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KORNELIA IMESCH

‘Messages from the sorcerer’s apprentice’ or ‘brave branded world’: an introduction

Today’s so-called ‘eBay or Google society’ is not simply a web-based market, consumer and knowledge community, but also a brand community.[1] In connection with the interpenetration of the arts and business in the late capitalist period, which has intensified in recent postmodernist decades,[2] brands have become a ubiquitous phenomenon.[3] Encouraged by the democratization of consumerism in the second modernist period,[4] brands have effectively become products in themselves. In the context of a holistic globalist and culture-specific strategy, companies have recently begun to cultivate a locally influenced image in accordance with ‘local branding’.[5]

Brands must create an individual profile; they are perceived as a ‘personality’ with which a product, company activity and corporate philosophy should be expressed in a uniform manner. The brand thus also increasingly constitutes the actual value and buying prices of firms and conglomerates. As with artists, brands are now classified according to rankings.[6] Today, almost everything is ‘branded’ – also in the original sense:[7] nations or corporations, products or services, artistic events or artefacts, CEOs, politicians, celebrities or shooting stars.[8] Marketability seems to be almost arbitrary when the broad spectrum of elite and popular brands ranges from ‘me brands’[9] to universities,[10] from cities and their shopping streets[11] to individual countries, while the United States, originator of Disney and the culture industry, are considered the mother of all brands.[12] Cultural and art institutions,[13] but particularly film divas and stars of classical and light music and sport, are indebted to this categorical imperative of the creative economy.[14] These stars mutate into companies with a wide range of products. Thus the David Beckham brand, for example, is offered as a total experience in miniature at Beckingham Palace or – in imitation of Dürer’s Christ-like self-portrait of 1500 – is stylized as a modern icon.[15] Even fictitious literary or film characters are subject to this trend. Thus the ‘Harry Potter’ figure created by the English children’s author Joanne K. Rowling has been transformed into a subtly structured brand within a short space of time – the Potter brand is available for only 75 of 200 possible merchandising products – and has thus become a cult brand worth four billion dollars within a mere eight years.[16]

Brands and their products are thus 'messages from the sorcerer's apprentice'. They activate symbolic visual ideas and endow our subconscious with a form. They contain a concentrate of the memory of our culture industry. In Umberto Eco's illustrated novel *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* the protagonist, who has lost his memory, finds his way back to authentic personal reminiscence via the brand world of his childhood, advertising, Mickey Mouse and the Vespa.[17] The 'brave branded world' is a cosmos of brands and lifestyles with their aesthetically presented images, codes, rituals and myths.[18] The brands and values communicated through them prove to be seismographs of cultural and social change.[19] They are thus far more than the products or services they symbolize or which they advertise. Brands are not only bought, but also worshipped, criticized, or encounter political resistance. They are designed artistically and launched strategically, or critically analysed from a cultural perspective and aesthetically parodied.[20]

Their identity-forming effect makes brands significant beyond the realm of economics – but also problematic, for in the age of neuro-marketing, brands and their images can also successfully manipulate our minds via brand control.[21] Accordingly, their aesthetic concept and the dramaturgy of their 'storyboards' can at times be sophisticated. Cult or super-brands thus possess the potential to be highly seductive and manipulative.[22] They borrow from all areas of society[23] that are appropriate to creating aura or mysticism, which can transform a brand into a fetish.[24]

While icons served to symbolize the sacred social order and to organize social structures well into the Early Modern Age, today it is the sports shoe, hamburger, motor car and service brands that characterize the social spaces in the NikeTowns and 'brand lands' of products and companies.[25] And by analogy with the divine, the essence of super-brands is constituted by their multifaceted and unfathomable character – an inconsistency that is also articulated in the paradoxical and dialectic relationship between originals and copies.[26] In the promise they hold, in their claims to prophesy and seduce, they are both real and fictitious. They are a material symbol of products, or can be 'grasped' in services. At the same time – and this is a general characteristic of the culture industry – it is not the real dimension of the super-brands, but rather their conceptual and symbolic dimensions that are consumed. However, this and brand consistency – a complex range of concepts with which consumers can identify – are based on the deception through appropriation on which every successful brand and its glamorous, superficial aesthetic is based. This all-encompassing character – totalitarian due precisely to its paradox nature – and the claims of brands and their images are indebted to the aesthetic marketing strategies of a new, visually dominated attention economy.[27] In the course of the second modernist period, in which the *economy* has also become the *iconomy*, scholastic thought with its large-scale models has been given up in favour of rhetoric with its associative fields.

But what is the connection between artistic strategies and marketing and branding tools? And what does the development of an artist's career have to do with that of a company and its corporate identity? Both certainly do not merely share aura, cult or the fake of the authentic and unique.[28] With the emergence of a modern self-perception among artists from the Quattrocento onwards and the gradual establishment of an art market and art system since the eighteenth century, artists have systematically deployed their personal styles, signatures and monograms or the genres and artistic media in which they worked to position their *oeuvre* 'on the art scene' and to establish themselves successfully in the art market.[29] With the aid of these early forms of artistic branding they rendered themselves and their work unique and distinct, positioning themselves as autonomous artists and establishing the status of authorship. Later they began to cite brands or products in their works, to document them (photographically) or make them the point of departure of their artistic creation, or even to stylize them as an *objet d'art* that ironically undermines traditional perceptions of art. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, this form of artistic exploration of the world of brands, products and consumerism is discernible in photographs by Eugène Atget, Berenice Abbott and Walker Evans,[30] in the works of the Cubists, Dadaists or the New Objectivity movement, as well as in the *oeuvre* of Duchamp. And it was with the vociferous Dada movement, which saw itself explicitly as a brand from its inception and considered art and its exponents an internationally marketable 'product',[31] that there occurred an artistic revolution on which Neo-Dada, Fluxus, conceptual art or the British and American Pop Art movements were to draw in the post-war modernist period. In their – certainly initially – subversive focus on the phenomena of everyday culture, the exponents of Pop Art stylized themselves as new prophets of an artistic activity indebted to consumerism and branding. The best art, as Andy Warhol is generally known to have said, is to be a good businessman.[32] With his ironically refracted focus on the world of consumer goods, he and his comrades-in-arms transformed commodities into works of art, works of art into commodities – and the artist himself into a product and his own label.

On the other hand, art in general and design and architecture in particular have assumed greater importance for the aesthetic conception, artistic innovation and design of brands and their images since the emergence of modern brand culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Artists, architects and designers were commissioned by the brand industry to help design products, or were even largely responsible for the design of entire product ranges as well as holistically designed corporate images.[33] The slogan 'The future belongs to the branded article' was euphorically launched by C. Kupferberg as long ago as 1921. It gradually gained ground in the following decades, through the introduction of brand management in the United States in 1931, for example.[34] This development was heralded by the paradigm shift that began as early as the turn of the twentieth century towards what Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) were later to criticize as the 'culture industry'.[35] In the context of this development of an increasingly close collaboration between business and the arts, which were also able to cultivate a public image with an ethical and political slant in campaigns like those of Benetton,[36] a number of artistic and branding-specific strategies emerged. These range from affirmation to subversion and cover a broad spectrum of variants as well as identity and image concepts.[37]

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1 Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum, called this phenomenon recently 'Googleization' of the world (*NZZ am Sonntag*, 22.1.2006, p. 35). See also Kai Lehmann and Michael Schetsche, eds., *Die Google-Gesellschaft. Wissen im 21. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld, 2005; Matthias Horx, 'Authentizität. Generation X und Generation Branding', in *Markenkult. Wie Waren zu Ikonen werden*, published by Trendbüro, Matthias Horx and Peter Wippermann, Düsseldorf, 1995, pp. 234–9. See the inexorably expanding range of services and programs from Google, available from <http://www.google.com>, which provides not only knowledge and information, but also makes accessible brands, products and services.

2 See also Olav Velthuis, *Imaginary Economics. Contemporary Artists and the World of Big Money*, Rotterdam, 2005, especially pp. 91ff.

3 On the topic of brands, see the standard work, Manfred Bruhn, ed., *Handbuch Markenartikel. Anforderungen an die Markenpolitik aus Sicht von Wissenschaft und Praxis*, 3 vols., Stuttgart, 1994; Per Mollerup, *Marks of Excellence. The history and taxonomy of trademarks*, 1st edn, 1997, 6th edn, New York, 2003; Manfred Bruhn, ed., *Die Marke. Symbolkraft eines Zeichensystems* (Facetten der Medienkultur, vol. 1), Berne, Stuttgart and Vienna, 2001; Wally Olins, *Marke, Marke, Marke. Den Brand stärken*, Frankfurt am Main and New York, 2004. For brand flops, see Matt Haig, *Die 100 grössten Marken-Flops*, Frankfurt am Main and Vienna, 2004.

4 One of the last consequences of this democratization, which is itself related to the emergence of an affluent middle class after 1945 are cheap brands, which have attained cult status in recent years (see M-Budget or IKEA), or the phenomenon of mixing luxury haute couture brands with cheap labels as seen in the Karl Lagerfeld and Stella McCartney designs for H&M or Jean-Paul Gaultier for La Redoute.

5 For the holistic, culture-specific brand strategy of 'inclusive branding', see Klaus Schmidt and Chris Ludlow, *Inclusive branding. The why and how of a holistic approach to brands*, New York, 2002. This 'local branding', which takes into account characteristics of the location and country in question, is now employed by McDonald's for its worldwide image.

6 See the American economics magazine *Business Week*, which has published a ranking list of the 100 most important brands worldwide in collaboration with *Interbrand* since 2000. The first Swiss brand ranking with the 50 most valuable brands was published by *Bilanz* in January 2005.

7 The terms 'brand' and 'branding', which are defined very differently in economic practice and theory, emerged in the context of the North American cattle trade, where branding served

as a quality seal and to identify the cattle as the property of their owners. The different cattle-breeders' brand marks are registered in state 'brand books', still customary today and in some states dating from the mid-nineteenth century. The marking of products and objects, however, extends far into antiquity. At a very early stage, markings served to distinguish one's goods from competing manufacturers, to build customer confidence and to cultivate an image. See Tobias Langner, *Integriertes Branding. Baupläne zur Gestaltung erfolgreicher Marken*, Wiesbaden, 2003; Eugen Leitherer, 'Geschichte der Markierung und des Markenwesens', in Bruhn 2001 (see note 3), pp. 55–74; Claudia Leu, *index-logo. Inspiration für die Logo-Entwicklung. Hintergrundwissen für die Praxis*, Bonn, 2005, pp. 63, 182, and the article by Franz Liebl in this book.

8 'I am a brand', said the politician Gerhard Schröder, for example, in the 1998 election campaign. Stephen Coomber distinguishes five different types of brandings (product brands, service brands, personal brands, organizational/institutional brands, event brands/geographical brands): Stephen Coomber, *Branding*, Oxford, 2002, pp. 10ff.

9 Conrad Seidl and Werner Beutelmeyer, *Die Marke Ich mit Herold-Prinzip. So entwickeln sie ihre Erfolgsstrategie*, Frankfurt am Main, 2003.

10 On the subject of university brands, see Julia Gerhard, *Die Hochschulmarke. Ein Konzept für deutsche Universitäten*, St. Gallen, 2004. On the subject of identity policy of universities via art and architecture, see Christian Philipp Müller, Beatrice von Bismarck et al., eds., *Branding the campus. Kunst, Architektur, Design, Identitätspolitik*, Düsseldorf, 2001.

11 See *City Branding. Image building and building images*, published by Urban Affairs, Véronique Palleeuw, Rotterdam, 2002. See also 'Marke Bahnhofstrasse' (Zurich) as a luxury shopping street, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 276, 25.11. 2005, B3.

12 Simon Anholt and Jeremy Hildreth, *Aufstieg und Fall der Marke USA. Amerikas Image zwischen Absicht und Wahrnehmung*, Heidelberg, 2005. See also titles such as 'Die Deutschland AG. Nationen als Marken', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24.8.1999, 'Marke Liechtenstein', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 5.7.2004 or 'Markenname Schweiz', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29.2.2000, which explains why, latterly, highly official figures have toyed with the idea of promoting Swiss culture and art abroad together with tourist advertising for the 'Swiss brand'.

13 The role model for this was the marketing strategy developed by Thomas Krens for the Guggenheim Museum as a brand. With regard to this topic in relation with the art system, see also the article by Holger Liebs in this book. On a local Swiss level, see also the Paul Klee Centre, for example, which has been referred to as a 'cultural wellness zone' (Samuel Herzog in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 114, 18/19.6.2005, p. 45), or the 'Kunsthalle Basel as a brand' (Sibylle Omlin in *Gratis Eintritt + 2 Fr. kriegen, Kunsthalle Basel*, published by the Kunsthalle Basle, no. 3, April 2005). UBS will soon also be presenting its art collection at the Fondation Beyeler in Basle.

14 See Elisabeth Bronfen and Barbara Straumann on the star and diva system: *Die Diva. Eine Geschichte der Bewunderung*, Munich, 2002; Wolfgang Ullrich and Sabine Schirdewahn, eds., *Stars. Annäherungen an ein Phänomen*, Frankfurt am Main, 2002. Classical singers have now also started to label themselves according to the recipes of the pop industry. See, for example, Renée Fleming, *Die Biografie meiner Stimme*, Berlin, 2005. Original English title: *The Inner Voice. The Making of a Singer*, 2004.

15 On Beckham as a company, see Ronald Reng, 'Die Marke Beckham', *Fussball EM*, special supplement, *Die Zeit*, June 2004, pp. 12–14.

16 See Stephen Brown, *Die Botschaft des Zauberlehrlings. Die Magie der Marke Harry Potter*, Hamburg, 2005; Stephen Brown, ed., *Consuming books. The marketing and consumption of literature*, New York, 2006.

17 Umberto Eco, *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana*, Milan, 2004.

18 See Joachim Kellner, 'Lifestyle-Markenstrategien', in *Handbuch Markenartikel* 1994 (see note 3), vol. I, pp. 619–43. For the following, see also Carmen Lakaschus, 'Sozio-kulturelle Aspekte des Markenartikels', in ibid., vol. III, pp. 1961–84.

19 For the communicative aspect and management of brands, see Klaus Fog, Christian Budtz

and Boris Yakaboylu, *Storytelling. Branding in practice*, Berlin, 2005.

20 See Naomi Klein, *No Logo. No space, no choice, no jobs*, London, 2000. On culture and counterculture and the various forms of cultural hacking, see Thomas Düllo and Franz Liebl, eds., *Cultural Hacking. Kunst des strategischen Handelns*, Vienna, 2005.

21 Regarding the great importance of images for brands, see Gerhard Johann Lischka and Peter Weibel, eds., *Das Regime des Image. Zwischen mimischen Display und Corporate Branding*, Berne, 2003. Regarding the anchoring of brands in clients' heads, see Rainer Gries, Volker Ilgen and Dirk Schindelbeck, *'Ins Gehirn der Masse kriechen!' Werbung und Mentalitätsgeschichte*, Darmstadt, 1995; Bernd H. Schmitt, *Experimental marketing. How to get customers to sense, feel, think, act, and relate to your company and brands*, New York, 1999.

22 See Christian Mikunda, *Der verbotene Ort oder die inszenierte Verführung. Unwiderstehliches Marketing durch strategische Dramaturgie*, Frankfurt am Main, 2002.

23 See Klein 2000 (see note 20); Alissa Quart, *Branded: wie wir gekauft und verkauft werden*, Munich, 2003.

24 On the secret of consumer goods and their fetishist character, see Karl Marx, 'Der Fetischcharakter der Ware und sein Geheimnis', in *Absolute. Marken – Labels – Brands*, editor and author of the essays Martin Baltes, Freiburg, 2004, pp. 3/6–4/1. For criticism of the aesthetics of consumerism, see Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Kritik der Warenästhetik*, 6th edn, Frankfurt am Main, 1977.

25 On the NikeTowns and total immersion (Erlebniswelten), see Friedrich von Borries, *Wer hat Angst vor Niketown? Nike-Urbanismus, Branding und die Markenstadt von morgen*, Rotterdam, 2004; Christian Mikunda, *Brand lands, hot spots and cool spaces. Welcome to the third place and the total marketing experience*, London, 2004; Christian Marquart and Hans-Georg Esch, *Mercedes-Benz brand places. Architecture and interior design*, Stuttgart, 2004. In connection with Volkswagen, see the dissertation currently being written by Claudia Hoff (University of Zurich). On branding and architecture in general, see 'Architecture & Branding', special issue of *Dialogue. Architecture+Design+Culture*, 083, August 2004, Jons Messedat, *Corporate architecture. Entwicklungen, Konzepte, Strategien*, Ludwigsburg, 2005, and the essay by Philip Ursprung in this book.

26 On the subject of originals/copies, see the article by Juerg Albrecht, 'From ™ to © and back again', in this book.

27 On the subject of the attention economy, see Georg Franck, *Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit. Ein Entwurf*, Vienna, 1998. On aesthetic marketing, see Bernd Schmitt and Alex Simonson, *Marketing aesthetics. The strategic management of brands, identity and image*, New York, 1997.

28 On the connection between art and branding, which to date has scarcely been examined, see Hans-Georg Böcher, 'Kunst und Markenartikel', in *Handbuch Markenartikel* 1994 (see note 3), vol. II, pp. 871–921; *Brand.New.*, Jane Pavitt, ed., exh. cat., Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 2000, (German edn, Munich, 2001); Wolfgang Ullrich, *Mit dem Rücken zur Wand. Die neuen Statussymbole der Macht*, Berlin, 2000, pp. 84ff; as well as the small handbook, structured in accordance with marketing principles, on the branding of Picasso: Bernd Kreutz, *The Art of Branding*, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2003.

29 See also the articles by Juerg Albrecht, Walter Grasskamp and Wolfgang Ullrich in this book. For the modern artist type, see Michael Groblewski and Oskar Bätschmann, eds., *Kultfigur und Mythenbildung. Das Bild vom Künstler und sein Werk in der zeitgenössischen Kunst*, Berlin, 1993; Oskar Bätschmann, *Ausstellungskünstler. Kult und Karriere im modernen Kunstsystem*, Cologne, 1997; Martin Hellmold, Sabine Kampmann et al., eds., *Was ist ein Künstler? Das Subjekt der modernen Kunst*, Munich, 2003; Julia Gelshorn, ed., *Legitimationen. Künstlerinnen und Künstler als Autoritäten der Gegenwartskunst* (Kunstgeschichten der Gegenwart, vol. 5), Berne, 2005.

30 See Ingrid Pfeiffer, 'Nicht Dokumente sondern Indizien der Warenwelt. Läden und Schaufenster in Fotografien von Eugène Atget, Berenice Abbott und Walker Evans', in Max Hollein and Christoph Grunenberg, eds., *Shopping. 100 Jahre Kunst und Konsum*, exh. cat., Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main, 2002, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2002, pp. 93–111.

31 See the self-stylization from Duchamp to Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven. See Irene Gammel, *Die dada Baroness. Das wilde Leben der Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven* [American edn, 2002], Berlin, 2003. A watch-manufacturing conglomerate also knows how to exploit the Dada brand nowadays. Since 2003/4, the Swatch Group has financed the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, the birthplace of the movement. On its 89th birthday, the movement, by means of gugusdada – an art concept by Com&Com – managed to achieve its own child and living ambassador. The Swatch group also here distributes Dada watches, and set up an instant store for its products. See also the four-page special supplement in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the 'Dada Swatch Edition' (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 5.3.2004), published for the re-opening of the Cabaret Voltaire, and the various reports in the Swiss daily newspapers, also on the instant store, about which the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* reported in its weekend edition of 13/14.8.2005 in the 'Zürcher Kultur/Stadt Zürich' (Zurich culture/City of Zurich) section. For Com&Com's gugusdada project, see <http://www.GUGUSDADA.ch>.

32 Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, New York and London, 1975, p. 92.

33 The first time by Peter Behrens for AEG, see: Tilmann Buddensieg, *Industriekultur, Peter Behrens und die AEG 1907–1914*, Berlin, 1979. One of the earliest, systematically applied corporate identity concepts was that of the National Socialists, developed in 1920. See Leu 2005 (see note 7), pp. 162ff.

34 On the introduction of brand management by Procter & Gamble and the new profession of the brand manager, see Coomber 2002 (see note 8), pp. 21ff.

35 On the culture industry and its implications, see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* [1944], 15th edition, Frankfurt am Main, 2004, pp. 128–76; Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* [1962], 5th edition, Frankfurt am Main, 1996, pp. 248ff.

36 The strategies of Benetton's campaigns, in which art, marketing and socio-political commitment intermingle, also perform a function of a role model for the interaction between art and branding in the post-war modernist period. As a company, Benetton also runs a 'creative workshop' in Treviso (Italy) (see SIAR symposium, 2004). For the history and myth of Benetton, see the founder himself: Luciano Benetton with Andrea Lee, *Benetton. Die Farben des Erfolgs. Mit einem Interview mit Luciano Benetton von Carlo Bernasconi*, Zurich, 1990; for the campaigns, see Lorella Pagnucco Salvemini, *Toscani. Die Werbekampagnen für Benetton 1984–2000*, Munich, 2002.

37 See Düllo and Liebl 2005 (see note 20), as well as the articles by Liebl, Ullrich and Freuler in this book in particular, and the statements by participants at the SIAR 'art & branding' symposium in: *bulletin* 2/04.