(DISCIPLINARY) POWER AND THE BRANDED (SOCIAL) BODY

by

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ABSTRACT

The initial question in this project asks why people might brand their bodies with corporate logos, and more than that, why and how brands have become so preeminent in our cultural firmament; the central questions in this project interrogate the concepts of power, resistance, the individual body, and the political body. I propose that the qualities of power and bodies (individual and social) necessarily generate duality of form and function that allows for both docility and resistance, in addition to many spaces in between. I utilize the theories of discipline, resistance, and the body that Michel Foucault sets forth in his text *Discipline and Punish*, as well as Theodor Adorno’s and Max Horkheimer’s ideas about capitalist culture that are passionately elaborated in their essay entitled “The Culture Industry” to create a theoretical framework that connects disciplinary power, the body, and capitalism. Finally, I analyze branding as a case study to explore these concepts in material/symbolic context. Branding is a powerful process that employs the tools of disciplinary mechanics to encourage the consumption of brand images. However, since the branding process depends upon the body (meaning the individual and the social) to communicate its messages, branding is also consistently resisted using the same transmission routes that promote it. This case study confirms the multi-directional possibilities of power relations.
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Introduction: An Anecdote and a Roadmap

Ashleigh DeSoto
An Anecdote and a Roadmap

In Naomi Klein's fascinating tome, *No Logo*, she notes that the branding phenomenon has extended to the branding of flesh; the Nike swoosh has become the most popular design in tattoo parlors all over North America.\(^1\) Dozens of Nike office employees mark the skin of their calves with the infamous check-like-mark. One fan, who has the swoosh permanently inked around his belly-button, relates that when he showers in the morning and sees his very brand-specific body decoration, he is beset with a can-do attitude; he is so inspired by the idea of “Just Doing IT,” that he is pumped up for the rest of his day.\(^2\) I laughed when I read this, but in a way, I was startled, too. Don’t get me wrong; I realize that tattooing the body has been and is a time-tested way to transmit cultural signs; what captivates my interest are the questions that arise when I contemplate that a pretty significant number of folks are having corporate logos eternally imprinted into their flesh. What can this mean? Why a logo? Why put such a sign on one’s body? Then, I remembered that many of my friends and myself are bedecked daily in clothing bearing the Nike symbol; or the Gap brand name; or the oh-so-warm-and-outdoorsy Roots. While theirs and my relationships with brands aren’t quite as undying as those folks who work for Nike, our bodies are often walking advertisements; we are brand-ed.

Growing up on a cattle ranch in rural Texas, I do know a little something about a brand; where I come from, it indicates possession, property, commercial value. Now, I am not comparing consumers with livestock nor am I equating product branding with cattle branding. Modern-day branding *usually* doesn’t involved seared flesh; branding, today and in this context, starts with the feelings, attitudes, and ideas that consumers hold toward

\(^1\) Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 56.
\(^2\) Ibid, 52.
certain brand names and can end with a colonization of space, identity, and the body through capitalist consumption. Branding is not all bad, though. Certain consumer theorists posit that branding is a modern mode of identity formation, the logical result of our capitalist cognitive processes. Some would argue that because the brand represents an idea or lifestyle, by choosing to consume the brand, we are in some way affirming a particular way-of-life, thus confirming membership among certain groups or affiliation with a specific social idea. Others would probably assert that consumer choice is illusory, and that whatever identity politics come out of branding, they are a direct and purposeful result of capitalist production and marketing design, and contribute little to enrich the lives of individuals and/or cultures. I think, though, that splitting the middle of this debate is the way to go; in some very important ways, when our brand choices are informed, they can demonstrate political and social values while claiming a space that resists a hegemonic regime of (sometimes) mindless consumption.

In spite of my rather vigorous and impassioned introduction to branding, my project will actually start with Foucault. The first time I read the introductory chapters of Discipline and Punish, I was horrified down to the roots of all the hairs on my humanist head. But I read the book, and I read it again, and sometime during the third read, my mind kept returning to that first chapter, to the idea that the branded body-as-spectacle was left behind somewhere in the messy past of penal history, to be replaced by the arguably more subtle disciplinary regime(s) of today. But that wasn’t quite right and the body-as-spectacle

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4 The opening scene of Discipline and Punish consists of a torture scene to demonstrate modes of punishment popular in our less ‘Enlightened’ days.

5 Foucault refers to such a disappearance on pages 7-8 of Discipline and Punish. I will refer to these passages in greater detail later in this project.
wasn't exactly done away with in favor of something more efficient and more palatable to modern(ist) sympathies. Rather, Foucault wrote a genealogy that demonstrates not evolutionary progress or movement away from barbarity, but merely a historically situated shift in modalities, away from princely punishments and toward a disciplinary regime. Discipline, in a Foucauldian sense of the word, is a method for the organization of power relationships. For Foucault, power is always relational, and as such, it is accurate to talk about a disciplinary matrix; discipline is power machinery, and like other machines, there are times when it runs smoothly and times when there are glitches. Those glitches are partly because of the power to resist found in the human bodies that populate and provide support and sustenance for the matrix (there's no Morpheus to pull us out of this one) and partly because of the proliferation of power relations that sometimes rub up against each other problematically. But what is it about bodies that makes the disciplinary matrix possible, while they simultaneously resist its timetables and prescriptions? And what does Foucault mean when he talks about the body, or its counterpart, the body social? I ask myself, why does he use these particular terms in such particular ways? What is he trying to tell us about power? What might we understand about power if we take some time to think carefully about his distinctions between bodies and the body social? So, gentle reader, these are some of the questions that arose for me, with such intensity that I decided to explore them in this thesis. As a result, in my first chapter, I will identify Foucault's understanding of the mechanisms of disciplinary power and how it is resisted; next, I will analyze the Foucauldian body, looking critically at his theory, as well as that of several prominent postmodern and

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6 I use the term power machinery for several reasons; first of all, discipline arose alongside/because of the rise of machines in capitalist production. Secondly, discipline fabricates and produces docile bodies with great efficiency, sort of like machines that produce canned goods. However, I do not mean that discipline is a material machine, though there are certainly material aspects to disciplinary tactics.
feminist theorists. Finally, I will closely analyze the text of *Discipline and Punish* to
diagram the body’s relationship to the body social, a connection that will be taken up in the
next two chapters, which will center around branding and capitalist culture.

The road between branding and disciplined bodies is paved with capitalists... or wait,
maybe it’s by capitalists with good intentions? I don’t know. But in my second chapter, I
am going to discuss capitalism, and what kind of culture it produces, informed quite a bit by
the critical theory of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. Though written in the first half
of the twentieth century, their essay “The Culture Industry,” remains highly relevant today.
The term ‘culture industry’ highlights the relation between the manufacture of mass
quantities of consumer goods and the production of culture; in effect, Horkheimer and
Adorno argue that culture has become just as much a product of capitalism as ... products.
To demonstrate this idea, they refer to ‘mass culture,’ which does not point to the poor,
unwashed masses, but rather the very particular kind of culture that is mass produced like a
Model-T Ford on an assembly line. Horkheimer and Adorno view the long-term effects of
consuming these cultural products as highly detrimental; they believe that the individual
loses his/her ability to reason, to imagine, or to create, well, anything. The ideas put forth in
“The Culture Industry” are useful as a bridge between Foucault and today’s branding for
several reasons, not the least of which is Foucault’s inclusion of capitalism as an enabling
factor for the disciplinary matrix. Additionally, however, Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s
different take on standardization (called normalization by Foucault) figures prominently in
any discussion of branding products and people. Finally, I will utilize “The Culture
Industry” as a jumping off point to stimulate debate about the body and capitalist
consumption that will lead into a thorough discussion of branding.
Well, I guess that brings us full circle to the anecdote at the beginning of this introduction. When a Nike tattoo engenders in its wearer feelings of well-being, confidence, and strength, Nike has succeeded as a brand. A unique confluence of social, political, and economic factors led to the ascendancy of brands, and now, brands have arguably become our most recognizable cultural signs and symbols. In other words, the decision to buy is based upon the cultural meanings and values associated with particular objects and the consumer lifestyle invoked through these objects; a consumptive, commodity-driven system of meaning-making has been created, and it is branded. This system (branding) is inspired by the mechanical schematics of disciplinary power, and is implemented accordingly, acting upon and through the bodies of people who populate the matrix. However, I intend to show that such a system can be and is resisted. People protest, write letters, co-opt billboards, and consume carefully and deliberately, challenging the administration of the brand. Thus, branding, as a case study, might provide some answers to my earlier queries about bodies and resistance because it is a modern mode of (disciplinary) power that acts on and through both individual and social bodies. Whew.

In this project, I propose that when we take a close look at branding today, we will see that bodies are 'branded' by the mechanics and technologies of Foucauldian-like discipline. While Foucault maintains that the body is not the 'primary' target of disciplinary repression, I believe that the body has become the principal target and transmitter of branding, and that branding is essentially disciplinary in its means and ends. However, branding, like discipline, perhaps by its design, can be and is resisted, in a myriad of different

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7 It is not the purpose nor in the purview of this paper to trace the social, political, and economic origins of the brand. I will, however, give a tiny brand history lesson in my final chapter.
8 Nixon, 183.
ways. I intend to show that branding, a technology that uses disciplinary mechanics, can be used to demonstrate important points about power and bodies both social and individual.
Chapter 1: Musings About Foucault, Power, and the Body (Social and Otherwise)

“Glad you made it/Welcome to the Farm/Who’s your Daddy?/I’m your Daddy now/I’m here seeking only what I need/In your mind is where I’ll plant my seed/It’s for sure/Let me keep you in this place/You’ll be better off this way/I will keep you warm and safe/You’ll be better off this way/You learn to love the price you pay/Trust me dear you’re better off this way/Put to bed the sun and sister moon/I’ll be hiding in your dirty room/I’ll go there seeking only what I need/La ti da we’ll stay there till we bleed/It’s for sure/Let me keep you in this place/You’ll be better off this way/I will keep you warm and safe/You’ll be better of this way/I will not wake you from your sleep/Leave you wandering counting sheep/No more sad and sunshine days/Trust me dear you’re better off this way.” — Guster, “Airport Song”

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Introduction

In this chapter, I will use the text of Discipline and Punish to ask and hopefully answer some interesting questions about discipline and bodies, individual and social. To aid in these interrogations, I will first outline what I perceive to be a Foucauldian conception of power and how power is manipulated through disciplinary technology. Next, I will attempt to gain a better understanding of the Foucauldian body, while responding to several select affirmations and critiques of his theories by other scholars. The general idea here is that bodies and the disciplinary matrix are symbiotic, much like normalization and individualization, two terms that I will explore in this chapter. Finally, I will talk about the social body, and how that concept relates to Foucault's previous musings about bodies. All of this culminates in a later chapter into a nascent theory concerning the relation among bodies, culture, and consumption.

Disciplinary Power

To talk about disciplinary power and its effects on bodies specifically, I will first address Foucault's ideas about power generally. Power, according to Foucault in The History of Sexuality, Volume I, must be understood as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization. It is not adequate to suppose that the sovereignty of the state or the law are the sources of power; they are rather effects of power, a power process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses force relations. In this model, power is omnipresent, "because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another; power is everywhere, not because it embraces

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10 HS, 92.
everything, but because it comes from everywhere." At innumerable points, power is exercised; it comes from everywhere, and there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rules and ruled at the root of power relations. Foucault's conception seems too simple, too obvious, at first; power is everywhere, it is found in the smallest relationship, it is productive in that it creates spaces of domination and resistance. Foucault doesn't need me to reiterate and laud the 'revolutionary' nature of his ideas and suggestions about how we look at power as a series of relations; however, I will anyway. While challenging other theories of power that do and have worked throughout society and between individuals, Foucault, with this characterization, illustrated the micro-physics of power, the myriad ways that power works in our everyday, seemingly mundane and, as some would complain, powerless lives. With this definition, too, Foucault discounted the binary notion of powerful/powerless, demonstrating in both *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* that power works in, around, and through people and their bodies, each and every day. A Foucauldian conception of power is especially helpful because it shifts away from more traditional examinations and forces us to look at the power relations inherent in and between bodies, which is where my interest arises.

Foucault writes about the technologies of power quite clearly and deeply in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, so it is this text that will inform my discussions from this point. *Discipline and Punish* is a genealogy of historical methods and modes of punishment, and in my understanding, the methods and modes of punishment that directly or indirectly focus on and are focused through the body. Bodies and disciplinary regimes are

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11 HS, 92.
12 HS, 94.
13 It's important to remember that while Foucault challenges other theories of power, he does not assert the ascendancy of his own theory to the status of 'law.'
intimately linked, a connection that will be thoroughly explored in this chapter. To understand discipline and disciplinary power, it is necessary to recognize that this phenomenon is not random or historically ubiquitous; rather, disciplinary power/regime is a modern device specifically situated amid capitalist society and liberal-juridical life. Foucault identifies the genealogy of three methods of punishment from a first stage to a third, manifested in the present. The first is the princely mode, which worked directly on the body; meant to emphasize the power of the king, princely punishment used the body as a public spectacle, an example— in effect, the scaffold represented the physical confrontation between the sovereign (the king) and the condemned man.\textsuperscript{14} The power of the prince was emphasized by the complete domination and objectification of the ‘criminal’ body; in a sense, it was a metaphor for the social body and its resultant political fear. This stage was characterized by the monarchical sovereign and his force, the social body and the administrative apparatus.\textsuperscript{15} Soon, however, the medico-juridical method replaced princely punishments to code power. In this newer, more modern modality, the ascendancy of science and capitalism were folded into the juridical edifice. An economy of illegality was formed whereby violations of ‘property’ became crimes against society and individual ‘offenders’ were opposed to the entire society; scientific ‘proof’ of criminal behavior was linked to the protection of capital and the owners of capital. During this stage, the ‘expert’ and his expert testimony were incorporated into the judicial system; criminals were not to be punished but reformed and, if possible, cured. In this stage, we have “the vanquished enemy, the juridical subject in the process of requalification, the individual subjected to immediate coercion.”\textsuperscript{16} These stages

\textsuperscript{14} Michel Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 73. Henceforth, I will reference this work as \textit{D&P}.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 131.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 131.
Foucault identifies as representative, scenic, signifying, public, and collective models of punishment. They contrast with the third, present type—discipline.

Discipline, according to Foucault, is coercive, corporeal, solitary and secret; though it operates through public channels, it is intensely private in its aims. Or rather, perhaps, discipline demonstrates that the public/private dichotomy is an overstated one, by its oh-so-effective utilization of both 'spheres.' In either case, discipline is not an isolated singularity. It is an invention of unique circumstances, situated amid and through capitalist and liberal systems that give rise to conditions amenable to the sustenance of discipline, and vise versa.

Discipline itself is a technology of power that uses and transforms bodies in an effort to obtain peak efficiency for the perpetuation of the system. Though the 'soul' seems to be the target of discipline, from a Foucauldian standpoint, bodies are indispensable parts in the machinery of disciplinary power. They are docile, because they are subjected, used, transformed, and improved. They are also active, and because of this feature, their activities can be watched, regulated, and refined. Bodies are powerful, and Foucault states that, "discipline dissociates power from the body," directs it, and produces a new aptitude, a new capacity. For example, the body of the factory worker can be trained to operate machinery in order to output more than s/he would in another setting. Furthermore, this disciplinary power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition for some who do

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17 D & P, 131.
18 Liberal theorists have traditionally separated their studies of power into public and private spheres, the polis and the home, distinct spaces where power existed differently (if the power in 'private' spaces was considered at all). Foucault contends, as do I, that these intellectual lines in the sand prevent an accurate understanding of power relations.
19 I explore this connection in more detail in my following chapter, which examines capitalism as a system.
20 I discuss the soul as conceived by Foucault later in this chapter.
21 Ibid, 136.
23 Ibid, 138.
not have it; “it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon
them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them.”²⁴
Here, we are told that, in spite of the size and scope of the disciplinary regime, resistance is
not only possible, but perhaps even an a priori feature of the system, by virtue of its main
components – human bodies.

Foucault believes that discipline creates out of the bodies it directs four types of
individuality, or rather an individuality endowed with four characteristics that Foucault
chooses to characterize in decidedly biological language: it is cellular (by the play of spatial
distribution), it is organic (by the coding of activities), it is genetic (by accumulation of time),
and it is combinatory (by the composition of forces).²⁵ Foucault states that these traits are
each developed by minute technologies that arise out of anatomo-knowledge of the forces of
the body, and emphasizes this anatomical feature of discipline by using the terminology of
(micro?) biological sciences. I believe that such language reminds us of Foucault’s
continuing recognition of the preeminent place of the body in the disciplinary regime. In
order to channel the body’s power, the disciplinary regime operates according to four great
techniques: it draws up tables, it prescribes movements, its imposes exercises, and lastly, in
order to obtain the combination of forces, it arranges tactics.²⁶ Each of these processes
inflicts a particular effect on the body by observing and directing the body’s activity.

Foucault identifies within the art of distributing space four techniques: enclosure,
partitioning, functional sites, and rank. It is important to remember that each of these
methods work through/upon the body; without bodies to populate these spaces, they are
meaningless. He states that, “discipline will sometimes require enclosure, or the

²⁶ Ibid, 167.
specification of a place heterogeneous to all others; enclosure controls, mandates, and regulates while eliminating the inconveniences of an unorganized, open space. An example particularly close to my heart as a student can be found in the enclosure of schools, spaces in which the bodies that inhabit them are labeled, assigned a desk, and taught to stand in line, thereby regulating through the organization of both space and the body. *Partitioning* occurs when each individual has its own place and each place has its individual; the aim is to established presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals… to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. The rule of functional sites refers to particular places defined to correspond not only to the need for supervision, but to also create a space that is *useful*. The hospital must be a center for treatment, but it must also be a filter that categorizes and diagnoses; the factory isolates individuals but it also articulates the distribution of space on a production machinery that has its own requirements to be functional. It is an economy of utility. Finally, the concept of *rank* is crucial for the distribution of space, and is especially important because it is found primarily within analytical (imaginary?) spaces, while the previous categories use physical space to indicate an analytical function. Rank is the place one occupies in a classification, the point at which a line and a column intersect, the interval in a series of intervals that one may traverse one after the other. Each of these techniques represent crucial supports in the structural engineering design of disciplinary power; they are like assembly line stations, working the body together to make a finished product with interchangeable parts.

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27 Ibid, 141.
28 *D&P*, 143.
29 Ibid, 146.
While discipline proceeds firstly from a distribution of individuals in space, it equally involves a knowledge of time. According to Foucault’s observations, the partitioning of spaces eliminates the effects of imprecision, establishes presences and absences, and makes it possible at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. Spaces also allow for a more efficient and productive economy of time. The time table fabricates rhythms, imposes particular occupations, and regulates the cycles of repetition, allowing for a time of good quality. Control of activity is also achieved through applying temporal imperatives to action, correlating this action to the body as gestures, and to the manipulation of objects, and finally through adherence to the rule of non-idleness, the maximization of both speed and efficiency, of exhaustive use. Time penetrates the body through acts temporally elaborated, and with all the meticulous controls of power in spaces that are individually assigned. Thus, disciplinary power creates its own species of space-time, where the two are inextricable; the space-time of discipline produces effects on the body that would not otherwise be possible without this unique union of spaces and time – of historical experience.

Discipline, then, involves spaces and places and faces – or, perhaps more accurately, eyes. The arrangement of spaces and individuals positioned in their particular places lends itself to disciplinary surveillance, the technology that starts with the knowledge that someone is watching you, and ends with a self-regulation born out of the possibility that someone is watching you, or maybe that everyone is watching you. “Visibility,” Foucault intones, “is a
Foucault sees in Jeremy Bentham’s proposed Panopticon the notion that “he [the prisoner] is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order.” In any panoptical arrangement, the see/being seen dyad is dissociated:

In the periphic ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen. It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes, in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up.

Here, we are introduced to the modern concept that has become fairly widely known as T(capital T)he G(capital G)aze. The surveilling gaze, that is. This gaze is a crucial cog in the disciplinary machine; while in the Panopticon, the gaze, or the idea of it, is represented by the tower, in today’s society, the tower is diffused, or maybe doesn’t even exist at all. But the notion of this tower is, in a significant sense, a powerful nexus where the disciplinary system is held together; the idea of the tower (which is quasi-consciously registered, culturally) reminds us to mind our minutia, to delve into details, to watch ourselves. The tower is sort of like Santa Claus, for grown ups; you better not do whatever, because Santa will know if you have, and you will be punished, or omitted, accordingly. Any given individual (or bad little boy or girl), regardless of her/his social positioning and the spaces

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34 Ibid, 200.
35 Jeremy Bentham, noted utilitarian thinker, designed the idea of the Panopticon, a prison in which every space allotted to prisoners is in view of the central tower. The general idea is that the knowledge of being watched, possibly constantly, will result in the prisoner policing himself.
36 D & P, 200.
38 The song “Crash (Into Me)” by the Dave Matthews Band is often reported to merely be the personification of the masculine gaze. “I watch you there, through the window where I stare, you wear nothing, but you wear it so well” is an excerpt from the song.
s/he occupies (whether or not he or she has a chimney at his/her house), is the object of information, of surveillance, of a regulatory watching; this surveillance, made possible by the space-time matrix specifically fabricated by discipline, assists in the assembly of a docile, productive, and 'improved' object by transferring the responsibility of policing away from a locus of individuals and toward everyone, everywhere (the North Pole, a highly useful vantage point that populates imaginations everywhere).

The gaze (which has been worked even into our Christmas mythology) along with other aspects of disciplinary power, produces a plethora of effects, though the effects that I am interested in, and thus the effects that will be specifically addressed in this project, are individualization and normalization. Individualization might be identified as the process of atomization, of categorization, that results from being meticulously catalogued, minutely referenced in the annals of ‘political anatomy.’ Foucault describes individualization quite strikingly: “the crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities.”39 All of the processes described above, each of the means of imposing a disciplinary regime, serve the process of individualization. By compartmentalizing, ranking, and enclosing, disciplinary technologies take the individual and isolate her/him from all the other hers/hims, so that the individual, fabricated by a particular power ‘structure,’ is meant to be separated as a condition of its productivity and utility for the disciplinary regime. The individual who might’ve been part of a collective effect of multiple individualities is subjected to the process of individualization to reduce/produce her/him into an atomized, disconnected individual, a ‘sovereign’ who no longer needs to be concerned with the collective effects of her/his individuality; every ‘man’ is an individual island.

39 D&P, 201.
With that said, individualization often occurs alongside normalization, which also results from the techniques of disciplinary power; normalization, however, has very much to do with the crowd, the mass and well, the norm. Foucault has this to say about normalization:

For the marks that once indicated status, privilege, and affiliation were increasingly replaced – or at least supplemented – by a whole range of degrees of normality indicating membership of a homogenous social body but also playing a part in classification, hierarchization, and the distribution of rank. In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them to one another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences.⁴⁰

Some key words for understanding normalization, then, are rule, homogeneity, fitting. Normalization establishes homogeneity, a rule of sameness, and an imperative to fit. It is a process that simultaneously compares individuals to the norm and ranks them according to their sameness; one of the functions of discipline is to ensure that ‘they’ might all be like one another. The idea of ‘normal’ is one that arose at the end of the 19th century, through the development of the normal curve, which would become the Bell curve. At the same time that normalization occurs (through discourse, disciplinary tactics, innumerable ways and methods) individualization, the atomizing of all of us from each other, takes place; these two effects of power are mutually entwined, wound and bound together, just like bodies and the disciplinary matrix.

It is my hope that this section has provided some clarification, both of some important Foucauldian arguments, and of things to come in my project. Though there are certainly more aspects to disciplinary technology than I have detailed here. The themes I’ve

⁴⁰ D&P, 184.
presented here are going to come up later, again and again, because they represent examples of the relational power network, which, if you’ll recall, is very much related to one of my central questions: what’s the body got to do with it (power, that is)?

The Body

As I sit here, typing words with the direction of my motor nerves, reading words with my eyes, and listening to Eric Clapton on my headphones with my ears, the ‘body’ debate comes forcefully to mind. Or rather, bodies and their centrality to historically and presently powerful discourses. Bodies that have been marked by ‘racial’ characteristics have long been used by various individuals and groups to justify such atrocities as race-based hate crimes, slavery, and genocide. Bodies and the perceived ‘sexual difference’ between them continue to be part of the ‘reasoning’ behind marking the sexualized body with various mutilations, domestic abuse, and rape. As Zillah Eisenstein rightly points out in Hatreds, “it is ironic that the body, the one thing all human beings have in common, becomes a site for demarcating difference, hate and pain... we each start with our bodies.”

Because the body is a site inscribed, fabricated, constructed, yet seen, felt, sensed -- a delicate balance that Foucault picks up on in both Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality -- it is a complex location of politics.

For example, at times it seems to me that for Foucault, the body is a sound. No matter how hard we might try to articulate exactly what it is that Foucault is getting at with regard to what the body is, no matter how much we analyze, categorize, or contextualize,

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41 I henceforth write the word body without quotation marks, but remain aware of the multiple meanings, uses, and significations of the word.
43 Ibid, 34.
44 A notion that I picked up in a classroom discussion, “Political Theory,” Fall, 2002.
defining the body from a Foucauldian standpoint is a daunting task, and quite possibly, an impossible one. One of the reasons for this difficulty, the answer to critics complaints that Foucault never explicitly gets at the meat of the body, is that words do not, cannot reflect the nuance and subtlety and multi-faceted experience, reality, whatever, that is a body. The body is a sound. It is a groan, a moan, of pleasure, of pain, of fear, of happiness, a grunt, an exasperation, a gasp, of surprise, of terror, of grief. (You see? My words are already confusing the body with emotions that the body may emit – see Appendix A, a sound recording.)

Following that with more articulable possibilities, Foucault’s conception of the body is so difficult to pin down partially because of the multiple ways that he describes it. Critics and fans have both charged Foucault with being too materialist, too constructionist, too paradoxical about the body. One only has to look at *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, to realize that they are quite right – in a sense. Foucault presents in these works many different ways to think about the body, and as Margaret McLaren points out, “there is no compelling reason to privilege... [one] account over the others.” Foucault simultaneously imagines the body as it is inscribed and inscribing, constructed and constructive, produced and productive; no matter what, “it is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and docility, their distribution and their submission.”

In the introduction to *Discipline and Punish*, he states,

The body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is

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45 The idea of an Appendix A is being used for artistic demonstration. There is no such appendix attached.
46 See sometime-critics Sandra Bartky, Susan Bordo, and to some extent, Judith Butler.
48 *D&P*, 25.
bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as a labor power is only possible if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument, meticulously prepared, calculated, and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive and subjected body.49

There's a lot going on with and upon and through and about bodies, as far as Foucault is concerned. And with good reason. The body he characterizes in this short excerpt is at the center of power relations; or better, since there is no center of power relations in a Foucauldian sense of the term, it is the fulcrum upon which the lever is balanced. Here, the body is a cultural creation, Frankenstein's monster but without a fear of fire and with a better vocabulary. The body is never outside power relations, never on the edges of the political periphery. It is a place where discourses and disciplines mold, shape, and control; this is the socially constructed body. But, it is also the active body, the productive body, the body in which power is embodied, through which it is channeled, and by which resistance might take shape. Foucault tells us that the body is "material, with a history, interpreted through various discourses... and is capable of resistance through producing counterdiscourses."50 While the body may never be outside of the power relations that work through it, it is at the same time material and discursively formed; a paradox, perhaps, but paradoxes, the seeming contradictions that would, should make something impossible, often appear when we pause to mull over intricate, complex entities, like bodies, or even something simple like social reality (Ha. Ha).

According to Foucault, the individual's body is rendered by the technologies of power, and specifically in the context of this project, disciplinary power. In Discipline and Punish, he states that, "the individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ideological

49 Ibid, 25.
50 McLaren, 114.
representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by the specific technology of power that I have called discipline." Thus the individual's body is subjected — to what it is subjected varies throughout time and space and the mechanics of power working during those particular times and in specific spaces, but its subjection is, within a disciplinary regime, anyway, a condition of its productivity. Foucault writes of the body:

One would see the soul as the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body. It exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished... it is born out of methods of punishment, supervision, and constraint. It is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference to a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a certain type of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power.

The individual's body is a product of disciplinary power and an object of knowledge; her/his body is the fount from which these technologies draw their nourishment and is the target of disciplinary tactics. What this characterization of the body tells us is pretty important; while the body is subjected to the technologies of discipline, it simultaneously is a source of power. This body isn't your grandparents' body, as a certain advertiser might observe; this is not the same body that was tortured as spectacle, or so Foucault would have us believe. It is not the body of previous penal punishments, the body that was physically tortured, dismembered, and branded. However, I will argue that the individual's body today, as in the monarchical/spectacle historical context, remains a branded spectacle-by-example, in a tangible, observable, way. It may not, however, be the body of a solid and supreme

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51 D&P, 194.
52 Ibid, 29.
53 D & P, 8.
materiality, because as Foucault reminds us, the individual’s body is imprisoned by the soul.\footnote{Ibid, 30.}

The soul, that which discipline is trying to get at (perhaps because discipline has a hand in its genesis?), is reachable only through the body, explaining why the body remains the fulcrum of power relations. However, it is at times unclear whether Foucault believes that the soul is merely a by-product of discipline or if it is one of the forces of the body that discipline seeks to redirect. At one point, previously quoted, Foucault states that the soul is produced by the functioning of a power exercised\footnote{Ibid, 29.} but soon after this utterance, he continues on the subject: “a soul inhabits him [the individual] and brings him into existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body.”\footnote{Ibid, 30.} The first half of this statement is consistent with the notion that the soul is the invention of disciplinary technology, and the individual is a unique effect of this capillary form of power infusing the body with a soul. However, if the soul is to be a factor in the mastery of power over the body, it is possible that the soul might exist outside a disciplinary regime. Or, on the other hand, if the body isn’t the target of discipline, and the soul doesn’t exist yet, might the creation of the particular kind of individual body, the material body with the mastered soul, be an intended outcome of disciplinary power?

The relationship between power, the body, and the ‘soul’ is one not easily described or characterized, and the above query is one not easily answered without bringing up other questions. Is the soul just another word for imagination? Or consciousness? Or is it something unique, something that, combined with the forces of the body, creates selfhood? I’m not sure that Foucault gives us enough to go on so that we might answer such a powerful

\footnote{Ibid, 30.}
metaphysical question on the basis of his text alone. However, I believe that one could characterize the Foucauldian soul as a component part of the individual, that, when coupled with the forces of the body, generates something that is more than the sum of its parts.

Critiquing the Body

Several prominent theorists disagree, sometimes strongly, with Foucault’s treatment and characterization of the body. Some contend that his representation is too concrete, too inescapable, too much like a prison. Others protest that Foucault’s body is too generalized, too ambiguous, too unspecified. Generally, naysayers can by divided into two groups, though of course many theorists fall somewhere in between the naturalists and social inscriptionists. According to naturalists, the body is inert, passive, and unthinking (in contrast to the active, thinking mind); the body is conceived of as part of nature, a material object consisting of organs, appetites, and biological functions. This contrasts with the social inscriptionist view, which holds that the body is conditioned by its historical and cultural situation; in its strongest version, the social inscription position believes that the body is constituted fully by historical/cultural/social forces, and is thus determined by them. One scholar who makes this claim is Judith Butler. Situated somewhere in between a naturalist and a social inscriptionist viewpoint is Sandra Bartky, who believes that while Foucault’s critique of power sounds a libratory note, his analysis as a whole reproduces that sexism which is endemic throughout Western political theory. According to Bartky, the text of Discipline and Punish treats the body as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of

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57 One scholar who makes this claim is Judith Butler. Foucault refers to the soul as the prison of the body in Discipline and Punish, 30.
58 I.e. Bartky and Bordo.
59 McLaren, 82.
60 McLaren, 82.
men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life. Bartky's demand, then, is for an account of disciplining bodies that specifies the different technologies applied to gender differentiated bodies. In her view, the body is almost always irrevocably gendered, its identification and symbolization most often triggered by visual cues denoting a masculine or feminine body. These symbolics are most assuredly socially inscribed, but Bartky seems to maintain that there is a prediscursively sexed body, or at least a body with sexed characteristics.

Foucault treats the body a little less deterministically, and I believe that his reason is straightforward—his project in *Discipline and Punish* is to identify a particular mechanism of power (discipline) that is enacted upon, through, and with bodies, not to assert a meta-theory of power and the body that supercedes or even supposes the existence of other, just-as-important theories of power. He is describing the blueprint of a machine, the structuring of an economy—discipline may be identified neither with a particular institution (like patriarchy or the presidency); it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a physics or an anatomy of power, a technology. Additionally, it has been argued by at least one other theorist that the omission of a discussion of gender-specific practices in *Discipline and Punish*...
Punish was quite possibly strategic, helping to pave the way for the deconstruction of gender and binary categorizations.  

However, Foucault does identify a materiality in the body, some sort of solidity, perhaps a starting point for reality. Judith Butler, in both Bodies that Matter and Gender Trouble, challenges the idea that the body is, in any meaningful way, fixed or material. To an extent informed by Foucault, Butler states that “materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power’s most productive effect.” Indeed,” she reiterates, “it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to space rearticulations that call into question that hegemonic force of that very law.” I believe that Butler departs from Foucault in her assertion that matter must be conceived of not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter. In effect, the body itself, in Butler’s view, would not exist without the process of culturation. Bodies, she argues, only exist in the discourses that constitute them; we cannot conceive of a corporeality beyond or before the cultural articulation of the body. However, this brings up a conundrum that the most inquisitive, inquiring minds in the world have pondered since the question was posed; “If a tree falls in the forest, and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?” It seems to me a most egocentric and anthropocentric thing to consider; does the world cease to exist if humans are no longer around to brood over it (a purely rhetorical question, I hope)? Simply because ‘we’ cannot imagine or conceive of something does not mean it is not there. Yes,  

65 See McLaren, 2002,  
67 Ibid, 236.  
68 Ibid, 239.
our bodies are to an extent fabricated by the cultural articulations that inscribe it; our perception of it is not necessarily the be all and end all of being. That thing called reality is undoubtedly shaped by perception, and the material and perceptible conditions of people’s bodies are certainly the result of widespread and specific genealogical events. However, “I think, therefore I am,” should not mean “I think, therefore, that is all that I am and that is what is there.”

Donna Haraway and her ideas about the partiality of vision and materiality are useful to this discussion. Regarding vision, she states that “subjectivity is multidimensional; so, therefore is vision. The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly.” The ‘knowing self,’ perception, the ability to conceive of something, is ‘incomplete’ and a result of situated knowledge. Perhaps one of the reasons for this unfinished business is the inutterable corporeality of our bodies; we have so many visual technologies, Haraway maintains, that are meant to expose the finest detail, that we fail to recognize the realization of the partial vision exercised by our own embodied eyes. These ideas about the complexity and usefulness of vision, for Haraway, are closely related to her thoughts about the complex but useful materiality of the body. She cautions against the loss of biological accounts of the body; in her words, doing so is to “lose the body itself as anything but a blank page for social inscription, including those of biological discourse.” For her, a meeting in the middle seems to be necessary. That is to say, Haraway realizes that neither extreme (too much social constructionism or too much biological determinism) provides an adequate vantage point from

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70 Ibid, 591.
which to view the body. Instead, she theorizes a “material-semiotic actor” which she defines as

A portrayal of the object of knowledge as an active, meaning-generating part of apparatus of bodily production, without ever implying the immediate presence of such objects or, what is the same thing, their final or unique determination of what can count as objective knowledge at a particular historical juncture.\(^{71}\)

When thought of as a material-semiotic actor, the body lands somewhere in the middle of the not-quite paradox. The body is simultaneously an agent, a symbolic, and a material object of knowledge that is not final or complete or finite in the possibilities of its existence; the body is a mean and a median, one that does not adhere to absolute fixity, nor to absolute fluidity.

Butler’s ideas about the seemingly endless fluidity of bodies and the discursive creation of matter arise from her own situatedness, as do my own. This does not mean that the body is the end, the alpha and the omega, the ultimate source of knowledge or existence; it is only a convoluted way of stating what is sometimes obscured by the necessary abstraction of some theory – the body exists, whether we want it to or not, whether we can conceive of it outside cultural articulations or not (the former is not likely, but possibilities are endless), and it exists in different ways for different people in different places, times, contexts. It is inscribed with endless cultural signs and is objectified, subjected, in flux, confused, formed by discursive technologies; it is an agent in its own construction. But the body is also a material reality. It is both at once (though there is not necessarily an equal balance in certain contexts or situations). Elisabeth Bronfen states this position eloquently when she posits,

The body belongs to a realm which, even while it can only be represented through symbolic language and images, nevertheless also exceeds any system of representation. The body emerges from the matrix of real materiality, upon which

\(^{71}\) Haraway, 595.
those signs and laws of culturation are grafted that engender our image repertoire as well as our symbolic codes. At the same time, the body emerges as the vanishing point of visual and narrative figurations of human existence, the unrepresentable alterity of the real which is as inevitable as it is ineffable.\textsuperscript{72}

This passage seems to capture the spirit of the Foucauldian body. The body, like any complex term, is impossible to characterize with ‘universal accuracy;’ the signs, symbolizations, and representations of language will necessarily change the meaning of the body. The body, as Foucault writes it in \textit{Discipline and Punish}, is both a sound and a text; it escapes representation while being a primary site for the functioning and inscription of powerful discourses and training; it is a site of resistance while being an object of discipline – a powerful paradox. Though such a conclusion might be unsatisfactory at first, it is a useful one; only an apparently paradoxical body, as close an approximation to the real thing as the representational signs of language allow, explains the inputs and outcomes of a disciplinary regime.

The Social Body

The disciplinary regime is also concerned with what Foucault terms the social body. With all these bodies milling around, a person could get a little bit confused about which is which and which serves what purpose in Foucauldian theory. There are infinite ways to think about the social body, though ultimately, Foucault settles on one way a little more quickly and clearly than he does with the individual body, even though the social body is no less complex.

At times, one can imagine the social body simply as a macrocosm of the individual body. Foucault conceptualizes power as capillary, a component of it that distributes; capillaries alone can carry both venal and arterial blood, back and forth from the cells to the

vessels that transport blood to and from the heart. Foucault says the social body has a heart, 
from which cries against bodily punishment leap forth to protest the utility of physical pain\textsuperscript{73}; 
the social body rejects the pain of punishment because it contains cell-like components that 
function to form a whole set of tissues (individuals), that are attached to the same nerve 
endings as the unoffending, normal(ized) parts of the body. Foucault states that “the pain 
that must exclude any reduction in punishment is that felt by the judges or the spectators with 
all the hardness of heart that it may bring with it, all the ferocity induced by familiarity.”\textsuperscript{74} 
Like ugly toes with ingrown nails that are not removed from a person’s feet because they 
provide the balance needed to walk with relative ease (that must be looked at everyday, and 
touched when they are washed), a deviant is an affront to the social body; but to inflict pain 
(punishment) upon what is a part of one’s own body sends the sting to the same neurological 
center, where hurt registers as a knowledge felt in each body part, not only the toes. Or, 
perhaps the social body gets the sense that the reason for this inexcusable but unexcisable 
abnormality is that it neglected to trim its toenails on a regular basis. There is tension in the 
system, for example, between the contractual, highly civilized and civic principle that expels 
the criminal from society and the image of the monster vomited by nature.\textsuperscript{75} That is to say, 
with ingrown nails as with the un-normalized, there exists just a little bit of self-recrimination 
– how did we let ourselves ‘go’?

Foucault, while conceiving the social body, seems also to model some of his ideas 
about disciplinary power on the anatomical features of individual bodies. In organizing 
‘cells,’ ‘places,’ and ‘ranks,’ discipline creates complex spaces that are at once architectural, 
functional, and hierarchical. These spaces provide fixed positions and permit circulation;

\textsuperscript{73} D\&P, 91. 
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 91. 
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 91.
they carve out individual segments and establish operational obedience of individuals, but also a better economy of time and gesture. The body, in its intricate, systematic way, is the ultimate organized space and is full of power relationships. The body is made up of organs that are made up of tissues, that are made up of cells, that are made up of ribosomes, chromosomes, and nuclei, that are made up of proteins, that are made up of amino acids. Each of these components occupies an organizational space that allows for peak efficiency. Each of these components is also subject to the hierarchy of the body, whereby each system is ultimately in the service of the brain; if the brain is at length deprived of the proteins and carbohydrates that it needs for fuel, it will begin to break down the least valuable tissues to feed itself, but finally digests its own muscle and bone matter if scarcity persists for a long enough duration. The survival instinct of the brain can cannibalize the body, and thus kill itself, but the body will, in most cases, die without the brain to carry out its necessary directorial role. Because of the way that the body’s space is organized, the ‘subordinate’ systems of the body and the brain are mutually dependent; but because the brain has the ability to control the functions of every other system, it does not always function with this symbiosis and co-dependency in mind. The body is full of power relationships.

Departing for a moment from the individual body as metaphor for the social body, one still sees that the politics of the body and the body politic mirror each other, rendering both populations and individuals docile and useful. Disciplinary power inserts into the deepest corners of the social body; “in order to be exercised, this power had to be given the instrument of exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as

76 D&P, 148.
77 Foucault uses the terms ‘social body,’ ‘body social,’ and ‘body politic’ interchangeably, as far as I can discern.
78 McLaren, 89.
it itself could 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.\textsuperscript{79} Foucault, in this passage, articulates the idea that we are indeed all of our brothers' and sisters' keepers, or at least, watchers. With the democratization of power\textsuperscript{80}, the disindividualization of the technologies that control bodies, the social body, the whole of the population is at once regarding itself with the gaze:

The seeing machine was once a sort of dark room into which individuals spied; it has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole. The panoptic schema, without disappearing as such or losing any of its properties, was destined to spread throughout the social body; its vocation was to become a generalized function.\textsuperscript{81}

Foucault further elaborates this point when he states:

Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies.\textsuperscript{82}

These two passages speak to the complex and multiple relationships between individual bodies and the social body. The panoptic model, which originally worked upon individual bodies, due to its efficiency, form, and function, has now spread throughout the entire social body to still work on individual bodies. The mechanics that worked to discipline the individual body now thrive within the whole social body, an eventuality that might lead us to suppose that the social body, in a general way, is a big version of individual bodies. And yet,

\textsuperscript{79} D&\textit{P}, 214.
\textsuperscript{80} By democratization of power, I am referring to that aspect of Foucault's theory that puts power into a micro-physical space, into each individual; that is to say, power is democratized because no one individual is truly powerless, according to Foucauldian theory.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 207.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 217.
this explanation is somehow incomplete; the latter passage excerpted above might aid in clarifying the specifics of the individual/social body association. Foucault seems to be saying that the social body is an enabling force for disciplinary technology to function; the social body serves to transmit images, commodify exchanges, provide circuits of communication, and circulate signs. In fact, he states in the introductory chapter of *Discipline and Punish*, "one would be concerned with the body politic, as a set of material elements and techniques that serves as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge." I would argue that Foucault, throughout the rest of the text, characterizes the body politic as a grouping of material essentials not because it is material in character, but rather because of material, manifested effects. The social body, then, might be characterized as the conveyor belt that feeds individuals into the disciplinary machine, the delivery truck that transports the finished products, the retail outlet that sells them, and the consumer that purchases them. While this metaphor might appear deterministic, I do not feel that it is inaccurate, given the clarity with which Foucault writes about the social body. The precision of his description of the social body contrasts with the much-talked-about ambiguity that is a feature of his talk about individual bodies. So the major difference between the social body and individual bodies lies in the disparate roles that each plays in the disciplinary regime. The individual body is the object of disciplinary power, while the social body is a means of transporting and maintaining both bodies and power. The individual body is also, in a very meaningful way, the source of power alchemized into discipline, while the social body is a catalyst in that transformation. Finally, the individual body, by virtue of its power, is a site of resistance. Might the social body also

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83 *D&P*, 28.
perform a role in resistance, or is it simply in the service of the disciplinary regime? Though it will certainly mean leaving the reader in unbearable suspense, it will be useful for the purposes of this project to hold this question until the concluding chapter, as the Frankfurt School and consumer theorists have a lot to say that might assist us in answering this query.
Chapter 2: The Culture Industry and the Commodification of Consciousness

Woke up today to everything gray/And all that I saw just kept going on and on/Sweep all the pieces under the bed/Closet all the curtains and cover my head/And what you wish for won’t come true/You aren’t surprised love, are you?/If this serenade is not what you want/It’s just how it is, it keeps going on and on/Come out, come out wherever you are/Would you do it all over right from the start/And what you wish for won’t come true/You aren’t surprised love, are you?/Once had this dream crashed down in Oz/Not black and white, but where the colors are/I never dreamed that I would let it go/And I will get what I deserve/Keep all the secrets under the bed/Open the curtains, forget what I said/And what you wished for could come true/You aren’t surprised love, are you?/So what you wished for could come true/You aren’t surprised love, are you?

— Guster, “What You Wish For”

Ashleigh DeSoto
Introduction

In this chapter, I take a pretty close look at Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s famous essay *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. To start, I introduce the text and its place within the broader genre of critical theory; following that, I tease out some ideas about capitalist culture and link them to the bodies, individual and social, that I introduced in my previous chapter. Doing so will identify and clarify the forms of power that I am going to address in my final chapter on branding; think of this section as a bridge between Foucauldian disciplinary theory and the branded body.

Critical Theory and The Culture Industry

Much like critical theory, the culture industry is one of those terms that you can kind of, sort of identify by context clues and just knowing the definitions of the component words. Or, at least, you think you can; but then, as with critical theory, you realize that the combination of these words truly equals more than the sum of two individual parts. According to Martin Jay, Critical Theory is expressed through a series of critiques of other thinkers and philosophical traditions; its development is thus through dialogue, its genesis as dialectical as the method it purports to apply to social phenomena, and its intent is change. The culture industry, on the other hand, is a term taken from a chapter title in the book *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Frankfurt School critical theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (henceforth H and A); the chapter title is “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” probably a little more portentous of the nature of critiques to come in that essay than if they had left it as the plain ole culture industry. It is a chapter that, through the process of doing critical theory,

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assesses the systems that have given rise to mass deception: capitalism and the enlightenment.\textsuperscript{85}

It is important when thinking about the culture industry to realize that H and A are referring to an industry that produces culture; in the words of Fredric Jameson, “the ‘Culture Industry’ is not a theory of culture but the theory of an industry.”\textsuperscript{86} As such, I read their essay with the production of and the consumption of the products of culture in mind, which is a pretty helpful way of demarcating their different ideas about capitalist culture without separating them. After all, according to H and A, the result of the culture industry and its various justifications is a circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger,\textsuperscript{87} which seems to me a quite straightforward way of asserting that production and consumption, or rather, producers and consumers, collude (perhaps) unconsciously to maintain the status quo. Indeed, if H and A were to compose a cohesive mission statement\textsuperscript{88} for the culture industry, it would likely read: “to maintain the pathways and distractions necessary to normalize and perpetuate the authority of capitalism as a dominant system.”

\textbf{(False) Consciousness and Capturing the (Un)Imaginable}

At first, H and A don’t appear to have much hope regarding the proletariat and the possibilities of said proletariat realizing the revolutionary potential of their class. In fact, the cynicism and seeming hopelessness is one of the major criticisms of H and A’s work, and is a

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{I am not, when I say that Horkheimer and Adorno are critiquing the philosophical systems of capitalism and the Enlightenment, saying that they are two distinct philosophical systems; most of would likely agree that the two systems are definitely related. I refer to them separately for the purposes of expediency and, at times, clarity.}
\footnote{Fredric Jameson, \textit{Late Marxism: Adorno, or the Persistence of the Dialectic}, (New York: Verso, 1993), 144.}
\footnote{Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, \textit{The Dialectic of Enlightenment}, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 121.}
\footnote{Mission statement is an oft-used buzz phrase in self-proclaimed ‘progressive’ and ‘cutting-edge’ corporations that summarizes the mission/goal/purpose/idea of the company in about twenty words or less.}
\end{footnotes}
major reason that some people in fields like cultural studies refute these thinkers as their origins, which are partially found in the methods and philosophies of the Frankfurt School. I, too, was a little uncomfortable claiming H and A in my own work, mostly because I was sort of in denial about their ostensible absolutism and bleak outlook. To overcome this attitude, I was recently advised to attempt to understand the text of “The Culture Industry” on its own terms, to try and insert myself into the minds of H and A. Following this advice led me to believe that H and A are not, in fact, the miserable and gloomy characters that I had once assumed they were. Their critique in “The Culture Industry” contains many intricate and interwoven themes that might lead one, upon a cursory examination, to diagnose their work with an incurable case of the doldrums; however, these themes should be taken on their own, sometimes separately and on their own terms, because doing so reveals the method behind the melancholy. In the course of my readings, the theme that I repeatedly found H and A coming back to was that of consciousness; well, not consciousness, exactly, or even false consciousness, but a sense of captured, stifled, or diverted imagination and, simultaneously, captured, stifled, or diverted rationality. After all, the might of industrial society is lodged in men’s minds. These ideas, for me, are the keys that open the text of “The Culture Industry.”

Culture, according to H and A, is not a chaotic, amorphous entity; it manages to impose its stamp on everything. When H and A talk about culture, they are talking very specifically about capitalist culture, a system in which the products of industry are relentlessly consumed. In fact, one of the products of capitalist industry is culture (or the culture they are referring to, anyway) itself. H and A co-opt the Marxian language of

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90 H and A, 127.
91 Ibid, 121.
capitalist industry to identify the players and processes of cultural production: the bourgeois owners of the means of production, the proletariat masses who are simultaneously producers and consumers, and the technologies that facilitate fabrication.\textsuperscript{92}

I do not believe that it would be unfair or inaccurate to compare the way that H and A identify the production of culture with Foucault's recognition of disciplinary power; like Foucault, H and A are talking about a distinctive technology, a formula, if you will, that generates a certain outcome. It isn't really surprising to H and A that culture might become an instrument of control; culture, according to them, naturally contains an embryo of schematization and a process of cataloguing and classification that bring culture into the sphere of administration.\textsuperscript{93} One has to wonder at this point if culture is pretty much always administrative and administered. That is to say, culture provides identifications, social norms, and other regulative aspects of who we consider ourselves to be; isn't that an administrative capacity? I think that what H and A are objecting to is not the administrative character of culture in general, but the fact, as they see it, that dispensation of modern, Western culture is going on without the knowledgeable input of its constituents. That is to say, capitalist culture is manufactured and maintained by a specific set of undemocratic administrative mechanisms that H and A clearly disdain. Some of these instruments include the phenomena of 'Everyman,' amusement, and advertising. Each of these contributes to the assembly of a consciousness that unquestioningly perpetuates the ruthless consumption of mass produced images by standardized individuals.

What is so appealing about the products of the culture industry? Why do we consume at such an exceptional rate? Life in the late capitalist era is, according to H and A, a constant

\textsuperscript{92} This terminology is used throughout the text.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid, 131.
initiation rite; everyone must show that s/he wholly identifies her/himself with the power that is belaboring him. 94 “Everyone can be like this omnipotent society; everyone can be happy, if only he will capitulate fully and sacrifice his claim to happiness.” 95 In two short passages very close together in the text, the word “everyone” comes up several times. This isn’t a coincidence. H and A believe that capitalist culture has pervaded everywhere and invaded the minds of everyone. One of the ways that this is made possible is through the false inclusion of … well, everyone. I say that the inclusion is false because the putative social contract is not without stipulations, requirements, and of course, since we are dealing in capitalism, exchange. Inclusion in the capitalist system is conditional upon cooperation, not necessarily knowledgeable consent. 96 Such inclusion makes the member ‘part of the whole;’ yet isolated.

Another falsity is the idea that somehow choice is involved in capitalist participation, seeing as how we post-industrialists (and arguably the whole world, these days) were born into our capitalist circumstances, so that, as H and A would likely point out, choice is a matter of degree. And yet, the culture industry generously extends to us all the invitation to join, to be like and liked, to be a Part Of Something Through The Consumption Of Products. But, since the invitation was proffered, it is on certain terms that we become part of Everyman, Inc. “Everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previously indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type.” 97

The scope of such a project is daunting; normalization of certain processes must occur so that

94 H and A, 153.
95 Ibid, 153.
96 I recognize that making any argument about consent opens all sorts of complicated locks on complicated doors. There is quite a lot of scholarship out there that talks in depth about consent, to democracy, to capitalism, etc., but for the purposes of this project, consent is defined as ‘voluntary agreement,’ a la the Oxford Dictionary, 1996 edition. By knowledgeable consent, I mean mindful and explicitly honest voluntary agreement. I clarify further with points from H and A later in this section.
97 Ibid, 123.
the consumer realizes his place within the consumptive hierarchy. One of the ways
Everyman, Inc. disseminates the requirements for membership is to exhibit sameness, to
eliminate difference. Difference highlights the inequities and iniquities of the capitalist
system; difference does not allow for accurate prediction of consumer behavior. When this
happens, according to H and A, every detail of consumption is so firmly shaped into
sameness that nothing can appear which is not marked at birth or does not meet with
approval at first sight. Any departure from one’s class norm serves all the more strongly to
confirm the validity of the system; anyone who resists can survive only by fitting in.
Sameness can be identified in details; in fact, according to H and A, details are more
important to the culture industry’s perpetuation of the capitalist system than the main idea.
That is to say, the details may, in part, anyway, be different, but the main idea, the driving
idea behind the products of the culture industry remains the same – capitalism.

Several present-day examples come to mind at this point. The Gap and Old Navy,
two popular retail clothing stores, are owned by the same company; yet the stores remain
separate in geographical space and pricing. The clothes are slightly different in style, the
stores have different decorating schemes, different details, but the consumer is essentially
buying the same product, made under the same conditions, even though it appears otherwise.
Or, take movies, many of which keep the same formula and vary only the actors and
background detail. The story remains the same. For example, the films Braveheart and The
Patriot look a lot alike, even down to Mel Gibson; in these films, a reluctant, educated man is
drawn into the violent independence struggles of Scotland and the United States,
respectively, because his family has been targeted by nasty British soldiers (in both films)

99 Ibid, 128.
whose intent is to threaten him into submission. Of course, this violence has the opposite effect, and by the end of the movies, Mel’s supreme physical and spiritual sacrifice has won the independence of his peoples. Though the setting is different, the clothes are different, the time is different, the message in both pictures seems to be one of self-sacrifice. Now, how might that serve the perpetuation of capitalism, hmm? This phenomenon is the same as a teen singing sensation who has black hair instead of blonde but produces an identical style of music; the details ask if the hair is up or down, while the bigger picture evanesces into the background. A proliferation of details allows the consumer to see ‘difference,’ when in fact none exists. Our differences in the membership of Everyman, Inc. are merely details that demarcate our sameness. Details occupy the mind, negate negation, and distract from the basic formula that we might recognize at the back of our minds, so that we don’t question our ability to question Everyman, Inc. H and A would likely assert that details exist so that we believe we are choosing, questioning, discerning, when in fact, we are perpetuating, continuing, furthering the end, which is capitalism.

The culture industry additionally shapes the minds of consumers through amusement. Amusement, in the minds of H and A, is not only a distraction from the mundane existence of the average worker, but a carefully calculated method for preventing complaints about our realities or the emergence of an idea that might challenge the capitalist norm. The amusement produced by the culture industry is interrupted, according to H and A, by a surrogate overall meaning which the culture industry must give to its products. This omnipotent presence is capitalism. During each amusement – whether it be movies, music, television, or professional sports – the consumer is consistently reminded that this incredible fun would not be possible without a capitalist system, without corporate endorsements and

\(^{100}\text{Ibid, 142.}\)
product placements, but in such a way that most people don’t even consciously notice the
contant promotion of capitalism. H and A believe that amusement has become an ideal, an
end, taking the place of higher things (like reason, art, fine wine, or citizenship) of which it
completely deprives the masses, so that genuine personal emotion other than amusement in
real life can be all the more reliably controlled. Amusement is in large measure the
creation of industry, as amusement always reveals the influence of business; in fact, H and A
see the original affinity of amusement and business in the former’s specific significance: to
defend society. After all, to be pleased is to some extent to say Yes, to affirm, to
comply:

Pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it
is shown. Basically, it is helplessness. It is flight; not, as is asserted, flight from a
wretched reality, but from the last remaining thought of resistance. The liberation
which amusement promises is the freedom from thought and negation... even when
the public does rebel against the pleasure industry, all it can muster is that very feeble
resistance which that very industry has inculcated in it.

Well, that does seem to be rather hopeless. H and A even seem to close the door on the
possibility of resistance; the bearded or flannelled college student with a fervent belief in
social change is, according to H and A, just as much a part of the capitalist system of
amusements as Guy Lombardo. However, it might be possible to resist the all-encompassing
scope of capitalist culture if the independent imagination is encouraged. That is, H and A are
resisting the idea of resistance that arises from the paradigm of capitalist amusements, from
the minds of people who are told their minds. They do not refute the possibility of someone
being ... not amused. It may not be likely, but after all, they are writing a critique of
capitalist culture, are they not? And are they not... not the first ones to do so?

101 H and A, 144.
102 Ibid, 144.
103 Ibid, 144.
104 Ibid, 144-45.
Another way that the minds of men (and presumably women, though they talk mostly of “men,” meaning hu-mens, I suppose) are occupied by capitalist culture is through the medium of advertising. H and A write that “the prevailing taste takes its ideal from advertising, the beauty in consumption.” Advertising is so closely related to the culture industry and to the social control maintained by the culture industry because culture is a commodity. So completely is it subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly consumed in use that it can no longer be used; therefore, it amalgamates with advertising. That is to say, the culture industry at some point needs reinforcement and support, which it obtains from advertising. Advertising has become the preeminent form of art because it is now undertaken for its own sake, a pure representation of its own power.

H and A characterize the relationship between advertising and the culture industry thusly:

Advertising and the culture industry merge technically as well as economically. In both cases the same thing can be seen in innumerable places, and the mechanical repetition of the same culture product has come to be the same as that of the propaganda slogan. In both cases the insistent demand for effectiveness makes technology into psycho-technology, into a procedure for manipulating men. In both cases the standards are the striking yet familiar, the easy yet catchy, the skillful yet simple; the object is to overpower the customer, who is conceived as absent-minded or resistant.

It might be said, then, that advertising markets the market. It doesn’t provide the same mental effect as amusement, which gets its power from pleasure; advertising manufactures ‘need,’ convincing the consumer that he/she needs to consume the products of the culture industry (and other industries) for reasons so varied in detail that we are reminded of the importance of minutiae in all of the culture industry’s yield. While Everyman, Inc. captures the consumer’s sense of (false) belonging and amusement occupies his/her will, advertising

105 H and A, 156.
106 Ibid, 161.
107 Ibid, 163.
108 Ibid, 163.
captures the imagination by creating an idea of what will happen to the consumer if the consumer particularly consumes a particular product. It will be Good. Or Bad, if Bad is Good, at the time. Advertising is a process of mythmaking, that tells the consumer what his/her desired myths are before he/she can conceive of them, on his/her own.

A major concern of H and A is the fate of the individual. One of the functions of the individual is his/her ability to reason and to imagine. H and A strongly believe that the culture industry robs the individual of these abilities by doing his or her imagining, or schematizing for her/him.\textsuperscript{109} The culture industry as a whole has molded people as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product. All the agents of this process take good care that the simple reproduction of this mental state is not nuanced or extended in any way.\textsuperscript{110} They use movies to demonstrate this point. The sound film, according to H and A, leaves little room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience. This “stunting of the mass-media consumer’s powers of imagination and spontaneity does not have to be traced back to any psychological mechanisms; he must ascribe the loss of those attributes to the objective nature of the products themselves.”\textsuperscript{111} This deprivation of imagination by the consumption of mass produced cultural goods doesn’t seem to offend H and A merely because it perpetuates capitalism; they seem to be genuinely concerned that capitalist culture is depriving the individual of her/his basic ability to reason, and to imagine, something else. This lack makes individuals somehow less than they could be, so that the system might be maintained with fewer and fewer questions about its efficiency, fairness, or any other reason that our imaginations might come up with. “Now,” write H and A, “any person signifies only those attributes which he can replace in everybody else: he is interchangeable, a

\textsuperscript{109} H and A, 124.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 127.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 126.
Surely this is the ultimate cycle: while capitalist industry mass produces products that are essentially the same, the culture industry produces individuals that are, essentially, interchangeable parts where it matters – in the mind.

However, I think Horkheimer and Adorno are asking us to put mind over consuming matter; that is to say, H and A want an avenue for resistance, and I believe that they provide scavenger-hunt-like clues that might help us find our way. They are critiquing mass culture wherein cultural production has become a routine, standardized, and repetitive operation that fashions undemanding cultural commodities which in turn results in a type of consumption that is also standardized, distracted, and passive. By arguing against the passive reception of the goods produced by the culture industry, H and A are implying that agentive, purposeful, and aware production and consumption are possible. After all, the consumer is an indispensable part of the process; there is power in consumption, because the power of capitalist culture is relational. Resistance to the obfuscation proffered by the dominant system involves actively seeking that which is not repetitive, and rejecting those cultural products that result from a self-perpetuating cycle.

That’s Nice, But How Does It Fit In With Chapter One?

The purpose, the end toward which this economy of capitalism, this technology of the culture industry, is striving is the transmission, perpetuation and justification of the capitalist system. The purveyors of the culture industry have done a good job, then, if these are the criteria:

By subordinating in the same way and to the same end [the dominance of capitalist culture] all areas of intellectual creation, by occupying men’s senses from the time they leave the factory in the evening to the time they clock in again the next morning with matter that bears the impress of the labor process they themselves have to sustain

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throughout the day, this subsumption mockingly satisfies the concept of a unified culture which the philosophers of personality contrasted with mass culture.¹¹⁴

There’s a lot to unpack in here, but it provides an excellent conclusion and summary to H and A’s work on the culture industry. They recognize that people are exposed to and engaged by the products of capitalist culture constantly, whether we are in our homes, at school, at work, or at play. When we return to work the next day, depending on where someone fits within the social hierarchy of capitalism, it is wearing the products that we have made (though we have not made profit from them), or, if we are workers in the middle class, talking about the products we have consumed the night before, watching our Sony Home Theater System in the comfort of our Ikea-furnished living rooms. No matter where one fits within the hierarchy, though, we are given little or maybe no space that is not saturated by capitalism, few places where the system is not endorsed. This circumstance provides people with a capitalist culture unified by means of an illusorily unified consciousness, held together by the transmission of capitalist values onto people’s bodies and through their minds. The social body creates us as consumers while its transmits capitalist culture.

Foucault, in the process of historicizing discipline, highlights the ascendancy of the capitalist system alongside the rise of discipline as a technology of power. In fact, it’s not hard to imagine that capitalism might be the disciplinary regime. The production of culture, like discipline, involves administration; the culture industry administers the products available for consumption, and by doing so, restricts or directs cultural space as if it were physical space. Additionally, Everyman, Inc. looks a lot like a subsidiary corporation of the same regime that directs the process of normalization through the gaze. Normalization, like Everyman, is all about fitting in, accepting the rule of the norm, and categorization according

¹¹⁴ H and A, 131.
to pre-determined divisions while isolating oneself from others in your fictional group. H and A point out that the products of the culture industry are fabricated specifically for members of each separate class; consumption outside of a designated consumer area is punishable by worse than a fine – it is punishable by difference, the ultimate penalty in a system that favors homogeneity. That is to say, rank and classification are as important to the culture industry as they are to the disciplinary matrix. They provide a chart, a timetable, an identifiable and quantifiable category that allows prediction and efficiency; the system almost runs itself.

Relating my ideas about the discipline Foucault identifies and the social control exhibited by the technology of the culture industry isn’t as easy as I had first imagined it would be. There are obvious similarities – mass psychology, critiques of capitalism, and a concern for the individual, to name a few – but there are large departures as well. One of these differences is the contrast between the inherent room Foucault sees for resistance to the disciplinary regime and the tight, breathless (but not inescapable) control H and A see the culture industry having over consumers. But what my mind kept coming back to was not this rather significant difference; instead, a short sentence nestled in the middle of *The Culture Industry* kept echoing in my head: “Under the private culture monopoly, it is a fact that ‘tyranny leaves the body free and directs its attack at the soul.’”115 Sound familiar? It should. H and A are not only quoting Alexis de Tocqueville, they are also paving the way for Foucault and his ideas about the soul.

The most obvious omission in their work on capitalism is the lack of attention that H and A pay to the body. The results of mass culture consumption, like the stagnation of imagination, arise from a lack of awareness, which includes a detachment of the mind from

115 H and A, 133, quoting Alexis de Tocqueville.
the body. The symbolic world cannot be separated from the physical world, in theory and certainly not in practice, because our bodies are a primary vehicle (along with other primaries, like language) for communicating with society, for recognizing signs and being recognized. While H and A would likely agree that a healthy mind requires a healthy body, the absence of the body from a discussion on the culture industry is harmful to the larger theory. The human body, as a sensual and sensory being presupposes its counterpart, the sensible body, a body subsumed to a cultural order – both symbolic and practical – defining its boundaries and its position to the larger whole. The body, in other words, is essential in the construction of the individual self, from a cultural standpoint, anyway; to talk about culture and mental atrophy without talking about the body is oxymoronic and neglectful.

While asking us to consider the detrimental effects of capitalism on our culture, on our emotional, spiritual, and intellectual growth as individuals, H and A neglect to identify the detrimental effects of the consumption of mass culture on the body. Perhaps H and A were using that old dialectic of enlightenment (in this article, anyway) between the mind and the body, the split between mental and physical attributes; also, it is likely that mass culture looked a lot different and maybe a lot smaller when they were writing. One could argue, without being a called a cynic, that for a large part of the population, our only cultural identification is with capitalist consumption. The culture industry is now found as much in shopping and in eating as it is in movies and music.

At this point, the body has to figure in somewhere, when talking about capitalism, and more importantly, the consumption of capitalist produced commodities. The effects of capitalist and industrial production on the body aren’t hard to imagine (fatigue, depression, cancer from chemical exposure, the list goes on), but people have only recently begun to pay

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attention to the consequences of consumption. Of course, the most talked about effect of mindless consumption on the body is obesity. In our distraction (provided so generously by the culture industry) and in our post-industrialist but still very capitalist lifestyle, we don’t, as a rule, move around much anymore.\textsuperscript{117} Watching television, going to the movies, playing video games, working on computers, or attending a concert with stadium seating doesn’t require movement; in fact, physical activity is incongruent with the process of enjoying certain popular forms of entertainment. Such amusements require sitting and watching, (non)activities that are both passive, causing, if consumed to an excess and without thought, a weakening not just of the mind but of the bones and muscles and eyes as well. Additionally, these inactivities provided us by the culture industry (and provided by ourselves) encourage the consumption not only of movies, TV, and games, but also the inattentive intake of food. It has been established that eating while the mind is occupied with watching TV or reading magazines leads to the ingestion of excessive amounts of food; that, coupled with the stillness required of many of our favorite entertainments, has led to the highest incidence of childhood and adult obesity ever documented.\textsuperscript{118}

Obesity isn’t the only effects the culture industry has on the body. Furthermore, the body has an effect on the culture industry. The body is, perhaps obviously, necessary for the consumption of cultural products. Several of our important body parts are how we interact with the world around us, how we obtain inputs and communicate outputs. You can almost hear the dialogue between the Big Bad Culture Industry and the Little Hooded Consumer,

\textsuperscript{117} Of course, the kinds and amounts of physical activity folks participate in varies between individuals and between classes. When I say “we don’t move around,” I am talking about people who are unhealthy due to the culture industry, in any socio-economic situation.

\textsuperscript{118} This is not, of course, to imply that the culture industry is the only cause of obesity; I firmly believe, however, that our various sedentary means of entertainment have contributed quite a bit to the increase of its incidence.
with a little bit of role reversal. "Oh my, little consumer, what big ears you have." The better to hear your products with, my dear. "Oh, but what big eyes you have." The better to watch your products with, my dear. "Oh, what big mouth you have." The better to talk about your products with, my dear. You get the idea, anyway. The eyes are instruments of intake (in addition to being windows to the soul), and so are the ears. The mouth both ingests and expresses — it has a dual function, this body part, like all the others, that is all at once material and symbolic. Then again, maybe these are the reasons that H and A don’t talk about the individual body, as such — they are focusing on capitalist production of culture, and the body, at first, appears too far on the consumptive side of the equation.

Horkheimer and Adorno, do, however, address the social body. If, as we established in the previous chapter, the social body serves to transmit images, circulate signs, and provide avenues of communication, then the culture industry has got a fairly prominent place in this body. The products of the culture industry are primary sources of our culturation, of our socialization, and the culture industry is part of the vehicle for transportation. But what do these products look like today? What does the culture industry produce in times of unbelievable technological innovation, and how is it transmitted? The answer is an uber-industry of culture, the culture of brand consumption.
Chapter 3: Branding the Body

My words confuse you/My eyes don’t move or blink/Cause it’s easier sometimes/Not to be sincere/Somehow I make you believe/Believe/When I speak I cross my fingers/Will you know you’ve been deceived?/I find a need to be the demon/A demon cannot be hurt/Honest is easy/Fiction is where genius lies/Cause it’s easier sometimes/Not be involved/Somehow I make you believe/Believe/When I speak I cross my fingers/Will you know you’ve been deceived?/I find a need to be the demon/A demon cannot be hurt.

— Guster, “Demons”

Ashleigh DeSoto
Introduction

In this chapter, I intend to briefly introduce the reader to branding, so that we might all get better acquainted with the accoutrements of the phenomenon. Next, I thought that I would relate branding to disciplinary technology, to show how branding is essentially disciplinary in its means and ends, and likewise forms a power relationship through bodies. Finally, I talk quite a lot about resistance to branding, how and why it occurs, and that it occurs (gasp) with the invaluable help of the body social.

New and Improved – What is a Brand?

Branding is not a new phenomenon, exactly; what is new, according to Naomi Klein, is the sheer size of the cultural and physical space that the brand now occupies. Brands emerged from the desire of companies and their advertisers to differentiate the mass-produced wares of the industrial age. If your company makes a washing machine and my company makes a washing machine, and we buy our component parts from the same manufacturer and we have the same wash cycles and wash-tub size, what reason does a consumer have to choose one product over the other? “Competitive branding,” writes Klein, “became a necessity of the machine age – within a context of manufactured sameness, image based difference had to be manufactured along with the product.”\(^{119}\) So, this statement obviously begs the question, how are brands manufactured? Before I answer that question, however, I feel it is necessary to take a moment to actually throw out some ideas about what brands are.

The definition of the term ‘brand’ is definitely up for debate. A brand has been described as some combination of each of the following: an aura that surrounds a product; a symbol of quality plus attractive values; tells people what business you are in; humanizes commerce with emotional appeals to allegiance; a company’s most valuable business asset;

\(^{119}\) Klein, 6.
translates into strong sales and an enduring market presence; what aligns a company’s business plan with its products and services; means you can cover a company’s logo and still have a distinctive feel for its product; a foundation on which to build every experience a customer has; an instant recognition; a deep psychological affinity to a product or service; a deep psychological energy and penetration.\(^\text{120}\)

Leaving the idea of ‘psychological penetration’ aside, what these phrases come down to is a social-cognitive process. In his book *After Image*, John Grant, marketing consultant extraordinaire, proposes that the brand fuses four concepts from cognitive science: proposition framework (a unit of belief that arises from social interaction), sense impressions (mental images that come from bodily experiences), metonymy links (when something is used to represent some bigger set of ideas of which it is part), and metaphor links (one model that is linked to a different one).\(^\text{121}\) To return to a cognitive link I used in a previous chapter, some might say that Frankenstein’s monster was generated with such cognitive concepts in mind, and look how that turned out. Grant’s model, like Dr. Frankenstein’s is not necessarily complete; for example, he neglects to recognize capitalism as a core proposition framework in today’s socio-political regime. If we take a proposition framework to be a socialized belief system, capitalism – buying, making, selling, consuming *things* – is something that we are all acquainted with at a young age, and certainly one of the earlier complex proposition frameworks that we are introduced to in our lives. Additionally, he rejects theories of the brand (psychoanalytic and Marxist) that identify unconscious identification, fetish and desire as some primary reasons for consumer choice and core concepts in advertising, and by extension, the brand image.


\(^\text{121}\) Grant, 99-105.
Sut Jhally, in his seminal text *The Codes of Advertising*, identifies fetishism as “seeing the meaning of things as an inherent part of their physical existence when in fact that meaning is created by their integration into a system of meaning [italics in original].”\(^{122}\) As I hinted at above, I believe the dominant system of meaning-making for the brand (and arguably for society, at large) is, of course, capitalism. Jhally and other Marxist brand theorists assert that the brand is successful because the social relations of capitalism obscure the complete social meaning of commercial reality.\(^{123}\) That is to say, the brand is capitalism’s favored progeny; the brand is the penultimate symbol of capitalism’s facility for producing subsumed image, meaning, and value within a disciplinary system (which I’ll get to, soon). It is more than likely that brand identification involves aspects of both sets of ideas, though branding is a little bit like psychotropic pharmacology – folks don’t know why they work, just *that* they work.

If the term ‘brand’ is so hard to get a handle on, then the verb ‘branding’ is even harder to figure out. Conjuring the unique amalgamation of ideas vital for the creation of a truly ‘transcendent’ brand requires a delicate, almost alchemic tincture that involves everything from advertising to company chants to the colonization of public space, along with many other never-insignificant details (here, I urge readers to remember Horkheimer and Adorno’s words about details). To take a cue from an ad I vaguely remember from my childhood, as far as new brand advertisements go, this is not your father’s ad campaign. Television advertisement, though still popular, is insufficient; the brand must be seen everywhere, or everywhere that is cool, ironic, or you know, whatever. Brand advertisements are no longer visual and vocal image and sound bites that must be impatiently


\(^{123}\) Ibid, 204.
tolerated while waiting for “Dawson’s Creek” to resume; the new brand publicizes itself during “Dawson’s Creek.” The production itself is branded, from its Abercrombie and Fitch inspired dress code to its omnipresent musical montage moment. But perhaps we have come to expect product placement in our television shows and movies; brands are most successful in transmitting their image when we are least aware that it’s even going on at all.

That is not to say that brands are courting consumers through invisibility; it is, however, to say that brands are encouraging consumption insidiously. The logo, that symbolic representation of the brand, is found in so many places that we tend not to consciously acknowledge its presence, unless we are shopping specifically for it. It is inconspicuous yet it is everywhere. Klein notes that in today’s economy, branding is occurring at an exceptional pace and in all sorts of new and different places. Concerts are brought to you by Budweiser, whose brand name is always presented before the name of the band; competing sports media are wearing jackets with the Nike or Adidas or Reebok logo; entertainers are incorporating themselves and hire an entourage of people to ensure that Britney and J. Lo are dressing, speaking, and attending parties that are consistent with the brand image. But maybe that’s to be expected; after all, these are products of the culture industry, and by extension, capitalism. We should anticipate such ploys from such a business.

However, branding certainly doesn’t stop with the entertainment industry. Facing budget cuts, many elementary, high schools, and universities have accepted corporate offers to market their brands within these places of education. Taco Bell and Pepsi hawk their wares in the school cafeteria, protected by exclusive contracts to ensure that McDonald’s
doesn't nose in on their action. Channel One, the 'student' news channel, which is mandatory viewing if you are in a classroom at public high school, is sponsored by brand advertisements. Kids using the Zap Me computer network are monitored, providing an excellent opportunity for market research while students are supposed to be learning (I guess they are learning, how to live capitalism and consumption, anyway). And since school isn't a full time job, some companies (like Disney) have created their own branded towns (like Celebration, Florida), where picket lines and protests are illegal within city limits. The towns themselves are advertisements for the brand, and the brand image cannot be marred with the annoyingly base requirements of citizens with political or economic demands.

At this point, gentle reader, you might protest that I am presenting a one-dimensional view of branding, and you would be right. Branding is not all bad, all the time – maybe. It all depends on what your normative claim is, I suppose. Because branding does increase the efficiency of certain consumptive activities, one might consider this to be a positive effect, say, if one were Phil Knight. Prominent consumer scholar Sean Nixon believes that consumer choice provides us with a sense of identity and belonging; we are now circulating within a consumer culture, so it is no surprise then, that our identity should be partially informed by the consumption of brand images. However, it is really important to remember that brand ingestion is not quite the same thing as consumer choice. Choice implies

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124 Of course, since fast food joints don't accept vouchers, poorer kids are stuck eating whatever the corporate sponsors allow the school cafeteria to cook. Some schools are banned from cooking cheeseburgers and pizza to keep from competing with the fast food chains. Klein, 91.
125 Ibid, 90.
126 Efficiency is an intended outcome of both discipline and branding. A lot of efficiency has to do with prediction; if brands can predict image people see when they see a brand logo, then they can predict purchasing behavior. Additionally, efficiency expedites the process of brand consumption because our choices have been made for us, and are pre-packaged according to brand identities and coalitions. For example, Taco Bell restaurants only serve Pepsi and only do promotions for certain film companies, but boy, is that Chihuahua cute or what?
127 Phil Knight is the CEO of Nike responsible for the ascendancy of Nike as Primo Brand.
knowledge, deliberation, and some sort of orientation, a checking-in if you will, with oneself, in addition to deep options beyond those that are only superficially distinct. Brand ingestion doesn’t really require any of these things, and in fact, a brand is considered most successful if it can convince its customers to purchase without thought, to not simply buy the brand, but to buy *into* it. It means going out and buying that new WWE cellular phone, because the images of uber-manliness, super strength (who cares if it’s steroid enhanced?), and ‘hot chicks’ are embodied in the insignia found beneath the pound key. Granted, the image projected by the WWE is not exactly identical to that of the Gap. However, while different brands may elicit different feelings, the process of creating these reactions remains the same, across brands and times and spaces.

So what does all of this tell us about brands and the process of branding? First of all, brands are the images associated with and emotions evoked by a given corporate name, not the products themselves; you might say that brands can even induce the consumer to purchase products because of their brand identity rather than their product value. Secondly, brands are created by the process of branding, which is a very complex technology that involves a multitude of very complex operations, from advertising to peer pressure to the colonization of physical space, to name a few.

These operations, I believe, are disciplinary in their tactics and ends; that is, branding takes a form of power (consumptive power) and attempts to transform it, or maybe transfer it, or maybe just tap into it in order to perpetuate the efficiency of the dominant social system—capitalism. We are living in a world where the brand has its own anatomy of power relationships, like discipline. That is to say, branding should be considered a modality of power, a modality that is like discipline in many of its tactics and ends, but is slightly
different in scope and method. While the body is a unique site for the operation and inspection of power relations, branding is an equally unique process that, when closely scrutinized, highlights the particularities of the relationship between power, the body, and the body social. I shall commence with such scrutiny post-haste.

**Tactical Convergence – Disciplinary Mechanics and the Technology of Branding**

Though the process might be simple, I intend to take the reader step by step through the minute techniques of disciplinary power that are replicated during the branding process. Branding uses the tools of discipline to fabricate its own matrix of bodies; to begin, spaces, public and private, are distributed in order to maintain the primacy of the consumptive regime. You’ll recall from the first chapter that Foucault identifies four mechanisms that distribute space and bodies within those spaces; these means are observable in the branding process. One obvious example is the branded town; the Disney town of Celebration, Florida is a place that is heterogeneous to other cities, a place void of competing brands (that alone makes it a functional site), a place where each housing project, park, or library is planned down to the last detail. The city limit sign demarcates an enclosure, whose purpose it is to neutralize the inconvenient improvisation of bodies in a disorganized space; the homeowner’s association in Celebration is not popularly nominated or elected, but rather appointed by the Disney Corporation, and even the streets are under Disney’s control – private space that pretends to be public.128 Another example can be found in the creation of Barnes and Noble uber-bookstores, places where the brand, rather than the books, is a destination. Such stores are planned to look like “old-world libraries” with “a wood and green palette” while providing “comfortable seating” so that you might want to spend your entire night curled up in a comfy armchair at Barnes and Noble, instead of your living

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128 Klein, 155.
room. The purpose of the branded bookstore is enclosure, the creation of a monotonous (though in this case, pleasantly appointed) space, meant to perpetuate the body’s efficient consumption of the brand. Additionally, traditionally personal activities are now quasi-public and the public place provides a quasi-private space.

Other examples of distributed, administrative brand-spaces proliferate, but for now, I’d like to shift my focus to other disciplinary branding tactics, specifically surveillance and normalization. By surveillance, of course I mean The Gaze, the suspicion that one is seen but can’t see the seer. The Branded Gaze is a complicated fusion of different administrative eyes watching from several different points, departing from the central gaze of the panoptic model. Klein writes about the presence of ‘cool hunters,’ people who infiltrate the hip, in crowd, armed with video cameras and PDAs to jot down what’s being said that’s ironic, then pass that info on to clients like Reebok and Absolut. While cool hunters do a lot of watching, a lot of surveillance, the cool people aren’t aware of the presence of these corporate lookouts, thus they are not likely to have a regulatory function. No, the gaze of branding is much more... everywhere... than a couple of twenty-somethings looking only at the cool-looking with camera phones. Cool hunters have a lot less to do with branding surveillance than the average person does, or rather, that person and his/her person’s peers.

As far as the branded gaze is concerned, appearance is what matters. Due to the preeminence of image for brand success, what is seen, what is observable becomes of the utmost importance. Brand loyalty often has to do with the idea that other people notice, thus resulting in a self-policing mechanism. Other people might be watching, might be wondering if your brand has the right balance of irony and sexy; it is not so much about

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129 Ibid, 150.
130 Klein, 72.
whether your shirt is, in an absolute sense (which doesn’t really exist, anyway) ironic and sexy, but rather if the maker of your shirt is perceived by others to be ironic and sexy. Not only is the wearer aware of eyes watching, judging, and ranking, but s/he is also engaging in a self-ranking, a self-classification, a self-evaluation of where s/he fits on the sliding scale of fitting in. The gaze assures not only brand loyalty, but also brand discipline, adherence to the forms and functions of appearance, of image, reflected back upon the branded body of the consumer.

Wearing, drinking, or listening to a certain brand, associating oneself with the image that the brand evokes, is important because everyone else is doing it. I urge you now to recall Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s words about the importance of Everyman, Inc. to the primacy of mass culture; branding takes Everyman, Inc. to the extreme and reestablishes mass culture upon a different foundation. Mass culture is a lot more massive these days than it was when H and A were writing. Today, our entertainment is capitalism, and hey, man, everybody’s doing it. The effect is both individualizing and normalizing, atomizing while homogenizing. H and A would likely argue that the individual is atomized because endless brand consumption has caused our relationships to be formed around brand images rather than with our communities; a loss of creativity, imagination, and individuality due to the same forces also homogenizes. Why do I need to imagine when my imagining is done for me? Branding individualizes and normalizes by several processes, but another prominent method involves an identification with symbols rather than with people. That is to say, branding separates people from each other by becoming the preeminent force in a person’s social interactions, and by ranking them according to what image they should project in our
social and political hierarchy. But the question remains, how do brands project and protect that individualizing image?

**Branded Bodies and the Power Relations that Support Them**

Though branding is certainly happening to ‘public’ spaces, it starts with what the dialectic of enlightenment would identify as the most ‘private’ of spaces – our bodies. The body is a unit through which we interact with the world; it is also the ‘vessel’ by which we communicate, with verbal and nonverbal cues. Thus, with very little analysis, one can see that the body is not a private space at all, and that the dichotomy between public and private, especially where the body is concerned, can be overstated. While the body is certainly a primary (if not the primary) factor in our notions of self-hood and the popular perception of our-selves as distinct, independent, individual entities, it is just as much a variable in our experiences of the social, the public. The body is, our bodies are, as I have stated before, both at once; that is to say, there are some secrets that our bodies keep at the same time that our bodies broadcast, ingest, and relate. Perhaps it is for this reason that the body is so important to branding; after all, branding occurs in a matrix that varies in its scope from macrocosmic to microcosmic, from massively public advertising campaigns to the psyche of the individual.

Branding takes the body and makes it more efficient, channels the powers of the body, its power to consume, its power to be public, and uses them. The branded body is again a spectacle, a public declaration of association with the brands by way of the branded products that are worn, ingested, and used. We wear our Gap clothes, walking in our Lugz

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131 The absolutist public/private divide is one that has been debunked by feminist scholars for years. I am using it here for literary purposes, not as analytic categories. However, this is not to assert that there is no possibility for an intimate private space. Instead, I would like the reader to imagine that the divisions between public and private are not as effortless as they have been characterized in the past.
shoes, Sony headphones attached to our ears while Sony produced music plays on a Sony Discman, which is stored in our Roots backpack. While all of these symbols are worn on our bodies, they are not attached to our bodies. We adorn ourselves in branded vestments, we advertise the image through the necessity of clothing our bodies. Branded bodies are so ubiquitous that our social perceptions of one’s rank and classification are partially determined by them; different bodies wear different brands. For example, you might hear that prep girls wear Gap, grunge girls wear Diesel, black kids wear Lugz, poor kids eat McDonald’s, Hispanics shop at Wal-Mart, cool guys smell like Axe.

What all these stereotypes suggest is that the brands on and in our bodies indicate a lot, socially, about our gender, class, race, and even sexuality, not just our chosen brand image. The branded body is a categorized, ranked, classified body, which involves sexing, gendering, racing, classing processes. Each brand has its niche according to the various social and hierarchical and mostly essentialized categories that folks still hang on to, and our bodies – what they are alleged to look like – are the targets. Bodies, and our perceptions of them, are sought by particular brands. In Emotional Branding, Marc Gobe devotes chapters to informing the advertiser, CEO, or plain ol’ brand enthusiast that women, blacks, and homosexuals represent specific branding niches because of the obvious ‘differences’ that are written on their bodies. What Marc Gobe, for all of his insight, neglects to recognize, is that brands help in the processes of gendering, sexing, and racing bodies; that niche that he points out is a function of the branding experience that he is trying to blueprint. So while the body is so intimately material, the branded body shows how important the symbolics of the body are in our socio/economic order, and the power relations that course through it.

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Power relations are reminiscent of the Law of Conservation of Energy, a concept in physics that states energy can be neither created nor destroyed, only changed. It is the same for power, I think. Power is neither ended nor generated; it can be channeled, mutated, used, discarded, transformed, but not taken away. This 'law' is exactly what makes Foucault's 'theory' of power relations so accurate; power relations shift, unbalance, and change form, but the sum total amount of power remains constant, or nearly so.

The power relationships between brands and consumers contain quite a lot of potential energy to be exchanged or shared – ionized, if you will. To again return to natural sciences, the relationship between brands and consumers is a little bit like the bonds between certain chemical elements: some connections help both atoms maintain stability (covalent) and others take energy to negatively or positively charge the other particle (ionic). The energy relationship in chemistry is one for the power of stability, a very important part of molecular life, indeed, and it is a mutual need. The power relationship between brands and consumers is likewise symbiotic at first glance, but becomes parasitic upon microscopic examination.

The thing about the power sharing relationship between branding and consumers is that both sides have to be getting something out of the arrangement, in that power is productive and systems that work, in some way, perpetuate. The manufacturers of brands are getting financial profit out of the purchase of their image. For the consumer, the gains seem to be a little more complicated, given that financial gain rarely comes from buying out the entire new line of Starbucks mugs. What are consumers getting out of this 'power sharing' deal? For one thing, as Horkheimer and Adorno would likely point out, people are getting acceptance. By consuming the 'right' brand, it appears as though you've got something in
common with that cute guy who has glasses or the neat girl with the pretty smile; when they raise their Starbucks mug in acknowledgement of your common consumptive tastes, there definitely arises a feeling of acceptance, or at least, of fitting in. Another payoff people get from the association with a certain brand image is a ready-made, easy to identify identity. I have a friend who, before totaling her vehicle (don’t worry, she wasn’t hurt), was known as ‘Jeep girl’ to all of her coworkers and acquaintances from school. It was a red Jeep, and when she wrecked it, she was devastated, beyond the usual amount of devastation one would feel after the trauma of a car accident. Her regret mostly arose from the erasure of a huge identity marker in her life; she told me that the Jeep made her feel cool, envied, and admired and how was she ever going to get that feeling back? She was grieving the loss of her Jeep-inspired identity that had been purchased along with the removable doors and ragtop.

Doubtless, there are other examples of what consumers are getting out of their end of the power relationship; like I said, something, no matter how imbalanced the relationship, no matter how small the payoff for one party or how large for the other, has to be working for both sides in order for the relationship to continue. However, like a verbally abusive relationship that has lasted fifty years, sometimes the payoffs for both sides are less than advantageous, and have become desirable only because the system has taught that it should be so. There is comfort in sameness, safety in stability and predictability and familiarity. But, as the above examples demonstrate, the brand/consumer power sharing relationship isn’t so much one of symbiosis as it is a case of parasitism. The payoffs noted above aren’t really

\[133\] I am reminded of game theory, one game in particular where party A is given ten dollars and party B is given nothing, though they must split the money. The rules of the game state that party A makes an offer to party B, and if party B refuses the offer, the amount of money on the table goes down to one dollar. Party B may then make an offer, and if party A refuses, the relationship is discontinued and neither receives any money. So assuming (and that’s a pretty big assumption, if you ask me) party A is rational, the offer that s/he makes is to keep $8.99 for her/himself and offer party B $1.01. If party B is rational, s/he will accept the offer, because if s/he refuses, the most s/he can make from her own offer is 1 cent less than what is currently on the table. It doesn’t matter that party A is getting a lot more than party B, that’s just how the game is played.
payoffs at all, but are rather deprivations. Acceptance doesn’t come with an attached
insignia; identity isn’t formed by what kind of car you drive. It might seem that way at first,
but the only thing such effects really serve is an economy of individualization, of separation.
Shifting the responsibility of acceptance and identity away from oneself and from other
people and toward brand image perpetuates the efficiency of the system by telling people that
if acceptance isn’t found after purchasing an Ikea sofa, it might be waiting next door at Bed,
Bath and Beyond. The impetus to buy, buy, buy is propelled by identity politics, the search
for selfhood, acceptance, and belonging. When put that way, the relationship between the
consumer and the brand doesn’t seem quite like a fair fight, and a lot of folks recently have
been stepping up to the plate and saying so. What I’m talking about here is resistance,
embodied struggles that seek to tip the scales of the power relationship a little more into
balance.

Resistance and Reconceiving the Body Social

Resistance is partially a struggle for meaning; it is often in the attempt to harness that
indeterminate meaning, or the seemingly calcified signifier, that animates both the exercise
of power and the resistance to which it may give rise, and we see this repeatedly in brand
resistance. But before we get into brand resistance, specifically, I would like to take a
couple of lines to talk about resistance, generally. The main objective of resistance,
according to Foucault, is not to attack a specific institution, group, or class, but rather a
technique, a form of power. If we think of resistance as any form of defense by which an
invader is ‘kept out,’ the subtle and sometimes unspoken forms of social and cultural

134 Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and
135 That is to say, brand resistance (and resistance in general, really) may be targeted at both fixed and unfixed
meanings.
136 Ibid, 212.
resistance are the most common. These quiet struggles are not only widespread, but by their very nature, are difficult if not impossible for the imposing force to combat, which of course makes them incredibly effective. Resistance is immediate, it is up close and personal, while it simultaneously asks the question, ‘who are we?’ Thus, it challenges individualization while asserting individuality; it opposes categorization and classification through spontaneity, immediacy, and questions of identity, and can happen at any time or any place in response to any modality of power.

Resistances to the power effects of branding proliferate around the world today. According to Klein, there are many different avenues for resistance to the branding system; some are large-scale, some are localized, and each is unique. One such method is known as culture jamming, which is the practice of parodying advertisements and hijacking billboards in order to drastically alter their messages. Culture jammers operate from the premise that the “streets are public spaces, and since most residents can’t afford to counter corporate messages by purchasing their own ads, they should have the right to talk back to images they never asked to see.” The brand image sought by corporations in public advertising space is flipped; the momentum of a particular ad is used to counter the desired message. Examples proliferate: a cigarette ad changed from ‘Marlboro Country’ to read ‘Cancer Country’ instead; pictures of Indonesian students rioting in front of McDonald’s arches are pasted onto ads for the infamous eatery; print ads in Adbusters magazine spoof Absolut Vodka with an ‘Absolute Nonsense’ parody. These illustrations are but a few of

138 The examples that I am about to present are samples, and of course do not represent every method for brand resistance. I have chosen these examples because they are either extremely public or very widespread.
139 Klein, 280.
140 Ibid, 280.
many attempts by folks of different shapes, sizes, and orientations to reuse and recycle the visual and physical spaces colonized by brand advertisements. This kind of resistance is not simply an isolated attempt to mock or to re-present an image; it is mostly an attack on a particular form of power – branding.

Another very visual and very public form of social resistance to brand discipline involves activism and protest, people out in the streets and in corporate headquarters, armed with placards, chants, and information about the products and images we consume. This form of resistance is organized at different levels and on different scales to protest different kinds of corporate misconduct: sweatshop labor conditions, unsafe and/or unhealthy food services, union-busting, wage freezing, the list goes on and on. In addition to often propelling social change, protest accomplishes a repositioning of the brand; by publicly accusing corporations of decidedly nasty tactics, activists let us know that while brands may be image-based, the branded products we buy are definitely real. Behind each pair of Gap jeans or Wal-Mart bag, there might be a little kid working in a sweatshop, or a person without healthcare because s/he is suspiciously offered one hour less than full-time work each week so that her/his company won’t have to pay out benefits. Demands for corporate accountability to people instead of pictures arise out of each act of brand protest, and the artificial line between what is real, or bodily, and what is imagined, or created, blurs. During these protests, bodies (and images of bodies) are often used to demonstrate the points of the demonstrators. Black body paint might be used to make a person appear to be drenched in oil (or tar, if one were protesting cigarette companies); effigies are shown with blood tears flowing down their painted faces to protest child labor; Truth.com had thousands of people lay down in the street and play dead to exhibit how many people perish from lung cancer.
each day. These examples show how and why the body is such a powerful force — it crosses back and forth in between the realms of the symbolic and the material, or maybe it shows us just how silly it is to demarcate such lines... just about everything is some combination of the symbolic and the material. Perhaps the body just shoves the false dichotomy in our faces because of its immediacy to us all — we cannot look away from it, as hard as we might try, because our other senses and how we process them are reminders of the symbiosis of what is real and imagined.

While protest and culture jamming are pretty effective forms of resistance, there is yet another forum that demands public space for the public, rather than the private interests who can make the highest bid for sole ownership of an entire street corner, or stretch of highway, or whatever space the advertiser wishes to place its brand image upon.142 This resistance is known as the ‘Reclaim the Streets’ movement; basically, a whole bunch of people almost-spontaneously get together in the streets of large cities and have a party. While on the surface, this might seem a little more like a rave than a political action, Reclaim the Streets is seeking to do just that; street-life in cities is becoming criminalized which enables the streets to be commodified, and RTSers don’t want any part of it. That is to say, since the street has now become a very popular place for the brand image and cool hunters to hang, the cops are cracking down on graffiti, panhandling, sidewalk art, community gardening and even food vendors.143 Many people see this as an intrusion and invasion of the right-to-lifestyle, the right to community, and the right of self-determination of city inhabitants, and are taking steps to reclaim their streets and repel the corporate conquistadors. Folks are reasserting that

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142 Klein, 312.
143 Ibid, 311.
they already have an identity, and resist the idea that the brand can or should provide one for them.

Now, the above kinds of resistance might be a little on the wild side for some, or maybe such forums aren’t local enough for others. However, that doesn’t mean that resistance stops and starts with large-scale, very public campaigns. As mentioned earlier, La Resistance is often characterized by the ‘little guys (or gals)’ defying the big guys (or gals) in little ways. For example, if one were to discover that one’s favorite brand of shampoo is manufactured by the same corporation that dumps nasty chemicals in the ocean, thereby killing baby seals, then one might be inspired to write said corporation a letter informing them that you think their practices are wrong and you are going to refrain from purchasing said shampoo, or any other product they or a subsidiary company produces, until they decide to start caring about the environment as much as you do. Such an action represents a very important act of resistance; it demonstrates that the knowledgeable consumer is capable of protesting and willing to protest the system of power that creates an image-driven mass culture. In other words, by simply wondering where and how the products behind the brands are made and writing a very short, but succinct letter or email supporting or protesting the practices of a corporation, any given citizen is refusing to cooperate with a system that seeks to catalogue and categorize while cajoling people into conformity, economic irresponsibility, and in many cases, mentally, socially, and physically unhealthy choices. Knowledge, and action (whether its public protest or writing a private letter) reflecting that knowledge and consistent with one’s morality and belief systems, buck the very particular form of power that branding represents.
A central mechanism of disciplinary technology is that of categorization; categorization allows for ranking, partitioning, and thus, adequate surveillance and normalization. Resistance prevents such categorization, and it often precludes a disciplinary adjustment due to its temporality – that is to say, it is temporary. The temporary and often spontaneous character of the types of resistance outlined above thwarts cataloguing by the system, for the system. Brands, and their cool hunters, often adjust their images to compensate for currently popular resistance movements. However, because resistance is a response to an immediate situation, the forms that it takes are spontaneous and temporary, and unique to the time, place, and circumstances that it challenges. Because resistance movements ask the question ‘who are we?’ they are constantly shifting, changing, and adjusting their identities. The give and take between brand resistance movements and brand manufacturers remind us to bear in mind an important tenet of Foucauldian theory – power is relational, which means that a change in one part of the power matrix will likely result in a response from another. Like chaos theory, a relational power theory assumes that effects manifest in places and in ways that we may not imagine at the time of the original action.

These examples of resistance serve a dual purpose: they show us that resistance to large, sometimes unimaginably large corporate cultures and their interests, is not only possible, but active and widespread. Secondly, they demonstrate a crucial point about the body social – while it might serve as a communications route for disciplinary power effects, its channels are not uni-directional. The social body, as stated in a previous chapter, serves to transmit images, commodify exchanges, and circulate signs⁴⁴, disciplinary technologies aren’t the only power effects that reverberate throughout the body social … the power of resistance resonates through its circuits, as well. Let’s return to the body social as biological

⁴⁴ Chapter 1, page 23.
body for a moment, if you will. The same mechanism within human cells that allows the
nutrients needed for cell growth and reproduction to permeate the cell wall permits the
entrance of viruses that take over the cell, causing it to eventually rupture. The bloodstream
carries life-giving oxygen (in addition to many other things) to tissues and at the same time,
by necessity of its design, is vulnerable to disease and deterioration. There are countless
other examples of the dual function of transmission routes within the human body, and so it
is with the social body, it seems. Due to the closeness, the inextricable togetherness of our
social network, our social body, the directions of information flow are unbounded; so while
brand-masters might wish to keep folks from subverting the absolutism of their images, it
simply need not happen. The social body is as much an avenue that leads to resistance as it
does to discipline.

Conclusions? There Are Conclusions?
Well, I think there are conclusions to be made, anyway, for the sake of brevity, at least
(Ha.Ha). I'm pretty sure that it's impossible to maintain brevity when trying to explore the
gigantic questions I've posed in this project. What are bodies, and why are they powerful?
What is the body social, and why is it powerful? What is power, and why is it powerful?
What is branding, and why is it powerful? What does it all mean? Have I come up with a
Theory of Everything? Probably not, but the answers to the above queries can be distilled
into a few short lines equally applicable to each interrogation. Bodies, social and individual,
are powerful because of their duality. The not-quite-symmetrical dyads of the real and the
imagined, the material and the symbolic, are manifest in the body. What makes the body real
allows for its unreality, that which allows its materiality paves the way for the power of
symbolisms etched upon it. The social body also embodies duality, with its ready
transmission of signs that discipline and signs that resist such technologies. Whenever and wherever power occurs, it is always reversible in direction, always ready for the alchemy that might change the unequal balance of the relationship. Branding is no different; while brands might target the body, bodies might target brands, and turn the tides of disciplinary technologies into sometimes-quiet and sometimes-crashing waves of resistance.
THESIS BIBLIOGRAPHY


