as much as broadcasting, and, as such, complicates the comparatively hierarchical and predictable flow of media and culture, advertisers are scrambling to figure out which commercial appeals to employ through which channels and how to situate audiences in their schematics such that power is exercised through freedom.

Christina Spurgeon (2008) usefully frames this shift as a transition from "mass media to the new media of mass conversation," where the process of "co-adaptation" to that "mass conversation" by the marketing and media industries shows up in many of the integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies of the past two decades (Spurgeon, 2008, pp. 2, 17). (The notion of a "regime of dialogue" in chapter 4 is a good example of how this "new media of mass conversation" allocates space to harness that productive – sometimes digital, sometimes offline – social agency.) I will, in this dissertation,

illustrate how guerrilla marketing strategy and practice applies to a situation where this

"flattening of… hierarchies" could spell the end of the monopoly of "'show-and-tell'

advertising" in favor of options more flexible, participatory, and decentralized (Deuze,

2007b, p. 256).

Manuel Castells' (2000) proposed that the technological transformation to our

interactive epoch could prove to be as profound as alphabetization almost three millennia

earlier:

> The TV-dominated system could be easily categorized as mass media. A similar
> message was simultaneously emitted from a few centralized senders to an
> audience of millions of receivers. Thus, the content and format of messages were
> tailored to the lowest common denominator… of the audience as evaluated by
> marketing experts. (p. 359)

This one-size-fits-all "interruptive" advertising model (prescribed by vertically-

oriented institutions of expertise) seems to be evolving with the guerrilla forays this

project will be exploring; the cool sell propositions of buzz agency and crowd-source

marketing (driven by horizontally-integrated networks of expertise) in chapter 4 and 5

can, in particular, be more understated, and more elastic, than that which media structure

necessitated in that "lowest common denominator" era. Online, brands can represent

themselves in more flexible capacities, as interactivity is programmed and meaning is

outsourced in an effort to foment digital engagement; this fluidity is, moreover,

diagrammed to be read as an egalitarian gesture.

More recently, theorists have taken stock of fads often classified under the

catchphrase, "Web 2.0," where "firms are built on, and make use of, network and

information economics, conversational interaction and intercreative innovation"

(Spurgeon, 2008, p. 112). Axel Bruns (2008), in an account of the recent deluge of blog authors, Wikipedia entries, and Second Life avatars, contends that we are witnessing a contemporary move away from more traditional models of industrial production and towards user-led, collaborative content creation (p. 6). He extrapolates this "produsage" thus: "Such modes of content creation – involving large communities of users ['produsers'], who act without an all-controlling, coordinating hierarchy – operate along lines which are fluid, flexible, heterarchical, and organized ad hoc as required by the ongoing process of development" (p. 1).

Many of the marketing campaigns documented in the pages that follow can be read as both a consequence of and response to that incipient environment: an attempt to engage, simulate, and co-opt where necessary the ideals of these heterarchical guerrilla (at the other end of a continuum from hierarchical "mass") media flows. Indeed, heterarchicality – as part of this alleged "flattening" of traditional authority – sits at the heart of the regime of engagement's philosophy of consumer governance: that is, as a rationality and mode of power, it works with and through the agency of the subject. Bruns points out that the rise of this "produsage" by such professional-amateur hybrids engaged in this media ecology could threaten the "'casual collapse' of the traditional content and copyright industries… charged with the accumulation and dissemination of information, knowledge, and creative works," and advertising is no less immune to this than journalism- or entertainment-oriented corporate entities (p. 5). (In chapter 5, for example, I will show how Lowe, an international creative agency, is an early casualty of this trend toward "dematerializing" the creative industries.)

In that environment, content producers like advertisers are urged to be ever more comfortable with textual plasticity (whereby the consumer "owns" and "controls" the brand, a mythic narrative borrowed from public relations that will be contextualized and deconstructed in chapter 4) and serendipitous and unbounded rather than deliberate and restricted engagement of audiences. Within such a framework, those who would purport to govern consumption try to figure out how to "democratically" woo the peripatetic "produser," as much as "autocratically" targeting a fixed consumer. Taken to the extreme, media artifacts like advertisements that cater to the structural principles of this environment may need to be comfortable as "permanently unfinished" objects, as Brian Eno puts it – part of a "continuing process" of development because the digital form of such content makes for an inherently "open work" when it comes to the brand-text (Bruns, 2008, p. 27).

Thus, Henry Jenkins' (2006) concept of "convergence culture" – applicable to guerrilla advertising and relevant in light of earlier theorizations of governance and hegemony – can be understood as "both a top-down corporate driven process and a bottom-up consumer driven process;" indeed, many of the examples that follow in these pages are an illustration of the complex interplay of these polarities of corporate power and consumer agency (p. 18). Jenkins further explicates his model in a kind of manifesto epigram for contemporary media industry conditions:

> Convergence requires media companies to rethink old assumptions about what it means to consume media, assumptions that shape both programming and marketing decisions. If old consumers were assumed to be passive, the new consumers are active. If old consumers were predictable and stayed where you told them to stay, then new consumers are migratory, showing a declining loyalty

to networks or media. If old consumers were isolated individuals, the new consumers are more socially connected. If the work of media consumers was once silent and invisible, the new consumers are now noisy and public. (pp. 18-19)

To be certain, Jenkins' dichotomization generates something of a straw man out of "old" media and audiences in ways that fail to reflect, as detailed earlier here, that marketers have long found consumers anything but "passive," "predictable," "isolated," and "invisible." Overstated as that characterization may be, Jenkins is, nonetheless, correct in claiming that these "assumptions… shape both programming and marketing decisions;" that is, again following Foucault, "truth" (about audiences) arranged in this fashion produces practices (of media production) of a certain order. To that end – and as economies increasingly center themselves on culture and information – Mark Deuze (2007a) reports on how "companies in several fields – and particularly the media and cultural industries – have begun to incorporate the productive activities of consumers in their business strategies" (p. 48). In one of the few major accounts to date on the impact of these changes in networked digital media ecology on advertising (save for Spurgeon, 2008) – one of the core themes of this dissertation – Deuze argues that:

> Advertising, marketing and PR are increasingly expected to be produced across different media platforms (with multiple tie-ins), while professionals in these industries additionally find themselves having to partly outsource their control over the advertising message to consumers online via viral, word-of-mouth, 'buzz' and other types of interactive marketing techniques. This kind of interconnectivity – between different media, between media makers and media users, and between consumers among each other – tends to be seen as a direct exponent of the potential of new media. (p. 126)

Elsewhere, Deuze (2007b) examines in detail the work of guerrilla powerhouse Crispin Porter + Bogusky and finds that amateur collaboration in cultural production has

reshaped expectations and executions there. He quotes an agency executive as claiming, "The more stuff people can do with these ads, the better… It's more fun, but they also feel like they own it. *They feel more empowered as consumers*" (p. 255, italics added). Here, again, the marketing ideology that animates "regime of engagement" thinking begins to emerge; it is a rationality of governance that embraces disinterested spaces and participatory flows, because this is where "agency" can be optimally situated.

Nonetheless, the creativity and sense of "ownership" that interactive collaboration cultivates also fosters productivity for the producer; therefore, much of the hype about amateur "empowerment" in the digital age ought to be contextualized within patterns of and theorizing on the "immaterial labor" that it embodies and that increasingly characterizes post-industrial economies of advanced capitalism. Maurizio Lazzarato (1996) defines this as "the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" – a set of skills and activities not normally considered "work" like "defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion" (p. 133). This labor might be read as the "agency" through which the subject (consumer-cum-worker) is invited to participate; such strategies of post-Fordist management equally resonate in light of earlier ruminations on Foucauldian "governmentality": "Capital wants a situation where command resides within the subject him- or herself… The worker is to be responsible for his or her own control and motivation within the work group without a foreman needing to intervene" (p. 136). As highlighted throughout, the logic of invisible governance places the onus on

the consumer to exercise agency (i.e., "Please sell me a piano") rather than the marketer overtly disciplining that action.

Advertising, Lazzarato recognizes, represents a "classic" form of immaterial production, and the independent, self-organizing, and fundamentally "precarious" labor ethos emblematic of, for example, word-of-mouth and crowd-sourced advertising only extends these principles further: "The cycle of production comes into operation only when it is required… [O]nce the job has been done, the cycle dissolves back into the network and flows that make possible the reproduction and enrichment of its productive capacities" (p. 137). Thus, the immaterial labor of guerrilla advertising offers an efficiency of purpose and process: a practice that facilitates the "conduct of conduct" by incorporating existing networks and flows into that program for management. Tiziana Terranova (2000) extends Lazzarato's critique in challenging the knowledge-based digital economy's reliance on "free labor" – work that is "simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited" – and situates free labor against the backdrop of the "social factory," where "work processes have shifted from the factory to society" (p. 33). Such free labor – a paradigm of agency that is productive yet not necessary "exploited" in the conventional sense – sustains "a substantial amount" of internet-based activity and content; advertising, faced with its own problems of governance, shows signs of finding utility in this subsidy (p. 48).

More recent research has empirically examined the complexities of this blurring of what had been a more "fixed distinction between production and consumption, labor and culture" when it comes to interactive entertainment (p. 35). Mark Andrejevic (2008),

for example, explores the two-sided coin that is online fan commentary for television programming: On one hand, fans are offered the "celebratory promise" of "shared control" over content while they simultaneously perform "value-enhancing labor" for cultural producers by way of off-loaded market research and self-motivated engagement with texts (pp. 24, 37). Andrejevic fruitfully concludes that because "the interactivity of viewers doubles as a form of labor…in the interactive era, the binary opposition between complicit passivity and subversive participation needs to be revisited and revised" and this research takes just such a step in that direction – examining examples of dialogue and interactivity hegemonically spun as "empowerment" yet clearly contributing to the commercial bottom-line (p. 43).

Brooke Duffy (2010) similarly threads the analytic space between empowerment and exploitation in her work on Dove's consumer-generated advertising campaign. She finds that, while some respondents bought into the "dominant [textual] meaning" embedded within participation (i.e., hyping the contest as emblematic of the "empowered" consumer and a feminist agenda), many recognized the limitations of their empowerment within the program; ultimately, "although some participants recognized the exploitative aims of the contest, they willingly accepted it as part of the larger cultural exchange for advancement" (pp. 39, 40). While Duffy's study provided valuable insight into participants' understandings of the user-generated advertising contest, she was unable to interview the Dove marketing executives involved; I seek to complement her approach with this inquiry into the perspective of the cultural producers (i.e., the

advertisers) who staged that opportunity for consumer-production to understand how the structure of governance might be strategized through the action of subjects.

Many of the examples of advertising to be analyzed here show those complex operations of agency prefigured by earlier theorists of power (Bourdieu, 1984; Foucault, 2000a; Gramsci, 1971; Thornton, 1996) and located, in this section, within a digital milieu. Decentralized participation in a networked communicative environment shows subjects to be, at once, resources for power and resourceful as autonomous agents; that their "immaterial labor" is mobilized to productive ends does not preclude it from being pleasurably populist on its own. Having considered the historical precedence of public relations, the industrial challenges facing conventional advertising and the changing circumstances of media ecology – and in light of simmering debates over power and agency – we can now turn to the particularity of guerrilla marketing as a mode of redressing this terrain.

The Guerrilla Metaphor

At its core, guerrilla marketing – much like the warfare it models itself after, not to mention the "dark art" of public relations – is about catching the target off-guard: governing the consumer subject without that subject ever sensing the weight of such disciplinary measures; "acting upon actions," in Foucault's terminology, without being seen as an exercise of power. Jonathan Bond and Richard Kirshenbaum (1998), creative executives who quite literally wrote the book on *Under the Radar* advertising, thus advocate (without acknowledging the debt to public relations philosophy) that

"persuasive marketing should be invisible, with the consumer *feeling* the benefit rather than having to uncomfortably digest its overt message" (p. 3, italics original).

This means embedding commercial appeals outside the boundaries of mass communication institutions where, traditionally, that governance has manifestly taken place – whether deserting the programming breaks partitioned for sponsorship and worming into the content itself (as in product placement) or departing from the television medium as a whole (as in word-of-mouth). (Needless to say, the recourse to "invisible governance" raises all sorts of ethical and regulatory questions about formal disclosure that will be considered in coming chapters.) Therefore, by studying guerrilla marketing, we can better understand "new media" in the widest sense: channels, forms, surfaces and spaces invented or annexed for promotional experience. For advertisers who turn to these methods, the guerrilla ideal is, curiously, to be everywhere and nowhere at once: to achieve what advertisers have always wanted – the ubiquity that commands the attention of a desired consumer set – but to do so in a way that remains more covert, underground, and serendipitous in its mode of engagement.

"Guerrilla" thus turns out to be an apt turn of phrase – and a productively applicable categorization of otherwise discrete advertising tactics – for what resembles, to marketers, an insurrectionary war for the attention of consumers thought to be capable of resisting conventional advertising assaults. By featuring unidentified combatants skirmishing outside clearly demarcated battle zones, guerrilla warfare departs from the tradition of conventional warfare. Similarly, by featuring subtle appeals engaging consumers outside clearly circumscribed commercial contexts, guerrilla marketing breaks

from the tradition of conventional mass media advertising and embraces a PR mentality.

Indeed, the stealth movements and ambush tactics that are often emblematic of guerrilla

marketing (i.e., invisible relay, serendipitous engagement) offer a richly militarized

metaphor that is significant and revealing.

Metaphors matter, for they disclose the definition of realities and the structure of

thought and action they are built upon (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Upon closer

inspection, marketing discourse is shot through with warfare as a conceptual analogy.

Creative department leaders have variously described advertising as "poison gas" and

recommend that a good campaign should be "militaristic" in its strategy (Leiss et al.,

1997, p. 177). One agency CEO suggests that product placement on TV and in film is a

kind of "invasion and assimilation" strategy (Verklin & Kanner, 2007, p. 110).

Marketing scholars Andrew Kaikati and Jack Kaikati (2004) advocate "stealth"

marketing (so named for the military aircraft) as a way of "[catching] people at their most

vulnerable by identifying the weak spots in their defensive shields" (p. 6). And Bond and

Kirshenbaum (1998), in perhaps the most elaborate use of the metaphor, maintain that it

is the consumers' "mental *machine guns*" that torpedo an ad's potential as much as the

remote control (p. 4); that "there are only a handful of techniques today that are

sophisticated enough to act as *stealth bombers*, dropping new messages [that escape]

detection;" that "many launches of new products are planned in ways not unlike those

used to plan the dropping of the *A-bomb* or the *Normandy invasion*" but that an effective

"under-the-radar launch… is executed more along the lines of the *American Revolution*"

(p. 93); that "the closest thing to… insider market overviews can be found in the

military," whereby "before *invading* a country, any good *army* will find out… the true, hidden infrastructure of communications, key people, and so on" (p. 138, 140); and that "just like the designers of real *fighter planes*, we as marketers need to keep evolving our 'technology' so that it can stay one step ahead of the consumers' defenses" (p. 163) (italics added throughout).

"If politics is war continued by other means," as Mitchell Dean (2010) suggests, and "we should attend to the mobile relations of strategy and tactics, to struggle and battles, and to the disposition of forces that are employed in the exercise of political rule and in the resistance that it provokes," then this dissertation attends to the manner in which guerrilla advertising tries to "rule" the consumer subject – those strategies and tactics, struggles and battles (p. 35). For like the low-intensity, decentralized, surreptitious combat of its namesake – *guerrilla* literally translates to "little war" – guerrilla marketing provides an alternative "little war" commercial communication strategy in contrast to the "big war" waged through mass media channels. In that, the 30-second Super Bowl ad spot functions as the "atomic bomb" of attention seeking (that is, crudely obvious, uniformly ubiquitous, and undifferentiated in its mode of address) whereas guerrilla methods like buzz agents' brand evangelism take a sniper's aim of the audience, flexibly improvising as needed (Bond & Kirshenbaum, 1998, p. 93). Just as overmatched guerrilla rebels would typically lose if they amassed for combat against official state armies in a conventional sense (donning uniforms, assembling on restricted battlefields), so, too, do the guerrilla marketers I interviewed often rationalize and justify

their approach as the necessary recourse in an asymmetrical battle against what they characterize as cynical, ad-zapping, "all-powerful" viewers.

Guerrilla marketing is thus but another instrument in what seems like an arms race for the attention of the prospective consumer. A browse through Che Guevara's (2006) *Guerrilla Warfare* textbook holds instructive parallels that are echoed in the guerrilla marketer's arsenal of stealth and surprise tactics: "Move continuously, hit and run" (seen, for example, in the "branded flash mob" stunts discussed in chapter 3)… "Use the enemy as the main supplier of weapons" (buzz agents proselytizing friends and consumers producing ad content in chapter 4 and 5, respectively)… "Hide your movements" (conceal embedded sponsorship via product placement in chapter 2)… "Make use of the element of surprise…" (a principle in evidence throughout) (p. 5). One coffee table book on non-traditional advertising embraces the metaphor in full and spells out the rationalities that inform the practice:

> In guerrilla warfare, invisibility is a mighty weapon… Conventional advertising… is so visible, so explicit, so identifiable as advertising that consumers can easily spot it and tune it out… It is precisely this undisguised visibility, this clear line between content and commerce that makes the traditional television commercial so vulnerable to ad-skipping technology… Advertising that gets away with it is advertising that does not look or feel like advertising. *It is advertising that blends in seamlessly with real entertainment, real events or real life to the extent that it is not possible to tell what is advertising and what is not.* What smart product placement, cleverly disguised guerrilla tactics, branded content and word of mouth all have in common is that they are harder to trace and label than advertising. And something that is harder to trace is harder to ignore… In other words, while visibility is the mantra in conventional advertising, in an ad-cynic era it proves more effective to be invisible, as small and as humble as possible. *The less pushy and the less dominant the commercial nature of the message, the more chance it has of being digested.* Brands cannot simply force their way into the lives of consumers; they need to act like chameleons and subtly blend in. (Himpe, 2006, p. 14, italics added)

So, too, does Guevara advocate, "Guerrilla fighters must have a degree of adaptability that allows them to identify themselves with the environment in which they live, to become a part of it, and to take advantage of it" (p. 54). Thus, what we seem to be witnessing is not merely "not advertising" in the sense of PR- and branding-informed methods outside the traditional scope of marketing space (i.e., the outdoor, interpersonal and online locations that I collate broadly under the banner of "new media"), but "not advertising" literally at the core of the guerrilla performance (i.e., self-effacing): that is, advertising that seems to deny itself as advertising by avoiding contexts where it is easily identified as such – obscuring its aims, obfuscating its source, and blurring "the line between branding channels and everyday life" so as to abdicate an appearance of authority while exercising power in the practice of governance (Walker, 2008, p. xvii).[6] Put differently, guerrilla marketing functions as camouflage on two levels: It shrouds the advertising message in unexpected media spaces and it also shrouds the fundamental project of consumer discipline that is, ultimately, the eventual purview of advertising. And, in so doing, agency once again emerges at the complex forefront of this project of governance.

The gradual transformation of the traditional information environment can be understood through the scramble to generate new and reinvigorate old alternatives for the

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[6] For instance, to once more draw upon Bond and Kirshenbaum (1998), they suggest that "the best ads aren't adlike at all," that "the most persuasive form of selling… is the invisible kind that never overtly alerts the targets that they are being sold," and that, "The opposite of the hard sell, a great under-the-radar ad may even be so soft sell that it doesn't look or feel like an advertisement. In some cases, it may not even be an ad at all. Under-the-radar creative ideas can take any shape or form" (pp. 18, 34). Over the course of my interviews, I heard many variations on this theme of advertising that "doesn't look or feel like an advertisement" repeated as the output aspiration of creative directors.

advertising industry – many prefigured by the philosophy and practice of public relations, as I have shown. It is not coincidence that the same year *Time* magazine broke with decades of tradition to name "You" – the "amateur-revolutionary" at the heart of Web 2.0 – its "Person of the Year," *Advertising Age* also named the consumer its "Advertising Agency of the Year" (Bruns, 2008, p. 4). This project is an exploration of guerrilla marketing as a means of processing the changes that resulted in those sorts of accolades – a way of locating theoretical debates about power and agency and historical exigencies put to industry in the corpus of and discourse about a particular set of practices that have, as their aim, the conduct of others' conduct. I seek, much like Mark Deuze (2007a), to chart guerrilla marketing's "media logic": "[This] points to specific forms and processes which organize the work done within a particular medium. Yet, media logic also indicates the cultural competence frames of perception of audiences/users, which in turn reinforces how production within the medium takes place" (Dahlgren, 1996, p. 63). By going "behind the scenes" and looking at the "strategies, tactics, and processes of meaning-making" of guerrilla creatives, we can perhaps "catch a glimpse of the future that many assume lies ahead in the knowledge economy of the information age" (Deuze, 2007a, p. 234).

Studies of Cultural Production

As a study of the creation of guerrilla advertising, this project contributes to a tradition of communication studies research on cultural *production* – a tradition that, while valuable, seems to have received comparatively scant attention relative to the

moment of cultural *reception*. This is one of the main takeaways from David

Hesmondhalgh's (2007) review of cultural industries scholarship. Hesmondhalgh defines

the cultural industries as those that "deal primarily with the industrial production and

circulation of texts" or, more abstractly, a collection of institutions "that are most directly

involved in the production of social meaning" (p. 12).

Cultural production research, Hesmondhalgh contends, has fallen in the gap

between two competing schools of inquiry – the outcome of a problematic binary

similarly identified by Laura Grindstaff and Joseph Turow (2006) in their review of

television sociology. On one hand, political economy approaches tend to lack "the

empirical attention to what happens in cultural industry *organizations*" and "often choose

to ignore the issue of textual meaning" (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, pp. 37, 40, italics original).

In other words, these efforts have tended to take a high-altitude view of how media

content is regulated, supervised, manufactured and circulated, without the nuanced,

complex, even contradictory backstage insight of on-the-ground work by symbolic

creators (that I will provide here).

On the other hand, while cultural studies has long sought to foreground the issue

of textual "meaning," it has done so in such way that perpetually privileges – and, indeed,

stereotypically celebrates – the resistant audience rather than the determinant producer;

this set of literature has, in other words, perhaps *overly* emphasized agency in theorizing

power. As Thomas Frank (1997) declares, "For all of cultural studies' subtle readings

and forceful advocacy, its practitioners often tend to limit their inquiries so rigorously to

the consumption of culture-products that the equally important process of cultural

production is virtually ignored" (p. 19). Yet capitalism is, as Frank points out, "dynamic

stuff, an order of endless flux and change."

That dynamism is readily apparent in the practices of guerrilla advertising

documented here (as befitting a Gramscian context for understanding the exercise of

marketer power vis-à-vis the uncertainty of consumer governance) and I will, in the pages

that follow, answer Hesmondhalgh's call to bridge that gap and "revivify" the study of

symbolic creativity by appraising "production and policy… *in relation* to other key

processes such as cultural consumption, identity and textual meaning" (p. 45, italics

original): That is, "the study of the cultural industries has to incorporate the consideration

of texts and the study of texts has to take seriously analysis of the cultural industries" (p.

307). In short, I apply the qualitative, interpretive tools that have long characterized

cultural reception research – specifically, textual analysis and in-depth interview methods

– to cultural producers (specifically guerrilla marketers), a group long theorized by

political economists at an arms-length.

To acknowledge a paucity of cultural production research in this way is not,

however, to claim a total absence of precedence (see Peterson & Anand, 2004 for a

detailed review). Much like Todd Gitlin's (2000) pursuit of prime time television's

backstage, I've captured, through interviews with symbolic creators, "the thinking" –

and, more specifically for my purposes, the "media logic" and "analytics of government"

– that makes guerrilla advertising what it is (p. xiv). Much like Jostein Gripsrud's (1995)

work on *Dynasty*, I believe that, through this backstage glimpse of guerrilla marketing,

we can "[grasp] what a unique slice of cultural history may be said to 'contain' or

(re)present of more general socio-cultural forces at play in the ongoing shaping of our lives and our worlds" (p. 2).

Hence, a production-of-culture inquiry into guerrilla marketing offers not only a window into industrial decision-making but a materialized reflection on the present moment by those with the power to produce commercialized social meaning and who seek to manage consumer subjects through it; drawing from this perspective provides "techniques for researching the constructed nature of collective representations, values, and the other aspects of culture" (Peterson & Anand, 2004, p. 327). In light of new media patterns – and "the restructuring of time, space, and place in daily work processes" because of the "digitalization of cultural production" – this inquiry into guerrilla advertising arrives at a particularly unique moment (Klinenberg & Benzecry, 2005, p. 8). For that matter, "close studies of industry processes" – that is, "the ways in which people actually carry out their work" – are more often oriented to news content than entertainment or, for that matter, advertising (Grindstaff & Turow, 2006, p. 118).

Indeed, turning attention to the production-of-culture literature specific to advertising, one finds it rather lacking. Besides valuable historical work (Ewen, 2001; Lears, 1994; Marchand, 1985; Pope, 1983; Presbrey, 1929), advertising scholarship has often rested on pillars like that of Judith Williamson (1978) – that is, insightful readings of the final product, but failures to truly account for the concrete workings of the

producer.[7] The Barthesian-informed influence of Williamson has, in the opinion of

Matthew Soar (2000), resulted in a "text-centered orthodoxy (and concurrent militantism

against authorship)" that largely ignores the "encoding" moment of Stuart Hall's (1980)

canonic model (p. 419).

Yet we need – following the lead of Aidan Kelly, Katrina Lawlor and Stephanie

O'Donohue (2005) – to be studying that moment of advertisement encoding and the

processes of creative producers who are involved in it. What little attention scholarship

has given to empirically investigating advertising production has, moreover, occluded

inquiry into a much larger universe of "marketing communication" that advertising has

often stood in for (Turow, 2006, p. 9). Branding, for that matter – a major facet of focus

in this project – has historically gotten the same short shrift from researchers, even as this

promotional activity has "recently become more significant to the form and functioning

of an increasingly 'cultural' economy" (Moor, 2007, p. 2).

As Don Slater (1989) speculates, "Understanding this process [of advertising

practice] might well lead us to reconsider assumptions about the way needs and

consumers are formed which underlie the paradigm of communicative power" (p. 121).

More recent contributions in this vein have included work on the making of gay market

(Sender, 2004), the Latino/a market (Dávila, 2001), and various agencies located around

the globe (Malefyt & Moeran, 2003). Sean Nixon (2003) provides an insider's account

of advertising, but his focus is more informal than industrial – querying the "subjective

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[7] Liz McFall (2002), calling for a more "empirical approach" to research on the business, adds that not enough work has been done to trace the changing methods of advertising and "gathering insight into the motivations behind its form" (p. 149). I take this as my point of departure.

dispositions and self-dramatizations" of the ad creative, particularly in the context of

gender and masculinity (p. 2). More recently, Nixon (2006) charts the strategic rhetorical

deployment of the idea of "creativity" by industry practitioners and argues that creatives

are, interestingly, driven less by the ideal of making a client's product stand out as with

drawing the attention of peer competitors. Relevant to this inquiry, he recognizes that

this "pursuit of newness" aligns these practitioners against the centrality and eminence of

the 30-second TV spot and toward "the importance of innovating in the forms" through

which goods are advertised (p. 98). The product of this creative yearning that Nixon

hints at – with practitioners longing to experiment and innovate with creative channels

and unexpected spectacles – is given full treatment here. Finally, to return to Soar (2000)

and his exploration of the advertising creative as both "culture vulture" and "cultured

vulture," I follow precisely his lead, raising questions about "how ideas are produced,

how well the processes can be explained, [and] the influences (if any) that are at play" (p.

421).

Recalling my theoretical stance, the project can be understood as an "analytics of

government" in the realm of cultural production (specifically, guerrilla marketing): that

is, "an analytics of government is a materialist analysis in that it places these regimes of

practices at the centre of analysis and seeks to discover the logic of such practices"

(Dean, 2010, p. 41). Such is the Foucauldian notion of "criticism": "to make explicit the

thought that, while often taking a material form, is largely tacit in the way in which we

govern and are governed, and in the language, practices, and techniques by which we do

so" (p. 48). My intent is, therefore, "to attack not so much such-and-such institution of

power, or group, or elite, or class" – or advertising firm, for that matter – "but rather [to

attack] a technique, a form of power" (Foucault, 2000a, p. 331). An analytics of

government, as reflected in much of Foucault's work, is especially concerned with and

oriented toward the "how" question: that is, what are the "conditions under which

regimes of practices [like the 'regime of engagement' here] come into being, are

maintained and are transformed" (Dean, 2010, pp. 31, 33)?

I thus seek to execute a study of the "microphysics" of a "concrete functioning of

power" – "a study of the forms and means of power focused on individuals and the

details of their behavior and conduct" (Gordon, 2000, p. xxiv; Rabinow, 1984, p. 6). By

closely studying guerrilla marketing, we can better understand the sense of power

relations that are embedded within it: thought that manifests itself as programs for the

"conduct of conduct" without that project appearing to the subject of (consumer)

governance. Moreover, this approach adheres to a Gramscian conception of power:

looking at the consumer subject through the lens of the producer seeking to "lead" him

through his freedom to a particular end. It is, thus, a way of understanding how agency

can be hegemonically "gamed," particularly for those inclined to buy into a hierarchy of

and matrix for subcultural flows and capital (Thornton, 1996).

Method and Outline

This study articulates how and why guerrilla marketing strategy is being deployed

in light of the themes and concepts woven throughout this introduction and the challenges

and opportunities that advertising faces at this juncture. It is an analysis of the

technological, cultural and institutional changes both internal and external to the

marketing industry in the past ten years, and it serves a way of interrogating a particular

consumer management ideology (the regime of engagement, as I call it) through the

industrial discourse attendant to creativity with the media channel used to reach

audiences with a commercial message.

I follow Gripsrud's (1995) lead – working in the tradition of Barney Glaser and

Anselm Strauss (1967) – in cutting a path toward triangulation as much as possible: that

is, being "methodologically pluralistic, in the sense that a plurality of sources and data,

gathered in a variety of ways, are employed to shed light on various dimensions of the

phenomenon under scrutiny" (p. 5). Namely, I've employed a qualitative combination of

textual analysis and in-depth interviews to glean what Dahlgren (1996) terms the "media

logic" (p. 63) of these promotional methods, to appreciate what Deuze (2007a) identifies

as the "strategies, tactics, and processes of meaning-making" (p. 234) demonstrated by

this media work, and to excavate an "analytics of government" oriented toward "how"

questions in the practice of consumer management. The excellent works of Thomas

Lindlof (1995), Pertti Alasuutari (1995), and Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson

(2007) inform my methodological training, though I fully acknowledge that this study is

in no way qualified to be called an "ethnography in the classic sense of term," but rather

is pursuant of a "broader perspective" that emerges from a "diverse range of data"

(Sender, 2004, pp. 243, 244).

Such a multi-method, multi-source approach has been useful in delivering in

multiple levels of "thick description" and rich detail in the following way: a textual

analysis of guerrilla advertising coverage in the popular and trade press has culled a

useful sample of case studies and the industry's public representation and explanation of

the techniques, while in-depth, one-on-one interviews with the practitioners involved

with those campaigns has illuminated a more nuanced understanding of the beliefs and

ideas that motivate and animate these forms and the inspiration and decision-making

involved (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). From the broad orientation provided by others' journalistic

reportage to the unique insights of my own interview data, each method has yielded

"webs of significance" to be synthesized for a kind of industrial *verstehen* on the

potentials and challenges of consumer management today (p. 5).

To put it plainly, however, I found it difficult at times to move my conversations

beyond the spin – a methodological challenge that Katherine Sender (2004) usefully

deconstructs in her appendix on investigating the construction of the gay market in terms

resonant to this project.

> Marketing 'pitch' was an underlying frame for my research; it structured many
> interactions with my subjects… 'The pitch' describes, most typically, the process
> whereby ad creatives introduce a new campaign to clients – selling ideas to sell
> products. But marketers, publishers, and journalists are all involved in promoting
> the idea of the gay market, and their product as somehow useful in gay
> marketing… (p. 244)

Similarly, most of the interviewees I spoke with were invested in "promoting the

idea" of their guerrilla marketing methods: whether that be for a branded entertainment

partnership, a street art campaign, a word-of-mouth program, or a crowd-sourced

advertising contest. Just as they had sold clients on the efficacy of their practices, so, too,

were they likely selling me on the success of those implementations. Thus, like Sender, I

got the sense that "many of my interviewees may have believed that both the discussion and the results of my project would feed back into their work… by raising their profile," which, in turn, may have colored our discussions (p. 245). Given the marginal (if rising) status that these guerrilla marketing categories hold within the industry at large, I should probably have expected that "the interview itself [was…] a marketing opportunity" for them. Certainly my disposition in the initial volley of e-mails before or early in conversation during our interviews betrayed a somewhat deferential flattery and a register of enthusiasm for the success of the work we were about to discuss; this was, admittedly, a conscious attempt on my part to secure access or put the interviewee at ease in order to frame a comfortable space for interaction, but such agreeability on my part (as a means of eliciting their participation) likely further lubricated the ease with which they slipped back into the "pitch."

This is not to say, however, that I merely tossed softballs to interviewees about award-winning campaigns. It is perhaps significant that I was rebuffed in my efforts to speak with representatives associated with "failed" projects like Bud.TV (for which I had to rely upon published coverage and competitors' postmortems). And interviewees could be, at times, cagey if not suspicious about my role in inquiry, as when one interviewee tried to pin down my "critical studies" vantage point on his company's work, when another skirted details on the financial overhead or ROI measurements involved, or when a third requested that I e-mail any and all quotes I would be using to verify accuracy prior to publishing. In sum, the "pitch" haunted my own efforts throughout interviews to induce an unfiltered reflexivity from participants about their advertising work; like

Sender, I chose to "step back from a fruitless debate between whether data are 'true' or 'false,'" specifically with regard to "success" (which constantly tugged at my interviews), and to instead consider "how [data] are shaped, contained, obscured, and elided in their production and analysis" (p. 244). Given the aforementioned orientation to an "analytics of government" vis-à-vis guerrilla marketing, this methodological approach squared with theoretical aims.

In accordance with the "critical media industry studies" research agenda that Timothy Havens, Amanda Lotz, and Serra Tinic (2009) propose, I have therefore conducted "grounded institutional case studies that examine the relationships between strategies (here read as the larger economic goals and logics of large-scale cultural industries) and tactics" (p. 247). Furthermore, I follow up on their suggestion to "examine… how knowledge about texts, audiences, and the industry form, circulate, and change; and how they influence textual and industrial practices" so as to obtain "a 'helicopter' level view of industry operations, a focus on agency within industry operations, a Gramscian theory of power that does not lead to complete domination, and a view of society and culture grounded in structuration and articulation" (Havens et al., 2009, pp. 237, 246).

In keeping with the metaphorical contrast they sketch, the "jet plane" (i.e., high-altitude) approach of political economy to cultural production could have provided the underlying framework of "governance" (as a way of understanding how advertisers think about consumer audiences) without needing to pick up the phone; but by opting for the "helicopter" view of this production (that is more informed by a cultural studies

approach), it has afforded greater detail and complexity and allowed me to see how that "governance" *actually tries not to seem like governance in relating to the subjects of its power*. This is a finding that truly could not have been ascertained from that high-altitude and the "pitch" as a site of analysis yielded this unexpected but central theme for analysis. In other words, even if I knew going in that guerrilla marketing was about choosing media that are "under the radar," the textual analysis and interviews conducted helped illuminate the underlying art of managing consumer subjects through those means in ways I could not have simply read off of the advertisements themselves or predicted analytically in advance.

Thus, I have approached this research with an exploratory, inductive posture: collecting bits and pieces of guerrilla marketing observation – whether found in press coverage or heard in interviews – and comparing, contrasting and connecting to "funnel" an emerging mass of raw data into an integrated understanding of the phenomenon at hand while achieving abstracted answers to my two most primary research questions, which might be summarized as follows: How and why has the medium itself for advertising been rethought in the past decade? And what do those strategies of governance reflect about ideologies of audience engagement and consumer management? I am, therefore, attempting to understand the "culture" that guerrilla marketing seeks to interpret, produce and engage – and these questions helped to orient and inform each stage of the process. As I reviewed press coverage and prepared semi-structured interview schedules, these have served as my compass points, via "many iterations of

tacking between the cases and the general cultural theories that informed this research to search for patterns" (Holt, 2004, p. 223).

The popular and trade press served as an overview entry point for the project – offering coverage of the phenomenon of guerrilla marketing that provided both case study examples (which I then pursued further through interviews) as well as necessary background for getting a sense of public discourse about the practice. Whereas articles on guerrilla advertising in the popular press naturally speak to a wider audience and explain the work in non-specialist language, coverage in the trade press offers greater depth for the industry community (and more substantive insight and potential contacts for my purposes). I used the Factiva online database to generate a corpus of articles on guerrilla marketing, limiting the database search to the past ten years.

My rationale for choosing the first decade of the 21st century as the timeframe for analysis was deliberate in that by 2000, internet usage had spread to more than half of the United States; prophecies of traditional advertising's "death" had grown louder in scholarly journals and trade texts; "interactive" panaceas began to be heralded with similar volume; older media institutions like newspapers, magazines, radio, and television stood on the precipice of a tumultuous era; and advertising dollars began sloshing into those newer venues at a greater pace. At a moment when these and other relevant trends were in motion, the start of a new century provided a convenient, if somewhat arbitrary moment – subjective in the sense of the exact cut-off date – to consider guerrilla marketing practices; moreover, the close of 2009 brought its own

useful flurry of decade-retrospective coverage in the press from which I could amass avenues for further inquiry.

From the trade press, I searched from *Advertising Age*, *Adweek*, *Brand Republic* (UK), *Brand Strategy*, *Brandweek*, *Campaign* (UK), *Creativity*, *Marketing* (UK), *Marketing Magazine* (Canada), *Marketing News*, *Marketing Week* (UK) *Mediaweek*, and *Promo Magazine*; from the popular press, I drew from daily newspapers (*Boston Globe*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*), weekly newsmagazines (*Newsweek*, *Time*) and business magazines (*BusinessWeek*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*). My primary search from those publication sources was for articles with at least *two* mentions of "guerilla" or "guerrilla" (it can be spelled either way) and "advertising" or "marketing;" this yielded a collection of 344 documents to be analyzed.

I also conducted a second search with a more expansive set of keywords so as to cast a wider net into the universe of popular and trade reporting on a phenomenon whose label is often as shifty as its modus operandi – indeed, as I acknowledged in the opening pages, only a fraction of the tactics I'm considering "guerrilla" have been usually labeled as such (and most of those that do are analyzed in chapter 3). Thus, I searched from those same publication sources using 9 other terms in combination with "advertising" or "marketing": "ambient" (producing 1225 documents); "branded entertainment" (1322); "buzz" (9342); "consumer-generated" (433) "experiential" (1734); "interactive" (23107); "stealth" (814); "undercover" (658); and "viral" (4544). These search trawls yielded a document load obviously beyond the scope (or efficiency of interest) of these efforts; I therefore looked at the 25 most "relevant" articles for each search term, as ranked by

Factiva's filtering mechanism (which is based on keywords appearing). To wit, this textual analysis of 569 articles considered how these press accounts could provide insights and answers to the primary research questions as well as offers a starting point for contacts to interview and examples to include. Yet even that figure (569) grossly under-represents by several hundred the *actual* number of press documents consulted for this research, as for many of the case studies I chose to pursue, I would comb through Factiva using these sources (with, e.g., "BzzAgent" as a search term) so as to gather background information in preparation for productive interviews.

The bulk of my data for this dissertation came from that stage in the process: one-on-one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews by phone (with one in-person exception) with prominent practitioners, creatives and executives involved in the guerrilla campaigns of note. Here I sought to elaborate on themes elicited from coverage in the popular and trade press and apply more concretely the guiding research questions (see Appendix A for an example interview schedule). The vast majority of interviewees were linked to or involved in the production of campaign examples that make up my case studies and I engaged in detailed conversations with them about these as well as contextualizing them against the state of advertising more generally. And although discussions with company CEOs and creative directors often gravitated toward hyping their "pitch" (as noted in my earlier reflection on Sender's methodological challenge), I also spoke with brand consultants like Lucian James and Noah Brier; trade journalists like Becky Ebenkamp, who regularly covered guerrilla marketing for *Brandweek* and Scott Donaton, the former editor of *Advertising Age*; and storytellers and content creators

like author Karin Slaughter, film producer Mike Monello, and game designer Jordan

Weisman – all of whom brought to bear their own particular lens on the phenomenon of

guerrilla advertising, are implicated in its practice in slightly different ways, and who

often shaded out helpful insight from varying degrees of autonomous reflexivity in their

roles.

Between the fall of 2008 and the spring of 2010, I carried out some 46 interviews

with 48 interviewees (out of 93 attempted contacts) – some as short as 20 minutes, some

as long as more than an hour, but generally lasting about 40 minutes each (see Appendix

B for a description of the name, job title, and date of the interview). While longer

interviews might have been preferable, given the busy schedules of my interviewees

(more than a handful were company CEOs) I appreciated any opportunity to speak with

them; moreover, for many, we had "exhausted" the topic by the time their availability ran

out. I had hoped to use a snowball sample as much as possible – "cold calling" desired

interviewees by phone or through e-mail when necessary (see Appendix C for an

example of that e-mail solicitation) but also relying on early contacts to put me in touch

with more informants. As it turned out, the bulk of contacts were made through that

"cold calling" approach, as few interviewees provided much in the way of suggestion of

other contacts (the product, I suspect, of my asking about what are, in effect, industry

competitors).

Although research often anonymizes participants out of habit, I have – unless

requested otherwise by interviewees (and none did so) – used their real names here. I had

three reasons for doing that: First, any attempt at rendering them anonymous was, in

reality, going to be a flimsy measure of protection. These interviewees were being

contacted because most are high-level creative decision-makers involved in very specific

and prominent campaigns that were discussed and – more often than not – I got their

names from quotes in the popular and trade press (i.e., they are already in the public eye).

To refer anonymously to, for example, "the creative director behind XYZ campaign"

does not really offer much in the way of anonymity, when a simple Google search can fill

in the blank where a proper name would go – and I needed to refer to their specific roles

so as to lend credibility and significance to the thoughts they shared. Second, any

attempt at rendering them anonymous runs somewhat counterintuitive to the nature of

advertising. My research participants will no doubt be desirous of recognition for their

creative production and will want to be credited publicly – even to a limited academic

audience – for the time and energy they invested in speaking with me. And, finally, the

power differential (with a powerful researcher and vulnerable research participant

presupposed) that is often of concern to institutional research boards and ethics seminars

was, in this instance, reversed: that is, high-level executives can hardly be characterized

as helpless vis-à-vis a graduate student doctoral project.

In analyzing these data, I again looked to Katherine Sender's (2004)

methodological lead, given that the "pitch" structured her data as well as mine. I tried to

"draw out both the continuities and the disparities between campaigns, venues, agencies,

and sites" and "to remain aware of the multiple and contradictory investments among

sources and to resist assuming seamless ideological positions among different kinds of

data" (pp. 244, 250). Because all interviewees had investments in the subject discussed, I

treated "their content not as fact versus opinion, but as facts carefully, if not consciously, prepared for presentation" (p. 250).

I begin in Chapter 2 by looking at advertainment, a term for practices of product placement and branded content and a useful entry point into the themes of the project. I trace and contextualize the long history of advertainment as a promotional strategy, going back to the early decades of film, radio, and television and acknowledge the linkages with public relations, which has long sought to place its own "product" into journalistic output – and which similarly conceptualizes its mission as "educational" ambience rather than direct salesmanship. I explore how and why, of late, the technique has grown as a source of revenue in traditional venues and expanded its reach into unconventional arenas of commercialization. I situate branding as a backdrop for thinking through the advertainment strategy of governance: a tactic of self-effacing persuasive intent though seemingly disinterested (cultural) spaces. By filtering the promotional overture through the "neutral" context of a novel, a pop song, or a video game, the guerrilla advertiser presumes to "casualize" the exercise of marketing "power," in the Foucauldian sense, over the consumer subject. By looking at case studies drawn from a range of media industries, I address questions about viability (or even necessity) of protecting the autonomy of creative producers (some of whom harbor ambitions of being brands themselves) when corporate storytelling is outsourced to them. Because economic and technological conditions find artists in need of a patron and sponsors in need of a vessel, I echo the specter that audiences' ability to filter out advertising from the texts they consume may well one day culminate in all content becoming branded content.

In chapter 3, I turn to alternative ambient marketing in an outdoor context: that is, the street spectacle of corporate "graffadi" and branded flash mobs which utilizes the out-of-home space in unconventional ways. I begin by turning to branding's chief ideological nemesis, culture jamming, that has concurrently taken shape and grown in vitality vis-à-vis its anathema. In keeping with the Gramscian framework of hegemony, I argue that – although culture jamming endeavors to awaken audiences to a true sense of agency external to advertising's regime of engagement – this guerrilla marketing of the outdoor variety can be understood as the expropriation of that political subversion for brand identity (not far removed from Dick Hebdige's [1979] own appraisal of subcultural style). I deconstruct the notion of the "brand hijack" as a way of thinking through the street spectacle strategy of governance: the cultivation of an anti-establishment ethos and the incorporation of dissident aesthetics as a means of obfuscating the exercise of marketer authority and working with the momentum of intransigence and subversion. This chapter also frames Foucault's usage of panopticism in the context of market research absorbing "street" trends; details a series of case studies from Pabst Blue Ribbon to the "Truth" anti-smoking campaign to elucidate how resistance is pre-fabricated; and illuminates the "media logic" of non-standardized micro-media formats as vessels of credibility and authenticity.

In chapters 4 and 5, I examine brand evangelism – a label encompassing practices of word-of-mouth and consumer-generated advertising that offers a flexible, crowd-sourced form of guerrilla advertising and which offers an illuminating Bourdieuian modeling of the conversion of social and cultural capital into economic capital. In

chapter 4, I begin by situating contemporary buzz practices against the backdrop of both

public relations long-orientation toward harnessing – also a la Gramsci – "grassroots"

social fervor as well as the aforementioned history of Avon and Tupperware as

precursors for the deliberate mingling of socialization and salesmanship. I extract,

highlight and critique the legacy of this traditionally gendered space wherein women's

personal relationships and social networks served as the venue for locating commercial

messages and explore more recent instances of how companies seek to "seed" messages

into communities through buzz agents – again, a la public relations – based on long-

standing notions about diffusion (often piloted through music promotion and increasingly

capacitated through internet infrastructure). I argue here that "dialogue" is crucial to

thinking through the word-of-mouth strategy of governance: it favors an agile,

conversant, and contingent conception of the brand-text, thereby abdicating tighter

control in favor of potentially wider and more credible reach so as to "vernacularize" the

promotional assertion and simulate a purportedly egalitarian "partnership" footing with

the subject of consumer management.

In chapter 5, I take many of the themes dissected in chapter 4 – the operational

veneration of dialogue, the brand-text as adaptive and unfinished, the pre-empting of

consumer participation, and the utility in gathering "naturalized" social data for

marketing research insight – and analyze crowd-sourcing in its digital context. I

foreground aforementioned contributions on free labor in the context of the

dematerialization of the creative industries that this approach forebodes and highlight,

following Andrejevic (2008) and Duffy (2010), how employment is sold to participants

as "empowerment." By examining case studies of consumer-generated advertising contests drawn from Doritos, Ford, and Chevy, I outline and critique the "brand democratization" myth in thinking through the crowd-sourced strategy of governance: interactive efforts to embed promotional messages in apparently autonomous amateur flows of communication so as to emphasize the collaborative, decentralized management of consumer subjects. Looking at branded applications of self-expression that *Mad Men* and *The Simpsons* have employed, I emphasize the persuasive utility professed in these enthymemes of new media that rely upon a continuum of open-to-closed media content as a way of understanding how brands oblige interpretation and engagement and I conclude by questioning the populist, organic sheen of viral memes.

In sum, this dissertation aims to clarify the degree to which guerrilla advertising – in its various forms as I've defined it here – offers a window into new insight on an enduring problematic: the tension between the exigencies and designs of structural power (here understood as the marketer's need to sell things) and the capacities and resistances of individual agency (here understood as the consumer's choice to buy things). Earlier thinkers, particularly Gramsci and Foucault, have contributed the theoretical backdrop for appreciating the exercise of hegemony or governance, in their respective terms, for this project. Guerrilla advertising, in its public relations-inspired recourse to "invisible" discipline, brokers and reconciles those exigencies and capacities in a way that consistently accentuates agency over power – raising profound questions about the way in which we, as consumer audiences, might be governed from the bottom-up rather than

the top-down, by invitation rather than interruption, and through freedom rather than

force.

The Ambient Governance of Advertainment:

How Brands Co-Author Content

> If you're creating a culture, you need to create content in order for people to interact or experience what the brand stands for. So, a 30-second commercial is content, but it's manipulated content that's supposed to persuade you to buy something. So people are conditioned to think of a TV spot differently than they are a piece of film on YouTube or a book or whatever. So I think ultimately if you want to get people on board, you have to give them tools, give them opportunities to engage and come up with really creative ways of doing it. – Scott Goodson, founder and CEO of Strawberry Frog (personal communication, January 11, 2010)

> The dissemination of the brand beyond the commercial sphere shows above all the capacity for the brand's logic to transform, to adapt, [and] to transcend in order to take charge of a virtually infinite variety of content and discourse. – Andrea Semprini, brand consultant (Lehu, 2007, p. 227)

The prolific growth of product placement and branded content provides an entry point into how the conventions of advertising context are being rethought as part of a larger strategy of "casualizing" the exercise of marketing power over the consumer subject. The seemingly neutral ambience provided by cultural spaces like film, pop music, and video games serve to obfuscate that project of governance: self-effacing persuasive intent and embedding an ethos – as opposed to a mere message – in textual material that is sought out rather than forced upon. As Scott Goodson's quote above attests, conventional advertising venues are thought to contextually condition subjects to anticipate the weight of manipulation – in militarized terms, putting them on guard – while entertainment or journalistic content prepares a different frame of mind. Thus, as a

program for the conduct of others' conduct, advertainment manages consumers less deliberately (and therefore candidly), with a quiet subtlety of objective and execution – its force arranged architecturally rather than foisted explicitly. And by showing rather than telling, it presupposes a self-governing subject of power.

Unlike "newer" media tactics to be explored to be explored in later chapters, much of this approach relies upon the channels and genres of more traditional mass media. Yet motivated by many of the same pressures that cue the search for commercially virgin territory in other spheres, it nonetheless amounts to a transformation of institutional models and a step toward blurring the boundaries of where audiences have typically encountered advertising and programming. What had been a more firm partition between commerce and content may increasingly resemble a seamless blend as that "extremely flexible and blurred" border becomes "fragile, even nonexistent" (Kretchmer, 2004, p. 39; Lehu, 2007, p. 23). The landscape that could ensue would redefine the roles and norms for advertising, clients, and cultural producers. For this reason, Coca-Cola president Steven J. Heyer boldly told attendees at a 2003 *Advertising Age* conference that Coke now thinks of itself as a vessel for *directly* furnishing entertainment and pop culture: "The bottle is a medium, [Heyer] said, 'to open a movie, popularize and sell new music… and maybe… charge [the entertainment and media industries], like [they] charge us" (Wipperfurth, 2005, p. 119). Such ambition would portend to alter the calculus of how part of the media business pays for itself.

Advertainment like this demonstrates both a guerrilla approach to using media space and a fidelity to the ideals of the cool sell introduced in the first chapter. This

principle of "under-the-radar" gets repeated throughout the industry discourse: from its

trade group, the Entertainment Resources and Marketing Association (ERMA), which

touts a "'seamless' or 'organic'" "product placement [that] doesn't make a lot of noise by

calling attention to itself" (Wenner, 2004, p. 107) to former *Advertising Age* editor Scott

Donaton's (2004) boast that, "Not only do entertainment tie-in's make the advertising

more attractive, they make it impossible to avoid; you can't zap a product placement

without zapping the very program you want to watch" (p. 21). For this very reason, Mark

Andrejevic (2007) astutely forewarns that the same technologies that enabled ad

avoidance – namely, television digitalization – ultimately ensured that ads would creep

further into the content audiences *actually* wanted: "If the advent of interactive TV

heralds the end of advertising as we know it – vignettes distinct from the program content

– it simultaneously anticipates the transformation of all content into advertising" (p. 12).

One might read this as a Gramscian shift from domination to leadership: that is, if

subjects are resistant to direct summons (i.e., petitions by power partitioned off), perhaps

they can be shepherded through ambient appeals (i.e., petitions by power modeled in

texts).

      This chapter takes stock of Andrejevic's premonition at a moment when the

forces transforming television are equally sweeping across other media industries. For

burrowing into content is not just a retreat move on the part of advertisers fleeing the

remote control or DVR pre-set; it is *also* part of an advance surge galvanized by

assumptions in marketing thought that seek out a wider swath of media space to generate

brand identity. In that, the brand's textual creep outward from its 30-second spot

"straightjacket" – as branded content expert Jean-Marc Lehu (2007) tellingly calls it – is part of a broader imperative to provide a (self-appointed) "cultural resource" to audiences and consumers (p. 23). This therefore necessitates a search for terrain more expansive than that which has been traditionally zoned for commercial purposes – e.g., during the programming break on TV and radio or surrounding editorial content in magazines and newspapers – particularly given the degrading value of that traditional ad space. Moreover, given the system of governance reflected in this strategy – to casualize the persuasive process, to discipline consumption without it *feeling* like discipline – pop culture content provides an appealingly "disinterested" space from which to make that case. In advertainment, that is, a brand can belie its true intention to sell products through the displayed cultural material that those products are wrapped within.

In recent years, branded entertainment as a broad market category (that is, encompassing product placement, advergaming and webisodes, and event sponsorship) has grown steadily to a figure of $22 billion in 2007 and was projected to double by 2012 (*Branded entertainment market*, 2008). In the sections that follow, I begin by laying out the logic through which brands increasingly understand themselves in relation to culture; it is an institutional self-conceit that has ramifications for both the ways in which the media environment is managed as well as how individual consumers are obliged to negotiate their agency and identity through it. I then detail the historic context, recent innovations, and occasional controversies that have taken place in both product placement and branded content – where the advertisement has swallowed the text whole. Throughout, I will take stock of advertainment in a cultural, industrial, and institutional

context – highlighting claims about the practice corrupting the autonomy of content

providers, proffering a solution to revenue model challenges, and necessitating regulation

given the less-than-transparent promotional content. I will demonstrate here that, by

inventing or annexing pop culture advertainment forms, the brand itself is not only

transformed, but that it transforms the creative industries and the expected consumer

experience along with it.

Locating Power and Agency in the Brand Project

Although historians date the first "brand" back to more than two centuries ago

(Wernick, 1991), the term "branding," and its centrality to business as an asset at once

verifiable if intangible, has increasingly emerged only in the past few decades. Liz Moor

(2007), who has chronicled this rise, defines branding as "a process by which

commodities are given an explicitly self-promotional form" (p. 2). Because brands

codify more than simply a name, logo, and trademark and are meant to "embody

'relationships', 'values' and 'feelings', to be expressed through an expanded range of

'executional elements' and 'visual indicators,'" they therefore "render a greater array of

materials communicative and informational… attempt to give concrete physical form to

abstract values and concepts… and try to influence the perceptions and behavior of

customers and citizens" (Moor, 2007, pp. 6, 143).

Though manifestly a tool for marketer power, the brand, theorists observe, is

equally a project of governance that rests upon the agency of the subject. For example,

Celia Lury (2004) describes the brand as an "open-ended object," a "platform for action"

– a characterization that expressly presupposes a certain capacitation from the target for whom management is supposed to work upon (pp. 1, 151). To situate power in this way embodies a shift from discipline to governance, as framed in the Foucauldian terms in the last chapter. Modern, Fordist marketing – ascendant for the first half of the 20th century – sought to "engineer" tastes and desires on command, "directed consumers as to how they should live and why their brand should be a central part of this kind of life," and issued paternalistic, "didactic" advertising appeals (Holt, 2002, p. 80). Such "marketing fiat" could come across as "overly coercive" – a project wherein consumers were positioned and addressed more for their acquiescence than their agency (p. 82).

Against that backdrop, brand managers revised focus from direct and primary reference to the product to a "*context for consumption*": In other words, "It is not the brand itself that counts, but what you can do with it, what you can *be* with it" (Arvidsson, 2005, pp. 244, 248, italics original). Thus, the brand itself has become a project for the structuring of agency in precisely the form that Foucault (2000a) found illustrative of "power" (i.e., "acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action") (Foucault, 2000a, p. 340):

> Brand management is not a disciplinary practice. It does not seek to impose a certain structure of tastes or desires, not even a certain manner of relating to goods… Rather, brand management works by enabling or empowering the freedom of consumers so that it is likely to evolve in particular directions. In its present form, brand management recognizes the autonomy of consumers. It aims at providing an environment, an ambience, which anticipates and programs the agency of consumers. Brand management says not 'You Must!' It says 'You May! (Arvidsson, 2005, pp. 244-245, italics original)

These aims to lead through ambience and to stage discovery (i.e., "You May!") rather than execute a hard-edged discipline ("You Must!") are especially resonant in the "invisible governance" of advertainment that is highlighted in this chapter. For integrating the brand into content is not only a way of demonstrating that context for consumption in a McLuhanian "cool" and casual way – as opposed to conventional advertising channels where that demonstration, by contextual definition, can be read as a deliberate contrivance – it is also meant to showcase what an autonomous agent (i.e., the popular storyteller) has "done" or "been" with it, thereby accentuating his or her agency distanced from marketer authority. Put simply, it is a way of "authenticating" that act of governance, because it is directed through a third-party (a technique the PR industry has long-since mastered) (Stauber & Rampton, 1995, p. 189). These autonomous representatives, who have been sequestered to a greater or lesser degree to work with and for the brand, help "[define] the contours of what the brand *can* mean" rather than "aim at sending a 'message' about the product" (p. 245, italics original). Contours, that is, "structure the possible field of action of others," as Foucault (2000a) wrote of governance; messages, on the other hand, work less as "fields" and more as dictates (p. 341).

All of this obviously operates at the level of abstraction (and, more usefully, "ambience") rather than as "a mode of action… directly and immediately upon others" (Foucault, 2000a, p. 340). As such, this means that the brand has to perform an act of self-effacement: to market without selling; to show without telling. This theme will

reappear again and again in the chapters that follow and Douglas Holt (2002) articulates

the obligation satisfyingly:

> The postmodern branding paradigm is premised upon the idea that brands will be more valuable if they are offered not as cultural blueprints but as cultural resources, as useful ingredients to produce the self as one chooses… To be authentic, brands must be *disinterested*; they must be perceived as invented and disseminated by parties without an instrumental economic agenda, by people who are intrinsically motivated by their inherent value. Postmodern consumers perceive modern branding to be inauthentic because they ooze with the commercial intent of their sponsors… Consumers will look for brands to contribute directly to their identity projects by providing original and relevant cultural materials with which to work. So, brands will become another form of expressive culture, no different in principle from films or television programs or rock bands (which, in turn, are increasingly treated and perceived as brands). (pp. 83, 87, italics added)

Acting "disinterested" is a way of situating and communicating the existence of

and opportunity for consumer agency even as power is being enacted in soft, subtle, and

sophisticated ways. Moreover, the nuanced difference between a "cultural blueprint" and

a "cultural resource" – the former being *operational* and the latter being *operable*, I

would add – bespeaks the mode in which consumers are governed by marketers through

their freedom – a way of deploying an "impartial" cultural proposition rather than a

pushy, vested imposition. Stage-managing this perception of "disinterestedness" – this

façade that the brand simply wants to put on a show rather than move product off the

shelf – represents one of the core tensions in the exploration of and experimentation with

the advertainment space; one would assume that creators of displayed culture and

multinational corporations might have fundamentally divergent aims in this regard.

Yet as one retail architecture consultant claims, "The primary objective is not to

sell the product but to generate a fascination with the brand; to get the customer to

identify with the world of the brand… and providing it with a deep emotional core”

(Riewoldt, 2002, p. 10). A useful fiction, I discovered that this disavowal of the venal

underbelly that is the “bottom line” in advertising is not an uncommon refrain these days.

In my interviews with campaign creators, many even shied away from the notion that a

“sell” was even taking place – preferring to think of their work, in more than one

instance, as an “education” about the brand. For example, the creator behind *America’s*

Army – an advergame recruiting tool for the U.S. military discussed at length at the end

of this chapter – frames his project this way:

> The idea was somewhat different from selling. So, we’re not so much trying to change their tastes as we’re trying to make sure they’ve got an adequate data set upon which to base their tastes… We really think it’s more in the field of education than actually marketing. That we’re adding information, experience, and so forth to their mix, whereas classic marketing is a call to action involved. Usually, it’s ‘I want you,’ which means you join. There’s no call to action really in any of our products. It’s kind of, try it on for size and see if you like it and, if you do, the logical action will arise, which is: take the next step, learn more. So, it’s a bit different than classical marketing, because classical marketing always has, just before the end, ‘Drink Coke’ or ‘Become part of the Pepsi Generation’ or something like this. And we actually think it’s better for the Army and better for kids, if, um, it’s more education and less marketing-oriented – that, if you buy a Coke and you don’t like, big deal. Next time, you’re going to buy a Pepsi, and, you know, well, I’ve wasted 75 cents or 50 cents, big deal. If you buy the Army and you don’t like it, that’s kind of a bigger deal. (C. Wardynski, personal communication, December 7, 2009)

Here we find a practical application of the Foucauldian logic of invisible

governance: this campaign director, hoping that “such-and-such ends” would be achieved

(i.e., recruitment), tried “employing tactics… to arrange things” (i.e., creating a game

which is a format expressly predisposed to participatory agency) rather than issue a direct

and an immediate “call to action,” a la the Uncle Sam of old protruding his finger from a

poster advertisement at the conscripted subject (Foucault, 2000b, p. 211). This passage

also demonstrates the (albeit unstated) legacy of a public relations-mindset, which is

fitting given that, like PR, the brand "pre-structures the action; it enters in between

consciousness and the act" in ways that Edward Bernays might have favored (Arvidsson,

2006, p. 8). (Given the last chapter's discussion of PR's roots and ethos, contemporary

branding might be considered the "public relations-ization" of advertising.) PR

professionals, like some of the guerrilla marketers quoted here, fundamentally see their

task as one of education ("the public must be 'educated,'" ran the refrain of one 1913

campaign), which is a strategic self-effacement on two- levels: discursively, "education"

sounds preferable to "selling" as the former purports to truth and the latter hype;

structurally, too, though, "education" is inclined to accord agency to the subject in terms

of education's temperament and expectations ("You May!") more so than simply

"selling" ("You Must!") (Ewen, 1996, p. 91).

This kind of "education" is, however, by default, a propagandistic perversion of

the autonomy intended by the utopically unbiased sense of the term. Benjamin Barber

(2007), excoriating Saatchi & Saatchi's "lovemarks" concept as the emblem of this,

explains: "[Advertisers'] job is to immerse products and services in a nonspecific

sentimental miasma from which 'emotional decisions' can 'naturally' arise (natural as a

creation of artifice, and emotional decisions as irrational and nondeliberative and hence

scarcely decisions at all)" (p. 184). Governance based on reason, Saatchi's CEO argues,

"leads to conclusions" while "emotion… creates action" (Moore, 2007, p. 28).

Therefore, the agency aroused through branding power is not meant to operate through a

prism of deductive coherence; hence, Saatchi's tagline, "loyalty beyond reason." Again, much of this is logic with old echoes: the Committee on Public Information in 1918 "routinely aimed at the heart, not the head" and Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion* recognized "the appeal of symbols was that they provided a device for short-circuiting the inconvenience posed by critical reason and public discussion" long before the Swoosh radiated unspoken allure (Ewen, 1996, pp. 122, 155).

Yet even if steeped in an ageless logic, guerrilla marketing like *America's Army* appropriates newer media platforms in innovative ways. The experience of advergaming is not, strictly speaking, "education" in the rational, deliberative, and, most of all, objective sense – even as "disinterestedness" operates as the premise for and hook of advertainment – but rather "education" in the emotional, evocative, and instrumental sense. This lack of an explicit "call to action" and this generation of ambience around a product rather than forthright persuasion about its value serve what I'm calling a kind of "casualization" of that governance in the regime of engagement; a passive-aggressive strategy of managing the audience by encouraging them to simply "discover" the message amidst the legitimate and unbiased popular culture they *choose* to consume (as opposed to traditional advertising, which forces its message through interruption).

Again, this approach constitutes the consumer in different terms than "modern or 'Fordist' marketing" did – and in a way that is informed, if tacitly, by public relations' principles: "It is not about *imposing* ways of using goods, or behaving or thinking as a consumer. Rather it is about *proposing* branded goods as tools, or building blocks whereby consumers can create their own meanings" (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 68, italics

added). To introduce those participatory propositions, rather than inflict propagandistic impositions, guerrilla advertisers tone down the hard/hot sell and elevate the importance of "disinterested" spaces in popular culture, where the intent of governance can be self-effaced – a tactic best exemplified by the product placement and branded content to be detailed here.

Innovations in Integration

Considering the deliberate, strategic, and highly profitable deployments of product placement today, it is interesting to note that the practice began as an ad hoc solution to film production needs. Although the term itself wouldn't come into vogue until the 1980s (thanks to its prolific appearance in *E.T.*), Jim Newell, Charles Salmon, and Susan Chang (2006) date the first brand sightings back to the Lumiere films of the 1890s, with integration becoming more sophisticated and widespread from the 1920s onward. At that time, though it was primarily employed by filmmakers to offset prop costs or outsource promotional responsibilities to manufacturers' ads (typically, a quid-pro-quo with little money changing hands), it was nonetheless regarded as a somewhat "somewhat sleazy practice," drawing the ire of exhibitors and film critics, and conducted so surreptitiously that, "Nobody openly admitted to practicing [it]" (Segrave, 2004, pp. 1, 94). Thus, from the very start, this form of guerrilla advertising was born of a controversial under-the-radar impulse that chiefly characterizes the medium as a whole.

It, too, owes a debt to public relations: the use of branded products on-screen in the early film era was considered "publicity" and, as such, by the time it became

regularized as a process in the 1960s, half the companies overseeing the practice were PR

firms (Hill & Knowlton being the most prominent), with ad agencies as a "minority"

player (Newell et al., 2006, pp. 576, 588). Much like guerrilla marketing broadly, "the

business operation of product placement developed somewhere between advertising and

public relations" (p. 590). Because of its financial and regulatory structure – with federal

limits on the amount of commercial airtime (even unpaid) and the potential detriment

seen in giving away what was being charged for during breaks in programming – radio

and television utilized product placement more haltingly over the same course of time as

it took shape as more of an "underground trade" than in film (pp. 576, 585). Nonetheless,

in the case of sponsored broadcasts – as when Texaco, Jell-O, and Camel cigarettes

would fully underwrite an assortment of variety programming or as with soap operas (so

named for their detergent patronage) – and, "in radio especially, program talent would do

double duty by shifting roles from entertainers to pitchmen for their sponsor's products"

and "subtle product mentions were not infrequent" (Newell et al., 2006, p. 584; Turner,

2004). (It is this sponsored content that serves as the historic precursor to more recent

"branded entertainment" projects like BMW's *The Hire*, Raineer Beer's *RaineerVision*,

Nike's "Classic" pop song, and the *America's Army* game considered in the second half

of this chapter.)

Following Reese's Pieces conspicuous inclusion in *E.T.* – and the sales increase

that famously ensued, a turning point for the visibility of the practice – a host of

companies across Los Angeles sprang up "that did nothing except to try and turn the

products they represented into movie stars" (Segrave, 2004, p. 164). Around the same

time, in the midst of a broader environment of deregulation, networks interpreted a

relaxation of what had been more stringent enforcement limiting and requiring the

identification of any "paid or sponsored material that is broadcast," which opened the

door to greater usage in content (Balasubramanian, 1994, p. 84). For instance, within a

decade of the FCC lifting a ban on TV infomercials, local stations had generated $250

million in revenue from the format (Leiss et al., 2005, p. 403). Thus, in recent decades,

the practice has seen dramatic growth: in the size and number of firms peddling it and in

the quantity and saturation of media texts using it. By 2002, *Minority Report* reportedly

collected $25 million, or one-quarter of the film's budget, from products featured therein

and *Die Another Day* pulled in a record $120 million from placement revenues (Lehu,

2007, p. 38; Segrave, 2004, p. 208).

This appearance of advertising, brand names, and commercial products in film

content has long been hailed and condemned along many of the same lines that endure

today in newer manifestations of advertisement. From the beginning, firms pitched

clients on the advantages of subtly cozying up to "captive" audiences whose attention

was fully absorbed; on the potential for repeat viewing of a single placement; and, being

embedded in content, on its impervious fortitude against remote control and DVR ad-

zapping technological threats. And beyond proffering a solution to those perennial

advertising crises, by operating in a "disinterested" space, product placement serves as a

way of legitimizing consumer governance through implicit, autonomous appeals. In

other words, the ambience of "You May!" camouflages the intent of "You Must!" In

keeping with the ideals of branding, a "context for consumption" is modeled by what are

assumed to be independent agents – and that latent socio-cultural potential that resides in a trademarked product (its *operability*, as I call it) can be defined especially casually in advertainment without having to spell it out in full.

As such, product placement has long endured two main criticisms: first, that such concealed commerce "destroys the illusion" of entertainment escapism to such a degree that the public would eventually come to resent it and second, that, indulged to the extreme, "[it] would result in having films made that were all mindless, content free, bland pap" (Segrave, 2004, pp. 96, 166). Consumer advocate groups have variously petitioned against the practice over the years: the Center for Science in the Public Interest labeled placement "an insidious form of advertising" and sought the FCC's intervention in requiring disclosure; later, the Center for the Study of Commercialism similarly asked the FTC to probe what they termed "stealth… plugola" to no avail (Segrave, 2004, pp. 184, 194).

Such disclosure is, of course, anathema to a regime desirous of advertising without *seeming* like advertising so as to govern consumer choice without the subject sensing an "overly coercive" "marketing fiat" (Holt, 2002, p. 82). Thus, one CSPI petition co-signor ominously intoned in the late 1980s: "We are watching the fringes of a phenomenon that will permeate across several art forms like a disease… We won't be able to recognize what is art and what is advertisement" (Segrave, 2004, p. 185). This willful blurring of designated commercial zones, I will show in coming chapters, applies to not only otherwise "objective" entertainment, but equally street culture, interpersonal conversation, and user-generated content; it is an obfuscation of purpose that resides at

the heart of guerrilla marketing. And such is the specter that hangs over each new "breakthrough" in brand integration here: the potential for polluting the "original institution" (in this case, art, storytelling, popular culture) hosting the new promotional forms.

Television

Variety once amusingly likened product placement to "cocaine" for U.S. television and the addiction, it seems, remains strong: recent figures show a steady uptick in placed products to the point that, mid-decade, Nielsen counted 100,000 appearances showing up in a single season of network programming, begging the question if content may one day be plagued with some of the same frustrations of "semiotic clutter" that are endemic to conventional commercial zones (Lehu, 2007, pp. 3, 160). Reality TV has, in particular, exploited product integration – *American Idol* and *Survivor* conspicuously so – and comments by Mark Burnett, producer of the latter, are instructive:

> *Survivor* is as much a marketing vehicle as it is television show… My shows create an interest, and people will look at them, but the endgame here is selling the products in stores – a car, deodorant, running shoes. It's the future of television. (Wenner, 2004, p. 102)

Even if *all* commercial broadcasting can be considered a "marketing vehicle" (in the sense that it creates an "interest" for an "endgame" of selling advertising space for the selling of products), Burnett's vision for the "future of television" nonetheless heralds a transformation of the flow of that revenue model and a compromise of the "objective" of content. Yet the more that product integration runs aground of infomercial territory – a

format that telegraphs the sales intent so aggressively that it can hardly be considered "disinterested" – the more obvious the project of power; balancing commercialization within content is, in fact, a question of the visibility of that governance. Scott Donaton (2004), the former editor of *Advertising Age* and a vocal advocate who penned one of the first manifestos for the *Madison & Vine* space, savaged Burnett's 2003 failed venture, *The Restaurant*, as "nearly unwatchable by product placements that were aggressive, intrusive, and clunky – anything but the *seamless* blend that is necessary to make them bearable" (p. 152, italics added).

In short, the product placement had not been "cool" enough – in the McLuhanian sense of low resolution; it had not self-effaced the ad component to a sufficient degree that it resonated subtly in the mediated ambience of the background. When consumer governance is "seamless," as idealized here, the exercise of power is muted even as it acts upon the subject. Recalling Holt (2002), the commercial intent of a program like *The Restaurant* apparently "oozed" in such a crass way that its brand patrons hardly came off as "disinterested" much less "authentic." Consumer governance so obvious insufficiently allocates room for discovery (nor does it "address" an opportunity for agency); it betrays dictation rather than proposition.

Others have taken note of the growth of what Siva Balasubramanian (1994) calls the "masked news" or "masked spokesperson" approach that is emblematic of that "emergent hybrid" genre of advertising-cum-public relations (p. 32). As for "masked news," there has been an uptick in video news releases since the 1980s – "entire news stories, written, filmed and produced by PR firms" that are "designed to be

indistinguishable from genuine news… [and] without any attribution or disclaimer indicating that they are in fact subtle paid advertisements" (Stauber & Rampton, 1995, p. 13). As for the "masked spokesperson," Andrew Kaikati and Jack Kaikati (2004) report that celebrities have been compensated for casually – and seemingly "disinterestedly" – referencing health care products on talk shows without disclosing their vested interests (which also presages the sort of brand evangelism model that will be explored more fully in coming chapters). Part of the advantage of planting a drug plug in such an "off-hand" mention is that it circumvents FDA requirements for conventional pharmaceutical advertising that stipulate a laundry list of potential side effects, as Kaikati and Kaikati (2004) flag.

More recently, an even craftier stratagem in this arena of "masked spokesperson" has been to enlist celebrities for "awareness" campaigns about public health issues that, either directly or indirectly, funnel customers into particular pharmaceutical fixes (again, a strategic recourse to "education"): for example, Rob Lowe "raising awareness" about febrile neutropenia while being on the payroll of Amgen, a company that stands to benefit from increased consumer anxiety about the condition (Cox, 2009). Such unidentified commercial speech is similarly unregulated by the FDA; it, in effect, obfuscates – swallows, hides, or minimizes – the true aims of persuasive intent. In a Foucauldian display of power, it governs choice without explicitly expressing preference: conducting conduct obliquely, "employing tactics" so that a given end unfolds "freely" rather than by ordination (Foucault, 2000b, p. 211).

Amy Doner, head of a PR firm specializing in this form of "Hollywood & Healthcare" guerrilla marketing, claims that drug companies seized on these innovative approaches to message placement in the late-1990s when legislation deregulated direct-to-consumer advertising. The real goal here is, of course, less an awareness of the disease, as much as an awareness of the *branded solution* – but, in true guerrilla fashion, the audience is meant to serendipitously "happen upon" that conclusion by advertising strategized in this backdoor way, for there is no direct and immediate "call to action" but rather a "field of possibilities in which the behavior of active subjects is able to inscribe itself" (Foucault, 2000a, p. 341). It is power that acts upon *possible* action: Awareness is raised ("You May!") in place of behavior dictated ("You Must!")

Popular Music

For many years now, record companies and musicians have licensed songs for commercial use and re-ignited old debates about the tensions of art versus commerce (B. Klein, 2009). For an industry whose financial model has been ravaged in the past decade – thanks to, among other factors, digitalization, peer-to-peer networks, and illegal downloading – an additional revenue source has become all the more enticing if not necessary. Yet that steady creep of song licensing has raised fears of "commercialism infiltrating the creative process" (B. Klein, 2009, p. 77). Such infiltration is, however, already well underway as part of a strategy of "masked art," as Balasubramanian (1994) terms it: "any work of art… that features branded products with deliberate (but usually not obvious) commercial intent" (p. 32). It is notable, however, that this commercial

penetration seems as much an external effort by advertisers and public relations firms to embed brands in pop lyrics as it is an *internalization* of the brand as a "cultural resource" by artists that leads to voluntary and thereby "organic" product placement on their own (Holt, 2002, p. 83). In so doing, the brand corroborates its ontology as an "open ended object": operable and presupposing the agency of the subject, whether artist intermediary or consumer audience (Lury, 2004).

Hip-hop has played an outsized role in this trend – perhaps not surprising given its outsized role in pop music more generally the past two decades – stretching back to "My Adidas," a mid-1980s hit by rap group Run-DMC. A gratuitous (in both senses of the word) paean to the sneaker, "My Adidas" features 22 mentions of the shoe; as legend has it, only *after* company representatives saw a vibrant performance of the track in concert was the group rewarded with a million-dollar contract licensing the song (Lehu, 2007, p. 172). The lyrical inclusion of trademarked names into pop music has pervaded to such a degree that Lucian James, head of a consulting firm, created "American Brandstand" earlier in the decade: an index tallying all the brand mentions in *Billboard*'s top song charts each week.[8]

On two occasions, actual sales impact has been alleged: When hip-hop cultivated an Escalade fetish, the average age of a Cadillac owner fell by a dozen years and when Busta Rhymes and P. Diddy recorded "Pass the Courvoisier," sales for the premium liquor jumped by nearly 20% (Lehu, 2007, pp. 174-175). Some of this brand saturation is

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[8] In 2003 alone, for instance, Mercedes racked up 112 mentions, followed by Lexus (48), Gucci (47), Cadillac (46), and Burberry (42) (A. M. Kaikati & J. G. Kaikati, 2004, p. 15).

strategic; PQ Media estimates that the product placement market for pop songs represents

$30 million of advertising spending (Lehu, 2007, p. 173). Reported examples include

McDonalds tendering financial reward to rap stars who weave the Big Mac into lyrics

and Jay-Z inking a "poetry-for-pagers" deal with Motorola (A. M. Kaikati & J. G.

Kaikati, 2004, p. 15). But a fair amount of brand saturation within hip-hop *is* voluntary.

In an interview with Lucian James, he contextualizes this phenomenon:

> A lot of brands [saw this development reflected in the 'American Brandstand' tally and] thought, 'This is sort of interesting,' and how would they go about buying a place in the *Billboard* chart? What we pointed out is that it isn't that. If you appear in the *Billboard* chart, it's essentially a reward for strategy that's really hit a certain kind of cultural relevance… Hip-hop talks about the here and now. [It] can be very reflective of what's going on in current culture. Chuck D from Public Enemy once described it as the 'Black CNN.' So it's got a kind of 'currentness' that you don't have in rock music or pop music, which is much more often about eternal themes of love and happiness and sadness, so that's less good for brands. Hip-hop was very good for brands…. Using brands in lyrics is an incredibly poetic way to – it's a very concise way to express yourself. When 50 Cent is talking about taking a woman back to the Holiday Inn, you know exactly what the situation is about, so it's a very concise way of evoking a mood… Thirdly, I guess, particular rappers over the past 10 years have been incredibly entrepreneurial. It's pretty difficult to imagine that they weren't somewhat aware that there may be some payback in the form of mentioning certain things. It reached a point where rappers were kind of calling car company CEOs and saying, 'Hey, look, I'll mention your car – send me a car.' They were very aware of their power, so it became less innocent over time. (personal communication, December 10, 2009)

Their "power" is, in fact, the ability to convert "cultural capital" – and, more

specifically, "subcultural capital" – into "economic capital," as Pierre Bourdieu (2001)

and Sarah Thornton (1996) theorized in chapter 1. Moreover, James here unknowingly

articulates what Adam Arvidsson (2005) identifies as the source of a *brand's* power, both

economically and culturally: its ability to foster "an *ethical surplus* – a social relation, a

shared meaning, an emotional investment that was not there before" (p. 237, italics

original). An "ethical surplus," again, not only presumes human agency, it *requires* it to

produce brand equity; that is, the "creativity or agency of consumers" (or, in this case,

"model consumers" like hip-hop artists) is directly linked to the value of brands. Brands

have thus achieved what they have long sought: to function as a paralanguage of sorts. It

is a sign that, if the brand "*proposes*" itself to consumers as a "tool," "building block," or

"cultural resource" for the creation and circulation of meaning – as "useful ingredients to

produce the self as one chooses" – then these popular artists have voluntarily internalized

that ideal and are relying upon it for creative expression (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 68; Holt,

2002, p. 83).

Furthermore, the brand-text – in its allegedly increasing "openness" and

"flexibility," a theme taken up in fully in chapter 4 – seems eager to accommodate rap

stars who wish to adapt or shorten the trademarked name: thus, the formal "Cristal" is

truncated to the more playful "Cris;" "Hennessey" goes by the less apparently corporate

"Henny." Recently, some brands have even taken to a strategy of giving themselves

nicknames in advance so as to conjure up a more endearing relationship with the

consumer target. Luxury vodka brand Belvedere began deliberately calling itself

"Belvie" (in response, apparently, to the nickname showing up in hip-hop lyrics earlier in

the decade – a Gramscian instance of commercial culture appropriating the linguistic

appropriation of objects) and Keystone Light "is now urging consumers to refer to their

beer as 'Stones,'" believing that "a nickname can be a sign of affection and belonging, a

proof of acceptance from those who bestow it" (Mullman, 2010, p. 4).[9] These nicknames are meant to humanize what is otherwise a faceless corporation; moreover, as Lehu (2007) proposes, "they remove part of the commercial character of the placement, and enable it to sound almost *natural* in the target audience's ears" (p. 176, italics added). It is, then, a guerrilla play for street cred; a way of simulating an artist's (or a subcultural community's) appropriation of the brand rather than giving off the impression that the brand is flaunting its ownership of the artist; a way of foregrounding "organic" agency rather than betraying the contrivance of power. And like other examples detailed here, it is a mode of "casualizing" that exercise of authority.

Publishing

Perhaps no realm of promotional integration has drawn the backlash quite so fervently as its incursion into letters – this despite the fact that product tie-ins can be found in 18th century Japanese novelettes and Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* (whose title is taken from a carriage line company) (Newell et al., 2006, pp. 578-579). One estimate puts the value of the placement market in books at $26 million, with the most conspicuous – and controversial – recent appearance coming in Fay Weldon's 2001 novel, *The Bulgari Connection* (Lehu, 2007, p. 167).

The Italian jeweler contracted Weldon – ironically a former Ogilvy & Mather copywriter before becoming a bestselling author – to provide a dozen brand mentions

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[9] In the case of "Stones" – as well as Radio Shack's "The Shack" and Pizza Hut's "The Hut" self-christening – that chumminess might come off a bit premature when it is cooked up at brand headquarters rather than vocalized "naturally" by an artist writing lyrics or reflected in the authentic vernacular of a given subculture.

throughout the book for an undisclosed sum; the author ultimately delivered 34, including

title space, earning her "firestorm of criticism" that variously derided the work as

"*publitizing*," "*literatisement*," "*fictomercial*," and "*the billboarding of the novel*"

(Nelson, 2004, pp. 206-207, italics in original). A chorus of critics castigated the

partnership as "damaging to the credibility of all books and the integrity of all authors"

and 20 dismayed literati wrote to book review editors requesting the work be treated as

an advertisement rather than an artistic work (p. 207). Such bracketing would run

contrary to spirit of "invisible governance," but it shows that as advertising redefines

itself through guerrilla means, the contexts co-opted along the way have their own mores

that cultural inhabitants there (like the aforementioned censuring literati) wish to protect.

The project was the brainchild of Bulgari CEO Francesco Trapani, who explained

his "analytics of government" thusly (Dean, 2010, p. 41): "When you take out an ad in a

magazine, you only have a certain amount of space in which to speak… You have to find

a different way of communication" (p. 208). The spatial rationale is instructive and

echoes the quote from Scott Goodson that opens the chapter; it represents a strategy that

simultaneously seeks to overcome challenges in the traditional advertising arena (ad-

zapping, clutter, cynicism) as well as carve out a wider, more embedded, more

"naturalized" expanse for the brand-text to reside than the tight confines that, say, a

magazine ad allows. That wider space is equally necessary to diffuse and casualize "the

conduct of others' conduct;" a medium that is insufficiently commodious, like a billboard

or 30-spot, has to get to the point (i.e., express its message of governance) directly and

immediately, but branded content can meander and linger without forcing that

governance (Foucault, 2007, p. 203).

Moreover, it works *with* the agency of the consumer in being "chosen by" rather

than "chosen for." In an interview, Nate Hahn, founder and president of Street Virus, an

alt-marketing agency, talks about advertainment as a reaction to the frustrations of

conventional "push" media – his firm created, for instance, an entire magazine, *Helio*

(based on a Virgin Mobile brand extension of the same name), to reach an otherwise-

unreachable hip youth demographic through the understatement of the cool sell:

> They're not watching television commercials; they're certainly not reading the
> newspaper; they're online but I don't know how effective banner ads are online.
> So we wanted to get this magazine and *Helio*'s sort of ethos into people's hands.
> And I can put a magazine in a hip shop; I can put it in a salon; I can put it in a
> cool bar or a restaurant – I can't put a *Helio* brochure in there. And if you read
> one – it doesn't have a *Helio* ad in it. It's called *Helio*; it has their web address;
> the sections go along with how the phone works, the functionality – but it's sort of
> a subtle reminder that *Helio* is ingrained in this culture, whether it's art or fashion
> or technology. Then on our end, it's about access – I can't put a brochure in a bar
> and, if I did, no one would pick it up. So creating this content provides us with
> new ways to get that content in front of people, because a standard ad – I don't
> have any place to put it where this demographic is going to see it. (personal
> communication, October 6, 2010)

To be certain, the structure of a project like *Helio* is more characteristic of the

fully branded content analyzed in the next section than the product integration considered

here – though, of course, this is simply a continuum of autonomy from artist-initiated

(i.e., characteristic of product placement) to brand-initiated (i.e., characteristic of branded

content). Hahn signals here not only a reactive desperation on the part of the marketer,

but also the idea that, as Lawrence Wenner (2004) militaristically frames it,

"programming has become the Trojan horse, with product placements playing the role of the armed warriors lodged inside" (p. 103).

The ease with which such innovations in product integration have been accommodated by creators of popular culture who might otherwise be protective of the integrity of their workspace needs to be weighed against the possibility that artists increasingly idealize *themselves* as brands. I first gleaned this logic when bestselling author Karin Slaughter was explaining her partnership with BMW in writing a short story ("Cold, Cold Heart") for the company's audio books site. BMW reportedly made but one request of authors for the series – that "each had to include a BMW car in their plotline, albeit subtly," of course, so as to ensure the cool sell (Nicholson, 2006).[10] In excerpts from an e-mail exchange, Slaughter explained why the transition from voluntary to contracted placement was an effortless fit for her:

> I have driven BMWs for the last twenty years, so I was already passionate about the brand. One of my series characters, Sara Linton, drives BMWs as well. I love the cars so much that sometimes when I am writing I have to hold myself back from talking about the performance or the soft leather… Every book I've written has BMW in it… BMW is all about innovation. It's an incredibly solid and reliable brand. *I think it melds well with my brand*… We live in the real world. We have to put certain products in our stories. Coke, Band-Aids, Dumpsters – these are all brand names. I think when you find yourself contorted to force an element into a scene, you're walking down a slippery slope, but when it's organic, when you have the story and love the product, it can work out incredibly well. (personal communication, December 7, 2009, italics added)

That "organicism" touted is a testimony to the "operability" (which prefigures interpretive agency) rather than "operationalization" (which dictates uses) of brands; it is

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[10] The "subtlety" of inclusion is perhaps in the eye of the shareholder: "In one of the 35- to 60-minute stories (timed for the length of typical commutes), the wife of a California real estate investor accuses him of loving his car more than he loves her. 'It's not a car,' he snaps. 'It's a BMW Z4'" (Verklin & Kanner, 2007, p. 114).

made possible by BMW's presentation of itself as a "cultural resource" that Slaughter has already used in her storytelling. Moreover, this proposition of artist-as-brand is by no means a promotional self-conceit unique to Slaughter, but rather reflects a cultural impulse common to other content creators. Rap music, again, provides a conspicuous example of this consumption. From P. Diddy's "Sean John" and Jay-Z's "Rocawear" clothing lines to Jennifer Lopez's "Glow" perfumes and even Kimora Lee Simmons' "Baby Phat" medical scrubs and lab coats, few hip-hop moguls – as some of the most influential artists of our time – have *not* styled themselves as the synergistic centerpiece of a consumer goods constellation. When a producer of popular culture therefore considers herself as a trademark as much as an author in the first instance, the integration of other brands into her content is not a trying proposition. Indeed, to hear some tell it, it's more of a question of aligning the *right* brands as whether or not to partner up with corporations at all: "There was a very entrepreneurial spirit to everything in hip-hop. It was all about doing it yourself. Puff [Daddy]… realized early on: 'I'm a business. This isn't just about music'" (R. Stone, personal communication, February 5, 2010, italics added).

Such a mercenary acknowledgement by a pop artist is to be expected, but other cultural arenas have recoiled at the appearance of "masked art." In addition to the aforementioned *Bulgari* affair, one of the more prominent controversies of late came from the magazine business, whose brand and product placement market is worth $160 million, when *The New Yorker* sold out cover-to-cover advertising space to Target for an August 2005 issue. The retailer not only plunked its peppermint logo in every nook and

cranny of the ad well (via suspiciously "camouflaged" cartoons by *New Yorker*

illustrators), but throughout previously sacred journalistic zones like the cover itself.

Aghast at this commercial desecration of a bastion of letters, Barber (2007) mourned,

"For that week at least, Target was *The New Yorker* and *The New Yorker* was Target,

their brands merged, their logos married, their content intertwined" (p. 229). Though

Target may not boast it (and *The New Yorker* certainly would be loathe to admit), the

issue's advertising was of course intended to be indistinguishable from the editorial as

part of the "camouflage strategy" that is the paradoxical essence of guerrilla marketing: a

project of being "invisible" as advertising so as to actually be noticed by the audience.

Again, this porous leakage of the brand-text and stealthy movement of a

promotional message across former borders that "corrupts" the church-state divide is

nothing new: Since the earliest mass advertising in the 19th century, advertisers have

hired journalists to write copy that blended in with the style and form of editorial content

and, in worming into news coverage, public relations has long been premised on its own

"product placement" of sorts (Presbrey, 1929). Today, countless brand incursions into

"How To" consumption features populate the pages of *Maxim*, *Lucky*, and similarly

advertorial periodicals. For an industry like publishing that has been battered as hard as

pop music by technological, economic, and cultural conditions, this retreat into "branded

journalism" might certainly grow stronger if newspapers and magazines continue to

struggle. Scott Donaton, as a prophet for and profiteer of *Madison + Vine*'s colonization

of these new spaces, notes that a shift in that business model would require an attendant

alteration of values by content creators:

A lot of magazines when they hear 'brand entertainment,' that's what they think: You're trying to blur the line and confuse the audience and no doubt, some people who do that are. But I think there's a different play for magazines, which is just that for editors to kind of get past their egos and their kind of rules that have been in place for decades and understand that sometimes a brand has something as interesting to say to your audience as whatever you want to say. And I think as long as it's clear, again, that the content comes from a brand, then it shouldn't matter. (personal communication, February 1, 2010)

Yet the issue of deception and disclosure – a tightrope walk of tension that will be explored again and again throughout these pages given guerrilla marketing's goal of advertising without advertising – is only part of the potential concern here. Editorial or creative autonomy remains in question each time the firewall of church and state is breached. Wenner (2004) reflects thoughtfully upon this problem as innovations in product integration mushroom:

When directors and screenwriters are pressured to 'make room' for product placements in their script, even if they 'theoretically' have veto power, the rights of the artist and the climate for creativity may have been impinged on… The creative product had a key locus in the artist's imagination. A product placement infused arts necessarily filters cultural observations. (p. 107; 123)

The degree to which this is *concretely* playing out is one empirical area in which "critical media industry" scholarship like this can continue to advance on the assumptions of political economy thought: to ascertain the degree to which, in fact, he who pays the piper really does call the tune (Havens et al., 2009). In the case of Slaughter's BMW-integrated short story, for instance, the car company apparently (and amusingly) had only one concern: "They were a bit nervous about the fact that the son in the story died in a car accident, but then they agreed that because it wasn't a BMW that everything was alright" (personal communication, December 7, 2009).

Branded Content

For companies seeking to co-author a richer, fuller "context for consumption" for themselves, the move from product placement to branded entertainment is a natural one (Arvidsson, 2005, p. 244). It not only achieves the goal, which Douglas Holt (2002) identified earlier in this chapter, of becoming "another form of expressive culture" – on par with film, television, or music; it is a way of enacting a scheme of governance that offers greater control over that "context" while still *appearing* to be autonomous from it (p. 87). Brands can thus usurp more of the "middleman" role typically played by media companies or advertising agencies and become "publishing arms of themselves… [that can] create messages, promote messages and direct messages of their own" (L. James, personal communication, December 10, 2009).

As technological and economic upheavals destabilize the business model that both entertainment and advertising have relied upon, the two industries may be forced to reconsider their roles in and rules for content. Donaton (2004) states this more starkly: "To ensure their mutual survival, these industries have to overcome distrust, often-divergent agendas, and creative conflicts and collaborate by forming alliances that benefit both" (p. 6). In the past decade, major media buying companies like Magna Global, Mindshare and Starcom MediaVest have aggressively invested in developing branded entertainment divisions (Vranica, 2006). In this section of the chapter, I'll examine a few case studies drawn from film, television, pop music, and video games where the

advertisement has swallowed the text whole and the consumer engages with a media product that exists exclusively and single-mindedly for the benefit of the brand host.

<u>Film and Television</u>

One of the earliest and most often-cited examples in this space is, without question, BMW's 2001 short-film series, *The Hire*, which featured original plots, expensive production values, A-list actors and directors (including Ang Lee, John Woo and Tony Scott), and a very noticeable automotive product as the real movie "star." According to Anne Bologna, who worked as head of strategic planning at Fallon Minneapolis, the firm behind the campaign, the project was conceived as a response to a crisis of unmanageable subjects: the fact that BMW's prospective consumer was thought to be increasingly unreachable through broadcast television commercials. By opting for the online release of film vignettes, BMW not only addressed practical financial challenges (i.e., buying eight minutes of advertising space for each film) but also carved out a space for the expression of consumer "agency" in depending heavily on word-of-mouth and viral uptake – themes considered in depth in later chapters:

> It's basically a short-film demo for the car and you were able to get away with things with the car that you could never get away with on television, because they wouldn't – the standards and practices and rules of what you can and can't show in a commercial on television would never allow for all those car chases, because we'd have to be all like, 'Don't try this at home.' So the truth is that we really looked at the film as an engagement demonstration for the car… One of the hallmarks of non-traditional media tends to be a little more often the consumer is choosing to engage with it as opposed to me just pushing it onto you. And the secret to engagement is not to hit people over the head with just your sales message because… it's just human nature – it's not how you want to engage with somebody. (personal communication, November 16, 2009).

Like the public relations "awareness-raising" strategy on behalf of pharmaceutical

clients that dodged FDA regulations, this guerrilla approach offers a way of avoiding

officious network gatekeepers. Beyond that, Bologna importantly signals the philosophy

informing this mode of governance: those "games between liberties" that Foucault

identified as the essence of power relations made manifest in governance ("the customer

is choosing to engage") rather than discipline ("hit people over the head") (Foucault,

2007, p. 299). For Bologna and BMW, this engagement is predicated upon a

"proposition" discovered as a way of subtly managing subjects. This became clearer as

she discussed the "media logic" invested in the consumer targeted:

> It's sort of like the more evolved person: high income; high education; don't
> suffer fools well; don't want to be advertised to; like to make decisions for
> themselves…When you're more discerning, it's: 'Don't sell me. Like, let me
> make a decision for myself. I'm intelligent enough to do that.' So the nature of
> the sell is counter-intuitive: the less you try to sell, the more you're going to sell
> to this audience… There's a confidence there that sets a very high bar for how
> they will allow themselves to be advertised to. Kind of like, 'I'm too good for
> commercials.'

The delicate Zen balance of the cool sell ("the less you try to sell, the more you're

going to sell") articulated therein underscores a kind of structured agency – a staged

discovery – in audiences' serendipitously encountering the subtle marketing message

amidst content that's not predisposed to force a decision. It also, again, echoes the way

in which marketer power obfuscates its own objective to "conduct others conduct" by

sublimating crude purpose – that vulgar "call to action" to buy BMW – for a higher

brand-building calling. The structure of behavioral conditioning evinced in *The Hire* is

thus casualized by recognizing the agency of consumers who "like to make decisions for

themselves" and governing their choice without seeking to control it as blatantly as a 30-spot might.

Interestingly, although the brand wholly underwrote the project, they reportedly had to abdicate "near-total creative control" to the talent involved, which meant tolerating elements that might otherwise make a client squirm – "like having a character bleed to death in the backseat of one of the vehicles" (Donaton, 2004, p. 99). Jim McDowell, BMW's vice president of marketing who oversaw the both the product integration in the James Bond films of the late 1990s and *The Hire*, commented:

> There were some things about [the Bond] scripts that made us quite uncomfortable, and through discussions back and forth we learned to deal with discomfort. Particularly the second James Bond film, which had a 7-series in the script that flew off the side of a parking garage and ended up in an Avis rental car showroom. We seriously had a debate about [this;] we didn't want to see our car falling seven stories and [being] destroyed. We began to learn that there were things that were more important about telling a good story than necessarily having it exactly the way that the car company wanted… Did [*The Hire* directors] do things that we would have not done the same way if it had been ourselves? Yes. Would the work have been better if it had been changed the way we would have wanted it? No. Because we understood that boundary. (p. 99-100)

As will be demonstrated throughout this project, the irony here is that the brand – by relenting the tight grip it has traditionally held over the ad product – actually succeeded in spreading a more compelling message by outsourcing the content creation to those who could "authenticate" it by telling their own seemingly autonomous stories with it. (Much the same will be witnessed with word-of-mouth and consumer-generated marketing efforts.) *The Hire* was, nonetheless, an exceedingly expensive endeavor at an estimated $15 million, but one that BMW justified as an emblematic model for success in the shift from "push" to "pull" media environments (p. 101). In other words, the attentive

engagement to eight-minutes of advertainment by a niche-targeted audience member who has *deliberately* downloaded the content (thereby expressing "agency" in ways accommodated by the program of governance) might be worth higher CPM than a fleeting 30-second spot that the same person in an undifferentiated TV audience might be avoiding or zapping anyway (expressing "agency" in ways dissident to the program of governance) (Jaffe, 2005, p. 189). Considered the "gold-standard… [and] default king of long-form content" and with more than 50 million downloads reported, *Advertising Age* named *The Hire* one of the ten best non-TV campaigns of the decade (Diaz, 2009; Jaffe, 2005, p. 188).

Other agencies and brands have experimented with long-form content, on television or online, to greater and lesser success. For instance, to revive a Raineer beer label with a twentysomething demographic target, Cole & Weber United created 30-minute episodes of *RaineerVision*, a *Wayne's World*-like late-night show (a slot more poised for "discovery" than prime time) which centered on the booze in its plotlines. Such work, the agency's website claims, stems from a core principle they summarize in the phrase, "Let them say yes":

> Advertising cannot force people to act. The difference between this old view and what we do is the difference between a screaming match and a conversation. Screaming works short-term, but what good is grabbing a few seconds of attention compared to someone experiencing your brand for hours at a time. Motivate people to tune into your TV show, link their blog to your viral film, replay your spot on their DVR, tear your ad out and tape it to their fridge. Now you're family.

Let them say yes: a tidy epigram for the Foucauldian marketing philosophy that strives to structure consumers' agency by luring them in through the mythology of a fully

realized brand world (a "context for consumption"). It is also a useful metaphor for a communication environment where "push" media are increasingly giving way to newer "pull" counterparts. Arvidsson (2006) claims that this represents the difference between the "interactivity" of today's brand management and the "discipline" of the Fordist advertising of yesteryear and that "brand management rather depends on the choice of the user as to the time, space, or general modality of interaction with the brand" (p. 93). That is, both represent paradigms of governance, but conventional advertising *pressures* by forcing obvious appeals while branding *fosters* by subtly coordinating participation; one presumes action *upon* a comparatively *passive* commercial subject, the other anticipates action *from* an *active* one.

This contrast – what I defined as the "regime of engagement" in chapter 1 – will be witnessed again and again throughout this dissertation: "'Discipline [or what I term 'the hot sell'] says: *Learn! You Must!* Brand Management [or what I term 'the cool sell'] says: *Discover! You May!*" (p. 93, italics original). Yet this "turnabout" can, again, be traced back to some of the philosophical foundations of public relations as in the quote drawn from Bernays (1928) in chapter 1: "The old-fashioned propagandist… [says] 'YOU… *buy*… NOW.'… The new salesmanship has reversed the process and caused the prospective purchaser to say to the manufacturer, 'Please sell me [it]'" (pp. 54, 56). At a moment, then, many decades ago, when Taylorist "marketing fiat" was ascendant, public relations seemed anticipate the Foucauldian turn toward accentuating agency and discovery – *let them say yes* – that an advertising firm like Cole & Weber now professes in its principles.

In order to orchestrate that discovery, those agencies have to think of their content creation, again, in wider terms than the narrow spaces traditionally partitioned for advertising, which reconfigures the roles they have played. As Britt Peterson, director of business development for Cole & Weber, notes in an interview:

> At the center of it, we are an ad agency, but I don't necessarily think we look like that anymore. Our real purpose is: how do we better connect brands and people in ways and in experiences that create longer-lasting relationships, allow more people to 'say yes' to our clients' brands in a lot of different ways… That's resulted in a lot more innovative thinking than just a standard – just to say a TV-spot is the answer or a print ad is the answer…[With *RainerVision*], we said… let's actually develop a TV series that purposefully airs at one in the morning that is all about Raineer and use that as a kind of way to restart the cultural conversation around Raineer and bring more people into the brand… We wrote each and every storyline. We produced every episode. And so, in that way, we almost became more of a TV production company than an ad agency (B. Peterson, personal communication, January 28, 2010)

Similarly, in 2008, working on behalf of the Sailor Jerry "lifestyle" brand of rum and apparel, Gyro Advertising, a company profiled in detail in the next chapter, spent $100,000 to produce a full-length documentary, replete with oral histories and interviews about the brand's titular character, which then aired at film festivals across the country. The chief executive of Gyro explicates the self-proclaimed "guerrilla" brand-building effort behind it: "[It's] basically an 80-minute ad for the brand… It reinforces the authenticity of the figurehead behind the brand. And of course, when [people] see it and are interested, they'll Google the name. And then, boom, they *discover* our brand" (Newman, 2008, italics added). In an interview, the executive expands,

> It's not underhanded or devious, because it's a legitimate two-hour story about this person [Sailor Jerry] that has value for people so they don't feel like they've been conned into watching an ad… People want stories and they want authenticity and they want things that are interesting. So, even with a client who hired us

because of Sailor Jerry, what we do is spend all our time creating content and making the story richer, so that if people like the brand, they become part of the brand. (S. Grasse, personal communication, September 28, 2009)

His project – creating stories that engage audiences "authentically" rather than function like a "con" job advertisement from an authority figure telling them to buy – articulates, once more, how advertainment tries to avoid the Taylorist discipline of salesmanship that must, nonetheless, be its ultimate intent.

Popular Music

When it comes to pop music, brands are showing similar interest in playing a larger role in content creation – a transition from licensing recorded tracks to seeking product inclusion in the lyrics, as noted earlier in this chapter, to financing the entire production from the start. The director of music at Grey Worldwide, a global marketing conglomerate, boasts, somewhat self-servingly, "We don't need the middleman, you don't need the labels. A lot of [artists] would prefer to associate themselves with a big corporation instead of a big label corporation" (B. Klein, 2009, p. 77). Citing the music industry's financial woes, Scott Donaton notes in an interview: "You can't break new artists in the way that you used to be able to… Brands have become the new A & R department" (personal communication, February 1, 2010).

To be certain, this is not wholly "new" – airplay of licensed songs via commercials has long lured artists with the promise of promotion and exposure and the hopes that TV advertising could serve as a "launching pad" to break unknown acts nationally (B. Klein, 2009, p. 59). The industrial reformulation here is that brands might

increasingly incubate talent from the start and distribute their music autonomously from

labels altogether. Recent examples abound: Bartle Bogle Hegarty, a London-based ad

agency, starting up its "Leap" label for publishing unsigned musical talent (Wipperfurth,

2005, p. 117); Wrigley's financing songs by headlining acts that incorporate gum jingles

(including Chris Brown's smash, "Forever," which contains a chorus nod to

Doublemint); and London's Saatchi & Saatchi launching a "manufactured girl band"

called Honeyshot that was open to hire for any brand that wished to employ them for

covert, chorus-line shilling.[11] No longer able to depend on the publishing apparatus that

traditionally supported them, pop artists – like journalists – need a patron. No longer able

to depend on traditional advertising contexts to either get their message across or to tell a

story sufficient to build brand equity, sponsors need a vessel. And in pop music, as with

other cultural channels, the emphasis is on eliding intent.

Rob Stone, founder and CEO of Cornerstone, has been active in bridging this

partnership of music and marketing. He won a recent Nike account for the campaign

celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Air Force One sneaker by pitching them on an

original track ("Classic") recorded for the occasion by hip-hop luminaries Kanye West,

Nas, Rakim, and KRS-One. Like other examples considered here, Stone disavows the

[11] The first single, "Style, Attract, Play," by these commercial mercenaries was pulled from BBC Radio 1 airwaves when it emerged that the song was actually a "thinly disguised" commercial for Shockwaves hair gel. A radio spokesperson commented, "The track was presented to Radio 1 in the usual way, via a legitimate promotions company and we were not aware that it was a promotional tool for a hair product. As this is created by an advertising agency with the sole purpose of selling this product, and we do not play adverts, it is not something we would play again" (Pidd, 2007). Whether or not Radio 1 eschews the countless hip-hop tracks that double as "adverts" – be they voluntarily or contracted – was not clarified.

notion that the project was even "selling" something in terms by now familiar for their

"invisible governance" ethos:

> It wasn't about marketing to us, so *we almost had to market the sneaker without marketing it*. And celebrate the 25th anniversary in the same vein that Nike had grown Air Force One organically. So we competed with some of the biggest agencies out there and I think what won it for us was the fact that we came with a very organic approach we didn't talk about media buys and buying 30s or 60s or a creative campaign that way. We talked about creating something that would live in the culture, much like the Air Force One did… I remember getting some blank stares, like, 'What do you mean no time-buy?'… [Later in the interview, he clarifies 'to market… without marketing':] The analogy would be that if you're going to court a certain female, your best approach might not be to just come out and say, 'Hey, let's go to my bedroom,' you know? That might work for some of them, but I think that you're probably going to turn 9 out of 10 if not 10 out of 10 women off… You don't have to be so: 'Buy our sneakers!' in the song. You can be a part of creating something and there's an appreciation – there's a very savvy audience out there and I think with appreciation comes respect and with respect comes sales. (personal communication, February 5, 2010, italics added)

Such is the "analytics of government" at play here: a definition of the consumer

target as "savvy" and therefore resistant to the straightforward, domineering sales

message ("buy our sneakers!") that lends itself to "strategic games between liberties" on

two levels: first, the liberty of the artist in representing the brand freely as he chooses;

second, the liberty of the consumer reacting to that representation (not being confronted

with an order) (Foucault, 2007, p. 299). "Organic" arises here again as a reference and

will suture itself throughout guerrilla marketing philosophy alongside "authenticity" as an

ideal; for the advertiser, taking refuge in an "organic" and "authentic" approach is a way

of casualizing the imposition to take action. For instance, mentioning the sneaker in

lyrics was, Stone claims, entirely optional (though two of four artists involved did name-

check the brand in their rhymes). The delicate calibration of credibility for a pop music

track initiated by a brand indeed requires careful attention to maintaining that "organic"

appearance – that same "disinterestedness" that Holt (2002) noted earlier in this chapter –

lest it be judged as a crass ad jingle. To that end, Stone comments of a similar project for

a Converse-backed pop track:

> When you look at what we did with Converse, there's no mention of the sneaker, but if you watch the video or read the reviews, it all points back to Converse, where you can get the download… So, yeah, there's a fine line and we push back very hard on the clients when they don't get it and we're not here to create a jingle. Like, the last thing that – the Nike song wouldn't have worked if we had tried to make it about Air Force One. You need to let the artists be the artist and you know what? When Nas says 'Air Force Ones,' it's a natural mention. He wanted to mention it. (personal communication, February 5, 2010)

Therein apparently lies the challenge for branded entertainment: to be involved

and unmistakably affiliated with the creative product without coming across as forcing

itself into the limelight; to stage cultural content so as to appear to be "disinterested" and

to "naturalize" the brand's positioning for the consumer to discover it serendipitously. Or

as *The Wall Street Journal*, reporting on a branded entertainment project by Unilever that

included online webisodes promoting its mayonnaise brand, frames that balancing act: "If

the marketing theme is too discreet, customers can miss it altogether. If it's too overt,

they might switch off" (Vranica, 2007).

Video Games

In concluding this chapter, some consideration ought to be given to the recent

growth of advergaming – an especially relevant format of branded content because

agency is quite literally written into its code. One of the most well-known executions of

this approach is *America's Army*, online "militainment" that offers first-person shooter game-play while simultaneously indoctrinating military values and processes. In recent years, as the U.S. armed forces has strained to sustain personnel levels, "they began to explore how games could be used to speak to younger Americans who were alienated or bored by traditional approaches to recruitment" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 75). The first version of the game that cost $7.3 million to produce was released in 2002 and, since that time, more than 12 million users have participated; 20% of West Point cadets and about 30% of new Army recruits report playing the game (Verklin & Kanner, 2007, p. 90). One market research firm, surveying high school and college students, found that 30% of respondents cited the game as the source of their pro-military views (hence, it's double-function as a PR-initiative). Colonel Casey Wardynski, director of the Army's Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis, was one of the creative visionaries behind the project. In an interview with *Fast Company*, he elucidates the cool sell logic driving the development of gaming as a recruiting tool: "The Army hadn't changed the way it communicated since George Washington... *It was us telling you about things rather than you discovering them*" (Quinn, 2005, italics added).

Once more, the "You Must!" logic of governance is marginalized in favor of a "You May!" alternative – a particularly emblematic shift given the image, as noted earlier, of the Uncle Sam figure of yesteryear sternly enjoining a potentially recalcitrant recruit. (Indeed, Uncle Sam might be the perfect visual metaphor for the managerial, Taylorist discipline of the hot sell.) In the midst of a broader shift toward instrumentalizing power through freedom (Rose, 1999), the Army needed to structure

that discovery of its "message" – now a branded ethos wider than a simple, direct Uncle Sam command – by embedding itself in popular culture in a form that the Army itself could author, because its research showed that by the time young men and women were old enough to join the military (age 18), they had already formed impressions of the institution based upon news coverage, feature films, and TV shows. In an interview, Wardynski complained – not unlike Francesco Trapani's earlier lament– that traditional advertising did not allow for the kind of space needed to generate that "ethical surplus" (Arvidsson, 2006).

Thus, the guerrilla message of American military ideology is so extensively saturated into this form of branded content as to be invisible; moreover the depth of engagement ("total submission," as one consultant leers) engineered by advergaming makes it "the sleeper of all non-traditional marketing approaches" and emblematic of branding's participatory regime (Jaffe, 2005, pp. 132, 136). Critics like Alissa Quart (2003) fear that such advergaming is "more devious, because it relies upon the ambience created around an item rather than a frank exaltation of a product's virtues" (p. 100). Indeed, as the title of this chapter suggests, the advertainment strategy is a project of governance through ambience; for marketers keen on exercising power over subjects without being seen as the source of authority, this is precisely the advantage and allure. In an interview, Wardynski pointed to the strategic benefits of interactivity inherent to the medium that allow for customizability and, hence, an optimal architecture for engagement:

We can sort of create an experience that learns on the fly and delivers information that's more relevant to the user about the Army. So, it's like, a tool for us to learn and a tool for them to learn at the same time. We don't learn about them in specific, because they play under a *nom de guerre* – so we don't know who the players are – but we learn in aggregate what parts of the Army they are interested in[12]… And then we took it to the next step, which was: we built technologies in the game where we could deliver a message tailored to the user… So they began to change their environment based on their interest so that they see more of what they're interested in and less of what they're not interested in. And now you're looking at, like, the polar opposite of TV advertising which is – TV is a dead end in my mind, because you're shouting at the world and very few people are actually interested in your message because your message is too generic and there might be something in your product they're interested in, but all you're able to say is, 'We got a product over here.'… I think [this] is a two-way street: young folks learn about the Army, but the Army learns about what kind of Army we really have to be relevant to young folks and the Army begins to adapt itself to the expectations of young Americans in terms of what do they want to get out of the Army… It's much different than traditional marketing where it's like shouting at everybody – with this one, you ought to be listening. (personal communication, December 7, 2009)

The fact that Wardynski borrows Bernays' famous phrase ("two-way street") and alludes to dialogue as a mechanism for governance, demonstrates an ethos of public relations, and foreshadows a core theme I will attend to in chapter 4 (Ewen, 1996, p. 186). For now, one might take note of the framing of TV advertising ("shouting at everybody") here again as overbearing and indiscriminate versus the ideal exercise of a more casual power – for *America's Army*, like other examples of advertisement in this chapter, the aim is to market without selling and show without telling.

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[12] Strictly speaking, this is not entirely accurate. The army tracks a voluminous amount of data associated with players: "what roles did you assume; what training did you complete; what players you like to play with; how do you play; like, you know, are you a guy that breaks the rules or are you a guy that adheres to the rules" (C. Wardynski, personal communication, December 7, 2009). Some players do become real-life soldiers, who are then potentially subjected to post-hoc surveillance using game data from the past: "So, we get a lot of this broader information – now, when somebody enters the Army, we can ask them, 'Did you play the game?' And we do that here at West Point… And if they want to, they can give us their game name and we can go off and see how long they played and so forth and we can see how they do in the Army."

Agency Beyond Reason?

"The audience cannot notice the integration but must remember it" (Nussbaum, 2008). When Jak Severson, managing partner at Madison Road Entertainment, idealized the project of product placement thus, it underscored a fundamental paradox in the way in which advertainment is conceived to operate as a mechanism of consumer governance. Contemporary brand management accentuates agency in "conducting" subjects, according to Foucault's (2000a) definition of the term. Rather than prescribing behavior unambiguously, as a "hot sell" conventional advertisement might, product placement and branded content slyly model a context for consumption – an "operability" – to achieve the desired ends. Yet in recognizing the autonomy of consumer choice and in framing the address of that choice as "You May" rather than "You Must," advertainment is not seeking a rational actor among subjects but rather an emotional being. If the audience "cannot notice the integration," as Severson summarizes, what kind of agency is really presupposed of them? The answer is an *unreasoning* agency, an instinctual agency – for though consumers are not being hailed in the paternalistic, didactic tones of old, it is *soft* paternalism of a different stripe. Advertainment "lets" them say yes without being confronted with a "mode of action that… [acts] directly and immediately" upon them; it is evocative without being deliberative (Foucault, 2000a, p. 340).

The continuing development of such advertainment may be a harbinger of reshaping how media industries are funded and managed. If many of the frustrations outlined in the introductory chapter – audience empowerment, market fragmentation,

semiotic clutter, and consumer cynicism – have driven advertisers to explore the creative

or editorial space of mass media as a site for locating promotional messages, the

possibility of constructing a wider brand identity by filling out the content that they alone

author there has enticed them to stick around. This is motivated by branding's imperative

to create an "ethical surplus" by reframing its product, the brand, as a cultural resource –

that is, a proposition not an imposition. Rather than dictate an ad message and impose

goods on the consumer as marketer disciplinarian, advertainment seeks to *suggest* a

cultural context (in this case, storytelling) where no "call to action" visibly appears. This

is because, unlike the 30-spot, brand content *casually* governs its consumer target; the

source of force is not the typical sponsor's voice of authority but the filmmaker or pop

artist who isn't *telling* us what to do with the brand but is, rather, *showing* us what has

been done with it – persuasive force is, hence, diffused.

As shown throughout the preceding pages, a central tension remains over how

that integration could alter or even corrupt the creative process: Who, ultimately, is

responsible for the story told, whether that be a feature film, a TV program, a pop track, a

magazine feature, or a novel? "Control" sits at the heart of advertiser worry (McAllister,

1996, pp. 11-36); curiously enough, the same could be said for consumer advocate critics

and cultural aesthetes when hear about product placement innovations, though for

opposite reasons. Advertisers fret about not having enough control over content; these

critics fear they'll exert too much. Oddly, the logic of invisible governance may actually

mediate these contrasting polarities in the advertiser's favor: as client patrons like BMW

found in according creative license with *The Hire* or when a company like Cristal or

Hennessey allows rappers to truncate a corporate nickname, they're indulging appropriation and encouraging autonomy – in other words, abdicating control – so as to authenticate a "disinterested" appeal and casualize the exertion of influence. This will be apparent in later chapters as well as the brand is rethought as more of an "open work" – an *operable* "open work" that, in this case, refers to the way in which the promotional interlocutor is granted agency to use the product as she wishes.

Yet even if advertisers are interested in cultural intermediaries for their *dis*interested credibility with audiences, those intermediaries might nonetheless be impacted – potentially (gradually) morphing their role from independent artist to sycophantic supplicant. In an interview, Scott Donaton notes that he has seen, among Hollywood creatives, what others describe as a "sea change" from product placement opportunities "already in the script" to product integration "becoming the script" (Wenner, 2004, pp. 113, 114):

> This is going to be a gross generalization, but if you go back five years ago, the view of most people on the Hollywood side was essentially: 'Oh, so, wait a minute, this is going to be another funding source that we haven't tapped into and we might be able to now? That's awesome, write a check and stay out of my face. I'm the creative guy, right?' And, again, this is gross generalization, but two years ago, I think the feeling was, 'Ok, listen, I understand that because you wrote the check, you need a seat at the table, but it's probably best if you just sit there quietly and don't say anything. We'll let you in the room, but don't talk.' And now it's almost to the point that content creators are saying to brands: 'Hey, if you don't like this ending, I'll write another ending' – to the point, where you almost have to say, sometimes, 'Hold on.' You know, 'I need you to maintain some level of artistic integrity so that we know this thing has audience-value.' Because there are brands that would be tempted to just kind of turn everything into much more of a sales message and I think everybody loses when that happens. (personal communication, February 1, 2010)

Such is the aforementioned specter from the opening section: the transformation of all content into advertising. Conveniently, one reality TV producer argues that, even as these product integrations proliferate, audiences won't be turned off by the excessive tie-ins: "I look at it from a very populist point of view. We live in a culture of brands. *It's the way we connect with the world*" (Donaton, 2004, p. 66, italics added). Such an argument represents the "verisimilitude" defense: that, for a work to accurately reflect the experience of contemporary life, it cannot be scrubbed clean of the logo-saturated landscape that we encounter in daily life. Some, moreover, suggest that brands can be useful in storytelling "as an aid to description" – an explanatory subsidy expressing a character's personality and attributes (Lehu, 2007, p. 166). The deployment of brands in this way goes beyond defining "real world" space through advertising to *defining human beings through it*. Storytellers' use of branded goods as a window into the soul of their characters – whether via paid or voluntary placement – corroborates that corporate endeavor to present the brand as a "tool" or "building block" from which, in this case, personalities might be constructed, be they fictitious or real; it seeks to authenticate (in culture) the artifice (of commerce). And yet, it perhaps reflects "a pretty crude sense of what a person is" (Galician, 2004, p. 222): that we add up to but the sum of our logos.

The ideal of product placement very clearly sits at the heart of guerrilla marketing's cool sell and invisible relay. That industry voices rhapsodize "discovery" as the goal speaks to a disciplinary model that strives to market without selling and show without telling – a crafty form of persuasion that, some critics contend, borders on deception and necessitates regulation. Discovery is essential to governance within the

regime of engagement that, I will continue to argue, characterizes contemporary brand policy. Before turning to chapters on word-of-marketing and consumer-generated advertising that more directly illuminate the thinking behind this regime, I want to examine branding's chief nemesis – culture jamming – and show how some guerrilla marketing has re-routed its resistance, co-opted cool, and simulated subversion.

The Street Spectacle of Subculture Jamming:

How Brands Co-Opt Cool

> Youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries, or rejuvenating old ones. – Dick Hebdige, cultural theorist (1979, p. 96)

> As a rule, we get off more on the culture jamming aspect of what we do for clients than the actual advertising aspects. – Alex Bogusky, creative director and co-chairman of Crispin Porter + Bogusky (Contreras, 2009)

As branding has emerged as a ubiquitous and significant social force, it has been accompanied by political reservations and, at times, outright contestations. "Culture jamming" often serves as the banner for the ideology and tactics of those who would protest branding's audacious incursion into everyday life and popular culture. It is also culture jamming that some believe represents the social movement most intellectually and expressively equipped to undermine the ambitions of corporate advertising and whose zealotry is fueled by much of the brand management philosophy – so voracious in colonizing "disinterested" space – that was elucidated in the last chapter. And, yet, when Alex Bogusky revealed the impulse animating his company (as quoted above), his comment bespoke a revitalized co-optation philosophy that characterizes some of the most of celebrated guerrilla marketing work of the past ten years – particularly given that his creative powerhouse won *Advertising Age*'s top "Agency of the Decade" status and Bogusky was named *Adweek*'s "creative director of the decade" ("Agencies of the

decade," 2009). Culture jamming, not unlike Dick Hebdige's (1979) punk *bricoleur*, may have set out to issue to "symbolic challenges" that sought to call into question the very premise behind the corporate symbolism that so clutters contemporary environments, but it seems to have partly succeeded in "rejuvenating" the industry that it was born to parody.

This chapter offers a study in the sociology of recuperation by using a framework of incorporation to understand how dissidence is productive and, in fact, necessary to the work of this particular form of governance. As noted in the first chapter, both Foucault and Gramsci made space for "resistance" in their respective schematics of power and it represents, in this chapter, the locus of "agency" that has been centrally theorized throughout. Foucault (2000a) articulated this functioning of resistance thusly:

> The power relationship and freedom's refusal to submit cannot therefore be separated. The crucial problem of power is not that of voluntary servitude (how could we seek to be slaves?). At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential antagonism, it would be better to speak of an 'agonism' – of a relationship that is at the same time mutual incitement and struggle; less a face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides that a permanent provocation. (p. 342)

Advertising represents one such "power relationship" whose governance of the consumer subject has to work *with* her freedom and, as necessary, finesse a "refusal to submit" that can take shape through an assortment of "counter-conducts" (Foucault, 2007, p. 201). These "points of resistance" might include "wanting to be governed differently… toward other objectives… and through other procedures and methods" (pp. 194-195). This broadly conceptualizes the project of culture jamming – one whose self-

conceit and often "clandestine" political action, whose anti-commercial "objectives" and "methods," almost resemble that of the secret societies that Foucault chronicles whose enterprise was similarly "[the] possibility of an alternative to governmental direction in the form of another form of conduct" (p. 199). The program of culture jamming's counter-conduct is antagonistic toward advertising as an institution of governance and intended to reclaim authenticity as an experience *external* to consumer culture. And, yet, as I will show, contemporary advertising is nothing if not a reactive institution.

Thus, the "agonistic" interplay of culture jamming and guerrilla marketing – implying, as Foucault (2000a) explains it, "a physical contest in which the opponents develop a strategy of reaction and of mutual taunting, as in a wrestling match" – is perhaps aptly framed as that of a hegemonic project (p. 348). And, as such, defiance requires of institutions of governance a mode of response that absorbs and channels that defiance. Governance of free subjects must function as that "compromise equilibrium" that Gramsci (1971) defined – a practice in which power "has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modified" as it is simultaneously "continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own" (Williams, 1977, p. 112). Power is thus processual and constantly being reinvented in relation and response to those wanting to be governed differently. One of the ways that governance channels that defiance to its program is by posturing as defiance itself: here read as the "invisible governance" exerted through guerrilla advertising's anti-establishment ethos and dissident aesthetics which attempt to absolve the pretense of marketer authority. It is, therefore, another stratagem of self-effacing power befitting of Raymond Williams' shrewd conclusion of hegemony:

"The dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits and its own forms of counterculture" (p. 114).

Working from that Gramscian point of view, Dick Hebdige's (1979) analysis of subculture offers a useful model for understanding the movement from oppositional gestures to incorporated practices and provides the particular theoretical backdrop for this chapter. "Subordinate" subcultures, Hebdige proposes, express their challenge to hegemony not directly but rather "obliquely, in style" – in the "humble" objects of material culture that can be appropriated for "meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination" (pp. 17, 18). Culture jamming issues much the same "noise" – that is, a "challenge to symbolic order that such styles are seen to constitute" – doing so by impugning the very existence and operation of the symbolic order (i.e., advertising) that it parodies (p. 133). And, yet, much as Hebdige reckons, that resistance is reconcilable and somewhat futile, at least for the revolutionary-minded (of whom, many committed culture jammers would surely count themselves):

> The process of recuperation takes… the conversion of subcultural signs (dress, music, etc.) into mass-produced objects (i.e. the commodity form)…The creation and diffusion of new styles is inextricably bound up with the process of production, publicity and packaging which must inevitably lead to the defusion of the subculture's subversive power – both mod and punk innovations fed back directly into high fashion and mainstream (pp. 94, 95).

I will demonstrate here that culture jamming has "fed back directly" into guerrilla marketing. Even the trade press seems to recognize some of the imbricative parallels: In 2001, *Brandweek* interviewed street artist Shepherd Fairey, noting that his famed "Andre

the Giant Has a Posse" viral sticker project is "arguably the longest-running guerrilla campaign, albeit not one devised for any actual campaign" and Fairey himself has capitalized on his own street art success to become an "alternative marketing whiz" for Pepsi, Sony, Ford, and Levi Strauss (Dolbow, 2001). More recently, the magazine named Banksy, a prolific pseudonymous British street artist, its "Guerrilla Marketer of the Year" (Ebenkamp, 2006). And one of my interviewees noted that "a lot of guerrilla marketing techniques were nothing more than offspring of street art" (A. Loos, personal communication, January 4, 2010). In the pages that follow, I'll explore in more detail instances of this simulation of subversion, this co-opting of the culture jam. Douglas Holt (2002) suggests that, "'Consumer resistance' is actually a form of market-sanctioned experimentation through which the market rejuvenates itself" (p. 89). How, then, has that resistance and rejuvenation unfolded, as marketers experiment, beyond the billboard, with outdoor space as a medium for consumers?

A word or two is in order on what I mean by guerrilla marketing in this context (relative to advertainment, word-of-mouth, and consumer-generated). In fact, when "guerrilla marketing" is discussed in the popular and trade press, it most often refers to the kind of tactics analyzed here (although, as I argue in the first chapter, these other approaches equally merit conceptual claim to the guerrilla label). According to one industry estimate, "alternative ambient advertising, which includes guerrilla, street teams and other non-traditional approaches" – the sort being examined here – has now grown to a market value of $550 million (Fitzgerald, 2009). Guerrilla marketing's street spectacles invent or appropriate outdoor settings and arrange almost theatrical tableaus in ways

characteristic of the guerrilla approach: unpredictable, serendipitous, ambiguous, and, most of all, not circumscribed by the traditional boundaries of road signs and storefronts. As sometimes-unauthorized, even illicit displays on behalf of a commercial product in that space, many require a surreptitious execution and telegraph a subversive undertone, again, not far removed from the tactics of culture jamming street artists who break similar rules or improvise with urban environments in order to post their work. This provocative approach is meant to be a way of demonstrating distance from the image of authoritarian marketer power and, like the advertainment considered in chapter 2, communicates through an unconventional space in which persuasive influence comes across more casually. It, too, might be thought of as ambient governance but of a "street" variety – both in the sense of an out-of-home context and a particular form of resistant identity imprinted on it.

In this chapter, I will highlight several examples of this anti-establishment medium as a way of understanding the "compromise equilibrium" between guerrilla marketing and culture jamming specifically and commerce and authenticity more generally. By "anti-establishment," I mean that the channel chosen is often dissident to both vandalism codes and advertising industry conventions, but is thought to cater to a perceived communicative hierarchy of "subcultural capital" (Thornton, 1996). Just as I started the last chapter with a summarization of branding, I will begin here by reviewing the position of branding's primary ideological opposition, culture jamming. I then go on to explain how guerrilla advertising here absorbs the lessons – and, more importantly, the mechanisms and textures – of agency, dissent, and cool and articulate the resourcefulness

of resistance, as both a creative act and as a constructive commodity. I further highlight how subjects might be governed through their resistance, as in examples drawn from Pabst Blue Ribbon and the "Truth" anti-smoking crusade. I conclude with a section on guerrilla marketing's self-conceit – illuminating, as Katherine Sender (2004) advocates, its "pitch" as an object of deliberate construction – and detail a series of case studies of corporate street art and branded flash mob executions.

Culture Jamming: Contesting the Brand

Brand management's escalating lust for and pursuit of content and mindshare has not only earned it the enmity of consumer advocate critics and cultural aesthetes who fear its imposition (as noted in the last chapter); it has also provoked backlash from leftist thinkers and social activists who oppose its basic constitution. From their standpoint, branding's pursuit of "ethical surplus" is, fundamentally, wasteful fetishism: not only in its capacity for spoiling and whitewashing material conditions (i.e., environmental and labor), but equally in its perversion of *mental* conditions (i.e., its presumptive arbitration of shared meaning; its aims to engineer social dependency; its replacement of a more "authentic" lived experience with a new set of commercially-oriented, irrational obsessions). This ethical surplus provides the source of brand equity – a set of "subjective meanings or social functions" that coax loyalty from consumers – and, as such, brand equity represents the productive exchange rate of affect into capital (Arvidsson, 2005, p. 239). (Though I use "productive" in an ironic sense here as what is actually produced is more imagined than material.)

Because of this, branding has emerged of late as an explicitly contested political terrain for those involved in the "anti-globalization or 'global justice' movement" who hope to catalyze wider social change by drying up the source of that ethical surplus and, in turn, depriving shareholders of the symbolic and social value that many a stock price is predicated upon (Moor, 2007, p. 146). Perhaps none make this case more forcefully than Kalle Lasn (1999) and Naomi Klein (2000), whose books have both chronicled and precipitated the rise of culture jamming – branding's most expressive ideological nemesis under advanced capitalism. To "read" guerrilla marketing – in particular the forms that will be covered in this chapter – is to recognize the adversarial literacy pioneered by culture jamming; the Gramscian synthesis proposed here assimilates the posture of culture jamming while depriving it of its actual politics.

Lasn (1999), founder of *Adbusters* magazine, has been at the forefront of shaping the culture jamming movement, which he places in the political-artistic tradition of Situationist *détournement*. This term refers to its goal of "a perspective-jarring turnabout in your everyday life" by "rerouting spectacular images, environments, ambiences and events to reverse or subvert their meaning, thus reclaiming them" (pp. xvii, 103). Led by Guy Debord and Parisian students of the 1968 uprising, Situationism idealized independence from the "'spectacle' of modern life": "Everything human beings once experienced directly had been turned into a show put on by someone else… Immediacy was gone. Now there was only 'mediacy' – life as mediated through other instruments, life as a media creation" (p. 101). Increasingly, as seen in the last chapter, brands *themselves* seek to provide that "mediacy" – that structure of social power – and Lasn's

call to arms represents a reaction to what he sees as the "most prevalent and toxic of the

mental pollutants," advertising, as it oozes out from previous confinement in all the usual

places (e.g., TV, print, etc.) so as to "slowly corrode the human psyche" (pp. 18, 103).

Inspired by the Situationist ethos, Lasn advocates "invad[ing] enemy territory and

[trying] to 'devalue the currency of the spectacle'" in his culture jammer's manifesto:

> We will take on the archetypal mind polluters and beat them at their own game.
> We will uncool their billion-dollar brands with uncommercials on TV,
> subvertisements in magazines and anti-ads right next to theirs on the urban
> landscape. We will seize control of the roles and functions that corporations play
> in our lives and set new agendas in their industries. We will jam pop-culture
> marketers and bring their image factory to a sudden, shuddering halt. On the
> rubble of the old culture, we will build a new one with a non-commercial heart
> and soul. (Lasn, 1999, pp. 103, 128)

If advertising is, as I have argued, a mode of governance for "conducting

conduct," then Lasn's polemic represents a succinct expression of what Foucault (2007)

conceived as those counter-conducts, that "alternative to governmental direction" (p.

199). How, therefore, does such romantic proselytizing about "the appropriation of brand

identity or advertising for subversive, often political intent" concretely emerge (Carducci,

2006, p. 117)? The pamphlet declaration of another key activist in the scene, Mark Dery,

covers some of the primary practices of its ideological refusal: "media hacking,

information warfare, terror-art, and guerrilla semiotics" that includes "billboard bandits,

pirate TV and radio broadcasters, media hoaxers, and other vernacular media watchers

who intrude on the intruders" (cited in Hynes, Sharpe, & Fagan, 2007, p. 109). Christine

Harold (2004) simplifies it as a strategy of "rhetorical protest" that seeks to "undermine

the marketing rhetoric of multinational corporations" (p. 189).

For culture jammers, the optimal means to sabotage that machinery of contemporary marketing is by "peeling away the brand veneer" so as to expose the unseemly "backstage" machinations behind the glamour and artifice of the advertisement and to destabilize branding's perverse claim on becoming some kind of "authentic" cultural resource – a presumption that rankles anti-capitalist critics (Carducci, 2006, p. 122). This "peeling away" leads to the kind of "subvertisements" for which *Adbusters* is perhaps best known: mocking Calvin Klein's emaciated archetype with imagery of a bulimic model; subverting Marlboro's rugged ethos with comparatively flaccid white-collar workers sneaking a drag outside the office. Such "semiotic Robin Hoodism" can also be enacted at a street level, with jammers known to deface the billboards of dominant brands by re-contextualizing their hype, teasing out the ugly reality beneath their slick chicanery (N. Klein, 2000, p. 280).

Fundamental to these various expressions is a common project of reclaiming public and social space from corporations, divulging the real-world upshot of advertising's fetishized values, and doing so through the kind of playful, parody-based "semiotic jujitsu" that is culture jamming's "stock in trade" – and that makes culture jamming an heir to Dick Hebdige's *bricoleur* (Carducci, 2006, p. 132).[13] It is, in short, an endeavor toward awakening: a bid to snap the slumber of shopping culture, this trance of consumerism, this (to culture jammers) consensual hallucination that ultimate contributes to brand equity's bottom line. *Détournement* is, therefore, a means of

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[13] Lasn shows a particular fondness for jujitsu as an explanatory metaphor for the mechanics of culture jamming: "In one simple deft move you slap the [brand] giant on its back [and…] use the momentum of the enemy" (N. Klein, 2000, p. 281).

instrumentalizing self-awareness and self-determination; as an expression of resistance, it is meant to be reclamation of *true* "agency" – autonomous and authentic individual choice that defies the structure of consumer governance, even as that governance obfuscates intent and casually exercises its power. Indeed, the more that marketers seek to shape conduct *invisibly*, the more semiotic grist for the ad-buster's mill; the more that advertising self-effaces its operation, the more that culture jamming seeks to bring those machinations to light. The more that a brand disinterestedly suggests, "You May!," the more that counteragents translate and parody its discipline purposefully as "You Must!"

For as branding hath coveted and conquered vaster swaths of cultural space, ad-busting jammers correctly perceive *it* to be the "ruling ideology" of our day and voice their own resistance through dissident aesthetics: *style*, that is, like billboard vandalism and street theater. Ironically, they are, at once, uncompromising and also playing along, as they seek to roust consumers from sleepwalking through commercial culture and lead them toward a life less dependent on Saatchi's "lovemarks" to achieve authentic *agape*. This stance therefore positions the jammer squarely in protest of the "brand equity" increasingly endemic to the discourse and practices of Madison Avenue, which are thought to generate capital from culture and community. If, however, advertising – and, for that matter, capitalism writ large, a specter of broader ideological menace to jammers – has proven anything over the course of its history, it is that today's rebellion is tomorrow's mall fashion; what starts as controversial content ends up as Hot Topic. Thus, as Vince Carducci (2006) rightly remarks, "The assimilation of skepticism toward advertising not just in terms of [consumer culture's] *content* but in terms of its very *form*"

means that "the rise of such alternative marketing techniques such as 'gonzo', word-of-mouth, viral, etc… *also* make a claim to rebellious authenticity" (p. 134, italics added).

Put simply, culture jamming offers guerrilla marketing not just a subversive message to annex, but a subversive *medium*. It is to that recuperation that I now turn.

Repairing the Rupture

> Many antimarketing activist techniques were derived from advertising principles – Lasn, for example, used to work in advertising – just as many of the marketers… have organically adopted antimarketing strategies into their marketing plans out of a genuine discomfort with traditional marketing. Those who work in advertising are most capable of subverting it, the conventional wisdom goes… Culture jamming has often been said to dismantle the master's house with the master's tools – *and then provide the master with blueprints for a better house and better tools*. (A. E. Moore, 2007, pp. 58, 83, italics added)

Culture jamming might thus style itself as the "appropriation" of brand identity for political subversion, but guerrilla marketing, at least in the examples featured in this chapter, is the *expropriation* of political subversion for brand identity – the corporate feigning of an unsanctioned paradigm; the dominant culture's incorporation of dissident practices and aesthetics; commerce appropriating the resistant appropriation of commerce. To be clear, the expropriation impulse is not necessarily a new phenomenon; one might even consider it the central breakthrough at the heart of Gramscian theory: a way of neutralizing the antagonism that a "ruling" institution encounters. I would argue, however, the fact that this expropriation is now feasting upon the meaning of the medium assimilated as much as that of the message does make for a more unique and recent development.

Thus, a self-proclaimed "serious history of co-optation," Thomas Frank's (1997) *Conquest of Cool* offers valuable background with an account of how 1960s' business thought subsumed the anti-establishment stirrings of that era in "bohemian cultural style's trajectory from adversarial to hegemonic [and…] hip's mutation from the native language of the alienated to that of advertising" (p. 8). He argues that the social opposition emblematic of hippie youth culture – the kind of "alienation and despair" that is, today, perhaps best illustrated by the culture jamming tactics indexed earlier – was essential to "replenishing… the various culture industries' depleted arsenal of cool" (p. 235). What Frank excavated from the 1960s, I probe from turn-of-the-millennium advertising thought and just as Frank documents how that era's advertising incorporated rule-breaking content, I will show how a strand of contemporary advertising increasingly accommodates nonconformist *form*. By this I mean corporate communication that takes place in maverick contexts – namely, the kind of street art and sidewalk theater that will be deconstructed later in this chapter. Frank describes one creative director's principles in a manner that presages the thinking behind guerrilla marketing: "Creativity was defined as an embrace of what he called the 'the unexpected,' a general contrariety that set an ad off from the mass-cult bubble surrounding it… '[Advertising] must be interruptive, disquieting, challenging, surprising and unsettling'" (p. 94).

Whereas in the 1960s, "the unexpected" might mean innovations in substance – for example, the clean minimalism and witty self-deprecation of Bill Bernbach's legendary Volkswagen "lemon" ad – today, this also means innovations in the intermediary employed: guerrilla media that opts out of conventional corridors like the

30-spot or the freeway billboard. Advertisers who take these steps toward innovation

seem to believe that that "mass-cult bubble" has so fully inflated that "contrariety," much

less eye-catching transgression, is difficult to achieve in traditional media; that the spaces

designated for commercial appeal have become structurally deficient, their semiotic soil

poisoned from years of overuse. One of my interviewees, a managing director at a

guerrilla firm, frames this in the familiar terms of the contemporary crisis in advertising:

> The reason I like seeing a message delivered to me, say, whether it be through a
> chalk stenciling on the ground or an interactive video or something you can text
> into or opt-into or on the side of a building on a Saturday night, [is that] it's just
> different. It breaks the mold. It's like being at a summer camp where you have to
> eat salad for 29 straight days and then all of a sudden, you're getting a
> cheeseburger – it's like something that you just sort of broke from the
> monotony… A lot of the advertising that happens today – whether it's billboards
> or TV or radio ad mentions like that – it's just a giant swirl of white buzz. (A.
> Loos, personal communication, January 4, 2010)

Thus, whereas products were once positioned as "bearers of nonconformity,

escape, resistance, difference, carnival, and even deviance," today the channel itself

might also fit those descriptions (Frank, 1997, p. 133). And not surprisingly, then,

fetishizing "the unexpected" is at the core of *both* culture jamming and guerrilla

marketing. Some have already noticed marketers experimenting with guerrilla tactics

that have "overtones of social movements created by the Situationists" (Leiss et al., 2005,

pp. 273-274). Just as *Adbusters* became an "underground hit with the young scions of the

advertising industry," so, too, did PBR's marketing manager think that *No Logo*

contained "many good marketing ideas" (Walker, 2008, p. 104; Wipperfurth, 2005, p.

156).

The irony in this appropriation of an appropriational movement should not be lost; it models the Gramscian manner in which "any hegemonic process must be especially alert and responsive to the alternatives and oppositions which threaten its dominance" (Williams, 1977, p. 113). In this case, guerrilla advertising is the manifestation of that recuperation, for *Adbusters*, *No Logo*, and the culture jamming phenomenon as a whole threatens the very structure of governance (e.g., "a right manner of disposing things") through which marketing power operates (Foucault, 2000b, p. 211). Such is the final step in the "dialectic" of resistance and appropriation in cultural production, as Richard Peterson and N. Anand (2004) articulate it:

> The industry co-opts and denudes the resistance of any symbolic force, converting revolt into mere style. The sanitized symbols are then mass marketed back to the many followers who want to buy into the form of the resistance without committing to its subversive potential… Much of what is taken to be subcultural resistance is manufactured by the consumer industry. (pp. 325-326)

Guerrilla marketing is emblematic of such prefab resistance; not just in the content of the sales pitch as others have documented, but, as I advance, in the context of it (i.e., a rebellious delivery). For example, one agency CEO defines guerrilla marketing as "getting consumers seeing things that they aren't used to seeing, creating something that lives in the context of what they do but that is out of context with what they are used to" (Capps, 2007). This characterization bears uncanny resemblance to *détournement* as defined earlier: "a perspective-jarring turnabout in your everyday life."[14] This is because

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[14] There are, moreover, echoes of the PR ethos that should be registered here, too: "A good public relations man advises his client… to carry out an overt act… interrupting the continuity of life in some way to bring about a response," Edward Bernays summarized, sounding not unlike a Situationist himself (Ewen, 1996, p. 18). As a science of "'creating circumstances'… calculated to stand out as 'newsworthy,'" public relations might be considered *détournement*, but on behalf of rather than in opposition to elite power (p. 28).

the project romanticized by culture jamming – producing something "so unlike what surrounds it on the commercial-TV mindscape that it immediately grabs the attention of viewers" – is, of course, precisely the same scenario that *advertisers* idealize (Lasn, 1999, p. 133). This is because (perhaps surprisingly, given their polarized aims) marketers *share* with culture jammers a frustration with the "media-consumer trance" – this zombie-like repose within "mass-cult," that Lasn alleges – that is habituated by a steady flow of commercial messages.

Although critical theory might maintain that advertisers, collectively, require this "trance," because it dulls the inertia of potential audience resistance and displaces any notion of systemic change or participatory refusal (whether that be turning off the TV or agitating to overthrow the foundations of capitalism), singularly, for any given advertiser who wishes to stand out amidst clutter and alter the buying habits of the (supposedly) narcotized, the lethargy of a "trance" is an impediment and awakening the ideal. Yet whereas culture jammers pursue awakening to revive consumers from the "false consciousness" of branding – to activate a more authentic lived agency – advertisers pursue awakening to revive consumers from the "false consciousness" of their product competitors. Think different, for *Adbusters*, means questioning the imagery and symbolism grafted onto personal computers – challenging the idea that an operating system can somehow represent a person's identity. Think different, for Apple, means questioning the dominance of Microsoft's market share – challenging the idea that one would want to be a P.C. rather than a hip Mac.

Chasing Cool: The Resourcefulness of Resistance

To be certain, advertising has long sought after "breakthrough" work – creative copy that slices through the ever-escalating semiotic clutter of the contemporary marketing environment. But the guerrilla strategies on display here proffer solutions that *literally* break through the confines of traditional media placement – strategies like "brandalism, vandalism committed as an advertising campaign" and "graffadi, or graffiti that is advertising" that shatter the boundaries that once circumscribed outdoor commercial spaces and utilize fonts known more for their opaque dissidence (Moore, 2007, p. 4). As noted above, if culture jammers aspire to this contextually unexpected exemplar so as to jar people *out* of their consumption stupor, these guerrilla marketers follow that lead so as to jar people *into* more consumption. And yet, much as Frank (1997) and others have recorded, the cycle of co-optation – whereby "emblems of dissent [are…] quickly translated into harmless consumer commodities" – has not changed all that much since creative shops first began perfecting the practice of plunder in the 1960s (p. 16).

Gyro Advertising, a Philadelphia agency (now known as Quaker City Mercantile) that lists buzz, guerrilla, and viral among their services, explicitly diagrammed this on its website by boasting a cultivated sensitivity to the "Life Cycle of Hipness": their step-by-step model of the movement of trends from fringe to mainstream, from oppositional to incorporated, from the street to the mall. Gyro's portfolio offers illuminating examples of the guerrilla marketing ethos and I'll consider their work and their self-conceit throughout this chapter. For Gyro postures itself as archaeologist of authenticity,

conquistador of cool – unabashed in articulating a coldly calculating ideology of co-

optation:

> Like the pop-cultural equivalent of a rapacious 1980s leveraged buy-out firm,
> Gyro Worldwide bought up cultural capital on the cheap from the second
> 'alternative' network, broke this content down into its most fundamental cultural
> tropes, then retailed it to the first 'mainstream' network at a significant premium.
> But where buy-out firms consumed, digested and finally excreted the rudiments of
> capital into the global marketplace, the maw of Gyro chewed up and reconfigured
> something far more elemental and powerful – the essence of culture itself.
> (Bernard-Levy, 2008, p. 33)[15]

Gyro is by no means the first firm to cannibalize culture in this way; it merely

offers a conveniently lucid and unsentimental expression of such scheming. The

rapacious foraging of and for symbolic material by commercial prospectors makes

"genuine" subcultural statements – especially oppositional ones – inherently ephemeral,

because they are so enticing and useful as emblems of dissent (particularly for a

disciplinary force trying to relate to consumers without the usual trappings of authority).

This speaks to the "resourcefulness" of resistance in a dual sense: There is, of course,

resourcefulness exhibited in the creative appropriation of commercial products and texts

from the mainstream to express unorthodox, even oppositional meanings (Hebdige,

1979). But resistance is also "resourceful" for power, because it is a display of agency

that can then be co-opted by the very structure that it acts out against – a kind of

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[15] Company founder Steven Grasse – writing under the *nom de guerre*, Harriet Bernard-Levy, in a self-aggrandizing history of the company – actually cites Situationist lineage in brashly (and likely ironically) overstating the agency's genius: "*Détournement*, this practice of cultural collage, or 'remixing,' had been abandoned since the European Situationist International ended their prankster days in the late 1960s. Resurrected by Grasse… it would now be ripped off by everyone from DJ Spooky to the magazine *Adbusters* under the umbrella term 'culture jamming.' Few knew that this, like so many dominant subcultural trends of the late 1990s and early 2000s, was born as a campaign at 304 Walnut [Street]" (Bernard-Levy, 2008, p. 15).

"farming" of cultural practices at lower-profile spaces sometimes termed "the underground" (Thornton, 1996).

Because this signification of resistant values can so fluidly be recuperated into the commercial establishment, however dexterous the defiance, absorption is ultimately inevitable; and, indeed, it seems not just inevitable but somehow necessary to revitalize that experience of agency among consumers – the sense that desire and action is not prearranged by marketing structure. Modifying Hebdige, Adam Arvidsson (2006) argues that style is not only what subculture produces – in its flickering moment of refusal before the ruling ideology subsumes the subversion – "[style] is the most important form of its ethical surplus [and…] *also what brand management mainly appropriates*" (p. 69, italics added). Thus from the very *first* moment of expressive opposition, consumers can be understood as contributing productivity to the brand. Their resistance and *bricolage* at the level of subcultural creativity acts as unwitting labor for the very entities meant to be subverted.

This is also why "authenticity" is such a preoccupation in advertising and especially guerrilla advertising: Authenticity is the experience of the "active subject" whose (consumer) conduct does not feel conducted as such (which, as has been emphasized here, is precisely the project and ideal of invisible governance) (Foucault, 2000a, p. 340). "*Authenticity represents the struggle between the will of the individual and the determinism of the commodity structure*," Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson (1996) declare. "[And] the dilemma of authenticity in the age of the consumer sign is that no sooner does something become recognized as a mark of authenticity than it gets

appropriated and transformed into a popular sign" (pp. 142, 143, italics original).

Authenticity therefore derives its power from an affected distance from mainstream

mediation, yet that affectation is not a hollow pose but rather the "will of the individual"

– that is to say, unreconstructed agency – trying to dodge the impending recuperation of

appropriation.

　　　　For advertisers, the key is to know how and where to locate this "authenticity" as

it is produced, which makes it a project of cultural reconnaissance. "Cool hunting"

represents one recent solution to this: a form of industrial epistemology whereby

inquisitive agencies and colluding consumers deliver on-the-ground intelligence about

social patterns back to brand headquarters (Gladwell, 1997). For example, Sputnik

emerged in the 1990s as one cool consulting firm in this regard; the founders' textbook

subtitle (*How Today's Alternative Youth Cultures are Creating Tomorrow's Mainstream*

Markets) neatly summarizes the commercial philosophy of cultural cannibalism they

practice (Lopiano-Misdom & De Luca, 1997). As discussed in chapter 1, cool hunting is

representative of that excavation of "subcultural capital" and the movement of cultural

practices from "authentic" to "phoney," "hip" to "mainstream," and "underground" to

"the media" (Thornton, 1996). Cool hunting is equally a Gramscian process of

commodifying resistance – absorbing independent, creative agency with material objects

and social rituals into marketer structure so that it can be *re*-deployed (i.e., sold) as a

form of authenticated (and, hence, invisible) governance. The willfulness of this

expression of individuality is precisely what makes it valuable to the exercise of power

and authority: it exudes a "bottom-up" authenticity, which can be pressed into service from the "top-down" commercially.

For any given audience – whether for television or t-shirts – is not a "given" at all, but rather a fabrication assembled by and for vested parties (Ang, 1991). Advertisers have cycled through – and continue to employ – a host of knowledge-gathering techniques meant to paint a picture of the demographic targeted in a particular campaign. As "the counter-culture movement legitimated the 'street' as a source of authenticity, sexiness, and coolness," that research has taken an increasingly ethnographic turn with participant-observers "hanging out with teens, and looking in their closets, lockers, and cupboards for clues to the values that would be most culturally relevant with consumers" (Leiss et al., 2005, pp. 318, 428). Urban Outfitters, for example, eschews questionnaires and focus groups altogether in favor of stalking city habitats in search of such style: "We're not after people's statements. We're after their actions," the company president reveals (Bond & Kirshenbaum, 1998, p. 135). In an interview, Adam Salacuse, a graffiti artist-turned-advertiser who converted his "subcultural capital" into "economic capital," tries to express how this impresses itself upon the advertiser's task:

> A lot of it goes back to my childhood, growing up in New York City – specifically, Brooklyn in the 1980s – in which I found most if not all advertising irrelevant. I don't think a billboard even to this day has inspired me to do anything, let alone buy a car or wear a certain type of clothes. It was pretty much the street culture – meaning friends, the local DJ shops, skate shops, the power of, you know, the cool kids on the block – whether that be a basketball player, a skater, or what have you. You know, you kind of learned about it through the streets… The streets are where it's at, if you ask ALT TERRAIN [his agency] and what we try to do is try to figure out a way of integrating brands and the streets in street culture in a way that people might actually like it. (personal communication, September 30, 2009)

This is a critical revelation: actions in the "street" are thought to bespeak brand use-value in a fluid, negotiated, and therefore accurate way; it allows for subculture to speak back to commercial creators on its own terms and in a data-format particularly easily predisposed to recuperation. The authenticity authored through expressive opposition can then funneled back into the marketplace with greater credibility, because it initially appeared as the product of autonomous consumer agency – answering the issue of creativity and individuality ("What's cool?") reliably because it is an open-ended (i.e., qualitative) question that marketing's knowledge apparatus has posed. Consultant Alex Wipperfurth (2005), whose "brand hijack" paradigm will be deconstructed shortly, argues that marketers need to fully embrace this kind of "cultural anthropology" approach that looks beyond "individual behavior" to "social trends, emerging values, [and…] tribal groups" and, in fact, a minor boom in these methods has ensued in consumer research since the 1980s (p. 178).

This shift encompasses two themes: First, it sits comfortably with ambitions charted in the last chapter whereby the brand conceives of itself as an operable "cultural resource" rather than simply a blueprinted, "trademarked shorthand" for product attributes or status connotations. (In other words, to construct itself as a true "cultural resource," a brand needs a form of knowledge that is more field-oriented from those who are already modeling that cultural resourcefulness.) Second, as a testament to that Gramscian flexibility of the "compromise equilibrium," it presages the increasingly negotiated nature of brand meaning that seems, at least partly, a byproduct of the two-

way flow of communication and information between company and consumer that buzz

agency and consumer-generated advertising models – part of a "constant oscillation

between communication design and market surveillance" (Leiss et al., 2005, p. 264).

Gyro again presents a tidy, eloquent summation of this mentality:

> Hire cool. This isn't as easy as it sounds. It takes years to build your cool
> pipeline, beginning at the deep, dark pools of cool that form around last call at the
> seamiest dive bars and ending with barrels of cultural capital pumped out all over
> the world. (Bernard-Levy, 2008, p. 25)

This, again, describes a "trickle-up" model of mainstreaming, where the brand

appropriates the productivity of subcultural capital, the ethical surplus that is "style."

Andrew Loos, head of Attack!, an agency that specializes in guerrilla and non-traditional

promotions, spells this out in more detail when he explains how his firm seeks to "geo-

target" cool based upon a "TVH" (trends, venues, and happenings) database they

maintain. Loos envisions a kind of "panopticon of cool" as the data-gathering ideal for

brands – a model of surveillance in which nothing ever escapes the gaze of the

marketplace and no meaning autonomously survives the "giant harvesting machine" that

is advertising, because advertisers are in constant competition to chart the latest frontier

of fads (Goldman & Papson, 1996, p. 8).

This is, at once, an abidance by and a departure from Foucault's (1977)

conceptualization of the panopticon. Foucault understood the panopticon as an apparatus

of surveillance that assures obedience through visibility; it represents those techniques of

"power/knowledge designed to observe, monitor, shape and control the behavior of

individuals situated within a range of social and economic institutions" (Gordon, 1991,

pp. 3-4). Following Foucault's (1977) theory:

> Knowledge follows the advance power, discovering new objects of knowledge
> over all the surfaces on which power is exercised… In order to be exercised, this
> power had to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent
> surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain
> invisible. It had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body
> into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions
> ever on the alert, a long, hierarchized network…(pp. 204, 214)

On one hand, these "thousands of eyes posted" aptly describes the pursuit of

omniscience through market research techniques like Loos's "TVH" database, the word-

of-mouth and consumer-generated feedback of chapter 4, and cool hunting broadly. It is

through this "exhaustive" monitoring and generation of knowledge that power (i.e.,

consumer governance) can flow. Yet unlike Foucault's schematic, resistant practices are

here *desired* and co-opted (for their aforementioned resourcefulness) not confronted and

disciplined; moreover, the "normalization" that results from bringing them to light (i.e.,

mainstreaming them) assures their degrading value as authentic and perpetuates the need

for *more* panoptic monitoring. Whereas dissidence is a problem for governance and the

source of anxiety in Foucault's panopticon, dissidence is the *solution* for governance and

the source of value in the "panopticon of cool" – put differently, if obedience is sought in

the former, *disobedience* is actually sought in the latter. In an interview, Loos elaborates

on the desperate challenges of maintaining that omniscience:

> One of the areas of intelligence that we provide is that trends and attitudes and
> consumer-types change every mile across the country we feel, especially in places
> like Los Angeles where it changes every *half-mile*! But you've got – what's cool,
> where's cool, what's not cool is changing very rapidly… Our database… it's a
> moving target. It's never stopped in nine years, because I think one of the lamest

things you can do… is to sit in a cubicle somewhere in the country and try and guess what is cool in a major market that you're not a part of or don't have someone there… It's like, man, you've got to get back in there and do that stuff… Get in and do some like hard-core raw intelligence using people who know – and that's another thing, is that a lot of people claim to know, but very few actually do know where the relevant spots are… It [takes] non-stop, around-the-clock recruiting and program management and communication with our army of people across the country… We also lean on them for local intelligence and we also rely on people at college campuses that allow us to get into student housing places, into dorms, into Greek Life… The one thing that we do is we admit to not knowing everything in-house. We are students of trends in research and we will commit to always being that; we will never admit to any client that we've got it all figured out. Which is why we rely on kids in your demographic to get us information and to reward them with things that will actually speak to them to give us that information… Again, it's a moving target. (personal communication, January 4, 2010)

His point here about the innate ephemerality of cool was echoed earlier by

Gladwell (1997) as a kind of riddle of epistemology ("the act of discovering cool causes

cool to take flight") – a burdensome paradox of Sisyphean surveillance that guarantees

that an advertiser's work is never done. This also re-confirms earlier points made about

the fleeting nature of oppositional subculture motifs, whether those be substantive (i.e.,

cultural content) or stylistic (i.e., cultural codes). Calibrating the underground therefore

represents one of the chief tasks of the guerrilla marketer. If, in the 1960s' heyday of

Thomas Frank's hot-shops, this meant channeling "subcultural capital" into conventional

contexts (i.e., TV, print, radio), today, staging the "underground" seems to require careful

consideration of cool-as-medium. It is not coincidence that one of the central theories

threaded throughout this analysis – the "cool" sell – shares a term with the "cool" hunt.

Being low-definition and therefore demanding higher engagement of the audience, *cool*

media, in the McLuhanian sense, is conceptually analogous to the reserved exclusivity of

cool content. By definition, cool culture *would* eschew loud, accessible, *broad*-cast channels in favor of what some see as more "authentic," higher "integrity" "micro-media." Basic economic theory dictates that scarcity drives up value; this is no less true when it comes to the taste hierarchies of consumer culture and, as I will now argue, the hierarchical means by which those hierarchies are communicated.

A Work of Advertising in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

"If 50 million people watch something, how cool can it be?" Scott Johnson, the executive creative director of Tribal DDB Worldwide, quips (Moore, 2007, p. 45). His rhetorical question points to a central tension in the production of advertising culture: how the "credibility hierarchy" of media might impact the way that brand management operates. By "credibility hierarchy," I am arguing, in the tradition of Harold Innis (1951), that each medium has a bias on a scale of inherent "qualitative core values" from obvious to hidden, from mass to niche, from untenable to credible, and from hot to cool. Jonathan Bond and Richard Kirshenbaum (1998), advertising executives who wrote a trade book on using covert methods to reach cynical consumers, plot out a scale of just this sort – with media ranging from "the most uncommercial, believable, under-the-radar" vehicles (word of mouth, public relations, product placement, guerrilla media, internet) to "the most artificial, contrived, and highly commercial" forms (magazines, radio, newspapers, outdoor advertising, television) (pp. 144-146). What they propose is essentially an inversely proportional relationship between gross ratings points (a standard measure of audience size within the advertising industry) and message integrity (p. 161),

whereby ubiquity comes at a cost of authenticity and vice-versa; or put in Sarah

Thornton's (1996) terms, the more mass mediated, the less subcultural capital preserved.

An excellent example from the "under-the-radar" end of the scale would be

something like ALT TERRAIN's pull-tab wild posting ads for New Balance sneakers

that almost function as "micro-media." Adam Salacuse, the company CEO, delineates

the "regime of engagement" media logic informing the campaign in an instructive

manner:

> We liked those more because they look non-commercial. And people are – the
> more commercial something looks, the more slick it is, the less relevant – the
> more someone thinks, 'It's not going to be relevant to me. It's a mass produced
> item.' And, so, if it's homespun, homemade-looking, and creative, sometimes
> it'll attract more attention than a really highly-designed piece in a magazine – an
> ad in a magazine, let's say. So they went with black-and-white – it looked like it
> was Xeroxed copies with photos pasted on that… We went out to a bunch of
> different markets and we saw – we'd repost every week and we'd go back and
> we'd see all the tabs gone from the posters, which is a very good sign that people
> are picking them up. It's almost, like, as good as a click on a banner – you can't
> get any better than that. Actually, we think it is better, because when you interact
> with media, it makes a huge, huge difference. I'm not a brain scientist, but, again,
> when you smell it, touch it, pull a little tab off a poster, it gets registered
> somewhere different in your mind… That is where you end up having the most
> impact. (personal communication, September 30, 2010)

This deliberately "non-commercial" form was intended to simulate something

"homemade-looking," rather than the conventional advertising context that a major

corporation like New Balance could otherwise afford in a huge, expensive billboard. By

not seeming to be "mass produced," it was thought to communicate a more "authentic"

message on behalf of the brand – one that, the agency assumed, youth audiences were

less likely to filter out because "homemade" and "non-commercial" governs consumer

choice less confrontationally and more casually than "mass produced." Call it the "aura"

of an advertisement in Walter Benjamin's (2001) terms: the difficult-to-achieve sense

that an authentic, unique message has been hand-crafted and distributed to a limited

group of receivers (thus maintaining that insider taste-knowledge that, Thornton notes,

supplies subcultural capital). Marketers who hope to insinuate "the underground" into

their brand image and simulate subversion must closely observe the patterns of this

"credibility hierarchy" of media logic; it is, it seems, less what they say and more about

how and where they say it.

I hear a refrain similar to that of Salacuse in the words of Joe Earley, the

executive vice president of marketing and communications for Fox, who discussed a

teaser campaign for *House* meant to stir up confusion and intrigue that relied prominently

on an ambiguous symbol similar to the caduceus (thought featuring House's signature

cane rather than the traditional staff), which was spray-painted onto city streets around

the country. The image prompted a flurry of online buzz (that was, of course, monitored)

as to its meaning and origin: Was it promoting a new film? Was it propaganda for that

summer's federal health care reform initiative? Earley notes that, in keeping with the

essence of the cool sell, less (information) begat more (participation):

> If we'd gone right from the beginning and put that [*House*] logo on [the
> caduceus], you know, maybe *House* fans would have immediately stayed tuned
> and watched [the campaign unfold], but I think by *not* putting it on there, this way
> we were able to probably entice and entertain some people who would have
> otherwise just moved on from it. (personal communication, January 14, 2010)

This is a rationality of governance that, once again, obfuscates intentions –

driving engagement by withholding the "conduct of conduct" meant to be exerted.

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Earley further explains how using graffiti as an advertising medium is not only fiscally

prudent but, he believes, retains those connotations of integrity:

> The cost of hiring a street crew to chalk – spray chalk on a sidewalk is, you know, fractional compared to what you would have to spend on outdoor [billboards]. It is also more credible… When you see it up on the big board, you immediately know that it's a big company that has enough money that is buying that ad. When you see it [sprayed] on the side of a building, on a window, on the ground – it can cut through your media filter. We're bombarded by so many images every day, consumers are absolutely sophisticated enough to know when something is a marketing message and it's much easier to tune it out. When you're walking and you're hit with something on the ground that wouldn't normally be there, that doesn't look slick, that isn't that highly produced and that's a little more raw – it can get past that filter.

It can, in other words, fake that credibility. The dissidence intrinsic to the

aesthetic – most graffiti and street art is, after all, *illegal* – is thought to purport toward a

purity of purpose even if, in this case, the ad message was hardly "underground," but

rather teasing the upcoming season of a top-rated network show – not exactly a beacon of

cultural exclusivity. Yet integrity is not only a product of deploying a renegade channel;

equally important, it seems, is *uniqueness* as a core virtue of the outdoor guerrilla

medium. Authenticity is here inversely correlated with standardization – a cultural

maxim stretching back at least as far as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1977) as

well as Benjamin (2001). The publishing apparatus of mass media, by virtue of its

mechanized, standardized (Fordist) output, cannot churn out that credibility so

convincingly, not off its conveyer belt production line. Guerrilla marketing, being more

nimble, fluid, and "raw," strives to offer alternatives to brands themselves striving for

that subcultural capital. These small-scale "micro-media" like stickers, flyers and graffiti

tags – as opposed to mass-produced billboards – equally serve the self-effacement of the

cool sell: being hand-created, seeming "non-commercial," and, therefore, governing

subtly and serendipitously.

Governing through Resistance, Establishing the Anti-Establishment

One of the blue chips in the economy of cool over the past decade has been PBR,

whose brand renaissance has been as youthful as it has been unexpected and represents a

compelling case study in simulating the anti-establishment. It exhibits key features of the

co-optation of culture jamming – particularly in how anti-marketing disaffection is

enlisted in the service of marketing – as well as this broader mobilization of agency

without forcing action that is being illuminated throughout this dissertation as the essence

of guerrilla marketing's "invisible" consumer governance. After years of decline, the

down-market beer label suddenly, inexplicably, achieved sales growth beginning in 2002

when it was embraced by otherwise ad-weary skater, punk and bike messenger twenty-

something tribes in hipster havens like Portland, Oregon – "the kinds of people who can't

be fooled by marketing and in fact tend to detest it" (Walker, 2008, p. 101). This

occurred despite the fact that PBR had long focused most of its marketing on a very

different, blue-collar, fifty-something target demographic.

Alex Wipperfurth (2005), head of a brand consulting agency, was brought in to

demystify and harness the newfound enthusiasm from the otherwise-"anti-corporate" and

"anti-brand communities" who, unexpectedly, now acted like "America's most logo-loyal

consumers" of PBR (p. 5). Reading up on the work of Naomi Klein, Thomas Frank, and

Kalle Lasn, Wipperfurth concluded that, in an era inundated with semiotic clutter and

goods overwrought with deliberately marketed (read: forced) meanings, PBR's distinct

lack of an image (read: truly disinterested) provided these consumer-fans with a kind of

brand *tabula rasa* from which they could ply their own meanings. (Again, take note of

the presumed efficacy of governance-without-machination: A brand that had set out to

manage a particular population wound up appealing to another one because it *wasn't*

trying to manage them.) What follows is an emblematic summation of how, in the case

of PBR, the cool sell was mobilized to precipitate participation from those thought to be

deeply averse to traditional, Taylorist advertising petitions:

> Within [today's] complicated cultural context, the no-frills aesthetic of PBR fits right in. It's perfect for the self-mocking, 'anti-brow' attitude of critics and rebels intent on expressing disdain for mass commercialism… This reading [of Klein, Frank, Lasn, etc.] proved a great platform to identify PBR's battle cry as the 'anti-badge' brand. It helped us understand some of the fundamental trends and drives of the skeptical, anti-corporate modern-day consumer. And, most important, it enabled us to create some marketing rules so that Pabst Brewing would remain the brand of choice for an audience that uses 'consumption as protest'… People consume PBR as an expression of their attitudes against mass marketing and hype. (pp. 23, 39)

The irony of annexing Lasn's ideology – fundamentally, *a protest of consumption*

– to chart new and more clever ways of stimulating "*consumption as protest*" should not

be lost here, nor should the program of governing *through* resistance and working *with*

the elitist discrimination within subcultures that disdains anything "mainstream"

(Thornton, 1996). Had PBR consciously sought after this psychographic, the brand

would have more than likely repelled them; recall the cool sell balance Anne Bologna

articulated in the last chapter: "the less you try to sell, the more you're going to sell." In

a funny twist of history, then, PBR accidentally stumbled upon the utility in a brand

obfuscating – backgrounding – its *actual* intentions within a field of disinterested cultural

output. Or, as Cole & Weber earlier encapsulated it, arranging a way to "*let* them say

yes":

> Pabst was careful never to force the brand on to a market. For instance, when
> sponsoring bike messenger races, it would refrain from hanging banners all over
> the place and it made sure that competing beer brands were served. This
> counterintuitive move allowed the various subcultures to *choose PBR rather than
> having the brand chosen for them*. (Wipperfurth, 2005, p. 43, italics added)

The Foucauldian logic of this discipline ("*Discover! You May!*" rather than

"*Learn! You Must!*") again underpins the policy strategy of what some call "bottom-up

branding" that is thought necessary "to establish street credibility" with a generation of

young people (Leiss et al., 2005, p. 493). Rather than *compel* a demographic that is

assumed to be otherwise resistant to invocations (i.e., consumer governance by force), the

brand *seduces* participation by stage-managing impartiality – playing down its

sponsorship role and serving competing beers – and by building in the opportunity for

agency (consumer governance through freedom): by "[structuring] the possible field of

action of others" not acting directly upon them in a palpable way (Foucault, 2000a, p.

341). Wipperfurth coined the term "brand hijack" to explain PBR's success. The phrase

is tellingly evocative of that staged discovery – that furnishing of space for agency in the

"hijack" – so vital to the regime of engagement prevalent in marketing thought today:

"Brand hijacking is about *allowing* consumers (and other stakeholders) to shape brand

meaning and endorse the brand to others… [It is] the consumer's act of commandeering a

brand from the marketing professionals and driving its evolution" (pp. 6, 12, italics

added). I emphasize "allowing" to highlight, ironically, the structured autonomy the term

discloses (much as I italicize Cole & Weber's "*let* them say yes" code that situates and anticipates an "active" subject). Essential to orchestrating a successful brand hijack is cautiously cascading media exposure: from early, delicate, patient seeding in credible (even, as needed, illicit) venues to establish integrity through to the mainstream and mass market blowout (pp. 100, 102).

If the process of discovery needs to *feel* unforced to – that is, "chosen by" – the targeted demographic (not unlike the notion of "disinterestedness" highlighted in the earlier discussion of branded entertainment), the staging and coordination of that consumer agency – "chosen for" – perhaps makes this form of advertising more challenging and sophisticated than ever. As Richard Kirshenbaum, co-author of *Under the Radar*, pithily puts it, "*It takes a lot of work to get accidentally discovered by the right people in the right way at the right time*" (p. 82, italics original). The brand manager therefore has to fight, at all costs, what he or she really wants to communicate to the audience. But a brand hijack is predicated not only on a simulated revelation; it must also be agile enough to accommodate audience appropriations: "If your brand is hijacked, the consumers may take your product or service in unexpected directions: They may choose to reinterpret how the brand fits into their lives… or use the brand for social commentary. Learn to trust them" (p. 39). Here we find both the productivity of consumer agency to the marketers program of governance as well as the negotiated, concessionary brand disposition: a Gramscian "compromise equilibrium" in full.

In some cases, as I will show throughout the final section of this chapter, advertisers may seek to not only internalize but actually preempt this *bricolage*, as in a

billboard campaign for Neon that endeavored to build "signs of cultural resistance" into its own ads by graffiti-tagging them *in advance* – a "wink-wink" simulated contestation of the ad; a street spectacle effort to "recode" the meaning as part of the initial coding.[16] As Goldman and Papson (1996) conclude, "This [Neon] campaign extends the war of bricolage and counterbricolage into preemptory tagging, a form of manufactured bricolage based on coopting mythified signifiers of subcultural vitality and resistance" (p. 260).

The American Legacy Foundation's "Truth" campaign represents another excellent case study in culture jamming simulation. One can recognize in the work of Truth a project to conceal the "call to action" portion of the marketing message beneath seemingly objective content (as part of that project to market without selling and show without telling) and to, moreover, stage such content rebelliously in opposition to the dominant commercial imagery generated by Big Tobacco (not unlike *Adbusters* politics and approach). In an interview, Eric Asche, the senior vice president of marketing, describes the intransigent subject who resides at the center of focus for Truth:

> An 'at-risk' teen is generally at-risk in some other areas as well. There's sort of this parallel of activity of pushing the boundaries of risky behavior… testing the boundaries on a lot of fronts… A teen that is a little bit more rebellious… You're talking about the most skeptical, the most cynical – probably the hardest group that we could get to. But they are at the same time, the most at risk. So how we effectively engage with that consumer is a very delicate dance for lack of a better term. (personal communication, January 19, 2010)

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[16] More recently, a senior manager for youth and urban communications at Nissan has also reportedly commissioned preemptory tagging as part of his guerrilla marketing push. He defends this as part of the work of engineering engagement in terms by now familiar to the philosophy of brand management under consideration here: "It's about *discovery*, letting people discover you, rather than [you] yelling at them" (Greenberg, 2004, italics added).

"Delicate dance" actually represents an apt metaphor for the Foucauldian mode of

governance being analyzed here – one which exercises power over active and, in this

case, resistant subjects by choreographing a graceful give-and-take. Courting that at-risk

teen and trying to compete with a tobacco industry that supposedly spends more each day

($36 million) than Truth does in a whole year ("we literally have the slingshot against the

Goliath," Asche intimated), the public service crusade uses prank activism that seeks to

"subvertise" against smoking ads in a way that's deeply reflective of guerrilla marketing:

> Unlike Nancy Reagan's 'Just say no' campaign that was, by most accounts, a
> dismal failure in the 1980s, Truth invites young people to assume a subversive
> posture that is far more active than just impotently saying no to tobacco. (Harold,
> 2004, p. 203)

In other words, rather than overtly instructing kids not to smoke (a disciplinarily

clunky "hot sell" in terms of behavioral administration that was tried and failed by the

former First Lady), Truth advertising "trains young people to practice their own brand of

Situationism, by confiscating a small space from commercial advertising and using it as a

site for rhetorical invention" (p. 206). Asche further elucidates the "analytics of

government" behind the encoding of this campaign; he is worth quoting in full for what

he reveals about how this strategy of guerrilla marketing thinks through – and tries to

disguise – its own position of authority:

> We may want to tell the consumer in the language, 'Don't smoke. Do not
> smoke.' But if we literally package the message in that way and tell the consumer
> not to smoke, that's going to be falling on deaf ears. In many cases, it may
> perpetuate them and cause them *to* smoke, because it's something *we* want to tell
> them versus speaking to the consumer in their own language… How do we
> actually communicate with them in a way that's productive, not
> counterproductive? ... In many cases, smoking is a way to take control and define
> who you are and it's a very powerful tool that teens still use today as a means of

self-expression. Most public health officials would look at that and say, 'Let's tell teens not to do it. Let's show them the harms and tell them not to do it.' Well, teens are filled with dos and don'ts and rules and what they're really looking for, in many cases, is a way to take the information and make their own decisions. So what we did was really – instead of fighting against the rebellious nature of the teen… our goal has been to work – it's almost like a judo approach – where we work with the momentum. Teens are going to rebel; teens are going to self-express and tobacco has traditionally been a very powerful way for them to do that. So how do we move with that momentum in a positive way? And the way that we've done that is shine a light on the activities of the [tobacco] industry and our hope early on was that when teens actually see that as they think that they're making this independent choice to smoke cigarettes and it's a tool for self-expression – that they are actually falling into the trap of a well-concocted industry plan. (personal communication, January 19, 2010)

Many key themes re-emerge here and are worth dissecting one-by-one. First and foremost, Asche reveals the reverse-psychology appeal of this "delicate dance" of governance – the challenge that is particularly acute to conducting the conduct of an age cohort constantly confronted with highly visible governance (those "dos and don'ts and rules" that structure the teen experience). Thus, Truth obfuscates intent by attacking cigarette smoking as an act of false agency – "unmasking" a gesture of pseudo-resistance as disciplined by Big Tobacco rather than being an authentic and autonomous expression of individuality. For Truth, this also means striking that "disinterested" stance of persuasive self-effacement by simply providing "information" rather than selling a message, as in the PR-recourse to "education" echoed in the comments of the creators behind *The Hire* and *America's Army*. Lastly, Asche cites judo tactics (so reminiscent of Lasn's jujitsu) that work to harness that rebellion and shine a light "backstage" so as to expose and disrupt the slick veneer of tobacco's pop culture image.

"As soon as we position ourselves as the all-knowing, all-being public health official, we are dead in the water with teens," Asche adds. "In the early days, we talked about a sort of guerilla feel and the idea being that Truth was… and is this subversive counterculture… We don't want to be 'The Man,' for lack of a better term." These days, few advertisers subscribing to a Foucauldian approach to branding would either. "The Man" (in the authority sense of the phrase) disciplined through the aggressive force of direct messages and interruptive mass media; "the man" (in the colloquially "cool" sense of the phrase) solicits through staging discovery, engineering participation, and naturalizing the persuasion process such that it hardly feels like persuasion at all.

Selling Cool

Advertising is, fundamentally, a constant sell: not just in the communication produced on behalf of companies for their products, but – importantly – in the communication produced on behalf of *agencies* for their products. Put differently, agencies are simultaneously pitching clients on messages, audiences, and *themselves*; it is for this reason that Katherine Sender (2004) reminds advertising researchers to treat these texts "as invested, if in different ways and with different ends in mind" and this approach as an opportunity to get behind the pitch as a site of analysis (p. 251). The self-styling of guerrilla agencies should, therefore, not be taken at face value, because the edgy, subversive angle that guerrilla firms sell *through* their methods must appear consonant with those same firms' self-conceit. Thus, these companies no doubt undertake their own

calculations and contortions toward credibility so as to shore up some kind of integrity to arbitrate cool.

For example, Wieden + Kennedy, a creative firm with a national profile on par with Crispin Porter + Bogusky, projected this image to clients in its rise to prominence in the late 1980s – with an "in-house atmosphere [of] 'T-shirts and jeans, long hair and insouciance, the meeting-was-supposed-to-start-an-hour-ago-where-are-they'" attitude meant very consciously to stand "in sharp contrast to the 1950s ad man, the man in the grey flannel suit" (Moore, 2007, p. 119). To pitch in this rebellious style is to project an air of authority about the group the advertiser is claiming knowledge of; it is a way of "acting" like the target – which is useful in the event that the target's rebellious disposition needs to be harnessed through a campaign program.

Gyro – and, more specifically, its head Steven Grasse – also presents a rich portrait of this cocksure contrivance. In an interview with *Adweek*, Grasse claimed, "Our clients work with us because they buy into the Gyro cult thing. They drink the Kool-Aid… It's like a party you feel cool that you were invited to. We make our clients feel like they're one of us" (Zammit, 2004). This is a strategic institutional disposition, cultivated to corroborate Gyro's credentials and also designed for contrast with those competing "grey flannel" suitors; the advertising pitch is then, in a sense, not contained in the campaign peddled but in fact spills over into the pose struck beside it. A photo caption in their company history reads: "Gyro's black pirate flag waves over Walnut Street, announcing the day of punk rock reckoning to Philadelphia's white-shoe, tea-and-

crumpet advertising world" (Bernard-Levy, 2008, p. 8). Later in the book, the firm

boasts:

> Much like the style of their work, Gyro's pitch methods were intended to shock
> even the most jaded of executives and involved tactics that frequently offended
> the fearful and the uptight… 'We would do anything to get a piece of your
> business… Anything. We'd fax you a phony ransom note, leaving a flaming bag
> of shit on your doorstep. Send you nutty junk from our basement. We'd keep
> coming until you either said, 'Okay, we give up, we'll give you something,' or,
> 'Don't you ever call this fucking office again.' (pp. 16-17)

The impudent style of Gyro's pitch, indeed, meshes with the typical content of it:

"use humor and/or offensive content to secure the target's attention" (p. 17). This is true

whether the "target" is a client or the audience the client hoped to reach. This could

clearly not work with all clients and all audiences (one would expect, say, a life insurance

company to be less amused by the antics), but Gyro apparently takes this license because

their clients have included Converse, Hot Topic, Mountain Dew, MTV, Puma, and Urban

Outfitters – corporations, in other words, hoping to stake out the same edgy space so as to

win over the hearts, minds and wallets of a youth demographic. Thus, Gyro has long

attempted this kind of double-sell: pitching provocative content and their services in a

provocative way. This double-sell notion is equally apparent in the tagline for Andrew

Loos's Attack! firm: "Your agent on the inside." In an interview, he illuminates the

thinking behind this frame:

> It means something different – it's to our clients and our [buzz agent] contractors.
> To our clients, it means we are the people who know where the cool is; we know
> how to engage your demographic and we know how to speak to them. In a world
> where people are being bombarded by traditional media, we know where your
> consumer is working and playing and shopping… And then, 'your agent on the
> inside' with our talent means: we're the company out there finding the coolest
> agencies, finding the best brands, finding the best programs – if you register with

us, you're going to have the inside track to the coolest promotional opportunities in the country. (personal communication, January 4, 2010)

The slogan is, in short, a statement of knowledge-power; a testimony to the task of poaching from the underground. It is meant to draw attention to the firm's "pipeline" (to borrow Gyro's term) of subcultural capital, to highlight their status as arbiter of cool flows. The image sells the methods, but, to be certain, the methods also confirm the image. Again, some of this kind of guerrilla marketing stands on wobbly legal footing – so the "bad boy" posture (as one interviewee put it in unambiguously gendered language) is not only a calculated scheme for cultivating cool, but also a product of the fact that some of these outdoor tactics could, indeed, get one arrested (A. Salacuse, personal communication, September 30, 2010). Adam Salacuse, CEO of ALT TERRAIN, says that the subversive feel also derives from its flouting of industry convention – that is, the fact that most other advertisers have to *pay* for their media space:

> Everyone else is paying for a traditional billboard spot and you're going, putting something below it or on it or whatever. So it is subversive to the other paid media… It gives campaigns that edge. That – for people to stand up and take notice and say, 'Oh, that wasn't there yesterday,' or, 'Is that supposed to be there or not?' (personal communication, September 30, 2010)

Loos adds that while guerrilla and street tactics are not legal per se, they're tolerated "the more you can sort of add to a cityscape and the more it's not sort of overt branding" (personal communication, January 4, 2010). In this regard, the cool sell apparently inoculates against potential fines for violating city codes – for the larger the logo, the hotter the sell, and the more likely its illegal placement will draw fire. But a subtle approach – presumed to confer subcultural credibility anyhow – stands a chance of

being overlooked by disapproving authorities. This, of course, does not always happen.

As Sam Ewen acknowledges, "We've had our fair share of people arrested, a lot of

citations given. We've done a lot of college guerrilla marketing where you end up

getting thrown off campus and are asked to never come back" (Murray, 2004).

Corporate Street Art and Branded Flash Mobs

Ewen should know these risks better than any other guerrilla marketer – as CEO

of Interference, he heads up the firm responsible for the most notorious incident in recent

memory.[17] When the agency launched its *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* stealth campaign on

behalf of the Adult Swim network in January 2007, it whipped up such a frenzy that

advertising executives called it "the largest ruckus they had ever seen from a guerrilla

marketing stunt" (Story, 2007). The incident provides a window into how advertisers

deploy ostensibly transgressive formats while, in actuality, safely corporatizing outdoor

space that had once been a site of dissidence. This street art technique can be interpreted

as a ruse to absolve the act of conducting conduct. By contributing ambiguous

iconography to the streetscape, like *Aqua Teen* campaign did, the disciplinary message

("Watch this show") was cloaked in content less obviously forceful and more (seemingly)

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[17] Given earlier discussions of the linkages between guerrilla marketing and public relations, it is also perhaps noteworthy that Ewen, when asked to define the former volunteered the following: "Guerrilla marketing is how a lot of people thought of marketing for, you know, over a hundred years… In the earlier part of the 1900s, when you had people like Jim Moran or Edward Bernays who were these kind of PR guys but they understood that using public spectacles that got people's attention – got media's attention – was a very valuable thing to do. The 'Torches of Liberty' parade that Bernays did or even something like the Ivory Soap competition that he ran – what it did was touch people in ways that *they didn't know they were being marketed to and they didn't feel it was a brand trying to sell you something*. It was: 'How do I work to get my brand into what can be the generalized style and culture of how people behave?" (personal communication, November 5, 2008, italics added).

disinterested; it raised a vague visual question rather than issue an exclamatory literal

declaration.

In pursuit of the youth demographic that the show targets, Interference hired

performance artists to place hundreds of flashing electronic light boards in major

American cities. Fans recognized the light boards' otherwise-undefined image to be that

of an *Aqua Teen* character (posed with middle-finger extended), but when officials in

Boston mistook the covert "street art" advertisement for potential terrorist explosives and

shuttered main thoroughfares for bomb squad investigation, the agency and network were

forced to pay $2 million in fines. (Adding insult – or ingenuity – to injury, the

performance artists arrested for the stunt held a "mock news conference" outside their

courtroom and opined, dadaistically, on the evolution of men's hairstyles. One can read

this, too, as an effort to avoid the appearance of being an advertising campaign at all

costs.) Video available from the website of the artist arrested shows his crew planting, in

the dead of night, the glowing Lite-Brite icons – not unlike something Banksy, the

esteemed street artist, might create – almost like Easter eggs hidden amongst the corners

of the Boston cityscape.[18] In the wake of the incident, a censuring *Boston Globe* editorial

observed,

> Such marketing is an odd descendent of guerrilla theater, the outrageous
> performances that were staged in the 1960s to freak out the Man. But the cartoon
> ad stunt did not shake the foundations of capitalist society. Instead, when ironic

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[18] The serendipitous *discovery* meant to be staged through the random location of the light boards'
placement is, again, part of the core of their cool sell (similar to, as noted earlier, Cole & Weber "planting"
their Raineer beer show on late-night cable). Yet the ambiguous image – enigmatically untagged as a TV
brand, withholding explanatory information, foisting the interpretation imperative on passersby and
therefore eliciting engagement – is equally essential to execution.

America collided with unironic America Wednesday, it resulted only in an industrial-scale waste of people's time. ("Out from the irony gap," 2007)

The *Globe* is correct in noting the *détournement* lineage here; the exercise of techniques such as these show that countercultural fonts, like street art and graffiti, can be conscripted by those who would author a marketing message. Whereas the guerrilla theater of the Situationist movement – the *Aqua Teen* stunt's aesthetic ancestry – might have attempted to shake the foundations of capitalism with a "perspective-jarring turnabout," *Aqua Teen* advertising actually fortifies those foundations. This is because ennui and dissatisfaction are, in fact, built into capitalism and it is the job of marketing to refresh or awaken that desire; advertising that is this unconventional in terms of context is one strategy to achieve that, just as culture jammers' strive to break that cycle with similar "subvertising" interventions.

Interference's furtive campaign on behalf of Le Tigre, an apparel company, offers another instructive example of this practice. Interference created non-destructive static cling stickers featuring the brand's tiger logo and disseminated them to staff that placed them on *other* advertisements and billboards in urban settings (not unlike the "billboard banditry" of culture jammers that was described earlier). A booklet handed out to field staff during the training offered tips for implementation like, "Are there people directly around me? If so, move" (Ives, 2004). Ewen explains how he tried to fulfill his marching orders from brand headquarters ("to stay as irreverent as possible"):

> Just by using these tigers, we could make everyone in every advertisement that we see, basically be wearing Le Tigre… We didn't have a lot of money really and we wanted to brand a lot of different stuff. We had an icon which I think worked in our favor in the sense that – and I think this is part of the guerrilla nature of it –

for people who are maybe going to get pissed off at it, they wouldn't really. It wasn't like we were putting the brand name on there – we were strictly using an icon. *You actually had to work to find out who did it.* But for the people who knew, it had a very tongue-in-cheek feel – you know, there's someone on the side of a movie poster and now suddenly they're wearing Le Tigre… We can put these things anywhere; we can do it overnight; no one needs to see it… We were sort of creating this *underground* opportunity for people to notice it. You know – we didn't champion it; we just wanted to put it out there and see what happened. (personal communication, November 5, 2008, italics added)

The cagey execution matches that which a graffiti writer must also abide by; the creation of a riddle, not unlike the *House* caduceus, "you actually had to work to find out" rather than an overt, hot sell, "official" appeal (explicitly "champion[ing] it" as a Super Bowl ad might) shows a preference for bottom-up mystery (obliging agency) rather than top-down proclamation (presuming passivity), a mindset befitting the strategic disciplinary locus of today's brand management. The fact that Ewen thought this coyly vague approach spoke multiple codes ("tongue-in-cheek" to those in-the-know, baffling to the unhip) equally bespeaks an intriguing logic about constructing public messages that reach all but communicate in different ways. One might term this a kind of pre-programmed polysemy that the brand – as an open and ambiguous rather than definitive and closed text – is increasingly accommodating (a point extrapolated further in coming chapters).

Moreover, Interference's use of existing commercial materials (the advertisements they defaced) to refashion a message of their own seems to follow Dick Hebdige's (1979) *bricolage* exemplar – albeit Interference's "theft and transformation… appropriating a range of commodities [i.e., existing ads] by placing them in symbolic environments which served to erase or subvert their original straight meanings" was done

not to advance the cause of resistant subculture (as Hebdige documents), but rather in the

service of further commodification (p. 104). Whereas the Billboard Liberation Front

sabotages outdoor advertising with an anti-corporate ethos, Interference was here enlisted

by a corporation to sabotage in much the same way. In the second half of the campaign,

Interference wielded a stencil of the tiger logo, but, rather than spray painting it directly

onto streets, the agency used a special industrial cleaning substance to spray *clean* the

grime and graffiti on previously defaced sidewalks and buildings around the stencil such

that only the *logo* remained – formed out of extant filth there. Here, I would argue, is an

almost perfect Gramscian metaphor of Madison Avenue's co-optation of the "street":

hegemonic forces scrub clean the resistant ideal of graffiti but retain and appropriate just

enough of it to extend a commercial message.

Some activists grouse about the intrusion of such "graffadi," as Anne Elizabeth

Moore (2007) calls it; in an article on the Le Tigre campaign, the head of a New York

City non-profit art group declared, "Our public sidewalks don't belong to Microsoft, or to

any other marketer" (Ives, 2004). This comment cuts to a core conundrum in the debate.

Outdoor advertising has escalated to such a degree that it feels like few public spaces are

not either filled in already or available to a willing bidder. Activists decry the visual

blight and the disappearance of out-of-home zones free from commercial appeal, but they

frequently fail to recognize that marketers *themselves* also bewail this predicament. This

is because advertisers produce what feels like a monolithic, even coordinated force – a

blinding, cacophonous assault from billboards and storefronts – but they actually arrive

there from different starting points and in aggressive competition with one another

(which is what drives conventional promotion to bigger, louder appeals, an arms-race of light and noise outdoing one another). And here is the self-perpetuating paradox of semiotic clutter: Advertisers abhor it as much as audiences and it is this same clutter, they rationalize, that compels them to creep outward into guerrilla marketing experimentation (thus, further escalating the clutter in unconventional spaces).

Outdoor spectacle is not, however, limited to static visuals like corporate graffiti. Street stunts showcase much of the same subversive simulation that guides the guerrilla advertising discussed to this point in the chapter, but adds an extra dimension of surprising live performance to the endeavor. Marketers here treat the banal procession of everyday life as a blank canvas upon which a commercial message can be sketched with hired bodies, sending actors onto stages we didn't know existed before to create, very much in the spirit of *détournement*, that "perspective-jarring turnabout in your everyday life" through unexpected spectacle. In January 2009, for example, commuters at London's Liverpool Street train station experienced precisely that sense of turnabout when T-Mobile organized hundreds of performers dressed as normal commuters to descend upon and break out in an elaborately coordinated – though seemingly spontaneous – dance medley. One of the more famous branded "flash mobs" to date, the stunt was captured and uploaded to YouTube and, as of August 2010, had garnered more than 21 million online views – making it a bona fide "viral" success at a moment when advertisers particularly venerate that as a metric for success.

In a sense, this kind of "sidewalk spectacle" updates the circus-like exhibitionism of 19th-century advertising when – in proto-guerrilla fashion – "the seller often quite

purposefully made it hard to tell the difference between the theater and product promotion" (Turow, 2006, p. 51). In more recent years, flash mobs have grown thanks to social networking contagion; in their organic or authentic form, they refer to a mass of otherwise anonymous strangers wandering toward a designated time in a public place to perform or engage in something quirky or rebellious yet fundamentally transient without warning or explanation (like pillow fights, naked bike rides or "silent" disco dances). A kind of performance art – and not without overtones of political demonstration, yet deliberately opaque in pinning down precisely what it is they're agitating for – they are meant to surprise passersby with their silly, absurdist character.[19]

Bill Wasik (2009), an editor at *Harper's*, has led the experimentation with flash mob assembly – "a self-conscious idea for a self-conscious culture," as he claims – and sees them as "an art project consisting of *pure scene* – meaning the scene would be the entire point of the work, and indeed would itself constitute the work" (pp. 19, 23, italics original). Improv Everywhere represents another key organization in the development of flash mobs, part of a larger "prankster movement," meant to "jolt strangers out of their routines, shake up the monotony of urban life and create mildly awkward moments that play well on YouTube" (Gamerman, 2008). Given those aims of disorientation and awakening – and, again, noting the ideological proximity to culture jamming – it should be of little surprise that marketers find them an appealing alternative to a traditional media environment cluttered with advertising competition.

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[19] More recently, thanks to riotous behavior by youth crowds in Philadelphia, "flash mob" has come to erroneously characterize a more peace-disturbing and occasionally violent non-marketing act.

In the case of T-Mobile's flash mob, Gareth Ellis, Saatchi & Saatchi's planner on the account, explains that the execution centered around an "organizing idea," "life is for sharing," that actually offers a slogan analogy to both a core theme explored throughout this project (brands abdicating what had been tighter control over their message to gain greater salience in consumers' lives by outsourcing the mechanisms of engagement), and also to the argument, invoked in the first chapter, that it is not broadcasting but the network that represents "the core organizing principle of this [new] communicative environment." Moreover, with the execution of this idea, the flash mob, in a sense, blurred that distinction between theater and product promotion just as P.T. Barnum's PR-techniques had done more than a century earlier. Over the course of an interview, Ellis touches upon the notion of the brand representing a "cultural resource" – an operable tool that suggests, "You May," to a target of governance resistance to typical discipline ("You Must"):

> Suddenly people were starting to share with strangers. Sharing has become open-ended and there were new types of sharing and flash mob is one manifestation of that… This gave us a role in the culture. And basically our role as a brand is to encourage people to come together, to get close together, to collaborate more and to be part of this 'we' movement – you know this movement from 'me' to 'we' seems to be a profound kind of cultural shift that was going on… [Later he adds:] Our view is that if you make an idea incredibly interesting and compelling, people will remember who came up with the idea. You don't need to rely upon obvious visual signifiers or cues to do that. So I think you treat people – you treat customers as being very, very sophisticated and I think they are very sophisticated now… I think you – not demean, but you actually do people a disservice if you make clumsy advertising because what you're saying is: we don't think you're sophisticated enough to get this. (personal communication, January 13, 2010)

For a telecommunications company, this "sharing" makes sense, of course, as an organizing idea, because "sharing" is the crux of their revenue model – the more

"sharing" that happens, the more profit that T-Mobile sees. Ellis acknowledges a debt of influence to Improv Everywhere, principally as a visual reference to explain the project idea in their pitch to T-Mobile.[20] Furthermore, he mentions that, in that pitch, they had to convince T-Mobile *not* to outfit all the participants in branded garb, in what would have been a "hot sell" strategy error, quite obviously impairing their ability to blend in and stage a surprising spectacle that invited attention rather than annoyed passersby. Here again, as I will continue to emphasize throughout, the brand that chooses guerrilla marketing as a strategy is choosing to resist coming straight out and "dominating" the demographic target with an unavoidable ad message and instead craft a way of governing through freedom: "letting" visitors to Liverpool Street station (or YouTube) "say yes" to viral collusion.

Agency, Authenticity, and Assimilation

"As analysts from Marx to the editors of *Wired* have noted, capitalism is dynamic stuff, an order of endless flux and change" (Frank, 1997, p. 19). Culture jamming seems to fantasize that through superficial subversion – not in a disparaging sense, but, rather, literally at the level of surface contestation – dissenters can lodge a contrarian

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[20] Other campaigns have toyed with this kind of performance art advertising. For example, to mark the 25th anniversary re-release of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album, Sony BMG choreographed paid performers to "randomly" break out in the distinctive music video dance in public venues like subway cars and city squares (with fingers-crossed for eventual YouTube viral success). A vice president for international marketing explained to *The New York Times* the logic: "It's really guerrilla marketing. You go in, do your thing and leave as fast as you can. There was never any intention to hand out leaflets and say 'Thriller is coming out again.' It's just bringing 'Thriller' back in the minds of people, but without the hard sell" (Carvajal, 2008). This is, once again, advertising without seeming like advertising – consumer governance without force – and the "do your thing and leave as fast as you can" stratagem is precisely the same conditions that a subversive street artist has to operate within.

counterpoint to consumer culture. Yet this chapter has documented case studies in the

sociology of recuperation, whereby oppositional ideologies – expressed not only through

but *as* aesthetic – can be emptied-out and altered to accommodate safe and commodified

ends. Such was the theoretical blueprint for Gramsci's notion of hegemony (as well as

Foucault's dynamics of power): a constant incitement and struggle between force and

resistance, co-optation and escape. Because oppositional gestures can be subsumed as

incorporated practices, authenticity – the expression of individuality amidst and against

the determinism of branded commodities – is constantly dying and being reborn again.

"Cool," much like capitalism, is an order of endless flux and change; "the act of

discovering [it] causes [it] to take flight," which makes it a fickle resource – one that

must be increasingly tracked with a panoptic insatiability (Gladwell, 1997). But for

culture jammers who view their practices through a true political lens, to homologize the

aesthetics of resistance (e.g., graffiti) is to "sell" them out.

This is an illuminating accusation, as street artists have grown disenchanted with

Madison Avenue trying to assimilate their language for corporate purposes. For example,

Playstation's 2006 nationwide street art advertising campaign tried to charm urban

hipsters by "duplicat[ing] genuinely underground art practices" in trying to sell a gaming

console. "This [was], in fact, the use of underpaid artists and urban neighborhoods for

the purpose of expanding product awareness and, hopefully profit – or in other words,

exploitation," Anne Elizabeth Moore (2007) critiques. "Graffiti may be staunchly anti-

establishment, but graffadi, at least, is now staunchly establishment" (Moore, 2007, pp.

138, 139).

Starry-eyed as this premise may be, I disagree with her essentialist approach to the politics of a medium; a medium *is* biased, as I have argued earlier, but not toward an inherent political allegiance. I would challenge the notion that culture jamming, indulging its "fantasy of transgression," ever occupies a space outside the logics and mechanisms of consumer society in trying to subvert it. Thinking of graffiti and "graffadi" in binary terms precludes a more realistic cyclical Gramscian dynamic – an "agonistic" interplay, as Foucault theorized – in other words, "corporate and anticorporate rhetorics do not *oppose* one another so much as feed off and respond to each other" (Harold, 2007, p. xxxii, italics original). This is because graffiti cannot pitch itself outside the framework of capitalism and consumer culture, much as it likes to romanticize this distance; in its "authentic" form it is itself still advertising, a kind of promotional vehicle for an alternative broadcasting network embodied in transgressive communication formats. Nonetheless, Moore (2007) reports that "genuine" street artists reacted harshly to the Sony campaign: "I hate seeing companies take a genuine grassroots cultural movement and turn it into another marketing vehicle for selling crap to young people," the curator of one popular street art blog declared (p. 143). Amusingly, some street artists actually "repurposed" the PSP graffiti (itself originally "a form of manufactured bricolage") by vandalizing the ads with culture jamming messages like, "Directed at your counter culture," and re-christening the company "Fony" a la *Adbusters*. According to Moore,

> To some outsiders it probably looked like the implosion of culture jamming, a strange, gentrified version of gang tag wars for control of neighborhood space… Not an hour after one Los Angeles ad had been thoroughly reworked by a street

artist, [he] told me, two artists – presumably hired by Sony – came by to clean the defacement and restore the company's pristine acts of brandalism. (p. 149)

This ideological back-and-forth, played out across the urban surface, succinctly captures the complex "strategy of reaction" between culture jamming and guerrilla marketing: the former ever-scavenging for new cultural forms and expressions to be fashioned out of remix; the latter, hot on the heels of the former, "selling out" the supposed integrity of the new medium forged. The notion that a resistant style could ever "hijack" (to borrow Wipperfurth's term) a cultural space that cannot be subsequently recuperated is, I believe, pure illusion – a chimera of romantic longing that has persisted throughout the history of the industrial production of pop culture. As Goldman and Papson (1996) conclude, "The circuit between commodity images and the appropriation of rebellious subcultural expressions of style has become nearly seamless" (p. 259). So seamless, in fact, when it comes to Sony, that it can be ready in less than an hour.

The dichotomization proposed by those who resist branding – corporate versus independent – does not, I think, accurately reflect the experience of participants in advanced Western economies, nor does it seem to give enough credit to the shifting sands that marketers and anti-marketers often find themselves on. A more fluid Gramscian model – a "compromise equilibrium" – seems to capture that complicated interplay of underground and mainstream, commerce and authenticity, culture jamming and guerrilla marketing. The methods of *détournement* cannot be assumed to have an intrinsic ideological allegiance even if they were originally developed for specific political ends.

Language may shape thought, but the language of culture jamming (i.e., street art, flash mobs) certainly does not preclude marketers from speaking it. And if that "language" is biased, it is toward satire and cynicism, not left- or right-wing thought. Flash mobs are a superb example of this – developed initially not to protest war, poverty, or civil rights, but (not unlike a *Seinfeld* episode perhaps) to be a kind of "show" about nothing, as Bill Wasik (2009) himself admits. Shepherd Fairey's legendary "Andre the Giant" street art campaign was a phenomenological experiment in much the same fashion – apolitical simulacra, masturbatory virality for its own sake. What could, therefore, flash mobs even "sell out"? What integrity is really being compromised when a brand uses DIY stickers like Fairey did? Gyro's Steven Grasse posits as much in discussing a campaign for Reactor blue jeans that pasted Reactor's own models in other advertisers' motifs (e.g., borrowing the font and Mountain West iconography of Marlboro just as *Adbusters* does in its own subvertisements):

> I think it was probably being too dumb to know that's illegal to do what we were doing. But it was also a way of getting a small brand that didn't have a chance in hell, sort of – trying to get them mentioned… I didn't think it was political – it was just really fucked up. And I think that – it's interesting, because the same tactics that anarchists use are the same tactics that I would use, but that's only because they're just tactics. It's just ways of getting the word out; they're not politicized. They're not saying something culturally if you put up a wall poster. It's just a form of communication. (personal communication, September 28, 2010)

Corporate street art and branded flash mobs are not, then, the de-politicization of street spectacle as Kalle Lasn might decry; they are simply part of a larger, ongoing process of resistance being generated and harvested – in this case, resistance found in the shape of the letters of cultural expression rather than what they necessarily spell out. The

guerrilla advertising highlighted in this chapter demonstrates how marketers strategize

the expression and experience of agency by working with the productivity of that

defiance. To exert power over the most intransigent of subjects (for, example, Truth's

"at-risk" teen or PBR's "anti-brand" communities) – jaded subjects who cling fiercely to

their own sense of autonomy, especially in the marketplace – the structure of power

cannot be seen exerting deliberate, palpable influence. It must, again, in Foucault's

(2000a) framing, "not act directly and immediately upon others" but rather "structure the

possible field of action" (pp. 340, 341). What was the operation and function of

"disinterestedness" in the last chapter is here an "anti-establishment" ethos.

One of the ways to accommodate a disposition of self-determination in generally

recalcitrant consumers is to situate the project of governance in contrast to more obvious

competing forms of it. Thus, the *Adbusters* ethos might be the most articulate and

marketing-centric opponent of contemporary brand management, but, as Klein (2000)

admits, enticed by its "great sales potential," what "began as a way to talk back to the ads

starts to feel more like evidence of our total colonization by them, and especially because

the ad industry is capable of cutting off the culture jammers at the pass" (pp. 297-298).

Having shown here how brands fend off those disaffected consumers bent on rebelliously

talking back *at* them, in the next two chapters, I'll begin to explore how – in that restless

pursuit of orchestrating a regime of engagement – brands are getting deeply consensual

consumers to talk *for* them with the rise of word-of-mouth and crowd-source advertising.

Buzz Agency and the Regime of Dialogue:

How Brands Conscript Conversation

> We now have a greater opportunity to move beyond transactions to relationships than ever before, but to do so requires that we strike the right balance between being in control and being in touch. Ironically, the more in control we are, the more out of touch we become. But the more that we're willing to let go, the more we're able to get in touch with consumers. – A.G. Lafley, CEO of Proctor & Gamble (Keller & Berry, 2006)

> It's not about, 'I wanna be like Mike' – Michael Jordan. It's about, '[I wanna be] like Steve' – and Steve's the kid around the corner. Because they have a hell of a lot more credibility. And you can get 10,000 Steve's for the price of one Mike… It's about getting someone who's authentic in my peer group that will endorse the product. And that's what 'real life product placement' was about – it was about getting *real* people to use *real* products in *real* ways. (J. Ressler, personal communication, November 7, 2008)

The advertising industry's abiding frustration with message placement in conventional communication channels has borne out renewed experimentation with perhaps the oldest medium of all: word-of-mouth. Because consumers have long been accustomed to casual conversation with friends and family as a trustworthy space, it represents fertile territory for advertisers who claim to be routinely rebuffed in their effort to break through other traditional media fronts. In the next two chapters, I'll demonstrate how marketers are adapting to and working through practices of the crowd – both online and off – in an attempt to embed structural objectives in flexible, autonomous, "grassroots" social flows: to "get in touch" (or exert more power) by "letting go" (or exercise less control), as Proctor & Gamble's CEO unknowingly echoes Michel

Foucault's (2000b) schema of governance above. Power is therefore here a project,

foremost, of *flexibility* – and it is through that flexibility that power – the mode in which

conduct is conducted – can appear both democratic and authentic (or "*real*," as Ressler

ironically puts it). Thus, these techniques known as buzz agency or consumer-generated

marketing, among other labels, are part of that reformulated thinking about how guerrilla

advertising relates to its audiences; the interactivity characteristic of these strategies is a

means of dynamic governance that reads and reacts to subjects more fluidly than before.

     To be certain, advertising has, for quite some time, venerated "authenticity" as an

ethical ideal; zealous pursuit of it discloses the true (and polar opposite) nature of the

industry's project: contrivance. It is because of this that guerrilla advertising, in

particular, self-effaces its own position of disciplinary authority and blends in with that

which is not typically contrived. Hence, Dave Balter, who founded what has become one

of the nation's largest word-of-mouth firms, BzzAgent, defines his marketing approach in

ways that bear a striking resemblance to Che Guevara's (2006) flexible, unbounded, and,

indeed, unpredictable warfare model whose parallels were outlined in the first chapter:

> [Word-of-mouth marketing] is not scheduled. It doesn't 'come on' at any exact
> time. You can't turn it on or turn it off. Sometimes it moves very fast.
> Sometimes it moves slowly. It's not contained in a single medium. It takes all
> kinds of forms… *Word of mouth is often all but invisible*. (Balter & Butman,
> 2005, pp. 161-162, italics added)

     Like guerrilla warfare's contrast with traditional warfare, "[Word-of-mouth]

differs from [traditional advertising] text precisely in its lack of boundaries: it exists in

the everyday real world" (Stern, 1994, p. 7). Needless to say, the fact that, in its ideal

form, word-of-mouth is supposed to be "all but invisible" would seem to create an

implementation conundrum when it comes to the formalities of and regulations attendant

to disclosure (a contradiction of theoretical aims and ethical practice that will be

discussed later in this chapter).

Throughout much of the decade, word-of-mouth had one of the fastest growth

rates of any marketing segment – from $300 million in spending in 2003 to $1.5 billion in

2008 and PQ Media, an econometrics firm, expects that figure to reach $3 billion by 2013

(McClellan, 2009). According to estimates from JWT Worldwide, more than 85% of the

top 1000 marketing firms now exercise some kind of word-of-mouth strategy to

"penetrate the no-marketing zones people have erected around their lives" (Verklin &

Kanner, 2007, p. 84). In an interview, one buzz marketing firm CEO spins this growth as

a "natural" progression, given social and technological trends:

> The majority of our conversations are sponsored in some way – they're a means
> to an end and so, you know, I think this is the natural evolution of marketing. If
> you're saying that media is moving to the people, well, if people are now creating
> all the media, then, you know, *the people become the platform*. (personal
> communication, December 17, 2009, italics added)

I begin this chapter by theorizing the role of "grassroots" agency in the

instrumentalization of power; proceed by analyzing how the brand-text is constructed

more flexibly, how marketers work to "shepherd" active, dialogical participation with it,

and how that engagement redefines their role; contextualize the gendered legacy of word-

of-mouth's use of social capital and its more recent deployment in music promotion via

fans' free labor; empirically detail one buzz firm's logic of practice; and conclude by

highlighting the paradoxical centerpiece of this marketing enterprise: an attempt to

engineer what is otherwise organic. Throughout, I will show how the designs of power

are hegemonically seeded and "vernacularized" through otherwise spontaneous, populist, social imprimatur.

Instrumentalizing Power through "Grassroots" Agency

Earlier chapters have shown the soft, subtle, and sophisticated rendering of Foucauldian power in the guerrilla marketer's arsenal through diverse means. For instance, invisible governance can take shape as a technique of self-effacement amidst disinterested spaces or as a program for obfuscating authority via dissident aesthetics. In this chapter, I will proceed to show how this same structure of power sets out to orchestrate a complex set of decentralized and, at times, unpredictable relations in the service of broad, albeit adaptive, objectives; for by instrumentalizing their autonomy, individual agents, communities, and networks can work simultaneously independently *and* within macro-level goals of governance. Thus, the key insight here hinges upon the mobilization and operationalization of that which might be termed "grassroots."

This form of populist authenticity is, admittedly, more often affiliated with politics than consumption; in that realm, it tends to designate an organic, spontaneous, and local social movement that is self-organizing and free from dominant interests. Yet it is precisely *because* of those characteristics that the grassroots ideal is fetishized – and, more importantly, strategized – *by* dominant interests: now, those selling goods as well as candidates. (This, moreover, represents most acutely in the context of this argument, the blurring of public relations' and advertising's mentalities and means.) In other words, the grassroots form functions as power because, like earlier articulations of resistance, it

seems to operate furthest from the appearance of it; that is, constitutionally, it seems to

"rise up" *from* the people rather than being imposed *upon* them. If Foucauldian brand

management says not "You Must!" but rather "You May!" then grassroots buzz (be it real

or planted) chimes in "We Have!" in manner that appears voluntary and guileless so as to

assure its power is legitimated (Arvidsson, 2005). It can thus manage sentiment and

action organically, without discipline or force (an example of which would be traditional

marketer contrivance). Freedom is, once more, the lynchpin of this mechanism of power,

as a neo-Foucauldian scholar theorizes:

> Certain ways of governing, which we will broadly define as *liberal* modes of
> government, are distinguished by trying to work through the freedom or capacities
> of the governed. Liberal ways of governing thus often conceive the freedom of
> the governed as a technical means of securing the ends of government. (Dean,
> 2010, p. 23, italics original)

The "use" of that which is grassroots is an excellent example of this. Grassroots

social flows and, more critically, their ethos of self-determination and credibility offer a

means through which one might "authenticate" the machinations of power – to embed the

intentions of governance in the sovereign agency of the governed. The grassroots

apparatus is, therefore, classically hegemonic: "naturalizing" the exigencies of rule

through the leadership of opinion-leaders proctoring and modeling the desired outcome

(Gramsci, 1971).

Those with designs on power, Nikolas Rose (1999) suggests, are today adapting

to these "self-organizing networks" characteristic of grassroots movements: "Politics is

seen as increasingly involving exchanges and relations amongst a range of public, private

and voluntary organizations, without clear sovereign authority" (p. 17). The lack of clear

sovereign authority over the brand rather than the polity – in other words, its increasing

flexibility as marketers exercise less control so as to exert more power – will be

demonstrated in the arena of guerrilla advertising featured in this chapter. Indeed, the

very label, "guerrilla" connotes a grassroots uprising against a power structure seeking to

impose itself undemocratically. Hence, as we shall also hear frequently throughout,

brand management increasingly hails a "democratization" of its relationship with

consumers, particularly as the network supersedes broadcasting as the organizing

principle of the media environment.

Networks are, by their very nature, a way of instrumentalizing grassroots agency.

But this entails two important conditions for the exercise of this power – themes initially

introduced in the first chapter. First, grassroots networks represent ways of working

through the social capital of individual agents. As Pierre Bourdieu (2001) notes, "The

social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of

connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital… possessed

by… each of those to whom he is connected" (p. 51). Thus, the more sociable an agent,

the more grassroots power they might mobilize on behalf of an interested party; various

buzz agency firms, recruiting prominent "influencers" who are active online and off, are

an example of this social "capitalization." The highly visible social productivity

emblematic of user-generated content has put "buzz" – a form of grassroots output – front

and center on agendas of governance, be they political or consumer.

And, yet, though word-of-mouth marketing utilizes the social capital of the

governed in staging a grassroots program (and meeting the needs of those governing), it

does not exchange it for economic capital in a narrow Bourdieuian sense (save for the free samples). This brings us to the second condition for the implementation of this power that was earlier previewed: the fact that this social capital is enlisted – even, as the chapter title suggests, conscripted – largely as "immaterial" or "free" labor (Lazzarato, 1996; Terranova, 2000). To be fair, the fact that individuals might volunteer their social capital as a resource for a brand's exercise of authenticity does not obviate the pleasure experienced in the process nor does it suggest that that authenticity is specious. Rather, immaterial labor here typically begets immaterial recompense: Independent agents who exploit (and are exploited for) their social and subcultural assets can often accrue *more* social and subcultural capital as product of that partnership and participation as opposed to purely financial reward. They are exhibiting, as I will propose in the concluding pages, a kind of "social capitalism" in taking advantage of the networked resources they already hold (as brands simultaneously take advantage of them).

Seeding buzz is, however, an uncertain exercise of power and an improvised terrain of governance. Grassroots flows – like those of the word-of-mouth agents in this chapter or the consumer-generated content in the next – cannot be "managed" in a literal, formal, Taylorist sense; they can only be negotiated. Foucault (1997c) tendered a useful analogy in his discussion of "pastoral" power:

> The shepherd's power is exercised not so much over a fixed territory as over a multitude in movement toward a goal… It is a matter of power that individualizes by granting, through an essential paradox, as much value to a single one of the sheep as to the entire flock. (p. 68)

Although Foucault does not use the term "grassroots" here, his phrase "a multitude in movement toward a goal" clearly evokes it. In other words, again, the subjects of a particular regime of governance – in the case, either consumers themselves or the buzz agent "model" consumers solicited to harness them – are individuals whose sovereign agency necessitates guidance rather than restraint; Foucault visualizes an "openness" of that movement conducted as opposed to a "fixedness" of ends that will be apparent in both the re-conceptualization of the brand broadly as well as in specific interview comments like those of Ressler later in this chapter. Moreover, Foucault's prescription for pastoral power equally manifests itself in that shift from "mass" media to "interactive" media that individualizes audiences rather than treating them as homogenous flocks (Spurgeon, 2008).

Once again, it should also be added, PR staked out much of this territory well in advance of guerrilla advertising tactics. Nearly a century before digital media augmented the potential for this grassroots deployment, Edward Bernays (1928) lent his own wisdom on the task in a fashion that would prove similar to Foucault's aforementioned logic of pastoral governance: "The people [have] gained the power that the king has lost… [However,] it has been found possible so to mold the minds of the masses that they will throw their newly gained strength in the desired direction" (p. 19). Bernays is speaking here of the genesis of public relations, which has long instrumentalized power through grassroots agency (and he, too, is foreshadowing the faux-populist tones that those like Ressler strike today). For as noted in the first chapter, word-of-mouth marketing

represents the guerrilla form most indebted to PR's legacy; the industry's imitation of

grassroots fervor even has its own neologism: astroturfing.

Astroturfing, as defined by *Campaign & Elections* magazine, refers to "the instant

manufacturing of public support for a point of view in which either uninformed activists

are recruited or means of deception are used to recruit them" (Stauber & Rampton, 1995,

p. 79). It is this $500-million-a-year PR subspecialty that represents, in Stuart Ewen's

(1996) words, "a calculated simulation of enthusiasm" through ostensibly "spontaneous"

phone calls, letters, and faxes; staged rallies; phony interest groups; and other trappings

of an authentic social movement (p. 29).

Gramsci might well recognize astroturfing's technique of strategizing consent

through such "corporate grassroots strategies… designed to mobilize the masses while

keeping effective control of actual political debates concentrated in the hands of a select

few" (Stauber & Rampton, 1995, p. 87). Though this diagnosis sounds politically

Machiavellian, the "corporate grassroots" *consumer* scheming analyzed here seems to

accede more genuine autonomy to conscripted intermediaries, if only because of the

desperate uncertainty that characterizes the marketer's project of governance. When it

comes to buzz marketing, I call this complex program of flexibility and authenticity that

endeavors to instrumentalize power through grassroots agency "the regime of dialogue."

The Regime of Dialogue

Branding's "democratization" of consumer dialogue is perhaps the central myth

animating the broader regime of engagement that informs the marketing management

thought I've been investigating. I use the term "myth" here not to cast aspersions as to its veracity – indeed, at first glance, there *does* seem to be a great deal more information flying back and forth between brand and consumer than in earlier decades, though it remains to be seen whether this merits a normative designation like "democratic" – but rather to understand its function in establishing a model for certain kinds of institutional behavior.

Moreover, I use "regime" here again deliberately, recalling Foucault's (2000c) definition of a "regime of practices" as a means of "[analyzing] programs of conduct that have both prescriptive effects regarding what is to be done… and codifying effects regarding what is to be known" (p. 225). "Dialogue," acting here as a kind of holy precept in marketing (based upon the practitioners I interviewed), represents both prescription – rules for interacting with the consumer subject – and knowledge – ways of knowing that consumer subject. It seems to be quickly attaining the status, much like the shifting penal logic that Foucault charts over time, of being "natural, self-evident, and indispensable" to advertising practice. And like penal logic at any given moment in history, "dialogue" is both *made acceptable* thanks to certain conditions and *makes acceptable* certain other conditions.

In this chapter, and in the chapter that follows, I will examine more closely the techniques that are attempting to actually build in "dialogical" channels with the consumer and structure, through strategic use of the crowd, a mode of brand evangelism that takes shape as buzz agency and consumer-generated advertising. Several sub-principles flow from foregrounding dialogue as the core organizational philosophy of

governance for an advertising business and herald a rethinking of the industry itself.

First, the brand-text has to be conceived as a more open, contingent, and flexible work-in-progress whose production through collaboration is distinctly non-standardized and post-Fordist in nature – a nod to truths constructed about fragmented markets and actions thereby necessitated toward customization. Second, marketers attempt to anticipate and pre-empt consumer roles and practices by facilitating a workable space for their agency – acknowledging unruly audience behaviors, abdicating former forms of message control, and staging the parameters for participation in the hopes of embedding the brand deeper in the affective experience. Lastly, because these new operational processes – and, more broadly, the current character of our media environment – generate vast sums of diffuse information and insight, the marketer is tasked, more than ever, with centralizing, collating, and monitoring it so as to best facilitate further crowd-source communication design. This speaks to a demand for and mechanism of surveillance that can be outsourced to subjects participating in that dialogue, extending the panoptic aspirations illustrated in the last chapter.

Responding to industry pressures that privilege engagement over impressions – a shift in governance from presuming passivity to activating and incorporating agency from the subject, a shift that clients seem to increasingly demand – the word-of-mouth marketer ballyhoos this participatory gesture as magnanimous (by giving the consumer a "voice") but the act of empowerment is equally a play for dependency, a way of burrowing ever deeper into our interpersonal affairs, a means of materializing the brand as social tissue. Word-of-mouth marketing does not *script* conversation – practitioners

are very righteous and adamant on this point – but it does *conscript* conversation in attempting to funnel interactions (and, if possible, relationships) through branded contexts. This reframes how the marketer addresses the consumer subject; it requires a more contingent, negotiated exchange.

Hence the rhapsodizing about "dialogue," which represents one of the most common thematic refrains throughout my interviews – perhaps second only to "engagement" as a buzzword. Even when it is not referenced by name, it seems to be at play in the logic that impels the work that gets done. Over the course of an interview, Dave Balter, founder and CEO of BzzAgent, a leading word-of-mouth firm which will be considered in detail later in the chapter, claims that this is part of a central and profound transformation in media as well as marketing – the product of that public sociability at the grassroots level:

> [It's this] idea of authenticity being the cornerstone of dialogue in many ways. We're at a moment in time where we've shifted from being spoken *at* by brands to have to communicate *with* consumers to ensure that brands have effective dialogues… Consumer-empowerment is becoming critical – social media has really come along and put a scale around that and allowed – given consumers an even broader voice than they had before… Communication between consumers about a brand isn't a fad and this is a monumental shift that I think they'll look back on in fifty years and say, 'You know, this is the time – can you believe before this everybody was sort of these drones watching what media producers wanted to put in front of folks? And they actually watched! That's crazy.'… The future's going to be about what people want to be doing and the ways that brands are going to get involved in that instead of the other way around. (personal communication, October 13, 2009).

Note Balter's Foucauldian "history of the present" (as captured from a futurist lens): It (self-servingly) frames an evolution from "drones" fed static, top-down content to self-determining individuals participating actively in dialogue. "Content," in this new

regime, is intrinsically unstable, and takes for granted a prescription for agency that, as

Alex Wipperfurth (2005) suggests, rewrites the "job description" from brand *manager* to

brand "*facilitator*" – a less deterministic, more agile and accommodating spin on

professional practice and, hence, consumer governance (p. 82, italics original).

Wipperfurth's "brand hijack" paradigm is predicated on the utility in that dialogue, and

by "allowing the consumers… to shape brand meaning and endorse the brand to others,"

corporations are abiding by another oft-cited, strategically "true" myth: "Marketing

managers aren't in change anymore. Consumers are" (p. 6). Here is that populist

embrace of grassroots flows that "dialogue" presupposes as a temperament of governance

and networked technology capacitates and pushes to the forefront of managerial options.

I heard a similar technologically deterministic exhortation in my discussion with

Britt Peterson, director of business development for Cole & Weber, who situates this

transition – this movement from "pitch" to "conversation" as a way to, as celebrated by

her agency, "let them say yes" – in the context of a shift from hot to cool media, a shift

from "aggressively shouting at everybody at the same tie" to now whispering

"occasionally to a few individuals" (A. M. Kaikati & J. G. Kaikati, 2004, p. 6):

> If you think about traditional broadcasting – that's what it is. It's a broadcast of a message out to millions of people. And, in that way, it does become a screaming match for who can say what the loudest; who can break through that number of commercials; whose message is more important than others; what's more unique about this than that. But it's very much from a marketer's perspective on: 'What is it that I want to tell you about this, that I think will motivate you?' A conversation is more about: 'Hey, I want to share this with you – what I think is interesting to you about me, but *I also want you to share what you find interesting about me to you*. Because I want to have that dialogue about how we can be more connected.'… You have to find ways to actually involve people in your brand or at least show empathy enough that it says, 'We get it. And we understand the

conversations you're having in the world and we want to be a part of them.'
(personal communication, January 28, 2010, italics added)

I italicize the passage above to ironically underscore the fact that – as democratic as "dialogue" may wish to sound – the dialogue encouraged must always tack back to the brand. It is not dialogue in the reciprocal, disinterested sense; a corporation has goods to sell and the subject, even when treated gingerly and deferentially by such dialogical programs, is still but a means to an end. As a conversational "partner," the brand that is eager to be "hijacked" remains deeply insecure and self-centered: "I'll tell you about me," as Peterson notes, assuming the voice of the brand above, "and then you can tell me about me."

A Work-in-Progress

That insecurity is perhaps not unrelated to the fact that the brands which undertake this kind of evangelism *are* fundamentally more uncertain about themselves than before, as ambiguity is written more and more into their narrative DNA. That is, as texts, they seem to be authored in a more flexible, conditional way than in earlier decades when marketing constructed product meaning more definitively; when the brand was a kind of stable idea-widget that came churning off the advertising assembly line. Because some advertisers now believe that certain consumers recoil at compulsory semantic authority – contrived proclamations about "utility," "symbolism," or "personification" imposed upon audiences with disciplinary force (Leiss et al., 2005, p. 22) – today, branding tries to accommodate a pre-programmed polysemy, to be more things to more

people by getting more people to interpret and promote meaning on the brand's behalf. This, of course, prescribes a pivotal role for free labor in the production process – namely, "the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (Lazzarato, 1996, p. 133).

Brands and products conceived so culturally conditional so as to rely upon evangelical structure for their promotion *need* the consumer-cum-producer to do the work – and not just the work of word-of-mouth or consumer-generated advocacy, but the work of actual self-definition. Buzz agents not only tell others about the brand, they also tell the brand about itself; participation in this system is, therefore, part annotation, part proselytization. In other words, the philosophy of the brand as open, contingent, and flexible allows for adaptively tailored messages rather than monolithically Taylorized messages. Such a move is emblematic of the post-Fordist shift in advanced capitalism where industrial output is streamlined to be agile and customized and, in turn, the advertising pitch can be manufactured, per Six Sigma production-line ideals, "just-in-time" as the conversation presents itself rather than stockpiled as media inventory – inventory that is, in any case, comparatively wasteful and inefficient with its one-size-fits-all message composition that might just get zapped by the remote control anyhow. The idealization of this flexibility was apparent in an interview with Ted Murphy, founder and CEO of Izea, a buzz marketing firm that specializes in social media:

> If you give ten different bloggers a laptop and ask them to talk about it, each one
> of them is going to come up with their own slant… Different people are going to
> value different things about your product and by giving them the freedom to
> create the ad unit instead of saying, 'Here's what we think is important, so here's
> what we want you to say,' you have the ability to create hundreds or thousands of

permutations of that ad message, each of those being relevant to the audience that's consuming the message. (personal communication, December 17, 2009).

In this regime, advertising is more conditional, as interlocutors support a fluid apparatus for promotion. This output, moreover, doubles as feedback as the flow of information about the brand through buzz agents to their social network can be re-cycled back into the production process, so as to develop new goods and respond to future demand (Moor, 2007, p. 38). Mark Deuze (2007a) borrowed "liquidity" from Zygmunt Bauman as the organizing metaphor for his book on media work – for it effectively captures the "increasingly fluid and unstable character of everyday lived experience" (p. xi). The image of waves lapping onshore is applicably analogous here: a variable, processual tide of content in and out of the consumer's life through flexible intermediaries like buzz agents.

A brand that presents itself as lithe in this way accommodates a host of unique, personalized messages; moreover, such interactivity and customized address is even situated so as to recuperate the "alienation" of "mass society" by making consumers "feel more connected to the products they buy because they receive [that] 'individualized' treatment, as Mark Andrejevic (2007) discerns. "Mass culture, like the mass market that produces it, has long been criticized for being top down, homogenous, and nonparticipatory… The promise of interactivity is to bring active, participatory forms of cultural creativity back to the people" (p. 25, 28). Thus, the iron cage of industrial rationalization – even for a flexible culture industry like advertising – can thus be more "humanized" when a friend delivers the jingle. As such, marketers often celebrate this

transition by casting about for straw men to knock flat. That move from monologue to dialogue, in terms of brand philosophy, is thus celebrated in rosy populist terms: two-way interactivity, whether online or off, is somehow "democracy" where one-way mass media messaging was purely "autocracy." A word-of-mouth message from a corporation can be just for me, because it comes from point of contact in my social network who can tailor it effectively, knowing the "audience" of one. Consumer discipline from that corporation thereby flows through a more casual, less confrontational (read: invisible) touch-point.

The Unmanageable Subject

Yet embracing this myth of dialogue – this facilitation of "social communication and cooperation" – is not just an egalitarian affirmation of agency, it is also a consignment to lost control: "Behind this 'surrender' is advertising and marketing professionals' increasingly widespread belief that the consumer masses have become unfortunately unmanageable" (Zwick, Bonsu, & Darmody, 2008, pp. 167, 174). Encouraging more "freedom" for their consumers is not, I suspect, a course of action that marketers would freely choose if they did not feel forced down it, given that sense of uncontrollable audiences and the desperation evinced in confronting that impression. I heard this refrain – resignation to the empowerment of those once mastered – expressed frequently throughout industry discourse; even if it did not always take shape as a lament, it must nonetheless be understood as that, because it is an acknowledgment that the Taylorist project of advertising – as the disciplining of want and need on command – has fizzled.

Buzz agency is, therefore, a way of harnessing what was once frustrating

disobedience to the "pre-digested meanings" meant to structure interpretation (i.e., the

brand-text as closed, permanent, and definitive) and the media institutions meant to

structure commercial exposure to those meanings (i.e., 30-spots we were supposed to sit

for, pop-ups we were not supposed to block) (Goldman & Papson, 1994, p. 26). It

constructs consumers as Foucault conceived of subjects: capable of acting and, indeed,

capable of conduct counter to the program of governance laid out (in this case exposure

and persuasion). By revising the institutional estimation of consumers in this way – less

as subjects to be engineered and more as agents to be collaborated with – power becomes

a matter of facilitation rather than management (to borrow Wipperfurth's terms); it hinges

upon flexibility, as I stated in the introduction. And that power, again recalling

Foucault's shepherd parable from earlier in the chapter, becomes "pastoral" in nature. In

an interview with Jonathan Ressler, the CEO who ran Big Fat Inc., a guerrilla buzz firm,

he states this emblematically. Though long, it is worth quoting him in full, for he

summarizes the recalibration of marketing thought and directly echoes the Foucauldian

(2000a) articulation of "structuring the possible field of action of others" that is the

essence of liberal governance (p. 341):

> Ten years ago, and even five years ago, and even today a lot of brands believe
> this: that they actually own the brand. And I don't believe that at all – I believe
> the consumer will drive the brand in the direction they want it to go. And today
> more than ever with the social media explosion, you can be out there thinking
> your brand is one thing and it's something completely different. People are
> talking about your brand – pick any brand and go out on YouTube and I guarantee
> there are hundreds if not thousands of videos about that brand where people are
> using the brands in their own way, where people are saying things about the brand
> that are not consistent with the brand message. So a company, a brand today has

to look at what's going on in this quote-unquote 'guerrilla' world and this social media and take cues from that. Before it was all about, 'Ok, we're going to develop our brand plan and here's our core brand values and everything we execute has to live within those core brand values' and today I think it's more about open-source marketing. The consumer owns the brand. You can start a message but you can't control the message anymore… The smarter brand people know right now that they don't control the brand anymore – they're, for lack of a better term, shepherds and they have to try to guide the flock. Or they're a cattle rancher: they have to try to get the cattle to go the way they want them to, but at the end of the day, if all the cattle go left, you gotta go left. You gotta go left! It's just the way it is because there are too many pieces of the puzzle that the consumer can control. The consumer doesn't control TV, but the consumer controls social media; we control the blogs; we control YouTube; and we control what the world knows about the brand. (personal communication, November 7, 2008)

If power relations are, as Foucault (1997b) suggests, "strategic games between liberties," then the image of a marketer "shepherding" a wily flock of consumers is both an applied example of those contemporary power relations and a redefinition of the advertising industry as blended with PR (which has long acknowledged that "you can't control the message anymore"). Yet there is also an intriguing contradiction of agency and passivity buried not only in this metaphorical conceptualization of the brand audience, but in the school of thought that informs this regime more broadly. Consumers are, at once, considered creative and autonomous yet still resemble a mass of sheep or cattle that has to be herded by marketers; the brand manager is sketched as deferentially bowing to the will of these now-emancipated *individuals* on one hand yet still imperiously regards them as an aggregated, tamable *collective* on the other. This is a productive tension that speaks to the Gramscian "compromise equilibrium" that is at the heart of the regime of dialogue, which represents the struggle over how advertisers accommodate yet marshal audiences who participate in today's social media ecology.

This contradiction delivers a key insight about the challenges that face brand management when it feigns, discursively, and takes small steps toward, in actuality, this abdicated control over corporate meaning: governance is now brokered through freedom shepherded as much as fenced-in subjugation.

Yet even that supervision must be assured without the visibility of authority's oversight, because subjects, as noted in chapter 1, are said to resist the weight of governance – even governance which suggests, ever so modestly, "You May" rather than sternly ordaining "You Must." This explains the allure of grassroots engagement – that "quote-unquote 'guerrilla' world" that Ressler likens to social media above – because it rises up organically through independent, disinterested social flows. At its "truest," there is no residue of the structure of power exerting its will and it represents an exemplar for an open-source, interconnected media environment. Perhaps more elemental than this, though, is the *ostensible* resignation of marketing management from the "top-down" to the bottom-up; a new way of thinking about governance when one can no longer manage subjects in traditional ways. Such governance "presupposes rather than annuls their capacity as agents; it acts upon, and through, an open set of practical and ethical possibilities" (Gordon, 1991, p. 5).

This is the advertising industry's way of making lemonade out of lemons: working with, rather than against, the exasperating trends of audience empowerment and consumer cynicism that I outlined in the opening chapter; putting their "freedom" to good use; reconciling that disobedience by channeling agency to productive ends as opposed to redoubling the typical disciplinary effort; harnessing flows rather than building fences.

Adam Arvidsson (2006) is again theoretically insightful here: "Brands work by *enabling* consumers, by empowering them in particular directions. This is different from Fordist advertising… which was primarily directed at imposing a particular structure of needs and tastes on consumers" (p. 8, italics original). It is, again, how markets "let" us say yes.

Dialogue is the cornerstone in this use of power; the method by which the intransigent independence of the consumer is recuperated into the regime of the now-pliant brand. As Arvidsson points out, this represents a profound reorganization of roles as compared to the structure of and assumptions about advertising and audiences characteristic to, say, a century ago when brands sought to be immalleable (their public trust and shareholder equity tied to a clear and durable symbolic image) and *consumers* were thought putty. Today's "have-it-your-way" brand ethos has to accommodate a doubly irreconcilable consumer. Yet while times have changed, the transformation is often miscast using "straw man" terms, as alluded to earlier. Take, for instance, Scott Goodson, head of Strawberry Frog, who, in an interview, (too) neatly summarizes the mythology of this shift:

> People are smart; people are truth-junkies. They're aware; they want to know the truth and today they have access to information that they didn't have five years ago… It used to be that you'd lob an idea out into the world and people would stand back with their mouths – jaws dropped – and say, 'Ooh!!' And that's just not the way anymore – now, it's about a combined brand-building, you know, where the consumer is building the brand together with the brand owner. (personal communication, January 11, 2010)

Goodson greatly overstates the heyday of advertiser power.[21] Today's fondness

of and nostalgia for the "golden days" of mass media when an advertiser could

(supposedly) elicit hushed reverence for her work clearly over-hypes the docility of early

audiences; as noted in chapter 1, Liz McFall (2004) observes that, as far back as the

1920s, marketers were fretting about the supposed cynicism of their consumer targets.

Yet, following Foucault, constructing history from the present in this way – whereby

audiences are seen as evolving from tame to resistant lends itself to a particular set of

practices; that is, by defining the consumer in such-and-such a manner, it "inevitably"

defines the course of action (specifically in Goodson's favor – i.e., methods – I might

add). Thus, unsubstantiated mythology aside, the way in which the brand manager's role

is constructed *has*, in fact, changed significantly as in-house exactitude gives way to an

embrace of outsourcing and the reliance on free labor for authenticity and adaptability:

> In the traditional ad world, the agency or brand creates a message and then they
> pay people to reproduce that message via commercial or via display ad or
> whatever it may be. In our world [of word-of-mouth marketing], you create kind
> of an introduction and the individuals are creating the message on your behalf.
> And so you have to kind of be willing to put your product in the hands of other
> people and put your marketing campaign in the hands of other people and
> recognize that those people will either do a good job or a better job than you can
> do on your own. (T. Murphy, personal communication, personal communication,
> December 17, 2009)

Such is the creed that the buzz agency "facilitator" repeats to himself as the brand

he manages is set "free," let loose in the rough-and-tumble arena of word-of-mouth and

consumer-generated advertising. (And, as in advertainment, such was the same creed

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[21] Though he is hardly alone in exaggerating this – recall how even the *Journal of Advertising* once puffed, "In advertising's prime, producers held virtually all of the power in the marketplace" (Rust & Oliver, 1994, p. 74).

that, for example, BMW clung to when it saw a character "bleed to death" in one of its cars in *The Hire*.) Faith is placed in the evangelist intermediary, because, for those who turn to this marketing practice, faith is less certain in traditional media formats and in the docility of subjects to be managed through them. The myth spun about the "lost control" of brand meaning legitimates, rationalizes, and naturalizes the presumed "inevitability" of choosing to outlay the advertising budget in this direction; the client is supposed to theoretically recognize, as Dave Balter tells me, "'Ok, I no longer have any control – what do I do to be a part of this dialogue that's happening with or without me?'" (personal communication, October 13, 2009).

"Lost control" equally ratifies the marketing management philosophy that treats the brand as an unfinished text: inviting, obliging, and, indeed, necessitating the engagement and unique tailoring provided by the evangelist and their conversation partner (i.e., the free labor). Marketers here have, admittedly, less control – in the narrow, traditional, Fordist sense – over the brand's reputation in such a disorderly, improvisational space, but can hope that they've achieved broader reach into what had been commercially dormant zones (and therefore avoid the emblematic ad-zap trap of TiVo). This strategy co-opts the labor of networked communication already extant in everyday social patterns as a means of orchestrating brand equity, in part because the "grassroots" nature of those social patterns is a key way of embedding the objectives of governance in the otherwise-autonomous agency of the governed. Put differently, if, as Foucault suggests, "the aim of the modern art of government [is] to develop those elements of individual lives in such a way that their development also fosters the strength

of the state," then the aim of the modern art of branding is to develop those elements of individual consumers' lives in such a way that their development also fosters the strength of the brand (Gordon, 1991, p. 10).

In this chapter and the next, I illustrate how brand management tries to execute the regime of engagement by presupposing and, hence, programming agency into word-of-mouth and consumer-generated advertising exercises. The cool sell ideal identified in my investigation to this point – to market without selling, to show without telling – still animates these outsourced approaches just as it did for examples of advertainment and street spectacle and is clearly apparent in the paradoxical quote from A.G. Lafley that opened this chapter: "the more that we're willing to let go, the more we're able to get in touch with consumers." Moreover, this paradox cuts to the heart of Foucault's fulcrum of power: conducting subjects not directly but through tactics, arrangements, and, here, intermediaries. The challenge is, quite simply, to conscript conversation without scripting it; to precipitate what comes naturally without forcing it; to govern without seeming like governance. And the problem, as *Advertising Age* critic Bob Garfield (2009) readily points out, is that "to actually, intentionally, simulate WOM" – one of the fastest growing sub-fields of advertising, nonetheless – "historically, has been about like trying to control the weather" (p. 75).

The (Gendered) Roots of Word-of-Mouth

Although it was not until 2004 that industry growth finally necessitated the formation of a Word-of-Mouth Marketing Association, buzz strategy traces a much

longer history, as I demonstrated in the first chapter. For nearly a century now, public

relations has tinkered with deliberately gaming the diffusion of influence through "Four-

Minute Men" community leaders and Edward Bernays' physician shills for Beech Nut

Bacon. Andrew Kaikati and Jack Kaikati (2004) trace the use of brand evangelists as far

back as the 1920s when Macy's reportedly cleared out a backlogged inventory of white

gloves by hiring elegant women to don them on subway trains so as to stir up

conversation. And Alissa Quart (2003) reports the use of "teen peer-to-peer marketing"

on behalf of Frank Sinatra in the 1930s, Hires Root Beer in the 1950s, and Converse

sneakers in the 1980s, when the shoe company refined a technique known as "'seeding,'

which involves giving away merchandise to a high school's most popular cliques in the

hopes that the brand will spread like wildfire among the in-crowd's teen fashion

followers" (p. 38). By mid-century, landmark research on this "two-step flow" model by

Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld (2006) had pioneered the notion that mass media

persuasion was tempered by interpersonal networks. This placed opinion leaders in the

pole position for the diffusion of trends, the grassroots uptake of social contagion, and the

influence of patterns within a network.

Yet Katz and Lazarsfeld were, as Susan Douglas (2006) points out, universalizing

their findings as representative of the entire population based on a specific study of

women's networks in the Midwest. It is a curious effacement, given that gender relations

prior to the women's rights movement of the 1960s would otherwise likely have

registered *men* as the opinion leader demographic – as demonstrated by the

aforementioned PR examples. That being said, talk about consumption has

stereotypically been associated with women to the point that there is a documented history of companies like Avon and Tupperware that utilized women's personal relationships and social capital in order to push products (Clarke, 1999; Manko, 1997). For these firms, the all-female sales force was a way of distinguishing their practice from sleazy door-to-door salesman – a way of insinuating advertising into grassroots social flows rather than having it be seen as an external imposition: "We train our girls… to be genteel, not too aggressive," one Tupperware representative claimed, presaging the "light touch" through which guerrilla marketing approaches its subjects (Clarke, 1997, p. 92). Avon similarly sought out interpersonal "confidants" rather than social itinerants whose reputation and network of contacts could be harnessed to commercial ends (Manko, 1997, p. 9). The Second World War marked a gendered dividing line for such peer-to-peer strategy: before it, 90% of direct salespeople were men who used door-to-door as the standard method; afterwards, 80% were women with the "party plan" as the standard method (Manko, 1997, p. 25).

Today, the framework of these traditions has been drawn into new forms of guerrilla marketing like word-of-mouth. Moreover, the same structure of "authenticating" commercial contrivance through organic and credible social patterns persists in the rhetoric hyping these methods. At a time when consumer cynicism is thought to be rampant and audiences are predisposed more than ever to zap out advertiser overtures, word-of-mouth buzz – predicated on interpersonal trust and social credibility – is thus similarly touted as an effective way of sneaking under the "advertising schema" radar that filters out commercial appeals (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1995). Because

advertising is fundamentally perceived as self-serving – and this, again, heightens the

importance of a brand striving to produce seemingly "disinterested" content, now

formulated as a conversation – peer recommendations have long represented a reliable,

pliable vehicle for marketer address. It is this "trust and credibility" – an apparent

independence from a commercial entity relative to traditional advertising, an autonomy

from the operation of power – that is essential to how word-of-mouth works and it is

what the buzz agency approach seeks to co-opt (Thomas, 2004, p. 65). One interviewee

who runs a word-of-mouth firm phrased it thus as a contrast of new and old:

> A broadcast commercial innately is something that you put your defensive guard
> up against, because you know you're being sold something directly and it's not
> necessarily pure sentiment. It's a paid endorsement… Broadcast is purely push,
> right?... You're not typically going to solicit a commercial. Word-of-mouth
> happens pretty naturally in your day-to-day life… [You're] just not being guarded
> because you know you're preparing yourself or bracing yourself for some pushed
> medium. You're pulling – you know, you might – it's like a word-of-mouth
> endorsement comes in through something that's already happening naturally in
> your day-to-day. (T. Steinman, personal communication, December 4, 2009).

Yet this again speaks to that continuing conundrum of conceptualizing

"authenticity" that is emblematic of word-of-mouth strategy: the engineering of that

which is otherwise organic. Because we do not (generally speaking) filter out friends,

this kind of guerrilla marketing is a way of parasitically harnessing that trust placed in

peer influences – peers who, in the Web 2.0 era, are thought to be more productive and

interactive than ever before – and flexibly accommodating decentralized interpersonal

commercial appeal both within and external to that new media environment.

Astroturfing Subcultural Capital, Exercising Free Labor

Buzz implementation is, in a sense, the obverse of "cool hunting" and, to be certain, anthropological surveillance and grassroots seeding often work hand-in-hand – a tidal pattern, as analogized earlier, of cultural trends being absorbed through opinion leader "insider informants" and commercial products then being tested out via those same vanguard market communities. What struck me in my in-depth interviews with leading practitioners of word-of-mouth marketing was the prevalence of music promotion as an apparent contemporary precursor to these tactics. For example, Sam Ewen, head of Interference and author of the *Aqua Teen* guerrilla stunt discussed in the last chapter, credits his background in music marketing with teaching him "how buzz happens and how word-of-mouth… can cause big change" (Ebenkamp, 2007). Having produced guerrilla work for various rock acts, Philadelphia's Gyro advertising agency also professes on its website that, "We believe brands can learn a lot from bands. That's because bands have been doing the whole viral thing forever."

This proposition hinges on two critical factors, both elemental to the idea of the cool sell and dependent on word-of-mouth rather than mass media dissemination: first, that a scarcity of information optimizes intrigue and hence engagement (i.e., the cool sell) and, second, that the diffusion of that information is funneled more effectively through that hierarchy of media credibility that was introduced in the last chapter. It moreover points once more toward the applicability of Sarah Thornton's (1996) notion of "subcultural capital."

The romantic mythologizing of an esoteric and exclusive "underground" – and, conversely, the scarlet letter that comes with being labeled a "sell-out" – is perhaps more

acute in music than in any other consumer culture arena and gives rise to the sort of

snotty youth "hipster" elitism echoed here and ably deconstructed in Thornton's work:

"Club undergrounds see themselves as renegade cultures opposed to, and continually in

flight from, the colonizing, co-opting media. To be 'hip' is to be privy to insider

knowledges that are threatened by… general distribution and easy access" (Thornton,

1996, p. 6). Thus, as Gyro head Steven Grasse contrasts in an interview, compared to

bands, "Brands you don't tend to have that loyalty because it's so much more rational

than emotional. But bands also keep things mysterious where they control distribution in

terms of not everybody can go to the show" (personal communication, September 28,

2009).

This presents the music marketer with a puzzling conundrum given that

popularity and purity are, in typical subculture framing, not only antithetical but,

moreover, inversely correlated with each other: the "bigger" the act, the less "ownership"

a fan feels of it.[22] Because pop music culture traffics so heavily in identity (and, in

particular, youth identity) as part of its "product," it therefore lends itself especially

keenly to word-of-mouth – "the consummate medium of the underground," as Thornton

terms it – as a solution to this paradox (p. 138). This is, then, the music industry's mode

of "astroturfing" promotion: simulating the bottom-up from the top-down through street

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[22] A member of the rock-rap group, Insane Clown Posse, hypes their own music in this regard: "Everybody that likes our music feels a super-connection to it… They feel so connected to it because it's exclusively theirs. See, when something's on the radio, it's for everybody. It's *everybody's* song: Like [someone who says], 'This is my song' [of a radio hit] – [I'd reply] 'That ain't your song, it's everybody's song.' But, to listen to ICP, you feel like you're the only one that knows about it" (Goodman, 2001). Again, gross ratings points seem to be inversely proportional to message integrity – this is what Walter Benjamin (2001) might have called the "aura" of the underground.

teams and the sort of "graffadi" and wild postings considered in the preceding chapter;

obfuscating the corporate record label source of hype through more authentic, "real-life"

intermediaries that "'communicate sincerity' better, faster and cheaper" than patently

commercial contexts like billboards and TV spots (Moore, 2007, p. 42). In short, it

embeds the objectives of an external commercial structure into the "authentic" flows

native to a particular set of agents or community. Subcultural capital oriented to pop

music trickles "up" through such grassroots networks thus:

> The bragging rights around identifying music as, you know, being an early
> adopter of music, a certain artist or a certain genre – and then having the bragging
> rights of being the first person to tell your friends about this discovery – with
> music, it's almost more powerful than any other form of media… [It's that kid
> who] wants to be the first person to tell everybody that they're his favorite band
> or her favorite band and, 'You gotta check them out,' because in a year when
> they're selling out stadiums around the world, they want to have bragging rights
> to say, 'I told you so' and 'I was the first one to know about them.' (T. Steinman,
> personal communication, December 4, 2009)

Todd Steinman, COO of M80, mentions "discovery" here – again a critical

component of the Foucauldian marketing scheme that I will continue to emphasize

throughout, because discovery is the means by which the subject is "shepherded" (that is,

discovery rewards their agency). His firm, one of the earliest to specialize in word-of-

mouth and social media marketing, got its start, like others, in the music promotion

business in the 1990s, recruiting "proactive fans" for M80 clients like Pearl Jam, N'Sync,

and Marilyn Manson – trading promotional gear for their buzz agency (Gardyn, 2009).

Fan communities have long been shown to exhibit productive tendencies, a phenomenon

ably demonstrated in the cultural studies literature (Brooker & Jermyn, 2003; Lewis,

1992). Word-of-mouth marketing institutions take their cues from these hives of

grassroots activity, channeling and capitalizing on the contributions from these social

networks. This "free labor" is, at once, gratuitous and also autonomous, both of which

help make it a resource for a structure of governance in need of authenticity and thereby

legitimation; these "active audiences" deploy their social and cultural capital on behalf of

bands of adoration. Steinman further explains how this value co-creation is meant and

made to feel effortless to those whose conversation is conscripted, as "empowerment"

begins to function as "employment" without the remuneration:

> These people [were] publishing about Neil Young or the Red Hot Chili Peppers or
> Green Day all day long. And so we aggregated them into some existing,
> rudimentary platforms at the time and put them to work basically… These were
> people who were willing to work for free, because they would do anything for
> these artists – the passion was behind it. And you can't buy that level of
> enthusiasm so it really became a matter of using… It was, 'What can I do with
> this crowd that I've sourced?'… *It was really a matter of what to do with them.*
> (personal communication, December 4, 2009, italics added)

Nate Hahn, founder and president of the buzz firm Street Virus, also got his start

in music promotion and phrases this logic similarly:

> [It] really sort of started with the idea of empowering fans. So, let's say in the
> mid-90s, all these bands sort of got together and said, 'We have these legions of
> fans. *Let's sort of empower them to do our marketing*' – whether it be putting up
> posters or going online and telling their friends or sharing their music. That's sort
> of the synthesis of where we started: how do we empower people and engage
> people on a very grassroots level?... We call that a sort of grassroots upswell.
> And that goes back to the music in that people were so passionate about these
> bands that they would, for free, go put up posters or tell their friends or start
> MySpace pages dedicated to the band or start fan pages or e-mail everyone they
> know. And we try to take that approach to those brands that don't have that kind
> of fanaticism. (personal communication, October 6, 2009, italics added)

Empowerment is, here, deployed in a "free labor" sense: channeling idle chatter

about a band to function as productive chatter *on behalf* of a band (and soon enough,

buzz marketers schemed, any brand). Moreover, Hahn emphasizes the "grassroots" ideal

here which brings us back to earlier rumination on this as the means by which

independent agents, communities, and networks can be mobilized and orchestrated for

their autonomy while assisting in a project of power. In other words, if cultural

phenomena emerge with the righteous stamp of "grassroots" appeal, they are presumed to

be authentic, democratic, and artless; to achieve that populist status for a brand or product

is the utopian goal of many a guerrilla marketer; it is a mode of governing through the

ostensible consent of a social movement. And yet, at the same time, "grassroots" is a

status not easily manufactured by cultural industries, the mass media or institutions of

advertising; this grassroots fetish whereby non-marketers do the work of marketing

underpins Wipperfurth's "brand hijack" model, Cole & Weber's endeavor to "let them

say yes," and, more broadly, the regime of engagement that I am positing throughout.

       "Everybody's trying to… get the consumer on their side. Whereas before it was

like… 'We're going to talk and you're going to listen'… The power has gone back to the

people. The power's gone back to the consumer," Jonathan Ressler opines,

emblematically summing up the philosophical shift in brand management from authority

to partnership (for the marketer), from compulsion to discovery (the marketing process),

and from passivity to agency (for the consumer) (personal communication, November 7,

2008).[23] Such egalitarian rhetoric is admittedly convenient – if the people are

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[23] Tellingly, as I have tried to highlight throughout, this is an old refrain from the PR world – as far back as
the 1920s, Edward Bernays was espousing that technological and institutional forces "have taken the power
away from kings and given it to the people" and Ivy Lee similarly hailed, "The people now rule. We have
substituted for the divine right of kings, the divine right of the multitude" (Ewen, 1996, pp. 34, 75). Again,

empowered, ad dollars should flow to a buzz marketer like Ressler who plugs his ability to mobilize them – but even so the mythology does help explain that documented growth in the word-of-mouth sector in the past decade.

What also needs to be contextualized more explicitly in that timeframe is the influential role of the networked society in accommodating buzz ambition (Castells, 2000). It is hard to imagine that the industry would have seen such growth if not for the popularization of internet use; this rendered palpable (and noisily so) what had been the "invisible networks" that structure our lives and the communication that flows through them and it, moreover, introduced a scalable platform for harnessing that social energy (Rosen, 2000, p. 15). In other words, connectivity in the online realm – and the ensuing social productivity of user-generated content, whether that be chat-rooms, ratings sites, video uploading, blogs, and the like – apparently spurred interest in utilizing social productivity *offline* as well (E. Keller, personal communication, January 22, 2010). Interactive media and the contemporary culture of everyday opinion sharing "in public" through Amazon and iTunes reviews, Facebook and Twitter status updates and YouTube commentary piqued marketer interest; to rephrase Todd Steinman, "It was really a matter of what to do with [it]." Dialogue that had been diaphanous was now "archiveable" and, indeed, almost impossible to avoid; peer-to-peer influence that had been ephemeral and estimated was now more demonstrable and quantifiable.

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then as now, the prescription that "the people now rule" portends certain practices over others – namely, those that can harness those "people" now "ruling."

How Buzz Agency "Works"

As one of the largest and perhaps most well-known word-of-mouth advertising companies, BzzAgent represents a useful point of entry to briefly detail, empirically, the industrial processes under consideration here. (I enclose "works" in quotations above so as to emphasize not only the functionality in terms of mechanics, but equally to, again, underscore how conversational labor is pressed in to service and contributes, generally gratuitously, to the creation of brand value.) With 620,000 volunteers in its stable as of October 2009, BzzAgent has assembled a network of individuals who, simply put, try out free products, talk them up with friends and report back to the company on that dialogue (D. Balter, personal communication, October 13, 2009). A campaign that utilizes 1,000 agents and runs for 12 weeks was said to cost a corporate client about $100,000 and delivered, on average, five to seven "interactions" per agent about the service or product (Balter & Butman, 2005, p. 69; Bernard, 2005). Like others (Moore, 2007; Wasik, 2009), I signed up for BzzAgent hoping to observe how the marketing network operates and manages intelligence this flexible, interactive form of decentralized commercial engagement. Although I was, regrettably, not invited to participate in any "full immersion" campaigns – those in which the BzzAgent receives a free sample of the product being buzzed about – several salient themes emerged in exploring the company's website, materials and overarching ideology.

The first major theme is that, to engineer that regime of dialogue, all activity points toward – and subsequently rewards – the giveaway of personal information. This even explained why, to my surprise, I never got offered a chance to buzz about free

goods: I had not given enough of my (consumer) self. In an interview with Balter, the company CEO, in which I disclosed my role as an underutilized participant-observer in his network, he explained that, with only a dozen or so campaigns going on at any one time, my status as a BzzAgent novice put me at the back of the line for campaign invitations, behind more "senior" BzzAgents: "The more you fill out profiles, the more you do that type of stuff, the more you get opportunities for campaigns" (personal communication, October 13, 2009).

Indeed, scarce as the actual samples may have been during my six months poking around as an "agent," there was no shortage of opportunities to vocalize consumer preferences. From the very start, I was subjected to an endless battery of surveys, both on BzzAgent's homepage and via e-mail from MyPoints.com, an affiliated shopping rewards program – poked and prodded on my habits, interests and expertise. My "status level," which would have earned me benefits like campaign invitations, could have been improved by even more active participation therein – that is, by contributing to the Frogpond (a user-generated index of "hot" websites) or the BzzScape (an assortment of social media "brand communities") portions of the BzzAgent digital toolset. If I had been invited to join a campaign for, say, Mahatma jasmine and basmati rice, Ultra Palmolive dishwashing detergent, or Neutrogena Clinical Anti-Aging Skin Care rejuvenator (to name a few of the participating clients who passed on my assistance during my tenure), the site laid out careful recommendations for crafting the perfect BzzReport about my word-of-mouth interactions as almost a journalism textbook might instruct:

Describe exactly what happened so we can imagine we were right there. To make your report shine, include some direct quotes. Remember when you had to answer the '5 W's Questions' in grade school? Who, What, Where, When and Why? If your report answers all those questions, there's a great chance we'll love it and show our appreciation accordingly.

Reflecting on the utility of the panoptic discipline as a mechanism of management, Foucault (1977) writes, "[It is a] system of power… [that] firstly, [tries] to obtain the exercise of power at the lowest possible cost" (p. 218). Such an economic (in the sense of efficient) approach to governance is reflected concretely here in BzzAgent's outsourced-observational scrutiny. The buzz firm's exhaustive profiling before, after, and during campaigns is a means of achieving the anthropological surveillance ideal that brands are increasingly privileging (as was discussed in the last chapter) and, by getting agents reporting in minute detail, the agency can "imagine [it] was right there," without really having to be *right there*.

"Let us know about your experiences – good and bad – so we can keep BzzAgent fresh and exciting," the company cheerfully beseeches. "After all, you're our eyes and ears." It is, in effect, subcontracting cool hunt reportage to the insiders under study, which is advantageous because, as any ethnographer knows, producing knowledge from fieldwork can be a slow, painstaking endeavor for one small slice of community, much less 620,000 heterogeneous agents. But with those hundreds of thousands of agents mobilized to be independently monitoring on behalf of the company, the scenario begins to resemble that "faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert, a long, hierarchized network" (Foucault, 1977, p. 214).

One of the ways that BzzAgent legitimizes this workload is by hewing to the myth of brand democratization: "Know anyone who'd have fun as a BzzAgent, too? Refer your friends and enjoy spreading word of mouth and influencing your favorite brands together!" Beneath the chipper tone runs a consoling affirmation about the consumer's power in this marketplace; an echo of Ressler's ("the power has gone back to the people") emancipation spin. We are not being used by corporations, the meta-message runs; we are "influencing" *them* and thereby making them better for us. This turning over of personal information – sold under the guise of obedient and responsive brands just "eager for your opinion," as BzzAgent claims, accompanied by tangible benefit sweeteners, and shined up rhetorically as a democratic gesture of inclusion from the corporation – undergirds the "customer relationship management" that advertisers increasingly strive to perfect (Turow, 2006). This contributes to a curious environment that Anne Moore (2007) skewers well: "It's like a work-for-hire contract, except no one is hired but everyone works anyway… a strange social space where every communication reflects a sales pitch and is preowned; where labor is called 'sharing' and remuneration is not an option" (pp. 186, 187). It is framed as opportunistic for the buzz agent, without actually being rewarding in a conventional financial sense.

Every conversation, under these circumstances, may indeed reflect a sales pitch, but, as BzzAgent and other word-of-mouth marketers go to great lengths to emphasize, the conversation is not technically *scripted* as a sales pitch. Corporate messages are, insinuated "authentically" into everyday discourse, not written out expressly. On its website, for example, BzzAgent claims, "We're not into writing dialogue. So be yourself

– share the positive and the negative. While we won't provide you with a script, we will provide you with info on the product and some suggestions and tips." This "BzzGuide" serves as a printed "educational" booklet – here, again, note the recourse to casting promotion disinterestedly as "education" rather than "selling" – with "suggestions on who, when and how to spread the word" in "bullet point format to help you spread the Bzz quickly and effectively" and featuring "anecdotes and behind the scenes information on what makes the product worth talking about" as well as "contexts and situations when Bzz might be appropriate."

        There is, apparently, a fine line between "writing dialogue" and providing "bullet point format" talking points and I do not mean to sketch this contrast wholly sardonically; I do take Balter and his company (as well as many others in the word-of-mouth industry) at their word when they emphasize that they want buzz to be authentic and appropriate to the social situation – neither forced nor predetermined. Marketers' stories that appear in traditional advertising are, as Balter acknowledges, always "sparkly perfect tales" which would fail the guerrilla test of blending in with the surroundings (in this case, a person's natural conversational cadence) and ring hollow to listeners anyhow (Balter & Butman, 2005, p. 113). But product stories woven into the social fabric by what would appear to be an objective, trustworthy interlocutor (the BzzAgent) stand a better chance of keeping an audience's attention because the contrivance is contextually naturalized (again, not unlike the artists of chapter 2); the act of discipline – getting you to buy – is here coercion "casualized," contrivance "vernacularized."

Making the Invisible Transparent

The complexities of word-of-mouth marketing stimulating what is typically spontaneous and scheming what is otherwise organic alights directly upon the dilemma of disclosure. "Undercover" word-of-mouth marketing – also called "shill" or "stealth," whereby buzz interactions are *not* revealed as the product of agency affiliation – has cropped up intermittently throughout the decade to the ethical chagrin of WOMMA membership (and their charter which expressly forbids it). One of the more notorious instances of this "black ops" approach to buzz marketing was a $5 million campaign in 2002 in which Interference hired 60 actors to pose as tourists in New York and Seattle, soliciting other tourists to snap their photo using a new camera-phone product from Ericsson. They also planted 60 attractive actresses as bar "leaners" to conspicuously toy with their phones, the intent being that "onlookers think they've *stumbled* onto a hot new product" (Vranica, 2002, italics added). As one executive involved claimed, succinctly encapsulating the "stumble" logic of cool sell obfuscation and discovery, "If you put them in a Sony Ericsson shirt, then people are going to be less likely to listen to them in a bar."

This is because the Sony Ericsson shirt would evince authority and the object of persuasion and, indeed, governance in the regime of engagement is to make the *consumer* the authority through their freedom to discover – to "stumble" upon – the promotional message rather than being subject(ed) to it. The stunt, which attracted national attention when covered by *60 Minutes*, drew the ire of the non-profit consumer advocacy group Commercial Alert, with one observer critiquing the covert effort thus: "They are trying to

fabricate something that should be natural." Interference countered that the effort wasn't

a sales pitch – another instance of retreating behind the PR-inspired rhetorical fortress

that is "education" not marketing. In an interview, Sam Ewen provided insight into the

logic of this exercise of Foucauldian power – it, too, operates by "shepherding" subjects

rather than disciplining them:

> I very specifically instructed and trained people [the actors] not to solicit. And so,
> what happened at that point – you're letting the consumer drive the
> conversation… What ended up happening was – at the time [people had] never
> seen a camera on a cell phone before, so there was instant wonder. And also the
> fact that people aren't shilling them in the sense that: 'Oh, you can go buy it right
> there.' You know: 'This is the best thing in the world; you have to have it;
> everyone has it.' It was very much like, 'Uhh, I just got it; I'm still learning about
> it myself.' Which was true. And, you know, literally, if they said, 'Where can I
> get it?' [The actors] would say, 'I don't know where you can get it, because I'm
> from out of town.' The person had to go find it for themselves and that was only
> if they wanted it. (personal communication, November 5, 2008)

Thus, once more, "discovery" comes to the forefront as a conceptual model for

marketing management, supposedly legitimating a scenario whereby the consumer draws

out information without feeling like it has been forced upon her – a regime of

engagement reliant upon creating an environment for a "pull" mechanism while still

"pushing" in an underhanded, even passive-aggressive way. In that sense, Interference

"managed" to conscript conversation without ever really seeming like it was dictating

dialogue. As another firm defended its own similar stealth seeding, with no apparent

trace of irony: "Marketers love [this] idea… because it offers what no other medium can:

a candid conversation with potential consumers" (Gardyn, 2009).

The "candidness" of a covert marketing interaction is perhaps in the eye of the

beholder (and ultimately the FTC, which prohibits outright deception). Interestingly

enough, Jonathan Ressler, the CEO who earlier hailed the emancipated consumer in some

of the most exaggerated overtones ("the consumer owns the brand… the power has gone

back to the people"), has been one of the more prominent stealth tacticians. Utilizing

Foucault's approach to analyzing regimes of governance – whereby a particular logic

gives way to a particular set of practices – this is probably unsurprising given that a

marketing worldview that presupposes indomitable audiences lends itself to (and thereby

legitimizes) furtive policy from the, by contrast, (apparently) impotent advertiser. In

other words, an unsanctioned approach is the apparently necessary recourse in an

asymmetrical battle against subjects defined as cynical consumers connected by social

media and driving the commercial conversation. Hence, Ressler's (now-defunct) Big Fat

firm had pioneered the aforementioned "real life product placement" as a way of

strategically seeding word-of-mouth on the sly.

This guerrilla approach of concealed interaction seems to conflate real life with

"reel life": treating humdrum exchanges between common folks as an opportunity to

script product placement as though life were a James Bond film – even if, again, precise

scripting is not feasible. Indeed, Ressler demurred, in an interview, at my

characterization of his work as "brand theater":

> You can't write a script. So you're trusting that they're the right person and that
> they're going to deliver somewhat of the right message. It is improv to some
> extent, because you can give 'em brand highlights; you can tell 'em, 'Here's why
> the brand is great.' But the reality is that they really have to love the brand.
> Because if you're telling me about some brand that you don't really care about, I
> know. I can tell if you're full of shit. So it's not so much brand theater as it is
> more about finding the little ways to creep into the lifestyle landscape… So
> putting it in people's hands and letting them create their own theater; letting them

use it in real ways is so much more relevant and so much more powerful.
(personal communication, November 7, 2008)

Ressler's use of the term "improv" here is telling: improvisation – as opposed to

scripted theater – is much more spontaneous, organic, and "authentic" (however tortured

that term has become as advertising has pursued it). As a tool of governance, it is less

deliberate and has a flexibility built in; note, too, that Ressler uses the verb "let" at the

end of the quote, which foregrounds agency as the mechanism of engagement. This faith

in the storytelling intermediary again parallels that of the clients invested in the

advertainment of chapter 2: outsourcing the exact details of a sales pitch to a creative

liaison, whose perceived autonomy from the source of the governance – the institution

that wishes to "conduct conduct" – is precisely what gives it power as a "naturalized,"

grassroots form.

Positioning the brand and consumer in relation to each other through Ewen's or

Ressler's "real life product placement" is here assumed to be a way of structuring agency

in the tradition of Foucauldian management; it is a way of offering the opportunity to go

through the motions of empowerment within a context that stages a broader passivity

conducive to the marketer's regime; a way of working independently even as one works

on behalf of power. Yet there remains a fundamental tension with this philosophical

approach – one that recalls the notion of "unreasoning agency" that I introduced in

chapter 2. "If you do it right, people never know [they've heard a marketing pitch]. It's

just a matter of presenting stuff in a different channel and trusting consumers to be smart

enough to make their own choices," says Ressler (Spethmann, 2002). The contradiction

of assumptions here (the consumer "not knowing" about the marketing pitch and yet at the same time being "smart enough to make their own choices") isn't resolved clearly; in fact, it is a contradiction that cuts to the core of word-of-mouth marketing.

On one hand, buzz agencies tout their ability to bypass those "advertising schema" filters that stymie traditional media approaches with rhetoric that borders on – and in some cases, openly hypes – the "under-the-radar" merits of this marketing option: arguing that, though individuals increasingly ignore or avoid advertising, they are still influenced by peers and that word-of-mouth strategy can intervene usefully, casually, through that influence. But if buzz firms request disclosure of their agent-participants, as many agencies obedient to the WOMMA charter do, the subtly of that guerrilla intervention is blown. Disclosure – ethical as it may be – by acknowledging that buzz stems from a formal or externally sourced campaign *denaturalizes* the otherwise "natural" cadence of conversation and weakens the premise of strength that word-of-mouth firms sell to their clients. Moreover, stipulating that a trustworthy source flags portions of his dialogue as the product of a marketing program generates much the same clutter from which word-of-mouth was supposed to provide an escape. Dei Worldwide, a social media marketing company that specializes in what it calls "conversational outreach," for example, boasts: "We deliver your messages seamlessly, integrating them into the context of the conversations that are already occurring" (Turow, 2006, p. 77). Given those benefits espoused, disclosure would seem to be fundamentally antithetical to the efficacy of the buzz act. If word-of-mouth "works" because, as Balter said in the

introduction, it is "often all but invisible," isn't transparency an inherent impediment to its competitive advantage?

Responding to these anxieties about covert buzz, in 2005, Commercial Alert, the advertising watchdog group, asked the Federal Trade Commission to investigate the legality of Tremor, Proctor & Gamble's teen buzz marketing unit, which has 240,000 teens on its rolls (alongside some 600,000 mothers in P & G's Vocalpoint buzz unit) and did not, at that time, require disclosure during promotions, leaving it up to the participant's prerogative (Walker, 2008, p. 168; Wasserman, 2005). Commercial Alert argued, provocatively, that such practices amounted to a "basic 'commercialization of human relations,' where friends treat one another as advertising pawns, undercutting social trust" (Berner, 2006). BzzAgent actually started out similarly surreptitious before embracing disclosure as a business policy: "The first site we had, I think it said like, 'Shhh! Don't tell anyone you're here! You're about to become part of this secret thing,'" says Dave Balter (personal communication, October 13, 2009). Balter claims that – contrary to my sentiments above – as agents would disclose their status and affiliation with the company, the effectiveness of the buzz was not diminished (see, e.g., Carl, 2006 for a study of this). Because people talk all the time about products and services anyway (one estimate puts it at 20 percent of all conversations), he asks, rhetorically, "Does the fact that [during Bzz campaigns] they're consciously helping the company through the sharing of their honest opinion make them untrustworthy?" (Balter & Butman, 2005, p. 176) Not untrustworthy, per se, but still, it cannot be denied that

requiring disclosure introduces an element of awkwardness – a stilted sponsorship caveat – into everyday interaction.

Try as BzzAgent might – and there is no shortage of verbiage stressing the importance of honesty and disclosure in their participant training – they can ultimately only verify that transparency through the self-reporting of agents. Balter acknowledges that, "It's just so authentic and natural to talk about brands everyday anyway that someone forgets to quote-unquote disclose" sometimes (personal communication, October 13, 2009). Yet is it "authentic and natural" to inaugurate a chat with friends on, say, the appeal of Starbucks Pike Place Roast (one of the campaigns BzzAgent ran during my participant-observation) with a "brought to you by" forewarning? What exactly does "being genuine" even mean in the context of these new social exercises coordinated through marketing? And, even if disclosure is a genuine priority for buzz firms – which would still seem odd, given that the practice is hyped precisely because it *doesn't* seem like advertising – the inherently outsourced structure of the marketing message makes disclosure regulation impossible to definitively police. For example, when WOMMA's ethics guidelines were released (stipulating transparency), some marketers expressed skepticism about the wisdom of requiring disclosure: "*The whole idea of marketing is not to make it look like marketing,*" reasoned Jon Bond, co-author of *Under the Radar: Talking to Today's Cynical Consumer* and co-founder of Kirshenbaum Bond & Partners which had also run stealth campaigns using covert actors (Vranica, 2005, italics added).

Indeed, self-effacement has been highlighted throughout these chapters as philosophically essential to the project of the cool sell; disclosure undermines the

guerrilla achievement of "invisibility" that this nontraditional approach affords. And to be sure, just like BzzAgent's initial approach, other buzz firms seem to have *actively* encouraged the clandestine image in their marketing materials. When General Mills launched a word-of-mouth unit in fall 2008 and garnered 100,000 volunteers within its first month, it named that network "Pssst" – evoking shadowy practices and trench-coated participants (Wong, 2008). According to *Brandweek*, marketers tend to be "very hush-hush about their word-of-mouth campaigns," with one buzz marketing executive confiding that "clients employ euphemisms like 'Can you get [high school] campus attention for this?' instead of simply asking outright for a word-of-mouth campaign" and "making such requests over the phone [because] e-mail leaves a paper trail" (Wasserman, 2006).

And consider Girls Intelligence Agency or GIA (a not-irrelevant company name evoking the Central Intelligence Agency) – with its 40,000 "Influencer" female "secret agents" (between 8 and 29) who host slumber parties centered around product exposure – which bills its services in fittingly militarized espionage language: "Behind *enemy lines*, GIA gets you into girls' bedrooms… Obtain immediate, candid data *from the trenches*…" (Meltz, 2004, italics added). The company's training guide reportedly advocates that agents "'gotta be sneaky' in promoting GIA" (Schor, 2004, p. 77). Part buzz marketing shop, part ethnographic cool hunting boutique, GIA CEO Laura Groppe flaunts their access in almost sordid terms: "Our clients feel like we're invited into the bedroom; it's a totally intimate setting with a girl and her best friends and that trust would take years and years to try and buy" (personal communication, January 8, 2010). With slumber parties

touted as a supposedly "authentic way" to "get a lot of girls together… to collect information and insight," they are, in effect, a kind of focus group manufactured in the field; an instance of sponsored social interaction; teen ritual underwritten for corporate purposes.

The Entrepreneurial Ethos of Social Capital(ism)

This chapter has demonstrated the long trajectory of social capital being utilized from retailers like Avon and Tupperware in the early part of the 20th century to BzzAgent and other word-of-mouth companies today. Then as now, these firms have had a familiar program of governance they seek to execute – the conduct of consumers' conduct – and recognize, first in women's interpersonal networks and later to other demographic groups like pop music fan communities, a guerrilla marketing opportunity to embed their cause. Although it would be easy to castigate the exploitative nature of this strategy – in which personal lives and professional commerce blur indistinguishably – earlier critics have wisely registered an ambivalence about the opportunism that Avon and Tupperware first afforded, particularly at a moment in time when women's mobility was limited and status hindered (Clarke, 1999; Manko, 1997). For those women who participated, it was a chance to convert social capital into economic capital – and therefore represents a practice that occupies a complex intersection of opportunity and exploitation (Bourdieu, 2001).

Today, that same entrepreneurial ethos seems to reign among those who participate in this mechanism of consumer governance. Critics like Commercial Alert or

the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood protest that word-of-mouth marketing such as this – even that which embraces disclosure as a policy model – represents a social perversion and commercialized betrayal of communal trust; a practice that is most dangerous when it involves the fragile identities of youth, so vulnerable – valuably so – to peer-pressured consumer influence. They charge that this is one more step in the corporate colonization of what had been a truly authentic space. And, yet, this critique doesn't seem to explain why – if this practice is *voluntary* – the ranks of would-be buzz agents continue to swell. Our conversations may be conscripted upon joining, but we are not conscripted to join in the first place.

This is, then, the "social capitalism" that makes word-of-mouth marketing possible: It hinges upon a participant bringing an ambitious market logic to everyday interaction in commodifying relationships and monetizing social network followings. Buzz marketing treats the status of consumers as practical capital – indeed, "social capital," as Bourdieu identified – and therefore offers them a unique resource that can be wielded through various "transactions" in the life-world. Social capital as such can be exchanged for economic capital – in the form of Avon salaries or BzzAgent samples – but within this marketing program, it seems just as much a way of investing in and cultivating *further* social (as well cultural) capital: in other words, participation by being "in-the-know" as part of a market vanguard set has the effect of further burnishing those credentials of being "in-the-know." If word-of-mouth is, as Ressler sells it, "real life product placement," then I would suggest that this is affording everyday people the conceit that they, too, harbor the social capital that a brand might find worth co-opting.

Buzz agents are, after all, theoretically venerated as "trendsetters," "influencers," those

10% of "thought-leaders" in society that Ed Keller identifies as impacting the rest (Keller

& Berry, 2003). Therefore, word-of-mouth marketing perhaps indulges the delusion,

however subtle, of one playing the role of "micro-celebrity" endorser within one's own

social network.

For example, according to Dave Balter of Bzz Agent, word-of-mouth marketing

"leverages… the power of *wanting* to be trendsetter" (Walker, 2008, p. 180, italics

original). In an interview, he adds:

> There's this pride people have when, 'Oh, yeah, everyone's paying attention.'
> Same thing [with buzz]: the idea that your voice is being heard and is being
> respected and others find it of value – that is a huge, huge motivator…We tell
> [agents], 'This is a way to get your voice heard.'… We make it very clear this is
> about their empowerment more than anything else. (personal communication,
> October 13, 2009)

Similarly, Walter Carl (2006) suggests that, even independent of these word-of-

mouth agencies contriving it, buzz comes naturally to us as a self-aggrandizing ritual: "It

gives us self-enhancement… If we know about this interesting product… we're hip and

cool" (D. Bennett, 2006). It caters to a "psychological principle" that "when we tell

others something new, we feel that 'we're in the know' and we're typically rewarded by

their reaction" (Rosen, 2000, p. 175). And Ted Murphy, head of Izea, adds, "I think that

there's a sense of celebrity that goes along with that and stature – that the brand would

think enough of you to compensate you to endorse or to speak about their product"

(personal communication, December 17, 2009).

Thus, we ought to understand the rise of word-of-mouth marketing in the context of an opportunistic social entrepreneurialism emblematic of the neoliberal self. Pursuant to this lifestyle in which the subject is *always* "on the job," market demands are embedded in interpersonal relations; social networks are evaluated for value and advantageousness; and friendship becomes a raw commodity to be instrumentalized like any other resource. After all, "networking" – a tool in which conviviality is coldly cultivated as self-interested strategy, a tool familiar to workers seeking employment and proprietors seeking business leads – well predates the rise of MySpace and Facebook. Yet this "networking" also articulates how conversation has already been hollowed out for enterprise; how – particularly for those who wish to make their livelihood in a post-industrial economy – camaraderie is drained of its selflessness and pressed into the service of capitalism; how the subject is meant to think himself in terms of that "Brand You," as certain management gurus rhapsodize. Identity and socialization are folded into the promotional imperative; one's "profile," both online and off, is supposed to be sculpted as a branded media property; we are encouraged to treat social output as a product of labor rather than a gift of fellowship. In short, such entrepreneurialism already converts ritual into capital.

For marketers, the logic of consumer governance is found in the power of that which seems grassroots: an artless, legitimate form of conducting others' conduct that seems to "rise up," organically, rather than being imposed artificially. The consistent veneration of buzz marketing as a practice that's already "natural" to social interaction speaks to the challenge of authenticating structural objectives amongst subjects being

managed. Indeed, the problem of unmanageable subjects mistrusting those who seek to govern them is redressed here in a clever, decentralized, populist manner: It gets subjects to govern *each other*. That is, after all, how the "grassroots" functions as a means of influence and a "disposition" of power and it is that which public relations has long sought to engineer. Moreover, as we've just seen, subjects with designs on social capital are all too easily enlisted in the program of collusion with that power – even as their agency is targeted and instrumentalized for its autonomy from it.

This chapter has also shown, perhaps more than any other, how advertising and public relations are blurring into one another. Word-of-mouth marketing is a contemporary example of many time-honored PR principles including Bernays' formulation of public relations as a "two-way street" that reciprocally calibrates public interests and elite exigencies (a forerunner to the contemporary "regime of dialogue"); the exploitation of opinion leaders and third-party intermediaries (today's buzz agents); and a fundamental comfort with less control over the "message" than traditional advertising commanded (now extended to the brand as a whole in thinking of it as an "open work"). More broadly that that, though, buzz marketing – not unlike the ideals of public relations – is about working through the "bottom up," for lack of a better grassroots synonym, in order to achieve structural objectives (like selling goods) that emanate from a "top down." At a grassroots level, which is the level of practices that peer-to-peer influence like word-of-mouth operates at, governance can be more subtle and spontaneous than comparatively deliberate and conniving advertising contexts. It is

hegemonic strategy in a classic Gramscian sense: flexible and improvised in shepherding rather than disciplining the subject.

In this chapter, I have tried to show how word-of-mouth marketers have conscripted the conversations and social interactions of consumers on behalf of the brand; in the next chapter, I will push forward with analyzing how those same consumers are increasingly volunteering similarly productive labor for advertisers, especially in the online realm as part of momentous changes that are taking place in the new media ecology.

Crowd-Source Marketing and the Freedom to Labor:

How Brands Commandeer Creativity

"One does not so much give orders or shape actions according to a given norm, as much as one works from below, by providing an ambience in which freedom is likely to evolve in particular ways. One works with and through the freedom of the subject." – Adam Arvidsson (2006, p. 74)

"Today the customer is in charge and whoever is best at putting the customer in charge makes all the money." – Stephen F. Quinn, senior vice president for marketing of Wal-Mart (Zwick et al., 2008, p. 164)

Over the past decade, as the network has increasingly displaced broadcasting as the "organizing principle" for contemporary media ecology, interactivity has simultaneously emerged as a critical component of how media work, and advertising more specifically, can be accomplished. This succession might be cast most starkly, if crudely and simplistically, through contrasting marketer perspectives on and their ensuing positioning of the imagined consumer: one who has historically been reclined in front of the television but is increasingly being wired into computer technologies. The structural nature of that evolution is biased toward engagement as the regime – programming "new kinds of ambiences, goals, and procedures for consumer interaction, participation and productivity," wherein agency rather than passivity moves to the forefront (Spurgeon, 2008, p. 2). Overdrawn or not – audiences are still, after all, watching as much television than ever, though they are doing it in tandem with web use – this shift to interactivity as the mechanism for engagement nonetheless presupposes two

familiar themes essential to the analysis here: first, a subjective flexibility in terms of

how the brand-text is conceptualized (i.e., the operability of an "open work"); second, a

collaborative interpellation of amateur roles (i.e., the operability of "open labor"). Both

developments present opportunities and challenges and herald a potential

dematerialization of not just advertising but the culture industries writ large.

Interactivity, moreover, represents yet another entry point into the governmental

power that has been centrally theorized throughout the preceding chapters, and Michel

Foucault's (2000a) articulation of that power is perhaps more evident in marketer

programs of interactivity than in any other form of guerrilla marketing heretofore

considered:

> A power relationship… can only be articulated on the basis of two elements that are indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that 'the other' (the one over whom power is exercised) is recognized and maintained to the very end as a subject who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible interventions may open up. (p. 340)

Interactivity, like the advergaming discussed in chapter 2, is, by design, a matter

of that Foucauldian calibration of "a more or less open field of possibilities" in which

"the behavior of acting subjects is able to inscribe itself" (p. 341). Whether that exercise

of power over a subject who can take action in a variety of ways manifests itself in the

viral and social media strategies, online self-publishing, or consumer-generated video

contests considered in the pages that follow, marketers "code" participation as central to

the logic of this governance – both literally in the sense of the digital programming often

required to prepare these campaigns and figuratively as part of that continuing myth of

brand "democratization" (which extends the earlier emphasis on "dialogue"). One way

of mapping that ongoing tension between structure and agency here is to place it in the context of professional versus amateur content flows.

Theoretically, the "amateur" – who is situated centrally within practices of networked interactivity much like the "viewer" was central to broadcasting practice – plays much the same role (and serves much the same purpose) here as the "grassroots" did in the last chapter: she operates as a decentralized, flexible, and organic node of power. Her autonomy from professional media practice is what purportedly substantiates her "authenticity" as a content creator and that authenticity, as has been noted throughout, is what professional media practitioners – and, especially, advertisers – most desire. At a transformative moment in the media ecosystem when major corporate content providers from NBC to Paramount to *The New York Times* to J. Walter Thompson are being confronted with the unpredictable "citizen media" practices of the crowd (Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2008) – when hierarchical concentrations of information flow are being complemented by heterarchical patterns of production and distribution – it is, then, *through* the amateur that structure is seeking to "catch up" to agency. It is – again following Foucault's (2000b) work on governmentality and Antonio Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony – an embedding of "top-down" exigencies in "bottom-up" freedoms.

The Uses of (New Media) Literacy

It is important to foreground the celebratory, populist ethos that Web 2.0 has garnered in both academic literature and popular sentiment – not because it is necessarily warranted or unwarranted as a characterization on its own, but for what it *warrants* of

professional media work (particularly that which seeks the "conduct of others' conduct,"

like advertising) (Foucault, 1997a, p. 203). In other words, amateur "produser"

participation, whether judged empowering or exploitative, serves as an opportunity for

marketers to construct more sophisticated schemes of governance in which that agency

can be inscribed (Bruns, 2008). This is governance that outsources its mechanisms of

engagement and seeks more power by wielding less control, to echo a theme from the last

chapter. The amateur is targeted as a "client" of power – an egalitarian means to achieve

structurally necessary ends.

Recall Henry Jenkins' (2006) portrait of the "newly empowered" media consumer

as "active," "migratory," "socially connected," and "noisy and public" (pp. 18-19). What

goes unstated but is, in fact, pivotal to portraits such as these is that those who make up

these "grassroots fan communities" at the vanguard of amateur co-creation are thought to

represent capillaries of power whose remove from centralized media institutions

theoretically authenticates their role and resolve (p. 22). Amateurs, this conventional

wisdom holds, are artless, autonomous, and models of a kind of folk culture agency for

the digital era; corporations, on the other hand, contrive, are vested, and represent a

distant structure seeking to impose commercial interests on audiences and consumers.

It is probably not surprising then that advertisers would find in amateurs, much

like buzz agents, a ready opportunity to "vernacularize" their designs of power – to

crowd-source promotional machinations through "local," disinterested channels: a

Facebook user, a blogger, a YouTube cineaste. By programming textual contingency and

relying on collaborative (and often free) labor, this form of consumer management is

perhaps less aptly described as "invisible" governance as much as it is "organic" governance, which nonetheless has the effect of shrouding structural ambitions beneath independent improvisations.

Christina Spurgeon (2008) frames the ascendance of interactivity and the increasing centrality of the network as a shift (or, more accurately, overlay) from *transmission* media to *conversationally-inspired* media (or conviviality). I would hasten to add that power, within the former system, is exercised more as Taylorist discipline (redolent of "marketing fiat") whereas power, in the latter system, represents more of a governmental partnership where objectives are brokered and aligned rather than dispatched. That is, transmission, structurally, has no real need for agency; agency is, at best, an incidental byproduct of semiotic decoding, not something written – ironically, by strategic omission – into the message (S. Hall, 1980). Conviviality, however, when genuine (and this is by no means a given), depends on it: "New media audiences cannot be conceived of as passive consumers of [advertising and marketing] services. Indeed, their active participation, especially as content creators, is a crucial ingredient of commercial success" (Spurgeon, 2008, p. 4).

Witnessing the media literacy and voluntary self-publishing commitment of consumers exhibited across a range of platforms characteristic of Web 2.0 – Blogger, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, MySpace, Facebook, and so on – brand managers today are attempting to make use of such abundant audience productivity: acknowledging agency, channeling creativity, and framing freedom in ways that contribute to the brand. This interactive collaboration invites – and, at times, necessitates – the kind of

"immaterial" or "free" labor that is characteristic of not just internet use, but the brand experience as a whole (Lazzarato, 1996; Terranova, 2000). For as Adam Arvidsson (2006) argues, it is immaterial labor that produces the very foundations of brand equity through what he calls "ethical surplus": "a social relation, a shared meaning, or a sense of belonging, that was not there before" (p. 10).

In other words, the social communication about, emotional attachment to, and communal involvement in brands is surplus value based upon fundamentally "free" labor volunteered on the part of consumers (Arvidsson, 2005). This "value co-creation" takes place offline as much as online – whenever socialization functions in a branded context, wherever the "operability" of a brand is conjured as a cultural resource – but it is especially apparent when a consumer does "producerly" things in a digital context (as highlighted in this chapter). Brand management therefore pursues the creation of a "mediatic space," which "anticipates the agency of consumers and situates it within a number of more or less precise coordinates… [where] consumers are free to produce the shared meanings and social relations that the branded good will help create in *their* life" (p. 245).

Writing of a "technology" of government where power works through freedoms exercised from the bottom up rather than rules and impositions ordained from the top down and where that "surplus value generated is based on the appropriation of the creative work of often networked and socially creative consumers," Detlev Zwick, Samuel Bonsu, and Aron Darmody (2008) usefully outline how this "collective embrace of the idea of a newly empowered, entrepreneurial, and liberated consumer subject"

portends strategic opportunities and advantages for the brand (pp. 164, 182). Thus, the

"co-creation" endemic to interactivity links the theoretical frames of Foucauldian

governance to "free labor" as "consumers voluntarily provide unwaged and exploited, yet

enjoyed labor" (p. 176). In other words, the subject's "field of responses, reactions,

results, and possible interventions" in the process of *engaging* with marketer power

contribute to the commercial project even as it accommodates, say, identity or expression

as well; it is not, in short, a zero-sum game. Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody add that,

> Customer management, then, as the exertion of political power to produce
> particular forms of life, clearly does not mean domination because marketers
> presuppose, and in fact expect, the consumer subject to act, innovate, tinker and
> run free. The marketing challenge posed by the co-creation model rests, of
> course, with establishing ambiences that program consumer freedom to evolve in
> ways that permit the harnessing of consumers' newly liberated, productive
> capabilities… Co-creation… aspires to build ambiences that foster contingency,
> experimentation, and playfulness among consumers. (pp. 165, 166)

As Wal-Mart's marketing vice president earlier noted, the customer – not the

brand – is "in charge" in such an environment, but only so that the brand – not the

customer – can "make all the money." Free labor theoretically satisfies the subject's

need to exert agency (to be "in charge") that is indispensable to the governmental model;

pragmatically, it also fulfills the commercial structure's need to keep costs down (so as to

"make all the money"). Working with and through consumer freedoms, brands can

outsource work that had once been within its circumscribed domain and rhetoric about

"empowerment" can double as a cover for "employment," even as it has the potential to

serve both (Duffy, 2010). The ROI-validating metrics that are often cited for these

crowd-source practices are as often how many people have *reached out* with

contributions of their own to the brand (i.e., concrete engagement) as how many people may have been reached (i.e., estimated impressions).

Amateur creativity and community labor – much in evidence "authentically" across the Web 2.0 spectrum – are thus a model for embedding the advertising message in seemingly egalitarian, ostensibly organic social and cultural flows which, like so many of the examples detailed to this point, don't really *feel* like advertising in the traditional, heavy-handed, top-down, hot sell sense. This is true not only in the fact that brands utilizing the consumer-generated model construct the brand as more of an "open" text than advertising has traditionally allowed (inviting, perhaps obliging, somehow "democratic" closure), but also in that, once closed, the circulation enlisted is from peer-to-peer as much as broadcaster-to-receiver (implying somehow "organic" distribution because it is decentralized: many-to-many rather than one-to-many). The amateur – both as co-creator and co-distributor – is the key vector in this "inflection" of credible power and it is amateurs, like the word-of-mouth participants in the last chapter, who must be "shepherded," through conditional means, as "a multitude in movement toward a goal" (Foucault, 1997c, p. 68).

Yet as Jonathan Ressler metaphorically diagrammed in the last chapter – and as is inherent to Foucauldian subjects of power and Gramscian subordinate groups – a flock of consumer sheep cannot always be herded in the desired direction (witness, for example, the Chevy video contest discussed later in the chapter). Strategies that proceed from this crowd-source premise concede both the flexibility of the brand-text as a contingent enterprise as well as the wayward nature of those feisty "new consumers" that Jenkins

posits, even as it seeks to cultivate their momentum. Indeed, given their presumed "unmanageability," especially as demonstrated in online spaces (where restiveness with "professional" content is apparent in the co-creative objections frequently lodged on comment boards, through blog postings, and in the mash-up bricolage rife across the web), consumer-generated marketing is a kind of guerrilla recourse to achieving engagement – a way of anticipating and allowing for "the consumer subject to act, innovate, tinker, and run free" by delimiting a wider context in which the now- "prosumer" is encouraged to position herself by furnishing the raw digital materials to (presumably) satisfy her co-creative needs. It is, therefore, not far removed from the same "jujitsu" principles that animate *Adbusters* and the Truth anti-smoking campaigns as described in the third chapter: working *with* the momentum and productivity of online audiences – fostering, optimizing, and marshalling it as a productive resource – rather than trying to stifle or contain it as an existential threat.

The mash-up culture of Web 2.0 can, in fact, be considered the digitally "subversive" analogue to culture jamming (Serazio, 2008a). Because the postmodern consumer is often "deemed impervious to most forms of marketing control, and delights in the playful and ingenious subversion of corporate marketing communication and dominant meanings" – think of that cycle of force and resistance, reinvention and co-optation discussed in chapter 3 – the co-creation of consumer-generated advertising is meant to "[transform] resistance and opposition to marketing power into a source of economic value… by actively *encouraging* consumer experiment and innovation, even if resistive in nature" (Zwick et al., 2008, pp. 168, 171, italics original).

The fertility of digital "folk culture" indexed by user-generated self-publishing

has thus borne out an inspiration toward crowd-sourcing as a productive mechanism by

the advertising industry. By inducing such labor (co-creation and co-circulation) from

individuals present in our social networks – not to mention the hordes of amateur-creators

we encounter online but don't know personally – these marketers are, as has been

delineated throughout, staging agency and arranging for commercial "serendipity"

because it is distribution that is funneled through independent flows. When control is

acceded to agency, the advertiser seeks to stage discovery rather than impose learning;

this is partly what cues much rhetoric in the trade press about "brand democratization"

(e.g., "Advertising of, by, and for the people," as one headline hypes it) (Kiley, 2005). If,

in the last chapter, I employed BzzAgent and the like as a way of deconstructing how

brands increasingly conscript conversation into a regime of dialogue, here I extend that

line of analysis to show how brands interpellate and commandeer the creative labor of

"prosumer" audiences.

Programming Power through Contingency

> Rather than thinking of the content as a defined, unchangeable unit, it should be
> considered an '*opera aperta*' – or 'open work' – the Latin term used by Umberto
> Eco to describe how literary texts which leave room for individual interpretation,
> and demand a higher level of reader involvement, will ultimately be more
> rewarding and engaging. (Maymann, 2008, italics added)

As changes in the structure of the media environment have come to privilege

interactivity, the notion of "going viral" – "today's electronic equivalent of old fashioned

word of mouth" – has increasingly become a buzzword aspiration for content creators,

both amateur and professional (Howard, 2005). This objective seeks to achieve the self-replicating dissemination of its bio-hazard namesake and the growth of culture formatted for the internet, wherein digital memes can be effortlessly spread through e-mail, links, and self-publishing, comfortably lends itself to such an undertaking. Notoriety, in the decentralized viral model – in which those memes "trickle up" to mainstream coverage from the blogosphere, a spatial and conceptual parallel to the notion of the "underground" discussed in chapter 3 – is fashioned as somehow more democratic than the mass media flows of old, where a more limited number of publishers and broadcasters determined a one-to-many circulation of content. With this "democracy," it is thought, so, too, flows a perception of credibility and, with it, marketers eager to insinuate themselves into the "authenticated" context,

Viral is an appealing model for two principle reasons: first, outsourcing circulation of the message to the crowd can often reduce overhead spent on buying conventional mass media space or time; second, by embedding the brand in peer-to-peer flows and attaining popularity through supposedly egalitarian hit counts and web traffic analytics, this marketing is thought to skirt the problem of consumer cynicism that plagues those traditional advertising venues. Viral content is, in short, typically opt-in, *chosen by* – discovered – as befitting the ideals of the cool sell and the regime of engagement that I've been proposing throughout, and in contrast with advertising in those traditional venues where the message feels *chosen for* the audience. It is a strategy of governance that projects flexibility and spontaneity as it exercises power over subjects. In this section and the next, I will discuss examples of viral advertising initiatives while

illuminating and critiquing the populist ethos that this form affects. First, though, a word

or two more is in order on content – namely, advertising content – that is increasingly

produced as the kind of "open work," that GoViral CEO Jimmy Maymann describes

above.

To do this, I turn to Mark Deuze (2007b), who helpfully theorizes a continuum of

media content as it is produced today in terms of the degree to which it can be described

as inherently "open" or "closed": "[These] refer to the extent to which a given media

company shares some or all of its modes of operation with its target audiences… [and

gives] customers more control over their user experience" and "how its mode of

production interpellates publics as either (individual) consumers or (co-) creators of

content" (pp. 247, 251). This offers a fruitful starting point for thinking through how and

why "media work" gets done in a variety of industries ranging from journalism to film

and television to video games to, indeed, advertising (Deuze, 2007a). And it also

dovetails very usefully with the strategy of the cool sell, where – drawing again upon my

reformulation of Marshall McLuhan's (1994) typology – media that are less defined,

more open (and therefore *cooler*) "interpellate" audience participation in ways more

desirable than the passive presumptions that accompany the hot/hard sell of traditional

media. Textual flexibility presumes the pleasures of interpretive involvement (or, as

some might call it by its less sanguine name, "labor").

Although implementation is eased with the most cutting-edge technologies and

platforms, the *logic* of such governance rests upon some 2,000 years of rhetorical

precedence – stretching back to Aristotle who defined an "enthymeme" as a "syllogism

with part or parts missing" that "[enables] the persuader and persuadee to co-create reasoning by dialectically coming to a conclusion" and by "[requiring] the audience mentally to fill in parts of the reasoning process, thus stimulating involvement" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006, p. 40). The enthymematic device is, therefore, a close (if ancient) precursor to the cool sell as I have illustrated it here; "interactive reasoning" is strategized through the interactive "co-creation" Web 2.0 affords (though it is, as noted earlier, an *unreasoning* agency whose coordinates seek to strike a "mood" or "feeling" rather than a rational, deductive argument). Semiotically, "unfinished" is meant to be read as "unforced" – an act of power that assumes interactive agency.

To recall the instructions of Alex Wipperfurth (2005): "The hijacked brand manager's key job is to keep the brand neutral – a blank canvas, so to speak – so that the market can fill it in with meaning and enrich it with folklore" (p. 41). This imperative to devise a kind of brand *tabula rasa* – to program textual contingency, to propose ambiguity so as to ensnare appropriation – is closely tied to changes in the structure of today's media environment, notions about creative leisure, and management practices of outsourced labor – even though Wipperfurth had no such specific designs on *online* crowd-sourcing (but rather more *subcultural* crowd-sourcing). The objectives and efficiencies that this philosophy demands can apparently be accommodated by that upsurge in "free" labor – that is, labor that is neither required nor remunerated – that "citizen" media-makers seem increasingly willing to provide. In an interview, Jimmy Maymann, whose "viral distribution agency" will be considered shortly, offers a summation of the philosophy fortifying this strategic turnabout. He illuminates the

pragmatic upshot of the media ecology transformation I've been positing here; note, too,

in his quote the way in which power is re-conceptualized as partnership rather than

discipline and the inherent uncertainty that accompanies Foucauldian "counter-conducts"

with the brand that are faced online (the "struggle against the processes [i.e.,

advertisements] implemented for conducting others") (p. 201):

> For fifty years with broadcasting, [clients] have full control… They've been
> wanting to have the same kind of control in this new channel and it's just not
> going to fly… If they're putting something out online, it can be changed – it can
> morph, people can play with it – they can create, you know, something that
> [clients] want or that they don't want their brand to be. But even if [clients are]
> not putting anything out online, [people] can still take stuff that goes on TV and
> put it out online and actually play with it, right?... Some [clients] don't realize that
> they have lost control, whether they want it or not. And that's why we're saying:
> It's a consumer-to-consumer republic. They're in control, actually, and we need
> to play with them rather than trying to protect the stuff. (personal communication,
> January 11, 2010)

Yet consumers are both "in control" while marketers simultaneously seek to

control through that control. Consumer-generated labor as such can range from simple

interactivity and viral collusion (e.g., entering information into a website or forwarding

an e-mail) to protracted self-publishing and video creation (considered later in the

chapter). One of the most hailed "viral" case studies of the past decade required only

modest input from digital participants and – as one of the more bizarre advertising

enterprises in that time – it demonstrates both the "playfulness" that Maymann counsels

as well the notion that intrigue, coupled with interactivity, can breed involvement when it

comes to "cool selling" through internet initiatives.

In 2004, as part of a promotion for Burger King's TenderCrisp chicken sandwich,

the fast food chain's agency, Crispin Porter + Bogusky, hired digital shop The Barbarian

Group to create an web page that came to be known as, "The Subservient Chicken." The

project was said to be part of a broader effort by CP+B to re-brand BK from "boring,

irrelevant, and unimaginative" to something "more edgy and cool." Filming hundreds of

video clips of a man in chicken suit and writing code for a database of search terms that

would respond to keyword commands for the chicken to perform those videotaped

actions, Barbarian concocted a site that, in its own words, "was so creepy, weird and

well-executed that many people who visited… thought they were actually controlling this

person in a chicken suit in real life." Moreover, by "[toying] with the dirty underworld of

transgressive webcam culture," Rick Webb (2009), Barbarian co-founder, claimed that it

was the "most gloriously subversive thing we have ever done." In an interview,

Benjamin Palmer, Barbarian CEO, clarifies that the project was chasing after (what is

presumed to be) that most resistant of subjects – teenage and young adult males – and

sought to execute a new approach to consumer governance that never disclosed its

intentions to "conduct conduct":

> You have to understand Burger King at the time – like, all the ads were like a
> picture of a cheeseburger and the price of the cheeseburger next to it. They hadn't
> done anything interesting at all… Like, our brief – sort of our 'playground' – was
> college kids, you know, who, like, get high and have to choose between
> McDonalds and Burger King and kids who look for weird stuff on the internet.
> So we had been told by the agency that the stranger we made it, the better. And
> so we really wanted to make it, like, we tried to make it kind of perverse and it
> was going to be something that got a lot of attention. The nature of the project
> itself – I don't think anyone understood what we were doing until we sort of
> finished it… It was sort of flying under-the-radar. (personal communication,
> January 26, 2010)

The project, in fact, sits at the nexus of user-generated content (the chicken as a

contingent brand entity and digital enthymeme interpellating the site visitor to enter

commands and "close the loop" of performance to communicate its admittedly opaque

message) and crowd-source virality (its renown spread initially via decentralized digital

channels). And in that, it proved, according to Barbarian, "that you can *utilize*

relationships – electronic and personal – between people and groups to spread ideas and

messages, and it can still work *even if the message is, at its core, commercial in nature*"

(italics added).

This is an important point to draw out: I would argue, as I have throughout, that

Barbarian was able to utilize this social media labor of fans to spread an ad message for

Burger King, because the message *didn't* feel "commercial in nature." Upon logging

onto the Subservient Chicken site, there is no sense of a product being deliberately

pitched to visitors; no obvious pushy salesperson waiting in the wings; no "picture of a

cheeseburger with the price of the cheeseburger next to it." There are, in short, no visible

seams of governance (that project of conducting conduct); the interactive experience

manages to seem, not unlike the advertisement from chapter 2, "disinterested" and

therefore autonomous from that "ooze" of commercial intent (Holt, 2002, p. 83). It

"manages" to self-efface managerial ambition; to "casualize" that persuasive force vis-à-

vis non sequitur ambiguity and enthymematic collaboration. The logic with viral

popularity here interestingly recalls the same reverse psychology that the vice president

of marketing for the American Legacy Foundation's anti-smoking campaign articulated

in chapter 3. One guerrilla agency CEO spells out the logic of this "governance without

governing" more clearly:

Do you understand the idea of social currency? So, if I'm trying to disseminate an idea about a new product that's coming out or create some type of excitement and I feel like you are part of a group that might take this idea as social currency and spread it – if I tell you I'm giving it to you as social currency and that I'm really trying to get you to spread it, then you might not want to do that, right? So, the same thing, if you find a funny video online, as an example, and there's no commercial aspect that you can discern easily, you might send that to 10, 15 of your friends. But at the end of it, if there's a Honda logo or something else, you might send it to a couple of people, but you're probably not going to send it to as many people, because you're feeling like, 'Ugh, I don't want to be used by Honda – I'm not doing their work.' (S. Leonard, personal communication, January 15, 2010)

Yet the premise of viral marketing – and the user-generated and word-of-mouth techniques of brand evangelism more broadly – is that you *are*, in fact, doing the work of Honda, Burger King, or any other brand that tests out these tactics. Thus, as with other case study examples that have been analyzed in these pages, a viral campaign must understate its intentions and, if necessary, obfuscate its sponsor; the core tension is that of staging a sense of agency versus making the participant feel "used" for his or her labor. To achieve that idealized "social currency" status, the brand must endow the value of its content with something more than mere commercial machinations (just like advertainment).

Put differently, this theory of the cool sell holds that the more low-profile the logo on, say, a piece of online video, the further it has a chance of traveling through e-mail in-boxes. A brand that tries to communicate a viral message must therefore embed itself for discovery rather than announce itself as patron. And, according to Palmer, Barbarian could "background" Burger King's role and intent in this way because of the low overhead of the project: "[We did] this for like 1/10th of the production budget of your

TV commercials… [But] if you're going to spend $5 million on it, you can't be like, 'Let's be subtle about [the brand's role in] it" (personal communication, January 26, 2010). Maymann suggests much the same when consulting on the type of viral content that companies and agencies attempt to plant: "That's where we tell the client – everything should be branded, right? But, please, let the brand take a backseat, right?" (personal communication, January 11, 2010)

As the industry comes to privilege "engagement" more and more, a site like this – where the first 15 million visitors spent an average of 7 minutes per session with the chicken – seems likely to remain a lauded case study (Jaffe, 2005, p. 217). Jeff Hicks, CEO of CP+B framed the success of Subservient Chicken in the context of that decade-long shift from "push" to "pull" media: "'Interruption or disruption as the fundamental premise of marketing' no longer works… 'You have to create content that is interesting, useful or entertaining enough to invite (the consumer). Viral is the ultimate invitation" (Howard, 2005). And invitation, rather than imposition, is the philosophy that animates power in this regime of marketing engagement.

The "Populist" Governance of Viral Culture

Part of the appeal of viral strategy, like so many other tactics of guerrilla marketing, rests on a pretense of populism – a masquerade of commercial structure working "from below," through (and hence on) audiences and consumers it can't seem to discipline with the traditional institutions of Taylorist authority. Unlike the intrusiveness of "interruption" advertising – where audiences seem eager to avoid commercial

messages – viral trades on the premise of participants opting in to the promotional project, often times complimenting the campaign with their own contribution (anything from a photo submission to a short-film production) and then ratifying it through pass-along to members of their social network. In this ideal scenario, consumers give freely of their time, energy and contacts to the brand – with the advertiser speechifying that it is "empowering" to do so; it represents, again, that linkage between Foucauldian governmentality (getting subjects to align their actions with the objectives of power) and "free labor" (getting subjects to volunteer immaterial effort). Thus, in that shift from "push" to "pull" media, viral exudes a democratic affect – a "youcracy," even, as one interviewee spins it: "The epicenter of effective user-driven marketing campaigns [with] 'you' [the user] and the media landscape the advertiser faces is a 'media youcracy' with empowered users who can make or break any product or brand," claims Maymann (Kilby, 2007).

Ostensibly egalitarian features suffuse: amateurs not professionals are creating the content; decentralized not dictatorial channels circulate it; mash-up productivity that once drew cease-and-desist letters from corporations' copyright lawyers is now being encouraged by those same corporations; and, all the while, CMOs rhapsodize about "dialogue," in stark contrast to the more tightly controlled, one-way monologue that once wholly comprised brand narratives. Even the oft-used synonym for the more clunky "consumer-generated marketing" – "citizen" marketing – is redolent of democratic participation (Fine, 2007).

Yet the notion that viral is somehow an organic tally of *authentically* achieved popularity assumes that advertisers aren't trying to "game" the blogosphere just as much as real-life politicians employ a variety of strategies (of varying ethical fidelity) to win elections, and thus stretching the "democratic" ethos of online buzz metrics. Corporations increasingly desire assurances that viral campaigns will garner a set level of exposure, consequently "seeding links on video-sharing sites and blogs, even trying to manipulate YouTube rankings to gain visibility" (Morrissey, 2007). This introduces an important nuance into earlier discussions of "mass" culture and broadcasting, vis-à-vis Sarah Thornton (1996), and the notion that gross ratings points and message integrity are inversely proportional such that ubiquity comes at a cost of authenticity and vice-versa. Advertisers still fundamentally need scale – for clients still need a "mass" of consumers to buy their products to remain competitive – but viral content is thought to achieve that scale more organically through networked flows than broadcast transmission. Viral content, it might further be said, represents the digital manifestation of "subcultural capital" – it operates in a kind of "underground" online field, removed the appearance of hierarchical, structural power, and trickling "up" to become massified at a certain tipping point rather than being disseminated in a widespread fashion from the start.

GoViral is one such firm offering its services to achieve those assurances of "mass" success; it is, in fact, an agency that – because it does not create any content of its own, but rather plants others' – might be considered a kind of "media buyer" for the Web 2.0 space. Formed as a response to the woeful click-through rates of banner advertisements (the web banner being a fitting symbol of old media persuasion and

governance – the billboard specifically – transplanted into a new media environment),

GoViral tries to strategize online marketing in more subtle, seemingly democratic ways.

Early in the decade, the company sought to "manually" drum up buzz by

"whispering in certain blog environments and forums" about client content, but, more

recently, their work has evolved toward a more structured "long tail" approach with

systematic categories and channels for seeding. In an interview, I spoke with the

company CEO, Jimmy Maymann, about a viral campaign for a new Nissan car that

involved, as he described it, reaching influencers "in a non-intrusive manner." One can

hear chords of planted populism – of the "grassroots" gamed – in the "underground"

ethos informing this kind of project:

> By using numerous channels, as opposed to a central micro site and letting the
> story unfold and progress in sequences, the [Nissan] campaign gains a certain air
> of underground activity. This does not mean that it won't be clear to people that
> this is a commercial message launched as branded entertainment, but it gives the
> users the opportunity to engage with the brand in a different way… [This] can be
> likened to a boutique hotel rather than a Hilton. By not being ubiquitous and
> flashy, it's a campaign designed to make users investigate and engage with it, by
> appearing at well-chosen locations which it takes a *feinschmecker* to seek out. It
> is about ongoing story-telling, rather than quick delivery, letting the story evolve
> instead of the classic linear format which is more closed. To sum up, the strategy
> of the campaign is to leave as many doors open as possible, and maintain
> exclusivity by staying off the mainstream channels. (Maymann, 2008, p. 90)

That "exclusivity" is characteristic of Thornton's theory of subcultural capital. It

unfolds here in a context sensitive to (and indeed predicated on) the structure of

contemporary media ecology as a way to modulate the cultivation of that capital.

Avoiding a "central micro site" is the online equivalent of Cole & Weber slotting their

Raineer Beer show at 1am or Interference planting *Aqua Teen* light boards

inconspicuously amongst the urban landscape: it is content meant to be "stumbled upon" (serendipitous discovery) rather than "forced upon" (intrusive interruption). That equally summarizes the viral ethos in terms of exercising power over audience subjects – once again a case of invisible governance. Viral *seems* grassroots because networked flows invite that presupposition; this is frequently aided by content, dressed up in ostensibly amateur production values, that playfully toys with the "real or fake" question: "Debates [about that] are often what spirals these things" (J. Maymann, personal communication, January 11).

Indeed, Maymann's delicate phrasing above about a campaign that fundamentally wants to seem non-commercial but that would – apparently – still "be clear to people that this is a commercial message" once more runs aground of the difficulties over disclosure that have been diagrammed throughout. GM, for example, drew criticism in 2006 when it planted three seemingly "member-generated" clips on video sharing sites. The brand's agency defended the move in familiar language: "The decision to put [them] out and let people discover it on their own seemed like the natural, organic way to do it… When you start promoting these things too heavily, people get annoyed that it is a promotion rather than something interesting" (Spethmann, 2006). Indeed, promotional proposition rather than dictation is the essence of the cool sell. As Maymann (2008) intimates:

> One of the reasons that brands find it hard to influence social media is because the flaw of classic marketing tells us to complete our communication, brand value and experiences, before we launch the product… Social media can be defined as the democratization of information… The illusion of control needs to be replaced by an understanding of the need to provide flexible scenarios of perception. For a better outcome, give your audience credit for their intelligence, invite them in and let them use you in their identity project. (p. 15)

The notion of advertising "letting" audiences "use you [the marketer] in their identity project" is based upon that operability of an "open" work: governance that interpellates subject agency by "structur[ing] the possible field of action of others" (Foucault, 2000a, p. 341). Moreover, this suggestion to "let them use you" crystallizes a turnabout of traditional power terms in which *marketers* formerly used audiences to discipline consumption.

One such example of this move toward positioning brands as a "cultural resource" for agency within an "identity project" might be thought of as "branded applications for self-expression" (Holt, 2002, p. 83). These would include: CP+B's SimpsonizeMe.com engine promoting *The Simpsons Movie* in which users were invited to submit a photo that would be rendered a la Matt Groening's cartoon characters; MadMenYourself.com where fans could project themselves as an animated avatar in the style of the 1960s AMC TV show; and, as part of an OfficeMax holiday campaign, an "Elf Yourself" micro-site that enabled participants to feed headshots that wound up atop high-pitched, singing-and-dancing elf bodies. Presuming "prosumption" as the first stage in the marketing co-creation process, these campaigns then encouraged users to spread the branded content via e-mail and social network profiles.

Tactics like this try to get participants to see themselves, quite literally, *in* the brand-text – to embed and reroute identity through the digital circuits of these media properties, which, rendered newly lithe compared to the "closed" controls of traditional advertising, can accommodate the interactive agency and co-creation. A user-generated

gambit like these seeks to hold up the brand as a kind of mirror to the self – arousing

anthropomorphic curiosities as a way to cement "affective economic" equity (Jenkins,

2006). In an interview with Scott Goodson, founder and CEO of Strawberry Frog, he

explains the logic behind strategizing "brand community" through similar, if more

extreme, means for a Scion campaign (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001):

> I had this crazy idea which was to create a new language and basically to call it Scion language and it would be a language to communicate certain ideas that only people within Scion would've understood what it meant. And where you placed the language or symbols on a car would also communicate it, so [for example]… if you put this sticker on your left mirror, it means you're driving and you're single and you want to meet another Scion owner. Like, you know, where you put it on the car communicated certain things about you… And everyone thought I was insane, so they didn't want to do that idea… We developed the idea further and came up with the idea that… why don't we do something where people can just sort of create these symbols online and then they can use them for their social media and then they can spread them around? (personal communication, January 11, 2010)

Thus, as part of their "ScionSpeak.com" project, Strawberry Frog reached out to

the "youth generation" demographic that Toyota targets for the sub-brand to "*let*

individuals create their own digital fingerprint in the form of a personalized crest," a kind

of DIY-logo meant to be spread through social media. In a case study discussing the

campaign on the Strawberry Frog website, two rhetorical questions posed to the visitor

stand out (amidst other rhetoric revealing of strategies of Foucauldian management that

includes claims like "invite culture into the creative process…let them take ownership of

the idea"). The first asks: "How do you [i.e., "we" – the agency, Strawberry Frog] start a

dialogue with an audience that doesn't want to listen? You let them do the talking. In

fact, you give them their own language." The second ponders: "How do you create an

authentic social media campaign? You don't. The culture does." In short – to yet again

call upon Cole & Weber's illuminating epigram of governance – *let them say yes*.

Buzz Agency 2.0

Amateurs are being productively employed not just in filling out a new media

enthymeme like Subservient Chicken or MadMenYourself.com – they are being handed

more (ostensibly) "professional" duties in the form of sponsored blogs and tweets, which

represent, perhaps most acutely, the word-of-mouth analogue for the digital realm. As

this portion of the advertising industry continues to grow (it is expected to top $3 billion

in revenues by 2013), it holds the potential to reshape and reorganize the role played by

marketers: from "top-down communicators, in control of what information is released, to

whom and when, as well as the channels of communication themselves" to social and

digital *facilitators*, seemingly cooperating and collaborating as partners rather than

authoring and administering as supervisors (Rosenwald, 2010; Spurgeon, 2008, p. 1). In

this section, I will situate some of these institutional developments in the context of

companies that outsource online buzz to the crowd.

The operability of the advertisement as an "open work" – agile and contingent as

a tool for exerting a particular form of power and interpellating agency from the subjects

it encounters – is as relevant here as it has been theorized throughout. As became

apparent in conversations with several social media marketing firms, if an advertising

message is written out in full by an advertiser to be included in an amateur's online

publishing stream (be it blog or tweet), the less authentic it sounds and, hence, the less

"naturalized" the exercise of power. But by presenting the brand or product to digital

interlocutors as more of an open text, selling points are assumed to emerge almost

"organically" as part of the process of agents discovering the features (rather than having

them drilled into memory through an explicit hot sell); promotion in this way is meant to

blend in, guerrilla style, with the (non-promotional) communication flow. Put

differently, the legitimacy that accompanies freedom when seeking to conduct subjects

obliges "vernacularization" not ventriloquism.

In an interview, Ted Murphy, founder and CEO of Izea, which pays its 400,000

social media content creators for their "sponsored conversations" or "sponsored tweets,"

explains that less is thus more for advertisers who opt to allow participants to tailor the ad

message to their individual online voice rather than cut and paste a pre-set sponsored

message into their blog or Tweet stream:

> The most successful advertisers actually provide the least amount of information.
> And so, me saying, you know, 'Here's our laptop, here's a couple of facts about
> it, we want to know what you think' – those advertisers are going to be a lot more
> effective than an advertiser that says, 'Here are all the value propositions of our
> product and here's why we think it is better than our competition.' Because you
> want people to approach it in their own way and kind of – whether you want them
> to directly repeat that information or not – the more you fill someone's head with
> information, kind of the less creative they get to form their own opinion. (personal
> communication, December 17, 2009)

This is, again, a theory of governance which holds that, in crowd-sourcing

operations, the less control wielded, the more power exerted and the fluidity of individual

agency is where that structural ambition can thus take place. A similar logic of

governance emerged in conversation with Phoebe Jamieson, vice president of marketing

for Magpie, another firm with 15 million agents among its ranks that sprang up in recent

years to capitalize on the micro-blogging phenomenon. According to Jamieson, when agents rephrase a given advertisement that is placed in their Twitter stream (as opposed to just cutting and pasting ad-speak), it results in 32% higher click-through engagement: "[Followers] are used to hearing a certain tone, a certain style… By allowing that Twitterer to really contemplate the offering and think about it from 'what… my followers are going to find interesting,' it… hooks a lot more [of them]" (personal communication, November 5, 2009). Again, the ad message shrouds itself – camouflaged, guerrilla-style – with the native vernacular of that particular digital space, rather than protruding as an obvious commercial interloper. For this reason, Magpie advocates on its website, in language directed at prospective advertisers:

> Join the conversation, don't try to buy it… By running more variations of ads, you will be able to generate an advertising campaign that comes across in a more natural and conversational manner. Better yet, allow the Twitterer to put your ad in their own words… Keep your message conversational. Twitter is not the forum for 'hard sell.'

The "hard sell" (or "hot sell," as I've modified it here) is, in fact, a program of Taylorist discipline more suited to transmission ecology: that media world in which interactive agency was less possible, much less necessary. But an environment where heterarchical patterns of information flow exist alongside (and are mobilized within) hierarchical structures – an environment that might be characterized as the "new media of mass conversation" – calls for that fluidity in the service of populist decentralization (Spurgeon, 2008). Murphy's Izea interlocutor is *expected* to "act, innovate, tinker, and run free" because it is that expression of agency that authenticates their entreaty on the marketer's behalf; it is that agency that legitimizes the project of power.

Although buzz firms operating in the Web 2.0 space seem to be thus trading on

the credibility of those social media influencers that they enlist, disclosure is no less a

contested issue for these agencies than their offline cousins discussed in the last chapter.

Several instances of corporate chicanery have cropped up over the years in the form of

supposedly "user-generated" digital content: a site ("Wal-Marting Across America")

purporting to be the cross-country chronicle of a couple who parked their RV each night

in a Wal-Mart parking lot turned out to be a "flog" or fake blog put out by Wal-Mart's

PR agency (Gogoi, 2006); around the same time, Coke and Sony attempted to launch

Coke Zero and PSP, respectively, by deploying their own quirky flogs (Garfield, 2009, p.

105); and a few years later the electronics company Belkin admitted to paying for good

reviews on Amazon (Chuang, 2009). More recently, a group of businesses filed a class-

action lawsuit against Yelp.com, alleging that the company offered advertisers higher

placement of positive reviews and lower placement of negative reviews; as *The*

Washington Post reported of the suit, "What appears to be a spin-free, grass-roots

marketplace of opinions is rapidly turning into a hotly contested battleground where

public relations firms and a new breed of imagemakers help businesses counter negative

online comments and manage their online reputations" (Rosenwald, 2010).

By planting that which seems organic and simulating that which seems

autonomous, this might represent the darker art of online buzz: astroturfing 2.0. Such

efforts do not represent *co*-creation, nor are they representative of Foucault's schema of

governance, because they lack the negotiated "game" involved in instrumentalizing

"true" agency as such. In fall 2009, in response to some of those abuses of trust that have

taken place in a digital context – like creating such vested blogs while purporting to

objectivity, paying for favorable online reviews and comments, and posting information

online under fictitious guises – the Federal Trade Commission laid out a series of

guidelines clarifying what had long been law anyway: that affiliation disclosure takes

place and that only truthful claims are made (Friel, 2009). The push, which was

accompanied by a threat of $11,000 in fines for each infraction, was an attempt to

promote greater transparency through blogging, social networking, and other internet

platforms; as one social media expert advised companies on the guidelines, "The

enforcement environment has changed entirely. What you may have been able to get

away with in the World Wide Web's Wild West era will no longer work" (Lawrence,

2009).

Contesting the Advertisement

> The defining irony of the interactive economy is that the labor of detailed
> information gathering and comprehensive monitoring is being offloaded onto
> consumers in the name of their own empowerment… We are invited to actively
> participate in staging the scene of our own passive submission – *and to view such
> participation as a form of power sharing*. (Andrejevic, 2007, p. 15, italics added)

Although Andrejevic overstates the degree to which "active participation" can be

judged "passive submission," he is correct in noting the casting of "comprehensive

monitoring" as "power sharing." To that end, the consumer-generated advertising contest

is another recent example of marketer governance that seeks to marshal the productivity

of the crowd and "shepherd" it to useful ends. The 2009 Ford Fiesta launch represents an

archetypal case study in this regard worth examining more closely for the way in which it

sought to harness the momentum of "disinterested" digital interlocutors so as to embed

hype in their social media flows – insinuating the structure of commercial objectives into

the self-directed agency of amateur participation. Moreover, the very name itself given

to this program (the Fiesta "Movement") is evocative of those challenges of mobilizing

and conducting the conduct of independent clients whose "indispensable" agency allows

for "a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible interventions" to open up

(Foucault, 2000a, p. 340):

> The real reason why 'grassroots' fits with this specific situation is because we're
> not selling this car [yet]… What we're asking people to do is to fall in love with
> the car, fall in love with the movement, and start following the movement and
> really hoping that that groundswell of activity and action can keep people
> interested and engaged… We had a long list of different names that we
> considered and thought about and really started batting around. But at the end of
> the day, Fiesta 'Movement' just conveyed a message of actual action. And it
> really worked in terms of the people that we were looking for… these initial
> agents for creating this change and creating this movement. (S. Garza, personal
> communication, October 13, 2009)

Note here several of the themes that have been woven throughout this analysis:

the effacement of the sales component (in favor of, here, brand-building as governance);

the pursuit of "grassroots" authenticity for a program of structural contrivance

(commerce); and the use of "actual action" from "change agents" as a resource to be

fostered toward a particular end (Dean, 2010). The story of the Ford Fiesta campaign

actually begins as something of a desperate response to demographic and institutional

circumstances. According to Sam de la Garza, the Fiesta brand manager, Ford had been

hemorrhaging market share annually for millennials at an "incredible rate" and the Fiesta

was an attempt to court that increasingly central age cohort; yet traditional media

channels, the company concluded, offered few prospects for reach: "Traditional media to us is *Motor Trend*, *Automobile* magazine, *Car and Driver*, and unfortunately that's not even close to traditional media for millennials… We don't even get a nod; we don't even get a wink [from them]" (personal communication, October 13, 2009).

Thus, experimenting with a decidedly social media-heavy approach and foregoing much of the initial traditional media buy, the automaker financed a contest that gave 100 young, web-savvy winners free gas, insurance, and six months behind the wheel of the new subcompact. In exchange, participants were expected to complete one "mission" each month with the car (based around a common theme, e.g., "travel," "technology," "social activism," "adventure") and post their impressions via YouTube, Flickr, MySpace, Facebook, blogs, and so forth. Applicants for the program were scored based on their "social vibrancy" ("how much they were followed online and across how many platforms") and their creative and technical proficiency with the video medium (Dolan, 2009).

Here is an example, then, of the use of a Bourdieuian (2001) hybrid: the operationalization of "social-cultural" capital on behalf of the brand, for agents value to Ford lay in *both* the "embodied" cultural capital of being savvy enough to "use a machine" (Bourdieu's term for computer) and in the social capital that resides in "the size of the network of connections [one] can effectively mobilize" – which, in the Facebook era, is tabulated for all to see (Bourdieu, 2001, pp. 101, 103). By employing popular, productive social media butterflies, Ford sought to ride on the credibility of amateurs and thereby avoid connotations of authority that marketers work to conceal through guerrilla

means; it was a way of burying the project of consumer governance beneath the

"guilelessness" of branded content from brand evangelists:

> It's one thing when you go to ask somebody, 'Hey, Mike, how many followers do you have on Twitter and how many friends do you have on Facebook?' And we jot down the numbers and go, 'Oh, wow, you've got 1,000 friends on Facebook, you must be powerful!' The cool thing about making them actually execute a video was that a) we learned how they told the story and could you tell a story through YouTube? But most importantly, it was: Now show me or demonstrate to me, demonstrate to the Ford Motor Company that of the content that you've developed, do people really listen? Do people watch that? So what it became was a really powerful tool to verify what they were telling us… It's like, wow, this is proof now that these people can go out and generate an audience. (S. Garza, personal communication, October 13, 2009)

This is, after all, what advertising specializes in (creating content and assembling

audiences), but when the industry conceives of its role as facilitator of "bottom-up"

communication as much as administrator of information released from the "top down,"

audiences are cultivated by surrogates shepherded. And what did these colluding

participants get in exchange? Economic capital, to be certain (i.e., use of the car), but

also, as I argued in the conclusion of the last chapter, an opportunity to further promote

themselves as inextricable to Ford's promotion in a kind of endorsement reciprocity – that

is, their free labor here functioned as a practice of social capitalism. What was good for

raising Ford's profile was, apparently, thought to be effective in raising their own, as "the

personalities used the car to boost their own followings and ad revenue from YouTube"

(social capital then converted to economic) (Learmonth, 2009):

> These people – especially the ones that had the strongest followings out there are creating their own online brands that they have to support with credible messaging and that they – I never really thought of it this way – but they really chose the Ford Motor Company as much as we chose them. And it really became this kind of two-way street of credibility… when you're talking about people that

are creating their own online brands. (S. Garza, personal communication, October 13, 2009)

I hear a similar refrain in interviews with other firms specializing in consumer-generated content. Commenting on the disparity in Twitter ad placement values between the "real" celebrities and "everyday college students and housewives" who serve as agents in his Izea network, Ted Murphy suggests, "[That] really gives creators something to strive for, because they can see as they put more effort into *building a brand* and creating good content and creating traffic, their earnings potential will rise along with it" (personal communication, December 17, 2009, italics added). Such is the promotional logic of interpersonal entrepreneurialism, where subjects are taught to "build a brand" out of their social output. Moreover, this again does not always entail a payday in the sense of pure economic capitalism, but holds social capitalism rewards as well; as one CEO commented of his ad content participants: "We kept probing about compensation. They said, 'It's not that. It's watching it get posted and seeing how many hits it gets.' They're hungry creatives, but they're hungry in a different way. *They're hungry for recognition*" (Garfield, 2009, p. 205, italics added).

Not only were these amateur content creators meant to "authenticate" product enthusiasm to social network followers in the form of Web 2.0 productivity, but they also themselves provided, for Ford, a ready resource (and, in a sense, an outsourced story source) when Garza was plying reporters for favorable PR coverage:

> It made the message more personal. It didn't make the message [from us]: 'Ford Motor Company is selecting this person because they have all these characteristics.' It was more all of the questions coming from reporters [to

participants], like, 'Why did you even want to apply for this Ford Motor Company thing?'

This is, in a double sense, "circuitous power" – both in that in operates through digital contexts and also in that it takes a tortuous approach to conducting conduct, a la public relations, by obfuscating corporate authorship and channeling an ad message through more "authentic" intermediaries – be they Fiesta evangelists or the journalists writing about those evangelists – so as to corral those disinterested parties and flows to do the work of marketers who are, by definition, not neutral about the hype. To be fair, however, participants were ceded what appeared to be genuine autonomy in constructing their video installments; Garza, for instance, reported "major concern" about and subsequent "war-game…ideas" for potentially unflattering (or even rogue) content that might get posted. (As a contingency, he says, they tried to monitor as much online communication from agents as possible and, if necessary in the event of damagingly "off-message" content, to swoop in to "really help them understand what the Fiesta brand is all about" – I assume this is code for "re-education," in the consumer-generated sense – as well as distributing branded paraphernalia "that really felt like they're being part of a community.") The challenge, as Garza reported it, was in achieving a modicum of panoptic awareness:

> The thing that worried me the most was: Were we, as a team, going to be able to listen enough? … We're not staffed to read a million tweets everyday – I can't physically read everything the agents are writing. The only thing I can do is probably read 5-10% of everything and hope that I'm listening enough.

In a way, this is a significant reversal of roles: "The centralized model is essentially inside out. You create all the messages and you send them out," says one

"open-source marketing" expert. "The new model is outside in: What you want to do is to receive all the information you can from the outside and incorporate them in the processes of the company" (Garfield, 2009, p. 215). In other words, this guerrilla strategy – using *audiences* as the supplier of the brand narrative – achieves the ideal of the cool sell, whereby the brand is not forcing a finished message but rather arranging for the conditions in which consumers can construct and disseminate their own "authentic" understandings of the product; creating that "mediatic space" which anticipates consumer agency within the coordinates of Web 2.0 programs (Arvidsson, 2005, p. 245). Moreover, this functions not just as outsourced proselytizing, but self-sustaining reconnaissance, as crowd-source content acts like a "real world" focus group finding, providing "naturalized" insight from consumers about the product – a digital Rorschach test for collective brand perceptions.

This is one of the main critiques that Mark Andrejevic (2007) levels at the "premature" celebration of interactivity as democratic and empowering: this oft-hyped "dialogue" with the brand is actually an "invitation to submit to the monitoring gaze of market researchers" and the "egocasting" emblematic of social networks and user-generated content "gives marketers the most direct window into our psyche and buying habits they've ever had" (Andrejevic, 2007, pp. 5, 27, 136). Or, put differently, "To draw persuasive messages from the very audience that one is trying to persuade is an ultimate form of marketing research. In theory, customers know what they want, and… crowdsourced advertising… [gets] customers to produce it in the first place" (Brabham, 2009).

To that end, the industry has developed a number of "listening" practices in recent years – the magnanimous euphemism for the more cold and calculating "surveillance," but which has, like surveillance, control as its eventual endgame (Foucault, 1977). For instance, agencies like Omnicomm's Rapp and WPP's Wunderman are testing out "text mining" tools like "Digital Anthropology" and "Listening Platform," respectively, that can sift through "the conversations taking place on blogs, Twitter, or other social-media sites to identify the emotional aspects and reasons behind consumer behavior;" one Rapp client, 7-Eleven, champions the validity of such a data-gathering process: "It's not in a focus-group setting so we were getting explicit and authentic data" (Bush, 2009). This is how truths are "naturalized" in contemporary marketing, in a Foucauldian (2000c) sense: their appearance, independent of marketer elicitation, authenticates their veracity and today's media ecology makes that appearance increasingly possible.

Such rhetoric accompanies consumer-generated advertising contests as well as social media surveillance. As one industry observer comments on Converse's original short-film solicitation from fans of the shoe, "Instead of telling consumers what the brand stands for, isn't it so much better (and more authentic) to let consumers tell us?" (Jaffe, 2005, p. 226) Doritos is another such brand that sought to furnish a high-profile "environment [or] ambience" that "anticipates and programs consumers' agency" (Arvidsson, 2005, p. 245).

In 2007, the snack label launched their "Crash the Super Bowl" contest, which offered fans the opportunity to create a commercial that, following a "public" vote, could air during the big game. A press release hyped attendant projects in which "the brand *put*

the consumer in control," like the "Fight for the Flavor" program, "which *invited* Doritos

fans to determine which of two new flavors survived on store shelves and which one was

pulled;" the "X-13D Flavor Experiment, where consumers *had a chance* to name a

mysterious new flavor of Doritos;" and the "Unlock Xbox" competition, "which

empowered fans to design the first-ever consumer-created" Xbox game (italics added

throughout so as to emphasize the "freedom" agenda inherent to consumer governance in

this project of marketing engagement). And, yet, as open and collaborative as these

efforts are meant to portray Doritos, just two clicks over to the FAQ section of the same

website hosting that press release, a legal disclaimer disabuses the consumer-creator of

any illusions harbored about a broader parity of roles:

> We are unable to accept ideas and suggestions from outside the company. The
> policy not to accept unsolicited ideas was adopted to preserve good relations with
> the public. We genuinely appreciate your interest, but do not want to foster false
> expectations as to the origin of any idea.

Co-creation, then, has its limits. Even Doritos, whose "Crash the Super Bowl"

contest is probably the most prominent instance of consumer-generated content, only

"puts the consumer in control" at particular times and in particular places, when that

agency narrowly serves promotional purposes; as brands thus "democratize," freedom is

framed and inflected in certain ways rather than others. Those imperatives, moreover, do

not always take. Whether or not the brand *genuinely* believes in ceding full control over

to the consumer as the "democratization" marketing myth holds – or has, in reality, a

more limited view of that participatory space as Doritos' legalese betrays above – the fact

nonetheless remains that, by opening itself (even slightly) to "citizen" media contests, the

brand is, potentially, opening itself up to wayward uses.

General Motors learned this lesson well, when, in 2006, it became the poster child

for consumer-generated advertising gone awry (Banet-Weiser & Lapsansky, 2008). As

part of a promotional initiative for its Tahoe SUV model, Chevy furnished audio and

visual material online and encouraged consumers to mash-up and submit a finished

commercial from the raw media pieces; however, when culture jammers crashed the

contest and populated Chevy's website with "endless iterations of one idea: that the gas-

guzzling Tahoe was a grotesque offense against a green earth," it became more known

for the subversive satire than the straight-faced participation (Garfield, 2009, p. 149).

The Tahoe disaster likely perplexed contest planners who (presumably) thought that by

programming a participatory model they could channel consumer creativity in a

productive direction. Yet shepherding amateurs runs a fundamental risk, as Chevy

discovered, and mash-up recalcitrance cannot be so easily "gamed" by throwing would-

be "produsers" a few semiotic building blocks.

What such transgression illustrates is the challenge for marketers that abdicate

traditional message controls and allocate narrative responsibility to the crowd: "It's not

all going to be rosy content," acknowledged a spokesperson for Chevy, which, to its

credit, continued to host the dissident creations for the duration of its competition

(Petrecca, 2007). Going forward, observers would be well-served to watch for how such

contests frame amateur co-creative "freedom" within more or less stringent parameters;

in positioning the brand as a *contingent* text (that is, eliciting closure from Web 2.0

participants a la the new media enthymeme), marketers will surely develop *contingency* measures in case the loop of meaning is closed in unfavorable ways (i.e., Chevy's culture jammers). At a juncture when audiences appear emboldened to involve themselves in the mediation process – via tweets, blogs, homemade videos and profile pages – the task for brand managers is to shape a semblance of empowering yet manageable conditions; to, again, structure agency in "valuable" ways (i.e., that provide value to creative types and to company balance sheets). "The challenge of [this] new marketing 'govern-mentality' is," as Zwick et al. (2008) conclude, "to ensure that consumer freedom evolves in the 'right' way" (p. 184).

The Future of Net-Work?

These examples of crowd-source marketing hold the potential to reshape the role and self-conceit of the industry as it simultaneously "dematerializes" the media work conducted and this is fittingly in accordance with other patterns of immaterial labor visible across the digital landscape. The more that amateurs are invited into the production process, and the more advertising views its product as an "open work," the more it demolishes the myth of (and monopoly on) a "special" creative class that generates content from a professional perch elevated from audiences – and the more it could augur change to what those professionals in all media industries are expected to do.

Already this structural instability that Web 2.0 has introduced has led to changes in the flexibility of marketing institutions. Unilever, for example, fired Lowe, the agency responsible for its Peparami account, a British snack brand, in favor of crowd-sourcing ad

ideas through a firm called Idea Bounty. Rather than getting the ideation input from "two or four creatives" at Lowe, as it alleged, Unilever opened the advertising challenge up more broadly, offering a $10,000 prize for the winning submission and, along the way, earning Idea Bounty "quite a lot of negative" feedback: "People get sensitive and think we are threatening the creative industry," the agency's marketing director confided (E. Hall, 2009). Because content has long "been subject to mystification and thus relegated to the clutches of a small, elite group," as one observer puts it (Jaffe, 2005), such "democratization" is bound to "puncture" the "creative ego," as Daniel Neville, Idea Bounty's brand coordinator, acknowledged in an interview (personal communication, November 10, 2009).

However, Neville counters that while his company is, admittedly, in the business of *dis*-integrating a core competency of agencies, implementation still requires the creative skill sets of professionals. This is, however, cold comfort, I would venture; if the past ten years are any indication, traditional barriers to creative entry into the media industries, like hardware cost and software proficiency, are likely to continue to erode. In other words, cultural production is – as any web-cam cineaste, basement blogger or bedroom DJ knows – no longer in the hands of just the professionals – such that ideation *and* implementation are already crowd-sourceable.

Ironically enough, Unilever was actually hoping to "pitch" the contest less to the general public and more to "professionals in creative businesses." Indeed, according to Neville, nearly half of the participants in Idea Bounty's previous ideation challenges came from *within* the advertising industry – "copywriters, art designers, directors,

strategy guys" and so on – a phenomenon that would seem to be corroborated in other competitions as well. One finalist in the Doritos Super Bowl contest was a location scout for commercials who took time off from work to create the video submission in the hopes of landing her creative content on a high-profile stage (Petrecca, 2007); another finalist claimed that he was "'doing whatever it takes to get some recognition' with [similar aspirations] of 'being signed by a production company' as a result of the exposure" (Brabham, 2009).

It is therefore interesting to note that not only amateur actors, musicians, and filmmakers are keen to take advantage of these "corporate canvases," but also those hoping to reach the higher creative rungs of the advertising industry itself. The fact is that even as advertising organizes the competitions illustrated here as a way of harnessing the collective productivity of the amateur media-makers of Web 2.0, within that competition, participants are vying to stand out in the crowd(-source). This also raises the question of how porous that designation of "amateur" versus "professional" may become and whether, because of that, the former may increasingly lose its claims to authenticity that it has held over the latter. In sum, the crowd-source trend portends a more flexible, stripped-down model of content creation that blurs former lines between the client, the agency, the production company, and the public.

I have demonstrated in this chapter how the enthymemes of new media provide a productive, inveigling template for advertisers if they are willing to concede flexibility in the brand-text and furnish a digital toolkit to co-creative audiences. Yet the *opera aperta* of "cool media" is appropriate for and applicable to more than just marketing ends and, in

fact, I would submit that *all* media industries might gradually remodel themselves with an eye toward this collaborative elasticity. Such a changing structure anticipates the audience role differently and turns out a more versatile product – materializing cultural production that is, in a sense, *less* material than ever before.

Journalists who once authored a more definitive, independent article in print now volunteer more provisional, interactive blog posts in cyberspace. Pop music artists once accustomed to cutting a tangible, permanent, analog record on vinyl now know that their MP3 source material is forever unfinished – putty in the hands of a remixing mash-up alchemist somewhere down the line. For cultural producers of all stripes, their textual work goes "from being etched in stone to being written on a dry-erase board" (Serazio, 2008a, p. 83). Media "content" is thus, in this fashion, rendered more temporary, conditional, and synergetic. And so as the media ecosystem continues to evolve this will impact *how* advertisers and other media professionals do what they do and *who* they believe they are doing it for. For the (free) labor of audiences is not just provisioned in the regime of engagement, it contributes necessary and expected productivity to the interactive project.

To be fair, though, for most amateur content creators, this "freedom to labor" is typically a labor of love. It is often unremunerated, yes, but it is also unrequired – gratuitous in the broadest sense. Why, then, do those interpellated by an *opera aperta* voluntarily submit to the part-time work? Is it, indeed, the pursuit of a "networked reputation" that drives this voluntary media-making – an extension of the entrepreneurial self elucidated in the last chapter's conclusion (Deuze, 2007a, p. 77)? This is certainly

possible; for those aspiring to Hollywood on YouTube, *The New York Times* in the blogosphere, and EMI on MySpace Music, that "networked reputation" is perhaps assumed to be a down payment toward hopes of long-term financial stability as a member of the creative class in the cultural industries. At a time when advertising is going through a seismic reshuffle of its traditional relationship with those mass media institutions (as detailed in the first two chapters), eager and cheap talent is a no doubt welcome development. One might wonder, however, if this profusion of voluntary labor might eventually erode and devalue the compensation structure that supports those professionals who have "made it" in the culture industries. In the concluding chapter, I'll tie together many of the different facets explored to this point in the project in contemplating how guerrilla marketing exercises its own new system of governance and what it could mean for media, consumption, and society.

Conclusion:

Managing Agency in the Regime of Engagement

This dissertation has inquired into the logic and practices of power as located in

the guerrilla marketing strategies of the past ten years. Stated succinctly, I have

examined how *subjects* are positioned and managed as *agents*: how this "conduct of

conducts and… management of possibilities," as Michel Foucault (2000a) wrote of the

exercise of power, utilize their freedom toward a particular set of objectives (p. 341).

The consumer subject, in this scheme of governance, needs to act – that is, after all, how

advertising effectiveness is judged – but the consumer subject, as I have discovered, is

strategically engaged to act *without the sense of being acted upon*. This makes the

program of exercising authority a complex, delicate, and chiefly invisible task.

Just as those who run schools, businesses, and prisons face the challenge of

controlling individuals while simultaneously recognizing and reconciling those

individuals' need to feel they "are not slaves, but free" (Rose, 1999, p. 67), so, too, is the

marketer confronted with the conundrum of compelling consumer behavior while

maintaining the appearance of being variously disinterested and autonomous. *Freedom*

is, indeed, the fulcrum for this negotiation of governance, but *invisibility* is how power

pulls the strings behind the scenes to manage as best as possible that freedom (and there

are no guarantees when it comes to *unmanageable* subjects).

Moreover, while Foucault and his intellectual inheritors have situated this

governance, these techniques of power, across that range of comparatively obvious

institutions – the prison, the insane asylum, the factory, the school – few have traversed

into the mall with such a theoretical framework in hand. And yet, the mall remains a

social, political, and economic institution that governs as many subjects with as much

force as – if perhaps less visibly than – these other more palpably repressive apparatuses.

It is, furthermore, an institution whose success or failure in that governance carries with it

a huge chunk of the global financial system. As the fate of governance goes within the

mall (in the most general, free-market, consumer-society sense of the word), so goes the

fate of capitalism in the Western world. For though the state acts as a major player in the

circuitry of modern rule, so, too, does the retailer; and yet the retailer has, to date, largely

escaped from a Foucauldian inquiry into its reasonings and operations – an "analytics of

government" that "places these regimes of practices at the centre of analysis and seeks to

discover the logic of such practices" (Dean, 2010, p. 41). This project has provided a

valuable corrective to that oversight at a critical juncture.

While advertising is fundamentally a project of "conducting conduct" like other

forms of governmentality, curiously – and, as I have shown here, quite deliberately – the

industrial discourse (both trade press articles and interviews with professional

practitioners) does not talk in such terms. This is because the project of contemporary

consumer management – this "regime of engagement" that is informed by the

participatory logic of the cool sell and executed through guerrilla media placement – is a

project that tries to structure agency and discipline through discovery; accommodate a

façade of content objectivity and disinterested space while self-effacing its own authority

and intent; democratize and collaborate with subject autonomy and more populist

communicative flows; and open up the brand as a more flexible, relaxed form. It is, in short, persuasion without the heavy hand: *governance that tries not to seem like governance*.

This is a substantial contribution to previous ideas about power like those of Foucault and Antonio Gramsci, both of whom I have relied upon most frequently in formulating the theoretical backdrop for this work. "Invisibility," broadly construed, has been central to this analysis of the struggle between (marketer) structure and (consumer) agency, though neither Foucault nor Gramsci spelled out invisibility as integral to that general program of power (even as it hovered in the margins of their theorizing). Yet I have demonstrated here how guerrilla marketing functions as camouflage on two levels: It shrouds the advertising message in unexpected media spaces and it also shrouds the fundamental project of consumer discipline that is, ultimately, the eventual purview of advertising. Thus, we can abstract the lessons offered here to propose that the *self-effacement* of power is the means by which macro-level machinations act upon the individual choice of a fundamentally sovereign subject. If that agentic subject is to be used, her freedom cannot be perceived as simply a means to an external end: Put simply, if the hot sell told her what to buy, the cool sell "lets" her figure it out for herself.

For Gramsci (1971), the hegemonic "leadership" of subordinate groups, rather than their coercion, is a game of invisibility (even if he does not express it explicitly as such); for Foucault (2000a), too, a "mode of action that does not act directly and immediately upon others" but instead "structures the possible field of action of others" is a game of invisibility (even if he does not express it as such) (pp. 340, 341). Across a

range of diverse examples examined here, "invisible governance" has been the abiding

logic of practice – the way in which subjects are managed as agents, those "strategic

games between liberties" – and thus bespeaks that blurring of advertising and public

relations, whose progenitor, Edward Bernays, made invisibility his theoretical and

methodological centerpiece (Foucault, 1997b, p. 299). Invisibility is thus a means of

legitimizing power, because it foregrounds surrogate forces – as I detailed here,

ambiences, resistances, grassroots, amateurs, and, above all, the freedom of the subject –

in place of its own obvious, vested, disciplinary intentions and impositions.

In a network society, agency is coded into structure. As such, audiences are

entering into a period of profound change and disruption in terms of how the media

governs culture and how advertising governs consumption: "push" media governs

audiences one way; "pull" media governs them in quite another. The former imperiously

takes for granted a more docile, fixed subject; the latter ostentatiously accords liberty and

acquiesces and complies with the interactive choice that ensues.

And, yet, this cannot represent volition in full, for long-standing exigencies of

capitalism endure – the worker still needs to be "consumerized," discretionarily as she

may now be regarded – and the nuances of an unconventional communicative form may

veil the structural objectives that persist. I have, in the chapters and case studies here,

sought to uncover and map the institutional discourse and cultural logic underpinning that

circuitry of rule – that exertion of influence over our market choices – when it comes to

advertisers experimenting with guerrilla methods. By situating this diverse set of tactics

and strategies in sharp focus, we can understand the broader philosophy of governance

that animates them; it is a philosophy wherein the power over the consumer subject is softer, more subtle, and more sophisticated than ever before and programs of determination are, paradoxically, implicated in and dependent upon practices of freedom.

In this concluding chapter, I will begin by reviewing and abstracting how that power works through freedom by accentuating the consumer experience of discovery and choice; how the marketer underscores that freedom by both self-effacing intent through disinterested spaces and abdicating authority to autonomous communicative flows; and how this freedom is dependent upon a more conditional brand-form that stages the opportunity for that agency. I then advance a critique of the "cool media" ecosystem that weans audiences on the pleasures of constant participation – many of which, I acknowledge, operate necessarily in the service of identity and community. Yet I conclude with a plea for consumer restraint and reflection – advocating *true* discipline and *real* discovery external to commercial culture.

Power through Freedom

Discovery, as was heard so often invoked by name and in principle, represents a way of framing that act of power as something *em*powering for the subject it is visited upon. It is a way of working through the agency of that subject by setting out the parameters of governance – structuring that "possible field of action" – so as to instrumentalize persuasion from "below" rather than "above." Indeed, discovery, as opposed to persuasion, mirrors the semantic and structural difference between power and domination that Foucault (1997b) identified in chapter 1: The former, unlike the latter,

presupposes the self-determination of the subject of power which makes possible a way of embedding the objectives of the ruler in the "free choice" moment of the ruled. Modern democratic governance imposes freedom upon citizens in much the same way (Dean, 2010); so, too, do the guerrilla marketers analyzed here structure the project of agency by attempting to precipitate consumption without really forcing it – "casualizing," as I frequently described it, the imposition as much as possible. Domination would simply "make consumers" (which it cannot do); power "makes consumers *willing*," as *Adweek* pithily summarized in chapter 1 (Anderson, 2004).

We saw this repeatedly: from the epigrammatic formulation in Cole & Weber's mission statement ("let them say yes") to the consultant-speak catchphrase through which Alex Wipperfurth explained Pabst Blue Ribbon's improbable ascendance (the "brand hijack"). "Let" has been the operative verb in the execution of this governance, because "let" allocates a sense of sovereignty rather than stripping those addressed by power of their experience of autonomy – it accentuates the feeling of being a "free" and self-determining agent of our own destiny. "Let" is the administrative strategy by which we are ensnared in the regime of engagement: Advertainment *lets* us discover the promotional message amidst disinterested cultural content; street spectacle *lets* us discover it in the anti-establishment appropriation of public space; buzz agency *lets* us discover it through casual conversation; and crowd-source marketing *lets* us discover it through new media flows.

When we arrive at the terminus of action under this mode of governance – that is, making a purchase – it must feel "chosen by" rather than "chosen for" us, such that we

"discover" rather than "are told" the commercial directive. Framed starkly, one might

say that traditional advertising addresses the consumer as a dictator might (interrupting

and imposing), while the cool sell addresses the consumer as a democrat might (being

solicited and proposing). The technological conditions of audience empowerment

foregrounded in chapter 1 contribute to the obligations of staging this agency. If these

new media furnish contemporary audiences with an apparent sense of "godlike power"

over our information environment, as one observer hyped it, the advertiser *would* need to

accede a certain veneer of independence to the subject in the promotional process. Yet

media ecology aside, agency as a prerequisite for obedience also needs to be

contextualized within an even broader strand of neoliberal patterns (Harvey, 2005): The

marketing "regime of engagement" that I am positing here is but a microcosm of a much

larger socio-political regime whose long march toward deregulation, open markets,

privatized services, and the dismantling of the welfare state can be summarized through

much the same creed of free choice and personal liberty.

"You've got a generation that doesn't want to be talked to; they want to be

included, and they're going to make their own decisions," one CEO explains of his firm's

consumer-generated content approach to reach a young adult demographic (Halpern,

2006). "The best way to get this demographic on your side is to empower them and give

them responsibility, choice and freedom to help shape your direction." Just as citizens

have been trained to loathe the "nanny" state in this regime of consciousness, so, too, are

consumers thought to loathe the "nanny" marketer. Self-reliance is, in fact, a strategy of

governance whereby the individual "discovers" what works best for her rather than having it imposed – "chosen by" an external authority.

The irony here, of course, is that while the *state* has slowly dismantled and outsourced its apparatus for governance in the name of "freedom" – delegating responsibility to the individual – the technologies and articulations of *consumer* governance that also accentuate freedom only make the consumer *more* dependent on the marketer for agency. "Freedom" in this regime of engagement is therefore but a way of aligning the objectives of advertisers with the aspirations of consumers who are otherwise their subject of governance yet weary of dictation from the ruler; it is, again, a way of governing *through* freedom as a way of disciplining consumption. And this is deeply reflective of the changing structure of the media industries: "Impressions" – the marketing metric of Fordist communication – presumed more of a passive subject; "engagement" – the metric of an interactive era – not only acknowledges but obliges the subject's participation.

Self-Effacing Designs

The appearance of abdicating a position of traditional, didactic authority when negotiating consumer behavior is essential when strategizing governance as such; it registered, in this dissertation, every time an advertiser made a fussy show of self-effacing his or her real objectives (i.e., to induce consumption) and once more points to public relations as the intellectual predecessor to guerrilla marketing practice. Because selling is ultimately an exercise of power and because, as established in the first chapter,

consumers are thought to be increasingly skeptical of and inclined to filter out those overtures (especially when they can be recognized in familiar contexts), there is a persistent effort to expunge any semblance of behavioral diktat; the anti-authority ethos of the guerrilla approach is a project of minimizing, even obfuscating the role of persuasive force.

This explains why Scott Goodson eschewed the calculating context endemic to the 30-spot ("it's manipulated content that's supposed to persuade you to buy something"); the reverse-psychology engineering of the Truth campaign ("[if we] tell the consumer not to smoke, that's going to be falling on deaf ears"); and the articulation of the consumer target's presumed mentality for BMW's *The Hire* ("it's: 'Don't sell me. Like, let me make a decision for myself'"). This again educes that central paradox identified in the introduction: to act upon an acting subject without that subject feeling as though they've been acted upon.

In fact, the decision to utilize guerrilla media is, from the very start, a deliberate choice to self-efface persuasive intent because these contexts lack the conspicuously commercial connotation that might accompany a billboard or 30-spot. Guerrilla audiences are thought to be drawn to the "objective" and credible sheen associated with entertainment programming (branded content), graffiti and street art (alternative ambient), interpersonal relationships and social networks (word-of-mouth), and amateur and viral content (consumer-generated). Recalling the metaphorical parallels of warfare stitched throughout, these spaces do not look like a "battle" is taking place there to win over consumers' spending habits quite like the assault they experience amidst

conventional advertising fields – these are contexts that intrinsically obfuscate the machinations of power embedded within them, which is what makes them so appealing as vehicles for conducting the conduct of audiences often decried as unmanageable.

For centuries, as Nikolas Rose (1999) discerns, "those seeking to exercise power have sought to rationalize their authority" (p. 28); Gramsci (1971) formulated his own cynical summation of this when he wrote, "the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority" (p. 80). Just as Edward Bernays first operationalized these principles, I would add that the best way of achieving that rationalization of authority is *to attempt to deny that any such power or authority exists* (p. 28). Invisibility is, therefore, a mechanism of legitimation. This obscuring of authority in the process of addressing consumers endeavors to open up a space for that aforementioned experience of freedom. It provides a rationale for the not-uncommon recourse, by interviewees, to frame their work as "education" as much as marketing (a legacy of PR); for by skirting the very acknowledgement of one's role as advertiser, one might deactivate the filter that the consumer employs when encountering the message. If there is no authority, the thinking goes, there is no threat of discipline; there is no act of power executed; it "naturalizes" the agenda of governance.

The fact that those in charge of campaigns drawn from so many different contexts here evaded that acknowledgement of their fundamental task of managing desire and moving product testifies to some sense of that task (selling) being somehow corrupted – that is, at least relative to the more noble and welcomed aspirations officially espoused for the work conducted (i.e., culture, community, identity, etc.). Such work, like the

"raising awareness" campaigns for pharmaceutical drugs or the commercially-unadorned YouTube video that gets forwarded along, aims to shuttle the audience through supposedly neutral content so as to engineer serendipitous encounters – "blind dates," one might say – with the brand. Creating a "disinterested" space is part of that self-denial of authority; this pretense of "disinterestedness" is, of course, a sham, but it is a *useful* fiction – a sham meant to deemphasize the application of power exercised therein.

The advertainment approach illustrated in chapter 2 is clear evidence of this, but so, too, is the simulated subversion seen in the tactics of chapter 3: By embedding a persuasive message in unauthorized, even illicit communicative flows, an anti-establishment (and, thereby, anti-authority) ethos is meant to be cultivated. "Micro-media," trading on its claims to authenticity and integrity, "governs" persuasion differently – less imposingly, more casually – than broadcast channels. It suggests rather than interrupts; whispers rather than shouts. A hidden piece of corporate street art like that of *Aqua Teen* therefore functions transgressively not only in terms of the legality of how non-commercial urban public space is used – a disinterested space, I might add, because communication, even corporation communication, is not permitted in this way – but also in terms of effacing its own fundamental commercial intent.

Authenticating through Autonomy

Self-effacement and the creation of a disinterested space are not the only tactics through which authority can deny its position of power in the process of guerrilla persuasion; as I showed in chapter 4 and 5, embedding the brand in autonomous social

and creative flows is a way of outsourcing hype and, thus, concealing the intent of governance. As discussed earlier, this is the appeal – and the challenge – of executing something "grassroots," for it is through "grassroots" flows that choice and behavior can (ostensibly) rise up from the people rather than be imposed upon them.

As the manifestation of a spontaneous, populist (even guerrilla) uprising, the grassroots form can function as power because it operates through independent agents, communities, and networks – that is, those furthest from the appearance of dominant interests. Public relations is, again, well versed in this logic of power; particularly, "astroturfing," a clandestine approach to simulating political campaigns and social movements intended to seem impromptu and authentic while actually being coordinated by a behind-the-scenes organization. As buzz and viral increasingly becomes a venerated metric, campaigns for consumer products may increasingly resemble these more traditionally political tactics.

This kind of strategy thus testifies to an attempt to flatten the hierarchy of relations between authority and subject: a shift of self-conceit from management to facilitation, from administrator to collaborator, from top-down to bottom-up. In arranging to stage the conditions of governance through freedom, the marketer *is* relinquishing certain patterns of control (as I will elaborate in the next section), while still aiming for management through collaboration. It therefore becomes a project, as Foucault (1997c) foreshadowed and Jonathan Ressler expressly articulated, of "pastoral" power: "shepherding" subjects "in movement toward a goal" (p. 68). At a time when audiences – especially online "prosumer" audiences – are noisier and more productive

than ever as consumer subjects, the logic of such practice makes it sensible for corporate

(and political power) to work *with* this momentum rather than trying, likely fruitlessly, to

stifle or contain it. Put crudely, if you can't beat them (that is, bombard the audience

with one-way messages), beat them by joining them (blend in with sovereign and

decentralized two-way communicative flows).

Working with that socially productive amateur momentum – those blogs, those

Tweets, those status updates, that sprawling public conversation that is, I will explain

shortly, becoming the opiate of our time – is another way of disguising authority; for by

furnishing the raw digital materials meant to satisfy audiences' co-creative needs, the

marketer can frame freedom and channel creativity as she sees fit. Thus, this line of

governance is how *employment* gets induced through a guise of *empowerment*; the latter

serves as a strategic rhetorical cover for the former, as consumers co-create value for the

brand and their free labor is appropriated to constructive ends (Lazzarato, 1996;

Terranova, 2000). It is a way of putting participation to good use, especially at a time

when self-publishers eagerly populate the internet with amateur media-making. This

interactive co-creation is also what bridges the concepts of governance and free labor:

The agency expressed by subjects (and presumably enjoyed as such) is equally a

gratuitous resource that can be marshaled for profit.

Working through the labor of the crowd – and, more specifically, their social and

cultural capital – is, moreover, a populist approach to exerting authority (Bourdieu,

2001). After all, what better way to instantiate power and govern subjects than through

democracy, which uses the will of the people as "consent" to – and a rationale for – force

wielded in a particular way (Bernays, 1947)? Hence, there has been much hype around "brand democratization" – the fulcrum for both the instrumentalizing of agency in the governed and the abdication of traditional authority by the governing in that exercise of power. Both "dialogue" and "virality" are pitched as magnanimous gestures in this regime of engagement; they imply – and at times, explicitly spell out – a strategy for ostensibly "splitting" that power. For example, Dave Balter ballyhoos an allegedly profound and egalitarian shift from "being spoken at by brands" to speaking *with* them.

Yet this shift must again be considered equally in the context of technological change, for the move from brand autocracy to brand democracy, as some like to make it out, is made possible by an evolution in media ecology from one-way broadcasting transmission to two-way networked interaction. (And because dialogue is also a useful way for corporations to elicit personal information and refine their sense of and strategy for goods that they hope to sell, dialogue is valuable as an extraction measure independent of its democratic façade.) Similarly, viral memes enabled by that environmental transformation can be cast as somehow more organic, populist and therefore credible than that "autocratic" broadcaster flow; being content that is opt-in, *chosen by* – discovered, supposedly, from the bottom-up – in and through decentralized social networks, viral advertising contrasts with mass media advertising that feels *chosen for* audiences. But just as disinterested space is only disinterested in a limited sense, these flows are neither truly democratic nor authentically organic. They have the aura of these ideals, but lack the substance of them, which is, after all, what branding does best.

Staging Participation

Even if brand "democracy" is more contrived hype than substantiated egalitarianism, advertisers, one must concede, *do* seem to be relaxing what had been greater control and precision over the brand by strategizing consumer governance in this fashion. Buzz agency, as I detailed, conscripts rather than scripts dialogue; consumer-generated advertising similarly presupposes an undeniably more autonomous contribution from amateurs in the crowd. In both cases, the "audiences" for that message (e.g., friends exposed to word-of-mouth marketing, Twitter users who are fed a sponsored Tweet) are encountering a brand-text that is conceived as more of a semiotic "open work" than at perhaps any time in the past.

This is because to allocate a sense of agency in this regime, the brand *has* to be conceived as that more contingent, unfinished, work-in-progress; to govern through freedom, there has to be an opportunity for ostensible participation. This is predicated on a philosophy of the brand as *operable* – a resource for use, a "possible field of action," a proposition that suggests, "You May" – rather the brand as *operational* – a pre-defined blueprint for behavior, a didactic fiat, a disciplinary imposition that ordains, "You Must" (Arvidsson, 2005; Foucault, 2000a; Holt, 2002).

The openness of the work (i.e., advertisement) can vary. Advertisement "opens" the brand up through flexible use by artist interlocutors in long-form storytelling; street spectacle through dissident yet ambiguous outdoor display; buzz agency through social improvisation; and crowd-sourcing through digital toolsets. Because ambiguity invites interpretation – recall the principles of the cool sell here – a denotatively flexible, albeit

materially obdurate form like the *Aqua Teen* light board or the *House* "graffadi" from chapter 3 is thought to elicit inquisition from observers by remaining undefined as commercial communication. Conceptually, PBR's brand image "*tabula rasa*" operated along much the same lines: inviting engagement from the "anti-brand" loyalists who took to its cause and inscribed it with meaning. Even more obviously, the creation of an online enthymeme a la Subservient Chicken or MadMenYourself interpellates audiences as co-creators and obliges seemingly democratic closure and subsequent circulation of what is, ultimately, a promotional message.

Yet for marketers, this recourse to "dialogue" and "open work" – this abdication of control and propagation of freedom – needs to be understood not just as an enthusiastic affirmation of the subject's newfound agency, but equally as a *surrender* to an escalating sense of audience unmanageability and, thus, a failure of old Fordist modes of disciplining want and need on command. This testifies to an ongoing desperation in the advertiser's project: Even if subordinate to power, shoppers are not automatons of marketer will, but rather must be regarded with a Gramscian sensitivity to that "compromise equilibrium" – and the uncertain, improvised exercise of governing consumer conduct is representative of this.

One can understand some of the developments in market research noted here (the cool hunt, the panoptic monitoring of online and self-reported buzz) as a way of accommodating a more flexible negotiation of brand meaning; for consumer reconnaissance as cultural anthropology evaluates, and subsequently subsumes, the authentic use of goods "in the streets" such that authority is meant to be traced back to

actual use in the cycle of co-optation rather than advertiser diktat from a corporate

boardroom somewhere. (This, however, only hastens that cultural cycle of force and

resistance, incorporation and reinvention.) Even the case studies of advertainment reflect

a resignation in control over the marketing effort – allowing artistic intermediaries (like

street artists, buzz agents and consumer-generated contest participants) to shape the

brand-text and articulate it to audiences.

This represents a paradoxical gamble in terms of governance: Force needs to be

lithe and power is to be found in accommodating flexibility (which is also the essence of

Gramsci's theory of hegemony). What is lost by way of careful supervision is thought to

be gained by expanding the space in which more casual rule can take place and, more

importantly, in situating that rule in what is thought to be a more credible, less

disciplinarian, *non-commercial* reach into those spaces (i.e., by outsourcing the authority

of governance through "disinterested" storytellers, street artists, buzz agents and amateur

videographers who can conceal the exercise of power). It is the same gamble, abstractly,

that neoliberal governance is willing to make: deregulating supervision; outsourcing

governance; and decentralizing the apparatus by which goals are achieved (Harvey,

2005). Society is free to take shape according to the "wisdom" of markets; the brand is

here equally free to take shape according to the "wisdom" of consumer crowds.

A New Media Opiate?

At its most basic, guerrilla marketing, as in so many of the examples and case

studies analyzed here, sets out to achieve governance without the usual semblance of

governance. It is, as has been demonstrated throughout, "not about *imposing* ways of

using goods, or behaving or thinking as a consumer. Rather it is about *proposing*

branded goods as tools, or building blocks whereby the consumer can create their own

meaning" (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 68, italics added). The difference between an imposition

and a proposition is the essence of an emergent approach to discipline in this exercise of

power; it hinges on participation, populism, heterarchicality, decentralization, and

freedom. Such is the logic of "discovery" that I've emphasized here: to instrumentalize

the agency of the governed such that a project of control is manufactured as a form of

consent. How, then, can consumption exist? Are consumers mere pawns in an all-too-

clever new scheme of capitalist power? By activating agency, is this actually a neoliberal

means of propagating false consciousness? Is engagement but the latest project of

commercial narcosis?

Some might be inclined to read this dissertation as an old critique in new clothes;

"invisible governance," after all, does invite close comparison to "false consciousness" as

an explanatory device. For much of the last century, consumer society has withstood a

succession of jeremiads, many of them predicated upon the belief that a more "authentic"

culture – *real* consciousness, in a sense – might be found beyond the horizon of

capitalism.[24] When it comes to media, the Frankfurt School perhaps gave loudest rise to

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[24] A litany of sources throughout this investigation issued a similar critique in different shades – that
guerrilla marketing was commercializing a form or space that had been non-commercial and thereby
corrupting something previously pure. This took shape as the concern that the creative autonomy of
storytelling might be infringed upon by direct sponsor interference (advertainment); that "graffadi" and its
ilk were selling out the political authenticity of a medium born of and for the street (alternative ambient);
and that interpersonal conversation and the creative labor of amateurs was being colonized for commercial
imperative (word-of-mouth and consumer-generated). I would caution here that this critique is often

this critique of the false pleasures of mass culture. Its indictment of the culture industry as "an organ of soft domination," wherein consumers are "active agents in their own duping" *would* seem to foreshadow many of the conclusions reached by this research: that guerrilla marketer power is exercised in soft, subtle, and sophisticated ways that presuppose the freedom of the subject in order to self-efface the machinations of those seeking to conduct conduct (Peters, 2003, pp. 63, 64).

Yet the alignment is inexact and the themes excavated here present an opportunity to push intellectual analysis and critique in a new direction from the familiar, if not tired laments about capitalism and consumerism, because guerrilla marketing functions very differently than in the "mass culture" era. The crux of the Frankfurt School's disillusionment with the mass media (as standardized, predictable, homogenous, and sedative) is "solved" by the regime of governance diagnosed here (as singular, capricious, heterogeneous, and invigorating). If the mass media, by dint of structure, churned out lowest-common-denominator content that supposedly promoted conformity, interactive media accommodates unique engagement that accentuates variety. If the culture industry once sought to lull subjects into docile submission and presumed passivity, today's cool sell anticipates agency and incorporates active audiences as partners in and instruments of the disciplinary project – a shift analogous to that which Foucault charted in his own work on managing constrained subjects (1977) to the more self-governing client (1997b).

romantically and nostalgically overdrawn; there is not a channel of communication that has been unambiguously insulated from promotional pressures (even if these outlets are enticing to guerrilla marketers precisely *because* they appear non-commercial and therefore represent an appealing "disinterested" space from which to obfuscate intentions). The mirage of a wholly "authentic" culture external to consumer society is, however, presumptuous, chimerical, and abortive.

If popular amusement once provided lethargic escape so as to recruit strength for the next day of work, the commercial diversions on display here demand quite a bit more time and energy from the participant.

Thus, here is where I part ways with the conventional jeremiad: Kalle Lasn's quote to open this dissertation – that "cool is the opiate of our time" – is far more right than he knew. For in the contemporary media environment, audiences and consumer subjects seem increasingly hooked on "cool," but in the McLuhanian sense as I've interpreted it here: *a participatory addiction endemic to life in the network society.* The more that broadcasting recedes as the organizing model for mass communication, the stronger they will feel this "pull" of "pull media" and the more that advertisers – not to mention cultural producers and media professionals of all shapes and sizes – will need to be willing to feed that addiction.

For I believe, counterintuitively, "prosumers" are being conditioned into a participatory stupor of sorts; their "narcotizing dysfunction" is the Facebook status update, with its flood of social trivia that they, themselves, have authored. With cool as an opiate and interactive media as the default expectation of *both* producers and consumers, popular and consumer culture will at once insist upon and have to provide more involvement for audiences. The more we are offered the opportunity for "on-demand," the more we will demand of the media industries and the more they will demand of us. Freedom, ironically, breeds dependency in this regime. For the new media enthymeme is not just a template for consumer governance available to marketers, but a model for how all media companies – in film and television, in popular music, in

journalism and so on – might increasingly structure and orient themselves to their audiences. The free (co-creative) labor of these audiences, as social gadflies and amateur producers, is "assumed" here – both in the sense of "presupposed" as integral to textual engagement and completion and "appropriated" as a useful resource.

By expanding the definition of media, these developments and themes also call into question the very notion of what we mean by creative industry. "Industry" has long retained its 19th-century connotations of, say, coal and steel production: a set of economic practices involving more or less *fixed* producers, goods, distributors, and consumers. Guerrilla marketing, however, portends a fundamental *fluidity* reflective of these patterns of participation, populism, heterarchicality, decentralization, and freedom; could it, therefore, herald a *dematerialization* of cultural production itself? Certainly the premise of "invisible governance" points in that direction. Just as neoliberalism dismantles the apparatuses of centralized governmental authority in favor of market-based solutions (thereby *dematerializing* the state), so, too, does guerrilla strategy dismantle the apparatuses of centralized marketing authority in favor of outsourced persuasive solutions (thereby *dematerializing* the industry).

To be certain, these guerrilla tactics represent but a fraction of the hundreds of billions of dollars spent on advertising annually, but it is a fraction that is growing in the midst of a crisis of advertising confidence – a time when traditionally dominant venues like newspapers, magazines, terrestrial radio, and network television would be eager to staunch the scattering of audiences and the bleeding of revenues. In that, the structure of those creative industries is itself perhaps being dematerialized and the more that clients

shift funding toward the unconventional channels illuminated here, the more that reallocation could destabilize how the media environment is underwritten and heighten the uncertainty already facing cultural producers who depend on that sponsorship. As a bitter irony, these cultural producers will be asked to do more (to feed that participatory addiction of their consumers) while depending on fewer financial resources to achieve it; journalists, to take one example from the creative class, have learned this paradox all too grimly in the past decade (needing to blog more and more with less and less workforce available). As such, technological advance seems to be writing checks that media institutions cannot cash.

And so this is why I place "solved" in scare quotes three paragraphs above: to underscore the irony in the fact that capitalism "solved" most of Adorno's complaints (i.e., it being standardized, predictable, and homogenous). The guerrilla form delivers a commercial message that is, alternately, disinterested (chapter 2), rebellious (chapter 3), conversant (chapter 4), or democratic (chapter 5). It does not look, sound, or feel like promotional model of old, yet it holds the same disciplinary purpose as billboards and 30-spots. If this is "tyranny" (Barber, 2007, p. 127), it is tyranny of the softest sort; a project far more recognizable in Gramscian terms, as I have highlighted throughout, than orthodox Marxist. And yet, I somehow find redemptive value in this tyranny: for this new media opiate could, in fact, provide existential balm.

Truth in Advertising

I ask, then, once more: How *can* consumption exist? Is there nothing really true – and by "true," I mean "real" in the experience of freedom by the subject in this regime of governance? Is this a hollowed-out self-determination? Even as that management of cultural production structures agency – revealing agency as a deliberate (and, to some, cynical) formula for the exercise of power – I hesitate to drain the *experience* of agency fully from the individual subject in this analysis. Something internally meaningful must surely draw consumers into the regime of engagement – this project that is, ultimately, of, by, and for brands, not consumers, despite the democratic pretense. Yet what can resolve the paradox of false agency within this system?

One might "discover" (for lack of a better word) the answer to this conundrum by listening closely as Alex Wipperfurth (2005), brand consultant, draws upon contemporary sociology in his discussion of why brands matter:

> According to… Anthony Giddens, we now are threatened by a number of 'dilemmas of the self,' like uncertainty, powerlessness, and commodification. We are lost, struggling with a 'looming threat of personal meaninglessness.' And that's where our consumer culture fits in. Brands provide an answer to our identity crisis by giving us meaning. They help us construct our social world. In other words, in our search for place and purpose in life, consumer culture is replacing tradition… No longer is history or government or the church at the center of our culture. It is instead the products of our marketing-driven economy that now create the greatest common bond between us. (pp. 119, 237)

This is, admittedly, a self-aggrandizing analysis: the brand manager opining that the fruit of his labor represents but the last tie that binds, the only surviving institution that thrives as necessary social glue. I would caveat his paean and caution that commercial culture is at least partly responsible for *perpetuating* that "looming threat of personal meaninglessness" – in prolonging our Sisyphean quest to satisfy identity needs

with goods whose branded meaning and value are ultimately, inherently and deliberately, disposable and ephemeral thanks to the dictates and churn of capitalism. Yet for better or for worse, brands *do* play a meaningful role in our lives; one that is communicative and I have earlier signaled the ways in which brands function as a paralanguage: tools for the creation and circulation of meaning and culture. Brands, like faith or polity, provide for that social order – a communion and fellowship that James Carey (1992) might well have recognized. We define ourselves through these commercial symbols and they help to construct a familiar reality for us. Brands – as marketing consultant Douglas Atkin (2005) provocatively argues – like cults, help "you become more you" (p. 4).

Indeed, functions once given over to religion or tradition in representing the social world, locating our place in it, and satisfying the need for the experience of a common culture are accurately if lamentably now seen as the province of marketers. Recent scholarship has begun to document the rise of "brand communities," those consumer groups structured around and through the social relations, shared consciousness, and rituals of a particular brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). To be certain, this kind of "ethical surplus" that is generated from the bottom up (e.g., relations, rituals, etc.) contributes to the brand equity of a corporation's bottom line. It is, therefore, in the interest of marketers to stage, from the top down, the conditions that will contribute to the formation of such communities and various marketing programs and brand management initiatives are being explored to that end. Yet does such contrivance invalidate the functionality of consumption and the social practices defined through it? I think not.

This identity project brings us to the second meaning of the title of this chapter. "Managing agency in the regime of engagement" refers to, primarily, the strategies of consumer governance that obfuscate authority, discipline through discovery, and exercise power through freedom. But managing agency also has a second implication that can be read from the perspective of the subject rather than the ruler in this regime; "managing" in the sense of "eking out" – surviving through, getting by on – the experience of that autonomy that, I would suspect, *feels* real enough to the subject at times even if it is, ultimately, mere "false consciousness" to condescending critics. This agency is, after all, how that participatory addiction of networked life and interactive culture gets audiences "high," and there are surely more detrimental forms of dependency (not least among them being suckled into "passivity" by the "boob tube" media organizing model of old).

For those branded applications of self-expression like SimpsonizeMe.com or MadMenYourself.com are clear instances of brands (and in this case media properties) attempting to program social value by allowing consumers to "use them" in their identity projects; by deliberately encouraging consumers to "discover" themselves – to see themselves, literally – in and through the brand-text. In light of these contemporary "dilemmas of the self" and the existential anxiety that accompanies such a "looming threat of personal meaninglessness," managing a bit of agency through a logo (and the lifestyle for which it stands) might not come at too steep a cost to make it utterly worthless to the subject in this regime, despite critics' lamentation that brands now seem to define us as much as traditional, ascribed, apparently dependable identity markers like race or religion. The term "subject" has itself a double meaning: self-knowledge *and*

dependence under the authority of another. In considering how brands execute the latter, critics should not overlook the value to be found in the former. And this is, I believe, what the brand gives back in managing agency.

A Policy of Regime Change

A recent film noir crime drama ends on this haunting note: "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist." I am reminded of this in weighing final judgment on the regime of engagement as a mode of consumer governance – not because advertisers are necessarily evil (Theodor Adorno and Kalle Lasn would surely disagree), but because it succinctly articulates their project of obfuscating power. Advertising is, in the examples shown here, slowly disappearing from view even as it, paradoxically, becomes more ubiquitous than ever. Perhaps the greatest trick the guerrilla marketer ever pulled was convincing the consumer that she didn't exist; this project has illustrated a technology of self-effacement by a source of cultural and capital power we would do well to observe more closely. As such, the dissertation serves as a necessary intervention into the inauspicious workings of "affective economics" at a moment of financial precariousness – pulling back the curtain on some of the machinery of the creative and commercial industry to appreciate the strategies it proposes and the structures it prefigures.

That structural transition from "transmission" to "conviviality" that accompanies the shift from broadcasting to the network addresses the audience (and hence the consumer) in a different manner: It markets without selling and shows without telling. It

is governance *sotto voce* and my fear is that such governance will be felt but will go

unheard. Consumers swayed by the strategies under examination here are, I believe,

blinded to these practices of influence – these technologies of power – that nonetheless

do great work on them. They are meant, like so many branding initiatives, to elicit

emotional rather than rational decision-making: agency beyond reason, as I framed it in

an earlier chapter. Even if we acknowledge the social functionality of consumption, as I

have in this conclusion – giving it more credence than the elitist jeremiahs from Frankfurt

onward would allow – we cannot be "allowed" (the defining commercial verb of our

time) to indulge it in full.

For the regime of engagement seeks to occlude rational deliberation from the

subject who participates in the marketplace – whether that be shopping for soap or a sub-

prime mortgage. This regime pursues a persuasive model inherited from public relations

in which decisions unfold "naturally" – and the faster and more "effortlessly" that these

decisions can be engineered, the more successful the project of marketing (even as it tries

to hide that project from the sightlines of those it is visited upon). The more consumers

"feel" good about a product or a brand because of its serendipitous positioning in a

movie, on a street corner, in a conversation with friends, or as a forwarded video link, the

more manipulation has taken place without ever feeling like a subject of governance.

And the more that kind of governance is executed, I fret, the less we will be able to resist

its advances. We need, in short, a policy of *affectless* economics as a strategy of response

for consumers participating in a marketplace where advertisers and brands casually (and

sometimes covertly) strategize affection.

This is, admittedly, more of a puritanical prescription than a Marxist call-to-arms. Adorno feared that the mass media tamed revolutionary instincts; I fear for our *own* capacity to tame *prodigal* instincts, particularly when we are subjected to the subtle wiles of the cool sell in an interactive era, when we respond to commercial appeal without seeing the "invisible hand" of consumer governance directing our actions. Even if, as a present-day "hidden persuader," guerrilla marketing prefers not to disclose a sense of discipline, we need to be aware when it is disciplining us as such – tempering instincts when marketers volunteer "freedom" so seductively. We need to work to "discover" ourselves in identities more profound and authentic than a superficial dichotomy like, "I'm a Mac" or "I'm a PC."

Official disclosure and state regulation certainly have a place in this prescription (and the more those marketers push the limits of subtlety, the more oversight and intervention will become inevitable as a backlash), but so, too, does *self*-disclosure and *self*-regulation: honest reflection on what makes us buy and whether we really need it to meet our needs. I would therefore advocate a redoubled commitment to media literacy: to identify how these commercial objectives "casualize" their program of power by shrouding themselves in guerrilla flows of communication. This research represents a first step toward that literacy – informing audiences of the Foucauldian machinations of marketers and brands that act upon their actions. If contemporary consumer governance "manages" us through these invisible fields – and weans us on the opiate pleasures of participatory media – it may be high time to think about regime change.

Appendices

Appendix A

Example Interview Schedule

Where did the idea come from for this campaign? Were there any specific influences?

What were you hoping to achieve? How was the campaign "put together"?

Why did this campaign take this approach to the medium or channel for the ad message?

Why was it important to deliver that message serendipitously or "under the radar"?

What challenges and problems facing advertising factor into this process?

What audience did you have in mind for this campaign? What is it about that

demographic that fits particularly well with this approach and set of techniques?

How did this campaign engage participation from that intended audience? How much

did the audience contribute to the advertising "work"?

What was the role of networks and networking in this campaign?

How and why did this campaign try to stage something underground or subcultural?

How did this campaign position itself against the "masses" or the "mainstream"?

What were the criteria for success? How did you approach the issue of ROI with the

client?

Are there other examples of this kind of approach that you've been impressed with?

Appendix B

Dissertation Interviews

Aldhous, Chris. Founding director and creative partner, GOODPILOT. Phone interview, December 15, 2009.

Asche, Eric. Senior vice president of marketing, Legacy for Health. Phone interview, January 19, 2010.

Balter, Dave. Founder and CEO, BzzAgent. Phone interview, October 13, 2009.

Bologna, Anne. Partner, Toy. Phone interview, November 16, 2009.

Bonds, Susan. President and CEO, 42 Entertainment. Phone interview, December 17, 2009.

Brenner, Jake. Partner, Marathon Ventures. Phone interview, November 9, 2009.

Brier, Noah. Head of strategic planning, The Barbarian Group. Phone interview, January 12, 2010.

Cleveland, Bart. Creative director, McKee Wallwork Clevand. Phone interview, November 20, 2008.

De La Garza, Sam. Brand manager, Ford Fiesta. Phone interview, October 13, 2009.

Donaton, Scott. President and CEO, Ensemble. Phone interview, February 1, 2010.

Earley, Joe. Executive vice president of marketing and communications, Fox. Phone interview, January 14, 2010.

Ebenkamp, Becky. Journalist, *Brandweek*. Phone interview, January 8, 2010.

Eliason, James. Founder and CEO, Twittad. Phone interview, October 12, 2009.

Ellis, Gareth. Senior planner, Saatachi & Saatchi. Phone interview, January 13, 2010.

Ewen, Sam. Founder and CEO, Interference. Phone interview, November 5, 2008.

Gleason, David. Senior vice president of strategy director, Publicis New York. Phone
interview, November 30, 2008.

Goodby, Jeff. Co-chairman, Goodby, Silverstein & Partners. Phone interview, March 9,
2010.

Goodfried, Greg. President and COO, EQAL. Phone interview, November 19, 2009.

Goodson, Scott. Founder and CEO, Strawberry Frog. Phone interview, January 11, 2010.

Grasse, Steven. Founder and CEO, GYRO/Quaker City Mercantile. In-person interview,
September 28, 2009.

Groppe, Laura. CEO, Girls Intelligence Agency. Phone interview, January 8, 2010.

Hahn, Nate. Founder and president, Street Virus. Phone interview, October 6, 2009.

James, Lucian. Founder, Agenda. Phone interview, December 10, 2009.

Jamieson, Phoebe. Vice president of sales and marketing, Magpie. Phone interview,
November 5, 2009.

Keller, Ed. CEO, Keller-Fay. Phone interview, January 22, 2010.

Leonard, Scott. President, A.D.D. Marketing. Phone interview, January 15, 2010.

Loos, Andrew. Managing director, Attack! Phone interview, January 4, 2010.

Maymann, Jimmy. CEO, GoViral. Phone interview, January 11, 2010.

Monello, Mike. Co-founder and executive creative director, Campfire. Phone interview,
January 27, 2010.

Murphy, Ted. Founder and CEO, Izea. Phone interview, December 17, 2009.

Neville, Daniel. Brand coordinator and captain, Idea Bounty. Phone interview, November 10, 2009.

Palmer, Benjamin. CEO, The Barbarian Group. Phone interview, January 26, 2010.

Peterson, Britt. Partner and director of business development, Cole & Weber. Phone interview, January 28, 2010.

Ressler, Jonathan. CEO, Big Fat. Phone interview, November 7, 2008.

Salacuse, Adam. CEO, ALT TERRAIN. Phone interview, September 30, 2009.

Sjonell, Calle. Creative director, BBH. Phone interview, October 13, 2009.

Slaughter, Karin. Author, *Cold Cold Heart*. E-mail interview, December 7, 2009.

Steinman, Todd. COO, M80. Phone interview, December 4, 2009.

Stone, Rob. Founder, Cornerstone. Phone interview, February 5, 2010.

Stradiotto, Matthew. Co-founder, Matchstick. Phone interview, January 15, 2010.

Suter, Janice. Associate media director, GSD&M's Idea City. Phone interview, November 19, 2008.

Thoburn, Patrick. Co-founder, Matchstick. Phone interview, January 15, 2010.

Turner, Chad. President, Student Workforce. Phone interview, November 5, 2009.

Wardynski, Casey. Director, Army Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis. Phone interview, December 7, 2009.

Waterbury, Todd. Co-executive creative director, Wieden + Kennedy. Phone interview, December 16, 2009.

Wax, Steve. Co-founder and managing partner, Campfire. Phone interview, January 27, 2010.

Weisman, Jordan. Founder and CEO, Smith & Tinker. Phone interview, December 3, 2009.

Appendix C

Interview E-Mail Solicitation

Dear [insert agency representative]:

My name is Mike Serazio and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of

Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. I am currently working on a

research project for my dissertation on the rise of [insert guerrilla, ambient, stealth, buzz,

viral, consumer-generated, etc.] marketing and I'm interviewing folks at various agencies

that have done interesting work with these techniques. I was hoping to possibly have a

chance to talk with a representative there to find out more about your work with [insert

example campaign]. Please let me know if there would be any interest in chatting –

thanks very much!

Best wishes,

Mike

Michael Serazio

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