Stony Brook University

Artist for Sale: The Production of Shepard Fairey

A Thesis Presented

by

Andrew Fredric Wasserman

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History and Criticism

Stony Brook University

May 2008

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

Andrew Fredric Wasserman

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the

Master of Arts degree, hereby recommend

acceptance of this thesis.

Andrew Uroskie – Advisor
Assistant Professor, Department of Art

Joseph Monteyne – Reader
Assistant Professor, Department of Art

This thesis is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Thesis

Artist for Sale: The Production of Shepard Fairey

by

Andrew Fredric Wasserman

Master of Arts

in

Art History and Criticism

Stony Brook University

2008

A professional wrestler, a B-movie horror film, and a Xerox machine: hardly the stuff of "serious" art. However, in the hands of Shepard Fairey, these disparate elements become the cornerstone of a commercially lucrative art practice. Originating in 1989, Fairey's project started as an innocuous stenciling activity: the result of an undergraduate art student attempting to entertain his peers. However, now almost two decades later, with the coupling of the head of Andre the Giant with a printed banner proclaiming simply "OBEY," Fairey's text-image union forms the foundation of a cottage industry directed at suburban teens and Gen-X extreme sports enthusiasts, as well as those with a penchant for the anti-establishment. His posters, stickers, and guerilla papering endeavors have become staples in major metropolitan cities around the world, appearing on the sides of buildings, bus kiosks, and the backs of street signs, as well as on other pronounced surfaces located in the public domain. Skateboard magazines, corporate advertising campaigns, art exhibitions, and most recently political campaign placards have followed. Borrowing iconographic elements from Soviet propaganda, 1950s Americana, militant rights movements, as well as U.S. currency, Fairey's works purport to challenge conventional consumer codes, thus falling in line with other mid-1990s culture jamming campaigns: the works encourage the viewer to question rather than simply "obey" the messages originating from government and commercial agencies. Paradoxically, Fairey has managed to build this lasting empire on a foundation these various ephemeral media, raising both the Andre hybrid image as well as his own name to a position of prominence as subculture icons. This enduring nature of Fairey's project, as well as his mogul status, can be attributed to the shrewd marketing and self-promotional tactics of its creator. Ultimately, the artist is transformed into the same type of commodity product that his art claims to argue against. However, rather than simply marking Fairey with the labels of sellout or corporate shill, this thesis seeks to examine the ways in which both Fairey and his project have been transformed in light of his engagement with the commercial sector. Fairey's stock graphics serve not only to suggest an ambiguous relationship between image and meaning, but they also serve as brand logos, advertising the presence of their creator.

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction

Two recently produced posters by Shepard Fairey successfully present both the artist's overall aesthetic sensibility as well as his political leanings. The first example was recently featured in a photograph accompanying the December 5, 2007 *New York Times* article "Justices Hear Arguments in Guantanamo Cases." The image presented five men in orange prison-detainee jumpsuits, black sacks placed over their heads, holding signs protesting the treatment of prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay. One man holds a sign which simply reads "SHUT DOWN GUANTANAMO" while another holds a placard stating "2153 days of undefined detainment." Two of the men hold a red, black, and white poster proclaiming "POW USA," arched across the top. A central roundel shows the silhouettes of an elevated prison watchtower, a linked fence capped with barbed wire, and a military helicopter flying above, all set against an undulating pale red sky. Along the bottom of the poster is the caption "PERMANENT VACATION IN GUANTANAMO BAY" as well as the website for a prisoners' rights organization. Sold on his website obeygiant.com, profits from the sale of the "POW Print" were advertised as earmarked for donation to a prisoners' rights organization. Thus, the poster is designed to function both as a consciousness-raising tool as well as a fundraising mechanism.

The second recent poster by Fairey features a portrait of Illinois senator Barack Obama. Created in support of Obama's presidential candidacy, the poster presents a fontal view of Obama, crisply designed using red, white, and two different hues of blue. Indeed, the vertical coloration of the poster itself suggests discrete bands of these three colors.[1] Fairey seems to have replicated an original newsprint source photograph of the original upward gazing image: hatch marks suggest subtle gradations of shadows. Formatted in a way comparable to Fairey's trademark "OBEY GIANT" posters—a style whose development will be discussed in subsequent chapters—the image is accompanied by the word "PROGRESS" as a banner caption. Placed on his lapel is what initially appears to be a presidential campaign button.[2] However, the consideration of Fairey's choice of specific imagery used for the button becomes significant for this project.

In response to Fairey's development of an Obama poster, Barack Obama sent the artist a letter dated February 22, 2008 thanking him for his creative contribution to the campaign, noting that Fairey's "images have a profound effect on people, whether seen in

---

[1] In what can be interpreted as an intentional gesture, Fairey has colored the portrait image of Obama so as to give him a striking red "power tie," markedly standing out against the darker field of navy and stark white that surround it. Thus, accompanying whatever patriotic associations maybe be suggested by the image, Fairey complements them with additional culturally resonant iconographic elements.

[2] Later versions of this poster replaced the banner "PROGRESS" with "HOPE" and "CHANGE," although still preserving the position of the text on the poster as well as the font and color. In addition, the specific location of the campaign button changed position with each printing, sometimes appearing on the left lapel of Obama's jacket and other times simply hovering in the lower left corner of the poster, in the latter case resembling more of a stamped insignia than a campaign button.

a gallery or on a stop sign."[3] Indeed, by this time, the Obama poster image had shifted from an artistic endeavor of a subculture scion to a mainstream political rallying tool. The initial limited edition printing sold out quickly, as did subsequent printings. Working in conjunction with the company Upper Playground, t-shirts with the Obama image were printed and sold for $25.00, with proceeds from the sale earmarked for the creation of even more posters, t-shirts and stickers of similar images. Indeed, to address the high demand for the image, Fairey made a low-resolution black-and-white PDF version of the poster available as a free download from his personal website. Even the official Obama campaign site started to advertise the availability of limited edition prints of a second version of Fairey's poster.[4] In addition to the changing of caption, the poster offered on this site demonstrates a modification of the original Obama poster, a significant omission of one of the original design elements.

In the original Obama image, inscribed in the outer ring of the campaign button is an alternating pattern of red and white stripes accompanied by a blue field above. Within this ring, Fairey placed what can be considered one of his trademark symbols: a five-pointed star containing the glowering visage of a man. Instead of projecting leadership and confidence, the menacing face inscribed in the star seems to suggest a far more ominous and nefarious tone. Thus it is not surprising that for the image sanctioned by the Obama campaign, as well as in subsequent printings of the Obama image, this hybrid element was omitted, leaving instead the more abstract red, white, and blue patterning. This star-face combination is more appropriate to the POW poster, where it also appears. In the case of the POW poster, it is prominently displayed at the top of the work. Indeed, its presence seems more appropriate in this context, sharing the space with a prison camp scene, allowing for a more predictable visual association with police state totalitarianism. However, the presence of this symbol in both the POW print and the original Obama image indicates that Fairey's primary intention in inserting the star image is not one of

---

[3] The full text of the brief correspondence from the candidate to the artist read:

> I would like to thank you for using your talent in support of my campaign. The political messages involved in your work have encouraged Americans to believe they can help change the status quo. Your messages have a profound effect on people, whether seen in a gallery or on a stop sign. I am privileged to be part of your artwork and proud to have your support. I wish you continued success and creativity.

Shepard Fairey, "Thank you, from Barack Obama," *Obey Giant: Worldwide Propaganda Delivery*, 2008, http://obeygiant.com/post/check-it-out#more-628 (5 April 2008).

[4] This was the "CHANGE" version of the Obama poster. On the "Artists for Obama" page of the official campaign website, Fairey is quoted. Citing his reasons for creating such an image, he notes that

> I wanted to make an art piece of Barack Obama because I thought an iconic portrait of him could symbolize and amplify the importance of his mission. I believe Obama will guide this country to a future where everyone can thrive and I should support him vigorously for the sake of my two young daughters. I have made art opposing the Iraq war for several years, and making art of Obama, who opposed the war from the start, is like making art for peace. I know I have an audience of young art fans and I'm delighted if I can encourage them to see the merits of Barack Obama.

"Artists for Obama," *Barack Obama*, 2008, http://store.barackomaba.com/Artists_for_Obama_s/1019.html (5 April 2008).

striving for internal visual coherence with respect to the individual works. Thus, looking for the reason behind its inclusion, both in these posters as well as in much of his work of the past two decades, requires that one search for justification beyond the obvious surface message of the work.

Repetitive graphic motifs have become his stock in trade, appearing again and again in his work: the generalized giant face; the five pointed star; a predominately three tone color scheme; a text-image hybrid structure. These elements, through their frequent inclusion, have become cultural trademarks of his artistic project. In addition, through his guerilla stickering and postering projects of the past twenty years, Fairey has managed to shift what started as an inconsequential design activity into a profitable art-making business. However, this repetition of graphic elements proves to be a double edged sword.

Rick Poynor has argued that something is lost in the repeated encounter with Fariey's images, and specifically the generalized Andre image, once the viewer knows about the history of its development. He suggests

> it is a shame that we know who is responsible for Andre the
> Giant. Giving the project a point of origin and ascribing it
> a purpose, as Fairey now does, as a 'phenomenological'
> experiment, is bound to narrow the range of possible
> interpretations and reduce its suggestiveness for those in
> the know.[5]

By ascribing not only specific authorship to the image, and but also the associated rhetoric Fairey insists on attaching to his project, the sense of absurd whimsy that surrounds the project is diminished. Indeed, Fariey himself acknowledges this same process of an informed encounter. He has stated that "once they [viewer's of his posters] learn about Obey Giant, they will take a close look at things the next time."[6] This is reinforced by his comments in a recent interview with a New York weblog, where he stated that "I guess once you're really paying attention it's hard to go back."[7] Although he was referring to what he believes constitutes responsible citizenry in relation to political machinations, the same sentiment can be applied to his own project.

Once we follow his advice and challenge prevailing consumer codes in advertising and question what indeed is being sold, we are then put in the position to begin challenging *his* work as well. Fairey suggests that one should critically approach commercial slogans and other advertising images in the public domain. Applying the same standard to Fairey's own work, once one challenges the work and approaches it from the position of criticality, the poster reveals itself to be a product, and perhaps even a promotional tool, of the artist himself. Repeated encounters with a wide array of his designs reveal that, rather than sending out a generalized message of consumer questioning, the work is an outgrowth of the artist's point of view and thus should be read as wholly "Shepard Fairey's message." Message and artist are then inseparable.

---

[5] Rick Poynor, *Obey the Giant: Life in the Image World* (London: August, 2001), 180.
[6] Shepard Fairey, *Obey: Supply and Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey* (Corte Madera: Ginko Press, 2006), 126.
[7] John Del Signore, "Gothamist: Shepard Fairey, Street Artist," *Gothamist,* 2008, http://gothamist.com2007/06/21/interview_shepa.php (3 January 2008).

It should be acknowledged that for an artist to have a point of view or particular stylistic tendencies, or that for the work-product of this artist to reflect these views and tendencies is not an occurrence worthy of condemnation. However, in the case of Fairey and his body of work, he goes beyond simply having a recognizable style. He actively cultivates a personal mythology as a subculture icon through numerous published interviews and other text-based promotional material, as well and promulgating this myth through both commercial and noncommercial art practices. Indeed, he has crafted a personalized icon, the inclusion of which on much of his work created in the past decade functions the same way as the logo of a major corporation functions. In the case of Shepard Fairey, the Andre-star hybrid icon can be read as such a logo. In imprinting the crafted object with the insignia of its creator, the artist not only brands the work, but also reflexively brands himself. Since his media of choice tend to be the readily mass produced objects of consumer culture—posters, stickers, stencil graffiti on billboards—Fairey's graphic images, by containing his logo, serve as self-promotional materials for himself as much as for his ideological agenda. Ironically, he puts himself forth as a brand name in the same works that endeavor to call into question the value placed on brand-name commodity-driven lifestyles.

Of the limited amount of critical work focused on Fairey, most trends towards being hagiographic analyses of his project, praising him for his progression from an independent sticker and poster maker to a subculture guru. In this thesis, instead, I seek to examine the ways in which his project, while perhaps motivated by anti-establishment tendencies early on, ends up working within the same economic establishment structure he purports to rebel against. Following a review of the historical connections between art and commerce, I trace the development of the Andre image from its inception through Fairey's most recent independent artistic works, as well as examining those projects completed as part of his commercial design endeavors. However, rather than seeking to demonize Fairey for his participation as a commercial artist and his use of the Giant image and star hybrid in various advertising campaigns, I propose that this is in fact the logical and only possible outcome of his project. If the intention is to make the image of Obey Giant as far reaching and pervasive as possible, at some point the banal products of commercial consumption must be harnessed as potential media upon which he can print his graphics. However, there are nonetheless consequences to this maneuver. The byproduct of such a move is that the project too must necessarily change from its original purpose. Rather than being about promoting an ambiguous message designed to question empty consumer codes, Fairey's graphics become trademarks of himself, with their very presence recast as personal calling cards for him. By proxy, he literally becomes a product of his own success.

Chapter II: The Context of Shepard Fairey

Shepard Fairey's engagement with the commercial sector is certainly not a novel endeavor on his part: one finds precedent for the symbiotic relationship between artist and the world of consumer culture through the history of art. Indeed, there is a long tradition of the sponsorship, purchase, and collecting of art by economically flush individuals with commercial ties: Italian Renaissance Medici patronage, seventeenth century Dutch landscape and still life purchases by a then on-the-rise merchant class, the present-day where the resources of investment capital and Charles Saatchi's advertising fortune are put towards the purchase and fostering of contemporary artists, etc. The history of modernism is also littered with works mirroring this same interest in consumer culture. Manet's *Bar a the Follies-Bergere* can be read as an advertisement for the foregrounded liquor bottles as well as for the general nightclub festivities. George Seurat's *Le Chahut* appears to demonstrate a clear stylistic borrowing from the posters of *fin de siècle* designer Jules Cheret. Picasso's collage works—*Landscape with Posters*, *Still Life with Chaircaning*, *Pipe, Glass and Bottle of Rum*—derive their structure from the inclusion of detritus drawn from mass culture. Precisionist canvases by Charles Demuth and Gerald Murphy explore the geometrical arrangement of advertising posters and mass produced products such as razors, watches, and matchsticks. The ultimate intersection of art and commerce in the modern period comes with the introduction of the Duchampian readymade and the relocation of the banal objects of industry into the gallery setting.

As a mission statement to the landmark "High & Low" show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1990, Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik note that a stylistic transformation occurs with modernism, requiring that creators of "traditional" art forms—read as painting and sculpture—develop "new poetic languages" in response to changing popular production and consumption.[8] They suggest that

> In order to express a feeling for such new things, whether it was
> the syncopation of boogie-woogie or the abstruse conundrums of
> altered ideas of space and time, modern artists had first to search
> the resources available in existing, developed languages of form,
> to find appropriate pictorial or plastic devices—they had, in
> other words, to make up a style. And their stylistic innovations
> often propelled the movements of specific manners and
> strategies from low to high and back again: billboards affect
> avant-garde painters whose work later affects billboard
> designers, for example; or techniques of sales display get picked
> up in structures of art that in turn change the look of commerce.[9]

The reciprocity of ideas and influences between "high" and "low" forms of artistic production finds its zenith in the arrival of Pop Art in the middle of the century, marked by the production of works that appear to revel in the banality of the everyday. Art continued to push against the boundaries of high culture and commercial engagement. As an attempt to provide a counter dialogue to "aesthetic" and seemingly more cerebral works of the previous decades, Pop, as suggested by Arthur Danto, "rendered almost worthless everything written by philosophers on art,

---

[8] Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art: 1990), 19.

[9] Ibid., 21.

or at best rendered it of local significance."[10] Richard Hamilton's collaged images of lives overrun by consumer products; Roy Lichtenstein's borrowings of comic panels and newsprint design; James Rosenquist's commercial billboard-inflected muralist works; Jasper Johns' arrangement of Ballantine beer cans on a ledge: all mark the mid-century integration of the popular with the previously considered elite domain of "art."

However, no consideration of the nexus of fine art and consumer culture can be complete without the name of Andy Warhol. Warhol, the mention of whose name instantly brings to mind Campbell soup cans, Brillo boxes, and celebrity glamour shots, becomes the prototypical example of the artist engaged with not only looking to mass culture products, but consciously playing off of and manipulating the relevance and impact of these products. Referencing his early career as a graphic designer, contributing to advertising illustrations for companies such as Harpers Bazaar, McCall's, and the I. Miller & Sons Shoe company, Warhol commented that "I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist."[11] Understanding the interplay between the "commercial artist" and the "business artist" is the key to differentiating Warhol's commissioned work as a corporate illustrator and his later "fine art" work.

A parallel has been suggested between much of Warhol's creative output during his decade plus career as a commercial designer and other commercially employed artists, with Ben Shahn as emblematic as one type commercial artist, and Milton Glaser and Seymour Chwast as another.[12] The comparison with the former is suggested by reliance of each on a clear linearity of design and conscious awareness of the play between positive and negative space when arranging forms on a page.[13] The joining of Warhol to Glaser and Chwast—and, more generally, designers working in the Push Pin Studio—serves as a more complex triad. Works created by members of Push Pin culled known literary and visual resources, recasting this traditional imagery through the use of bold outlining and vibrant color choices. Their work is typified by a reorientation of familiar yet neglected design and stylistic motifs, such as Art Nouveau and Victoriana, now placed in the service of promoting novel objects and commodities. Push Pin design made previously ignored and even derided forms of popular design relevant again. The same point could be made with Warhol's turn of attention to towards middle-class consumer products. Indeed, with his ultimate movement into the gallery system, as well as the ascendancy of Pop Art in general, there is an implicit elevation of these products to the status of fetishized elite objects.

As Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller observe, the "realm of communication which served as the source material for Pop Art did not come from the vanguard of advertising and design, but from… tried and true vocabulary."[14] They suggest that it is this use of a known pictorial vocabulary, inflected with the influence of photographic mechanical reproduction, which is able to connect his commercial work to his later gallery projects. The maintenance of a bridge between

---

[10] Danto is referring to the overthrowing of the entrenched Platonic notion regarding the necessity for the separation between art and the mimetic depiction of real life. In the 1960s, he suggests, a radical reconceptualization of what made a work of art occurred, due to the failing of purely visual criteria as underscoring judgment. Using Rauschenberg's *Bed* as an example of the intrusion of "real" objects into the domain of art, Danto suggests that "artists were beginning to close the gap between art and reality. And the question now was what made these beds art if they were after all beds." Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 124-125.

[11] Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 92.

[12] Ellen Lipton and J. Abbott Miller, "Line Art: Andy Warhol and the Commercial Art World of the 1950s," in *"Success is a job in New York…" The Early Art and Business of Andy Warhol*, ed. Donna M. DeSalvo (New York: Grey Art Gallery, 1989), 28-43.

[13] Ibid., 30.

[14] Ibid., 41.

the two worlds—that of the commercial artist and the fine artist—it what ultimately makes Warhol's work problematic.[15] This contributes to the transformation of Warhol from a commercial artist to instead a shrewd cultural observer engaged in art creation. For Warhol, there was an awareness that art need not just be understood as a social pastime, but rather can be conceived of as a marketable business practice. This is where one finds the division that Warhol seems to be making between "Commercial Art" and "Business Art," in which conventional "serious" art practice is linked with market economics and demand.[16]

In her study of the intersections between art and advertising in the twentieth century, Michele Bogart notes that Warhol, despite affecting a purposefully aloof and contrarian persona to art making, nonetheless maintains some of the romantic ideal of the artist as a creative, individual force present in the beginning of the century. She suggests that his works, such as *Green Coca-Cola Bottles*, represents a final product that "was not a reproduction, nor an advertisement, but a single canvas… The image confirmed the persistence of and force of "fine art" ideology even as it mocked these elite and transcendental ideals."[17] The fact that Warhol promulgates the image of the "factory" setting and deadpan-disaffection towards the production of his works furthers the sense of art as a commercially viable practice: the art of business intersecting with the business of art.

In the post-Warhol era of art, one finds an embrace of these parallel tracks, manifest perhaps no more clearly than in the projects of Keith Haring in the 1980s. Haring, like Warhol before him, sits at the intersection of several heavily loaded concerns: the divide between high and low; the place of popular culture and kitsch in "serious" art making; issues of race, drug use, and sexuality, etc. Regarding the first two categories, Robert Pincus-Witten argues that Haring

> has become the post-Warhol motor driving the wedge between
> high and popular culture even more deeply; or, said another way,
> further severing their once clear distinctions. What this really
> means is quite the opposite. Haring's art binds high and popular
> culture together so tightly as to render the division a distinction
> without difference.[18]

In light of this, the diametrically opposed category labels of high and low seem lacking if one is to objectively consider Haring's project. Indeed, his great crime, and the source of much criticism, seems to come not from his merging of high and low, but instead from his perceived entrenchment in the completely taboo category of middlebrow art. Whereas his contemporaries such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Julian Schnabel, and even Kenny Scharff have fared better in terms of their place in the art historical canon, Haring is still tainted with the notion of actively courting the commercial and creating non-serious art, a stigma that colors his entire production. This is due in no small part to his opening of the Pop Shop, the storefront he opens in 1986 to sell merchandise derived from his street and gallery projects. This action, combined with engagement with commercial commissions to design a set of Swatch watches and other miscellaneous commercial design ventures, seems to contribute to the conceptual removal of Haring from the generation of artists contemporary with him that are engaged with challenging similar issues of commodity fetishization. Haring acknowledged this situation, noting that the group of "Neo-Geo" artists, such as Jeff Koons and Peter Halley, mine the same issues of art and mass culture as him, but do so without suffering the same critical drubbing. He noted that

---

[15] Ibid., 41.

[16] Warhol, 144.

[17] Michele H. Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1995), 300.

[18] Robert Pincus-Witten, "Keith 'R' Us," in *Keith Haring*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997), 255.

> What's interesting is that this movement purports to be
> conscious and reflective of the whole consumer aspect of the art
> world… But these people have the blessings of museum and the
> critics because they played the game and went through
> conventional art channels as opposed to starting on the streets.[19]

He is victim to the conceptual critical divide between art produced within the gallery system and that which is produced outside of this structure. However, Jeffrey Deitch comes to the defense of Haring, arguing instead

> he is unconstrained by the boundaries of the traditional artist's
> role and is seeking to develop a role of his own. Meshing
> Madison Avenue and Walt Disney with systemic and contextual
> art, and laying it all onto a graffiti beat, Haring is creating more
> than good paintings and drawings. He's not just making art; he's
> communication in a totally contemporary way.[20]

Building off of this point, Stephen Brown and Anthony Patterson observe that although "marketing, advertising, commodification and capitalism were once the four letter words of artspeak, so to speak, they are now epithets of approbation. Almost."[21] The practice of an art of business manifests itself in the works of Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, and Richard Prince, drawing from commercial culture in order to comment on the very same phenomenon. In each, there is a reference to the familiar: the use of slightly altered stock phrases and advertising layouts in the case of Kruger; the use of LED displays, billboards, and television commercial segments as media of display for her oft used truisms in the case of Holzer; and the rephotographing of photographs and stock imagery firmly implanted in the cultural ethos in the case of Prince. This jumbling of media is further explicated by W.J.T. Mitchell's suggestion that the late twentieth century movement towards "an art of noise, discourse, and speechifying, characterized by impure, hybrid forms that couple the visual and the verbal, or erase the difference between image and text" is in fact a return to the originary position of a combination of media in art.[22] The specter of Greenbergian formalism and the modernist call to medium specificity and purity are not undone by the infusion of language into the pictorial field (as well as the reciprocal process). Instead, it is formalist thinking that marks a momentary hiatus in a larger art historical progression towards intermedia blending.

Regarding the latter practice, in the trend towards and capitalization of an awareness of the business of art, the romantic notion of the artist-as-creator is replaced by a more contemporary notion of the artist-as-commodity-producer and even artist-as-commodity, as exemplified by Shepard Fairey. With the rise of "market mindedness," artists have not only moved from an awareness of the pervasive nature of the commercial in the everyday, but instead use the commercial realm as a forum for producing works that themselves are capable of bringing awareness to the artist himself or herself.[23] Thus, the sight of limited edition art objects sold at the Museum of Modern Art and the New Museum of Contemporary Art in Manhattan are no longer unfamiliar occurrences. In addition, the distinction between the traditional labels of "fine artist" and "commercial designer" has become blurred in recent years. Thus, both in practice as well as

---

[19] John Gruen, *Keith Haring: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991), 193.

[20] Jeffrey Deitch, "Why the Dogs are Barking," in *Keith Haring*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997), 88.

[21] Stephen Brown and Anthony Patterson, "Figments for Sale: marketing, imagination and the artistic imperative," in *Imagining Marketing: Art, Aesthetics, and the Avant-garde*, ed. Stephen Brown and Anthony Patterson (London: Routledge, 2000), 9.

[22] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 245-246.

[23] Brown and Patterson, 9.

in the formal properties of the works produced, one finds evidence of the artists capturing a sense of visual and intellectual branding to their works. Through the dominance of the art market combined with the dominance of the international art promotional structure, the artist and his or her work become transformed into objects to be sold based on name value rather than specific proscriptive aesthetic criteria, as perhaps the recent ascent of Mark Kostabi and Damien Hirst attest to. Thus a framework of promotion and self-promotion is constructed, allowing the artist to become his or her own brand name institution, thus causing any objects produced under this brand to be then marked with the imprimatur of their corporate creator.

Referring to the 1980s and 1990s revolution in consumer marketing practices, Naomi Klein suggests that "the ostensible product was mere filler for the real production: the brand. They [the corporations] integrated the idea of branding into the very fabric of their companies… they were branded to the bone."[24] Citing Nike, Apple, Calvin Klein, Starbucks and others, Klein suggests that this period is typified by a turn away from valuing tangible goods and products, and instead replaced by a move towards "lifestyle marketing" and "intense lifestyle branding."[25] This crossover between the ad world and the art world, where the associated cache of "high art" is applied to the "low art" product and synthesized into a selling of a particular lifestyle, is perhaps nowhere more acutely present than in the Absolut Vodka ad campaigns of the past two and a half decades. Hoping to building off of the by then established bottle-background-pun triad model, Absolut approached Andy Warhol in 1985 to create a painting to be used a part of their advertising campaign. The result was a vibrant neon and black canvas displaying the top half of the bottle. This would become the first in a series of works the company would commission from both established and upcoming artists, among them *Absolut Haring* in 1986, *Absolut Hirst* in 1998, *Absolut Paik* in 2000, and *Absolut Yuskavage* in 2001.[26] The success of this hybrid venture requires the mental elision by the viewer to associate the alcohol brand with the artist's name and the social cache of each.

This activity of the viewer is predicated on what the graphic designer Paul Rand referred to as "good design."[27] As Rick Proynor has suggested:

> We imagine that we engage directly with the 'content'… but the
> content is always mediated by design and it is design that helps
> direct how we perceive it and how it makes us feel. The
> brandmeisters and marketing gurus understand this only too
> well. The product may be little different in real terms from its
> rivals. What seduces us it its 'image.' This image reaches us first
> as a visual entity—shape, color, picture, type. But if it is to work
> its effect on us it must become an idea. This is the tremendous
> power of design.[28]

While Proyner is mostly correct in his analysis, there is one feature that needs to be more clearly teased out of his analysis: namely the convergence of the pictorial message with the textual message as comprising the total image. In the case of the Absolut advertising strategy, it is: 1) both the aesthetic ordering of pictorial citations that suggests the artist and the company, 2) the conceptual/cultural meaning that each brings to bear on the viewer, and 3) the clear banner underneath the image which proclaims the company and the artist. The viewer is sold the "idea"

---

[24] Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 2000), 16.

[25] Ibid., 17, 46.

[26] The actual sculpture commissioned from Nam June Paik for the ad was subsequently displayed in 2000 in Grand Central Terminal in New York City at an exhibition sponsored by the vodka company entitled, appropriately, "Absolut Exhibition."

[27] Paul Rand, *Design Form and Chaos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 11-41.

[28] Proynor, 136.

of Absolut Vodka through the concatenation of visual material on the page: both text and image combine to assert the message of the brand. The understanding of the printed image relies both on name and image recognition.

In her article "Images in Advertising: The Need for a Visual Rhetoric," Linda M. Scott proposes three conditions that must be met for this rhetorical decoding to occur. The visual elements must, independent of a particular arrangement, be capable of representing concepts and abstractions, so that when combined, they can convey an even more complex concept. In addition, they must also be able to be arranged into and supportive of a complex argument. Finally, she proposes that these elements must be able to be read as multivalent, with the precise meaning only apparent through the graphic designer's selection of a particular style. It is up to the designer to articulate the particular meaning he wishes to deliver.[29] Referencing Bakhtin, Scott suggests style "is like the intonation of an utterance, something that pervades and is continuous with the words spoken."[30] The manner of presentation and delivery affects the way in which the message is interpreted.

This link between the formal arrangement of elements and the expected message finds a parallel in speech act theory, most famously articulated by J. L. Austin and later more rigorously structured by John Searle. Fundamentally, the claim is that communication, whether in the guise of simple description or overt declaration, always contains some aspect of performative action.[31] One is able to structure a set of expected reactions to an articulation based on the content of the original statement. To this end, Austin proposes that when "we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking again not *merely* at words (or 'meanings' whatever they may be) but also at the realities we use words to talk about."[32] Translated into the visual domain, through the inclusion of an explicit and intentionally devised pictorial and textual accompaniment, the attuned graphic designer is able to control specific variations of meaning in the work produced. The printed page is a composite image of both text and pictorial components working towards a unified message, despite any potential disjunctions between the inherent meanings of the individual elements. It is assumed then that the viewer, equipped with an understanding of specific cultural cues and conventions, will thus be able to translate the arrangements of select elements into a decoding of a different reality; a reality chosen by the graphic designer keyed to promoting a particular proposition.

Mitchell proves to be helpful here as a source for key terminology in understanding the hybrid visual forms of advertising. To borrow designations provided by Mitchell in *Picture Theory*, the categories of "image-text" and "image/text" seem most appropriate for this study.[33]

---

[29] Linda M. Scott, "Images in Advertising: The Need for a Visual Rhetoric," *The Journal of Consumer Research* 21, no. 2 (1994): 252-273.

[30] Ibid., 268.

[31] The claims put forth by Austin and Searle are not entirely commensurate with one another: Searle refines Austin's proposals, drawing distinctions between the specific rules underlying human behavior. However, for the sake of this thesis, the specific distinctions between their theories is collapsed in favor of using a generalized Austin-Searle theory of "performative utterances" and "illocutionary speech acts," in which the local surrounding context of a statement can directly impact one's reception of and understanding of this same statement. In connection to design, all of the elements framed within a single work can be read as contributing to the context of the specific message being delivered, as well as the greater cultural context within which the design project is situated. J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962) and John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

[32] J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 182.

[33] Mitchell proposes a third category, the "imagetext," which are primarily synthetic combinations of the two domains. Simple expository captioning or straightforward explanatory accompaniment of images, and

Mitchell defines that the term "image-text" as designating those combinations marked by "*relations* of the visual and verbal."[34] On the other hand, "image/text" composites are defined as "a problematic gap, cleavage, or rupture in representation." It is a subtle distinction that Mitchell appears to be making, especially given that one could consider this point of rupture as the trace of an enacted relationship between the textural and the pictorial. Indeed, one could interpret all image/texts as image-texts, but not vice versa. I choose to modify Mitchell's usage, and instead consider the image-text as forming a coherent, though not immediately apparent or obvious, relationship between the two domains, while still maintaining the designation of image/text to problematic relationships between image and text. Thus, a Shepard Fairey poster of Lenin supported by a banner of "OBEY" can be considered as an example of an image-text, while more obscure pairings, such as those found in some works of Raymond Pettibon or Matthew Brannon, pairings that verge on the border of being nonsensical, fall into the category of the "image/text." In the case of much of Fairey's work, a correspondence between the textual and pictorial elements untimely coalesces into a generally coherent and comprehensible message. The text and image components mutually inform one another. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, the specific intentions and motivations driving the creation of these works, as well as Fairey's project in general, still remain occluded, in spite of this image-text relationship.

The selection of Shepard Fairey as an example of an artist who works within advertising models may seem like an unusual choice, or at least a non-obvious one. Indeed, his rise to prominence comes about through the mining of graphic conventions used by fascist, para-military political posters. However, the choice seems more logical in light of Alan Gowans' definition and enumeration of persuasive arts. He notes that these are the printed media "deliberately employing all other types of art to create visual metaphors symbolizing values and fundamental beliefs, thereby attacking or defending ideologies and establishments, forming or stabilizing social institutions."[35] It is into this category that he places posters, marked as "a branch of advertising specifically of persuasive arts generally."[36] In the case of Fairey's posters and stickers—stickers read as a form of small scale, guerilla poster advertising—what is being sold is both an idea of distrust of and challenge to belief, in addition to the idea of Shepard Fairey as a product.

Although Fairey may exist as the scion of the Generation X—perhaps to some degree even Generation Y—ethos of the anti-establishment, punk artist, he nonetheless appears to be actively courting attention to maintain this status. Through his commercially motivated ventures into mass marketing advertising campaigns, through his BLK/MRKT or Studio Number One design firm, Fairey is able to dually finance his "art" project while also simultaneously keeping his aesthetic in the public consciousness. He couches his project in terms of providing a message of awareness and alertness to the prevailing messages of corporate and government organizations. However, over the past two decades he has become a type of corporate structure himself: his regimented process of self-promotion through the cross referencing of images in both his "pure art" street practice and commercial work results in each domain becoming an advertising platform for the other. The notoriety received through his guerilla postering program results in the notoriety that gets him corporate commissions which allow him to economically sustain the initial project. Throughout, the line between "art art" and "business art" becomes blurred, resulting in Fairey's projects becoming more about Fairey than about any specific anti-establishment message.

the reciprocal clarification of text by the image would seem to be the best examples of this category. Mitchell, 89n.9.

[34] Ibid., 89.

[35] Alan Gowans, "Posters as Persuasive Arts in Society," *Art Journal* 44, no. 1 (1984): 9.

[36] Ibid., 9.

In order to understand how Shepard Fairey—born Frank Shepard Fairey—ends up in this self-as-commodity position, it is instructive to trace the evolution of his work over the past twenty years. By examining the chronological development of not only his stylistic choice, but also his changing motivations in continuing a now almost two decade old project, one begins to see how certain elements begin to take on functional roles, unanticipated at their initial conception. Fairey's progression from a teenager fascinated with punk skateboard culture to the subculture mogul position that he holds today is directly related to the propagation and cultivation of not only a cult of Andre but also a cult of Fairey, with the presence of the artist and his specific investment in his work becoming more visibly apparent in recent years.

1) The first phase finds its point of origin in 1989. This year marks the creation of the first "Andre the Giant has a Posse" sticker and the now apocryphal story surrounding its development, while Fairey was a student at the Rhode Island School of Design. As frequently recounted by Fairey, the now famous early image of Andre the Gaint was selected as a result of looking for an image to teach a friend of his, Eric Pupeki, how to make a stencil to be printed on a t-shirt. The image, found in a wrestling advertisement, presents a starkly drawn Andre Roussimoff, his head slightly cocked to the side, staring out at the viewer with a blank expression fixed on his face. Indeed, as Fairey noted later, "the image has a good balance between goofy and creepy… I always thought it was more humorous than disturbing."[37] This balance of humor and menacing seriousness is underscored by the inclusion of the height and weight of Andre within the frame of the image. Recorded as "7'4," 520LB," Andre is cast as a leader of the movement of individuals, the image attesting to the fact that "ANDRE THE GIANT HAS A POSSE" of followers.[38]

The notion of recasting Andre the Gaint as having his own surrounding alliance of supporters is linked to both Fairey's personal association with a Providence skate shop as well as a peripheral engagement with a rising hip-hop culture at the time. Fairey has noted that, within the skate shop, a group was formed that referred to itself as Team Shed: primarily comprised of individuals with an interest in skateboarding as well as the associated punk rock music scene of the late 1980s. The Andre image in this context thus functioned as an iconic mascot for a subset of the larger clique of skateboarders who gathered around the shop. However, the use of the word "posse" in the image signals an appropriation, or at the very least, a nod to the vocabulary and conventions of hip-hop culture. Fairey notes that "we were all starting to listen to Ice-T, Public Enemy, NWA

---

[37] "Art Prostitute Magazine Interview," *Obey Giant: Worldwide Propaganda Delivery*, 2008, http://obeygiant.com/main_new.php?page=articles&article=i2 (3 January 2008).

[38] A second notation of "7'4", 520 LB, ANDRE THE GIANT with Bobby "The Brain" Heenan is also included in the lower left corner of the original design, but this is left out of screen prints of the image, and is one of the first elements of the original stencil to be abandoned.

and they were always talking about their posse," and the inclusion of the phrase in his own creation "was our white boy affectatation of that culture."[39] Thus, with the initial design in place, Fairey created an image marking the convergence of several different subcultural domains: professional wrestling, skateboard culture, and hip-hop. Andre the Giant was reborn as an underground punk icon.

This also the period in which Fairey composes a manifesto in which he compares the spread of the Andre image through guerilla postering and stickering campaigns, as well as the viewer's encounter with the image, to a Heideggarian phenomenological exercise. Rather than evaluating Fairey's interpretation of Heidegger, regardless of however specious it may seem, it seems more fruitful for the purpose of this study to see what idea is that he is attempting to motivate with the application of phenomenology and associated rhetorical tropes. In the second paragraph of his concise mission statement, Fairey proposes that

> The Giant sticker attempts to stimulate curiosity and bring
> people to question both the sticker and the relationship with
> their surroundings. Because people are not used to seeing
> advertisements or propaganda for which the product or
> motive is not obvious, frequent and novel encounters with
> the sticker provoke thought and possible frustration,
> nevertheless revitalizing the viewer's perception and
> attention to detail. The sticker has no meaning but exists
> only to cause people to react, to contemplate and search for
> the meaning in the sticker. Because Giant has a Posse has
> no actual meaning, the various reactions and interpretations
> of those who view it reflect their personality and the nature
> of their sensibilities.[40]

Thus Fairey locates the productive part of his artistic experiment in the audience of the work. The reception for the work becomes as integral to Fairey's larger project as the initial selection of the image. It is worth pausing to note that he composes his "Manifesto" in 1990, subtitling it "A Social and Psychological Explanation." Having decided upon the image only a year earlier, Fairey was already exploring the far-reaching implications of the Giant sticker as an iconic image capable of provoking some sort of reaction from those who happen upon it. The oblique referentiality of the image, as well as its placement throughout the city on surfaces frequently reserved for advertising and promotional materials—signposts, storefront windows, bus kiosks--, confound expectations of meaning and thus, as Fairey seems to believe, elicit a reaction that "reflects the psyche of the viewer."[41]

He identifies several categories of viewers, and explains what he believes their reaction to the image will be. He suggests that previously informed viewers, those who know both the source material of the image as well as Fairey's appropriation of it, will "find the image itself amusing, recognizing it as nonsensical, and… [will be] able to derive straightforward visual pleasure without burdening themselves with an

---

[39] "Shepard Fairey," *Obey Giant: Worldwide Propaganda Delivery*, 2008, http://obeygiant.com/main_new.php?page=articles&article=i7 (3 January 2008).

[40] Fairey, *Obey: Supply and Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey*, n.p.

[41] Ibid., n.p.

explanation." However, the "PARANOID OR CONSERVATIVE VIEWER" will "be confused by the sticker's persistent presence and condemn it as an underground cult with subversive intentions." There is also a third category: those who look to the image as sign of rebellion and attach themselves to some sort of anti-establishment movement of their own creation. It is this category that Fairey believes to be comprised of individuals who, although they "may not know the meaning of the sticker, they enjoy its slightly disruptive underground quality and wish to contribute to the furthering of its humorous and absurd presence."[42] In a magazine interview conducted during his rise in popularity at the end of the 1990s, he reiterates these categories of reactions. In this rearticulation, he notes that there are those individuals

> that are totally clueless as to what it is, and are probably not
> going to pick up the magazines that I'm in. Then there are
> people that have an idea what I'm about and want to know
> more. Then when they read the interview and find out what
> I'm about, then hopefully they'll get motivated to support
> and put some stickers out.[43]

The nature of his project during this early period is, essentially, one of underground vandalism. To come across Fairey's stickers frequently suggests an unplanned encounter. Since they are located in the public domain on public property—a term of which Fairey debates the meaning—they are read as intrusive objects. This intrusion into the space of the everyday speaks to Fairey's larger purpose of using the image as a means of directing attention, and forcing a space where he can engage with his public.[44] He notes that his project fundamentally entails "a constant dialogue with the public.... What I did was put something out there and got a reaction and put new stuff out there based on that reaction."[45] This echoes the section of his manifesto in which he writes that "Whether the reaction be positive or negative, the sticker's existence is worthy as long as it causes people to consider the details and meanings of their surroundings in the name of fun and observation."[46] However, in order to activate this environment of "fun and observation" Fairey relies on his absurd image as much as its specific location in the public space. Through the selection of an image/personality already squarely located in the public domain and appropriating it in order to further his own pseudo-sociological experiment, Fairey calls upon his viewer to provide the meaningful interaction, and even performative element, of his project.

2) The second phase of Fairey's Giant design progression follows soon after with the modification of this initial Andre design. By Fairey's own account, he was initially reticent to modify the original Andre image, which within a matter of two years had

---

[42] Ibid., n.p.

[43] "Art Prostitute Magazine Interview."

[44] The use of "forcing" here is not an unintentional selection. Theoretically, these are not technically neutral spaces in which Fairey places his stickers and street posters. Considering sense of attachment individuals hold for public spaces they frequent on a daily basis, there is a proprietary relationship between people and these sites in which he places his works (sites understood as the general vicinity and not the specific street sign or bus kiosk). Fairey's interventions into these spaces can be read as an attack on personally privileged sites of the urban everyday.

[45] "Art Prostitute Magazine Interview."

[46] Fairey, *Obey: Supply and Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey*, n.p.

become recognizable to inhabitants of Providence, as well as select neighborhoods of other east coast cities, through the underground stickering campaign mentioned above. Fairey has stated that "I never felt like changing the original Andre design, because I considered it a 'happy accident' I couldn't improve upon."[47] This is perhaps why when modifications were made to the design, they primarily affected the background of the image, leaving the relative structure of the original Andre sticker intact. Thus, one finds sticker sheets from the early 1990s in which the format of the original Andre image is the same, and only the color scheme of the image is altered: for example, sheets of psychedelically inflected stickers, where Andre's head is foregrounded against a background of vibrant swirling colors.

Perhaps the greatest deviations of this original from this period can be found in images that actively reference popular print ads from the 1960s and 1970s. In one screen print from 1993, Fairey mirrors John van Hamersveld's 1967 poster designed for a Jimi Hendrix concert at the Shrine Auditorium.[48] The frontal view of Hendrix is replaced with that of Andre, but the streaked afro and scarf, as well as the grainy dissolving shirt, are maintained from the original.[49] Furthermore, Fairey calls upon references outside of psychedelic rock, ranging from Flash Gordon to Neil Armstrong, in order to reorient familiar imagery by inflecting it with the absurd. These range from the harmless visual citations—Andre made to resemble rock star Ozzy Osborne—to the more consciously irreverent—a proliferation of merchandise to mark the actual Andre the Giant's death showing Andre's head surrounded by a crown of thorns. In a *Juxtapoz* article chronicling the career of Fairey, it is suggested that by running through this "lexicon of visual puns," the core image of Andre "is the signifier for communication itself, because what is said hardly matters compared to how it is said."[50] Perhaps overreaching, the article suggests that the image of the wrestler "is so familiar, his incompatibility towards his environment constitutes the matrix of a conspicuous alienation to which we remain by and large oblivious (or at least inured). He is a cult of and for cults."[51] Regardless, the importance of this brief transitional period in Fairey's development of his project lies in the move towards transformation and modifications. Although minor in terms of content when viewed in the context of his greater career, the impulse to alter the Giant image by appropriating cultural icons foreshadows more dramatic modifications to come.

3) The most important alteration to the Andre image occurs in at the end of 1995, following Fairey's viewing of John Carpenter's 1988 film *They Live*. In the film, Roddy Piper plays a wandering construction worker who stumbles upon an alien plot in Los Angeles to transmit subliminal messages of control through common advertising and other mass media promotional materials. By gazing at these media forms through a

---

[47] Ibid., 20.

[48] Throughout the late 1960s, van Hamersveld created numerous now-iconic images through Pinnacle Rock Concerts, a promotion agency that he founded. In addition to the Hendrix logo, van Hamersveld crafted images for the bands such as Jefferson Airplane, Cream, and the Rolling Stones.

[49] Fairey mimics the organization of the text of the original van Hamersveld poster, but the font and exact organization are not the same. Nonetheless, there is still a movement away from the 1989 framed portrait of Andre, with the text of the 1993 poster moved to a place beneath the image.

[50] Carlo McCormik, "Power to the Posse," *Obey Giant: Worldwide Propaganda Delivery*, 2008, http://obeygiant.com/main_new.php?page=articles&article=a21 (3 January 2008).

[51] Ibid.

particular pair of sunglasses, he realizes that what previously appeared to be a billboard enticing viewers to take vacations to the Caribbean instead contains messages for humans to marry and reproduce. Money is revealed to be printed with "THIS IS YOUR GOD" emblazoned on the sides. The most shocking of these encoded messages is simply one that orders its viewer to "OBEY." With the primary method of control being television, Roddy Piper sets out to destroy the central site of transmission: the basement of a local television studio. Although he is ultimately victorious in stopping the aliens and alerting the public to the subliminal messaging system, he ultimately loses his own life, with his final action being the delivery of a damning hand gesture in the direction of the extraterrestrial oppressors.

The quality of film itself, seemingly reveling in schlock, B-movie, alien-horror movie conventions, is not as important as the idea of the products of a commerical culture functioning as a separate medium for the conveyance of messages of consumer control. Fairey notes that the film "was totally campy, but I really like the subversive elements of it, how people don't realize they're slaves to consumerism because everything is glossy on the surface. People are just sleepwalking through life."[52] This is reinforced by his statement elsewhere that the film seems to reflect the sense of ambiguity that accompanies the public's perception of his "ANDRE THE GAINT HAS A POSSE" stickers: "stickers that aren't really physically undermining anything, but are kind of an annoying nuisance to people that want to maintain order."[53] This sense of ambiguity is then compounded by Fairey's manipulation of the Andre face into a more generalized image. This new stark image, in which rough, graded contours of the face are simplified into crisp outlines of features, takes on a menacing, impassive glower. More obviously attributed to the influence of John Carpenter's film, Fairey at this time includes the message "OBEY" beneath the new image of Andre the Giant. Thus begins the "OBEY GIANT" phase of Fairey's creative output.

In generalizing the face, Fairey complicates an easy visual association. No longer does the face function as a veristic portrait of Andre Roussimoff, but instead, in Fairey's own words, can be considered as "Orwellian Big Brother face."[54] He suggests that the image functions

> more as a universal Big Brother icon and not just
> something that has its roots in wrestling. It's more of a
> propaganda icon than a reference to [Andre the Giant]…
> because that can only go so far. The longer he's [Andre's]
> been dead and the less he's seen in the public eye, the less
> relevant that factor is going to be.[55]

---

[52] Fairey, *Obey: Supply and Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey*, 30.

[53] Chris Nieratko, "'Always remember to Obey' The Art of Shepard Fairey," *Obey Giant: Worldwide Propaganda Delivery*, 2008, http://obeygiant.com/main_new.php?page=articles&article=i4 (3 January 2008).

[54] "Art Prostitute Magazine Interview." In addition, as if to reinforce this point, Fairey was recently commissioned by Penguin Publishers to design the cover art for re-issued volumes of both of George Orwell's most famous novels: *1984* and *Animal Farm*. For each, Fairey has created a design using many of the stock graphic elements that will be discussed throughout this and the subsequent chapter.

[55] Nieratko.

Motivated by this interest in creating an icon with propaganda associations rather than with clear entertainment pop culture references, Fairey develops a second image during this period: the generalized face enframed by a five pointed star. Indeed, this image of the doubly inscribed and cropped face, as well as the poster works done by Fairey at this time, finds a clear parallel to the formal motifs used by Bolshevik and Soviet propaganda poster designs: sharp diagonals, large areas of a single unbroken color, a determined central figure, advancing military cohorts, industrial complexes as backgrounds, etc.

In addition, this association to early twentieth century Russian political graphic art comes through in the three-tone color scheme that pervades much of Fairey's work during the mid-1990s, ultimately becoming as much a trademark of Fariey's design as the specific manipulated images themselves. While the specific three colors used in works produced in between 1996 and 1999 vary, many use only red, black, and white. Fairey has argued that, by limiting the color scheme to starkly contrasting colors, one heightens the "visual efficiency" of the work, allowing for a pure, formal visual impact.[56] While this is certainly true of the work, other accounts provided by the artist suggest rather that, like the selection of the Andre head, the choice of a limited color palette emerged instead as a convergence of chance and limited available resources. The more likely reason behind the limited color scheme is purely practical in its justification: his budget allowed for him to use only three colors. Fairey recalled that "I could run the print through [the xerox machine] twice once with each color and as long as the registration was really loose then I could get these posters. Free... Then I just started designing around those colors. But it made sense."[57] In addition, Fairey noted that

> Kinko's copiers had a red toner and a black toner, so I
> figured I could run the copies through twice and get red and
> black, so I if can work with that palette, I'm chillin'. So
> what immediately popped in mind was Barbara Kruger's
> work, Soviet propaganda and the Hello my name is format.
> Anything that worked well in red and black I was like,
> "How can I knock off this style?[58]

The association with Barbara Kruger's work is an interesting one for Fairey to make. Certainly there is the clear alignment between the two artists in the use of the red-black-white color scheme, as well as the interaction between textual and visual components. In addition, each artist purports to put their respective arrangement of elements in service of social commentary. In Kruger's work, one finds a joining of imagery derived from popular culture with pithy phrases in order to create a space for discussion regarding issues of feminism and messages of consumer culture. The text and image play off of one another and the result is a convergence of the two informational modalities, thus allowing it to be read as an example of W.J.T. Mitchell's proposed image-text structure. Rather than providing simple captions for the images, the social messages put forth in Kruger's composite works are motivated by the relation between the text and the image, something that Fairey picks up on in his own work. However, with Fairey's works, as opposed to Kruger's, there is no concrete message put forth by

---

[56] RCF1, "Shepard Fairey: billposter," *Obey Giant: Worldwide Propaganda Delivery*, 2008, http://obeygiant.com/main_new.php?page=articles&article=i9 (3 January 2008).
[57] Nieratko.
[58] "Art Prostitute Magazine Interview."

the images in the poster; or rather the works themselves are fundamentally about the absence of message. Recalling his work from the mid-1990s, Fairey notes that "When I started the Obey campaign, I wanted to borrow Kruger's style, not as a direct homage to her but to set something up that was dynamic and made people think that there was a message behind it."[59] He continues by observing that the "irony was that I didn't have a message at all: the lack of a message was part of my idea that people can be manipulated just by a stylistic approach—style over substance."[60] This is reinforced by his comments regarding his appropriation of Russian revolutionary typographic fonts, regarding which he remarks that "type becomes a design element and it doesn't even matter what it says."[61]

Thus, through actively courting this comparison between Soviet revolutionary iconography, Kruger's 1980s consumer critique posters, and his own late-century, fictive underground movement, Fairey seems then to suggest something about the power of imagery, with clear historical and social implications, to serve as a medium to convey complex messages. Fairey subverts this in his own work by suggesting that specific messages and meanings are not necessarily required to be present. It is merely the suggestion of a message, any message, to which Fairey is pointing. Indeed, as Fairey further explores this idea in the next phase of its development in the 1990s, one finds that imagery begins to gain primacy over text. The empty message of "OBEY" functions less as a directive and more as a contextualized symbol of totalitarian power. This comes as a realization that one's reading of the poster need not be spelled out explicitly through captioning. Instead, the image carries with it a certain cache of associations driven by visual recognition, and it becomes the case that these associations are what will motivate personal interpretations of the text.

4) With a clear visual vocabulary and syntax determined, Fairey begins to introduce new iconic elements into his work. An extension of the second phase, in which Andre the Giant's identity was suddenly recast using popular imagery from the middle of the century, Fairey breaks apart the OBEY plus Giant face formula and examines the possibility of applying them independently to other recognizable and emotionally loaded images. Specifically, he looks to political leaders of the past century, as well as to leaders of resistant movements during the 1960s and 1970s. One could even suggest that "Obey the Giant" has been transformed into "Obey the [insert your favorite revolutionary leader here]." Among the world leaders that Fairey has chosen to depict, Che Guevara, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and Emiliano Zapata appear most frequently, although generalized figures of Chinese Red Army soldiers, Latin American guerilla revolutionaries, and Bolshevik and Soviet workers also feature prominently in his iconographic choices. Furthermore, it is during this period that the star icon begins to take upon new prominence in the output of Fairey. In the context of politically inflected posters, a newly increased ominous quality is attached. In addition, since it is no longer specifically attached to the original Andre the Giant as a reference point, the star icon functions now as a shorthand for the artists signature, appearing either as an overt or occluded inclusion in much of the work moving forward.

---

[59] Fairey, *Obey: Supply and Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey*, 32.

[60] Ibid., 32.

[61] Ibid., 89.

One can use the conditions surrounding his choice to use Che as a way of examining his larger approach during this period. Fairey makes use of the now iconic Alberto Kordo 1960 photograph of the leader: the portrait photograph of an unshaven, Che intensely staring outwards and upwards. However, Fairey freely admits that "I stole it not so much to endorse what Che was about or what he did, but to demonstrate that symbols become easy to manipulate after they have a life beyond their real history."[62] This explanation coincides with Rick Poynor's observation that there are in fact two different understandings of Che in the contemporary period. The first still retains the resonance and message of the revolutionary Che Guevara, and this tends to be found in Latin American countries and true revolutionary sympathizers. The other more widespread understanding of the image, the one which Fairey seems to be exploiting, severs the portrait from a specific geographic and social attachments and instead promotes Che as a symbol for generalized rebellion. Rather than being politically motived, the adoption of Che as an icon becomes simply trendy, or at least gives the appearance of slight anti-establishment leaning. Proyner suggests that as an isolated symbol, Che "embodies a charisma, a commitment and a martyrdom so heady, so different from a frantic life or parties, press receptions and fashion shoots, that, even after countless iterations on everything from beer bottles to Swatch watches, his image still casts the wearer in a flattering light."[63] Furthermore, he notes it is not even "necessary to depict Che himself; it is enough merely to evoke the idea of Che in relation to a new message… and this can be achieved through the image's graphic treatment and invocation of a few highly familiar details."[64]

As Julian Stallabrass suggests, the adoption—or, to paraphrase Fairey, the theft—of this imagery functions "sweetly both as registers of the decline of once fearsome enemies and ideologies to the level of mere image, and as examples of cultural hybridization."[65] This hybrid is most clearly reflected in a 1997 screenprint in which Fairey has overlaid the original Giant face onto the Korda photograph. Working in the now established red-black-white scheme, the image is equal parts Che and Andre, emphasized by Fairey's inclusion of the slogan "VIVA LA POSSE" and the substitution of "GIGANTE" for "OBEY." Further underscoring this fusion of styles and references, the roughness of the original Che image stands in stark contrast to the crisp outlines of the Giant star insignia, centrally located on Che/Andre's hat. This leads to a doubly hybrid image: not only is the original Andre face included, but the more generalized giant face inscribed in the star is also included in the same work. The saturation of color differs between the portrait and the logo, thus making the latter appear as though it sits on the surface of the printed work. It is as though both the image in the poster as well as the poster itself have been branded with this symbol. Through Fairey's appropriation, the

[62] Ibid., 95.

[63] Poynor, 114.

[64] Ibid., 114.

[65] Stallabrass is specifically discussing the Western reception of the works of Wang Guangyi and Jose Angel Toiric. Working in China and Cuba, respectively, the two artists create works in which images of former communist leaders of their given countries are juxtaposed against other seemingly banal pop culture references in order to examine the rhetorical force of the original photographs. Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 60.

figure of Che is thus now thoroughly removed from any culture-specific context and becomes comparable to reframed likeness of Andre Roussimoff.

The inclusion of the star image, as well as its appearance as layered in the work, becomes a visual trope during this period. Fairey creates a series of works in which the star image is enlarged and forms a background to a more prominent image of communist leaders. In a conscious attempt to play with nascent encoded meanings, Fairey's use of the star functions as a way to provoke and alert his audience. He notes that "I'm really trying to desensitize people to symbols, because they're way too loaded. The star is used by so many different cultures that think they oppose each other politically like the Russians, the Chinese, the Americans, the rebel flag. The five-pointed star is just a pleasing icon, but you use it with red and people assume you're a communist."[66] In this light, the superimposition of the star-Giant hybrid with the face of a communist leader signals Fairey's active engagement with constructing associated visual relationships. He acknowledges this transference of associations, notion that since the audience will "make assumptions through associations, I try to create new associations incongruous with those assumptions."[67] These assumptions are further thrown into question when he includes the word "GIANT" or "OBEY" within the frame of the image. No longer specifically attached to the original "Andre has a posse" motif or even "OBEY GIANT," Fairey is now playing with a stock set of elements, recombining them in order to rouse audience reactions. He suggests that in "juxtaposing the absurd Obey Giant imagery with the leaders, I'm hoping to show that symbols are often appropriated to champion or sell things or ideas they originally had no relation to. With a lot of the dictators, I'm saying 'beware' or 'obey with caution.'"[68] However, through Fairey's insistence on recombining these stock elements with different resonant images, he throws into question the meaning of his created elements, rather than just simply the meaning and significance of the recognizable figures used.

In the "Brown Power" series, as he has labeled it, Fairey looks to leaders of the Civil Rights movement. He selects image of Angela Davis and Jesse Jackson, and frames them as he previously framed images of Lenin. Thus, in one poster, the face of Davis stares out intently from the surface of the work, as the star logo and "GIANT" are also included. The same framework is used for the Jackson image, as well as for two additional posters displaying non-descript, unidentified men. Fairey has intentionally chosen anonymous figures, but in placing them in context with Davis and Jackson, suddenly they too become symbols of a freedom and resistance movement. In addition, the phrase "POWER TO THE POSSE" takes on additional resonance in this context, no longer applied to the "Team Shed" mentality of Fairey's early 1990s clique, but instead seems appropriate in the context of the Black Panthers group, which Fairey seems consciously trying to evoke. Furthermore, in the context, the star image is accompanied by a crescent moon in a larger circle. This, taken with Fairey's modification of the coloration of the image, suggests a link to Islam. In this case, the star, at least superficially becomes part of the visual syntax of the religion. However, Fairey still maintains the generalized Andre face inscribed in the star, thus allowing it to function as a subversive inclusion. The absurdity of its placement in the work is then thus

---

[66] Nieratko.

[67] Fairey, *Obey: Supply and Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey,* 93.

[68] Ibid., 126.

simultaneously adds support to the intimidating appearance of the historical figures while also co-opting the figures and placing them in service of Fairey's design program. He has extending his set of historical stock characters from communist revolutionaries and instead sets up civil rights activists as conscripted figures acting as participants in the social revolution for which he advocates.

       5) The next great dramatic shift in his work is a stylistic change rather than an iconographic change. While still making use of political figures, social leaders and reformers, starting in 2000 Fairey's printed works begin to take on a textural quality, adopting an aesthetic of equal parts collage and wallpaper design. There is a greater complexity of the formal content of the posters, signaled by a greater intricacy of design and layering of elements within the works. Influenced by printed money design, government stamps, and perhaps even the palimpsest of images and textures found on exposed surfaces covered with graffiti and posters, the work on paper produced during this period—as well as those screen printed on metal surfaces and album covers—reflect an increased interest in the subtle insertion of imagery, both political and brand imagery, into a greater image. Indeed, from this phase on, the Giant image and the star logo are used as less overt inclusions, with their presence either functioning as a component of a greater totality or existing as an almost subliminal insertion.

       In a series of works from 2000, referred to by Fairey as *Lenin Stamp*, *Mao Stamp,* and *Nixon Stamp*, the image of the three national icons are screen printed against a field of red and yellow curvilinear forms, printed so as to suggest the aesthetic of printed federal designs. Parallel line hatchings and subtle dotted, pixilated components make up the images. The appearance of a rough hewn texture marks a dramatic split from the crisp, clear outlining that was prevalent at the beginning of Fairey's project in the early 1990s. This is not to suggest that Fairey forsakes that particular design aesthetic; far from it, as has already been seen in the POW and Obama posters that opened this chapter. What is relevant is how his interest in corporate and governmental and their promotion and transmission of symbols leads him to examine simultaneously more complex and more subtle graphic methods. In the case of the stamp works, while the faces of the figures are foregrounded, Fairey embeds three framed elements more deeply in the work. Two oval forms flank a centrally located star logo, suggesting the imprinting of an official state insignia on the paper. It functions as a secondary image in the work, calling for the viewer's attention to shift from the surface design to the embedded elements.

       This is picked up in works that more consciously evoke a collage aesthetic. It seems appropriate, given Fairey's dual interest and engagement with punk rock culture—specifically the printing and pasting of band posters—and street art. In a series of portrait works from 2004 to 2006, Fairey spray stencils the clean-line image of a notable popular culture or social resistance figure in black against a collage of newspaper clippings, fragments of 1950s and 1960s era advertising campaigns, and patterned paper swatches he designed himself. He accompanies these with secondary sprayed images borrowed from his stockpile of graphic forms. Thus, in an image of Martin Luther King, Jr. from 2004, one finds a sprayed stencil of a protester waving a smaller poster of the generalized Andre face, but tempered by his holding of a rifle containing a daisy—a clear evocation of the now iconic 1960s protest image. However, amidst the background of interlocking key patterns, shoe advertisements, and floral designs, Fairey has also included OBEY

twice, as well as a stenciled, sprayed insignia of the star logo. However, in this case, the logo is only half visible, with the right side cropped by the edge of the paper.

While this partial inclusion of the star-Giant hybrid could be read as yet another subversive act, Fairey's choice to include it in this image, as well as in comparable collage-based works, suggest that both it and the word OBEY have undergone yet another transformation. They subtly reveal themselves, buried in the cacophony of images and forms. Rather than signaling an encoded message of distrust or counter-obeyance, it seems appropriate to consider them now as functioning in a way comparable to the signature of the artist. Indeed, given that the subjects of these portraits are not exclusively politically reviled individuals, but rather men and women that Fairey respects as cultural icons—Dr. King, Andy Warhol, Jimi Henrix, Debbie Harry—indicates that the imprinting of his logos on the work can be read as Fairey literally providing the individuals with his own stamp of approval.

6) The most recent transformation in Fairey's work is marked by the introduction of contemporary political leaders and overt governmental commentary into his work. While certainly a strong political undercurrent has been present in Fairey's work since the mid-1990s—it is difficult to encounter an image of Lenin, Che, or Zapata and not read some political commentary into the work—what sets this period apart is the focused indictment of current United States governmental policies and officials, specifically those of George W. Bush's Republican administration. It is the specificity and directness of this critique is what is striking and novel for Fairey's body of work.[69] Rather than a generalized attack against governmental actions or a call to question advertising messages, recently Fairey has turned towards challenging the American government's activities in the Middle East and perceived mishandling of military actions. Playing off of graphic conventions of 1930s to 1950s era ephemera, Fairey's project maintains its original platform of raising social consciousness while simultaneously devolving into partisan politics. It is within this most recent body of work that one can situate Fairey's Barak Obama posters and stickers, as discussed in the introductory chapter.

Working in the vein of early and mid twentieth century postcards and travel posters, Fairey created a serious of posters displaying the phrase "Greetings from IRAQ," displaying in various fonts. While the foreground image initially calls to mind the image of geysers in Yellowstone National Park, one soon realizes that is surrounded by inclusions signaling a landscape far from the American West: a pair of oil rigs, the shadowed profile of three camels crossing a sand dune, and four military planes gliding through the air. In this context, the geyser image instead is recast as the blast of an aerial deployed bomb from one of the military aircrafts. In addition, Fairey includes in the upper left corner a crescent moon/Andre star hybrid combination insignia, similar to those that appear in the Brown Power series, again indicating the polysemic interpretation

---

[69] One of Fairey's first experiments with the power of the Andre image involved repeatedly pasting the wrestler's face and name onto a billboard touting the reelection campaign of Buddy Cianci in Providence, Rhode Island. The disgraced mayor was again seeking political office, after allegations of domestic abuse and political corruption. Following Fairey's modification, the billboard touted "ANDRE never stopped caring about Providence" coupled with the slogan "ELECT CIANCI MAYOR" and the blank stare of the waving giant. However, rather than a critique of Cianci's politics or unsavory personal activities, according to Fairey's own admission, the act was simply "a prank" designed to "affect the quality of the day with humor." Fairey, *Obey: Supply and Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey*, 23.

of the individual graphic elements: they are both representations of the religious temperament of the region as well as functioning as the personal insignia of the artist. In support of this latter interpretation, Fairey adds to the complex of basic element the banner of OBEY, situated as cutting across the crescent moon, thus creating a layering of personal markers of the artist. Furthermore, it is in the subcaption where Fairey asserts his own editorial commentary: "ENJOY A CHEAP HOLIDAY IN OTHER PEOPLE'S MISERY." The image no longer functions like the original Andre face stickers: the product of an anonymous artist with an ambiguous message. Instead, it becomes an indictment of the United States' engagement in the Iraq War.

When asked in an interview if he considered himself an activist artist, Fairey responded "No not as far as any affiliation with any groups… Activists have such a martyr symbolism, that I'm not really into. I don't feel that I should be telling people what they should be doing, because I don't always know what's right. Sometimes I address things that I feel like addressing."[70] However, it is difficult to reconcile a statement such as this with works such as the set of posters in which the image of George W. Bush is merged with the features of Adolf Hitler. The text of each work proclaims "WAR/EVERYONE WANTS IT" while accompanied with a secondary statement of either "EXCEPT SMART PEOPLE AND THE U.N.!" or "ELECT BUSH AND STILL GET GORE," the latter a reference to the controversial 2000 presidential election in which Bush defeated then Vic President Al Gore and the bloody aftermath of military engagement in the Middle East. Points of continuity with earlier Fairey works can be found in the font used, as well as in the graphic articulation of cityscape, the isolated exclamation point, and advancing paramilitary combatants. All have formal roots in Russian Constructivist and Soviet agitprop imagery. However, the captions coupled with the central figure of George W. Bush, complete with the added Adolph Hitler-inspired mustache, attest to the artist's personal feeling regarding the current administration. While Fairey is not providing his audience with a clear directive of how to respond to the current political crisis, it is certainly not an ambivalent or ambiguous perspective being presented. More than a call to question messages of government, these pendent images are meant to expose and incite active audience outrage.

In response to the dissemination of these images, including one in which the portrait of George W. Bush is presented with bleeding fangs and the caption "ONE HELL OF A LEADER," Fairey found himself on the defensive in a way not previously encountered by him. He has noted that

> I lost a lot of fans with the Bush Hitler thing. It's not even
> an Obey Giant poster. It doesn't say Obey, Giant or even
> have one of the icons on it. People still know it's me. I have
> tried to keep the project a-political. I wanted people to kind
> of interpret it and get them thinking about what it's about.
> The more that you can pigeon hole something as coming
> from a particular perspective, the easier it is to write it off
> and the less challenging it is. I was really mad about the
> war, I have this audience and I am in a unique position to
> communicate with a ton of people. This was something that
> I had to make the compromise and be outspoken about it.

---

[70] "Art Prostitute Magazine Interview."

>Just weighing the pluses and minuses it was very worth it
>to do.[71]

Yet, as has been shown in the "WAR/EVERONE WANTS IT" images, there *are* Obey and Giant-derived elements. Furthermore, in the fanged Bush poster, OBEY is stamped in the lower left corner of the image, and a five-pointed star button appears on Bush's collar. Yet, even isolated from these factual inaccuracies, the remarks in the above quotation are nonetheless problematic. Even if the original Obey project, the "pure" Obey project is apolitical in its intent, to challenge prevailing communication and reception practices *is* a political action. It is a challenge to the supposed status quo, one that in the mind of the artist is believed to be controlled by corporate and governmental propaganda machines. Fairey's project claims to be a challenge to the spectacle of misinformation and the perceived stuporous compliance, and thus political in its origins.

The very fact that the same formal graphic inclusions do appear throughout his output from the past two decades does color how one reads Fairey's overall project. Fairey's creative output, regardless of his comments, can be read as a continuum of works, part of a single universal project of social critique. Implicit in this project is the desire to push the image of Giant beyond the clear association with its professional wrestler signifier. By generalizing the face and coupling it with iconographic emblems derived from fascism, Fairey's imagery takes on its own cache of associations, not the least of all being the sign of the creator of the work itself. Credence is given to the reading of these graphic inclusions as signs of authorship when one also considers his commercial projects. The boundary between independently created works and commercially contracted projects is blurred due to Fairey's transfer of many of the same aesthetic tropes across the two domains. Indeed, once they appear in a commercial context, side by side with other brand names and logos, these stock figures of Fairey can be even more clearly read as logos of the artist himself, rather than exclusively as universal markers of ambiguous communication.

---

[71] Ibid.

Shepard Fairey's critical project, at least superficially, appears to fall in line with other late 1990s projects of brand scrutiny. Perhaps most emblematic of this trend towards consumer questioning is the emergence of *Adbusters*, the Vancouver-based magazine promoting social activism through "culture jamming." Attempting to replace habits of passive reception of brand logos and corporate messages, culture jamming advocates an active intervention, even vandalism, of the messages being sent: the physical manipulation of printed advertisements, the defacement of billboards, the addition of captions or supplementary images to brand logos, etc. As Kalle Lasn, the founder of *Adbusters*, observed, "The only battle worth fighting and winning, the only one that can set us free, is The People versus the Corporate Cool Machine. We will strike by unswooshing America^{TM} by organizing resistance against the power trust that owns and manages the brand."[72] At the core of the movement is the belief that the reality presented by various media outlets is removed from the actual reality of the everyday. The rallying cry centers around the recognition of 'infotoxins" in the cultural discourse:

> Ads stretch the truth, news bites give only part of the story,
> and press releases are carefully tailored to make leaders
> look irreproachable. We are constantly being hyped,
> suckered and lied to. The marketers, spin doctors and PR
> agents that produce commercial and political propaganda
> realize what we as a society hate to admit: disinformation
> works.[73]

Under the designations of culture jamming and "design anarchy," publications and programs such as Adbusters have taken on large corporate conglomerations ranging from fast-food purveyors, to cellular service providers, to tobacco companies.

However, Lasn and his fellow corporate assailants are far from utopian in the vision of their project. He notes that among the issues facing such a design anarchist project "is the problem of recuperation, the nagging suspicion that each criticism and every protest ultimately serves to help dysfunctional corporation and opaque governments to improve their PR and fine-tune their marketing strategies."[74] This anxiety over the long term efficacy of such a social activist project provides the impetus for a series of related concerns:

> Is it still possible to do anything outside of the capitalist
> model? Has the human spirit been tamed to the point that
> no opposition can escape being transformed into a
> marketing aesthetic? Has activism become nothing more

---

[72] Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam: The Uncooling of America^{TM}* (New York: Quill, 2000), xvi.

[73] Kalle Lasn, *Design Anarchy* (Vancouver: Adbusters Media Foundation, 2006), n.p.

[74] Ibid., n.p.

> than an amusing sideshow to the consumer capitalist circus?[75]

In terms of Fairey's project of graphic consumer subversion, these concerns prove to be real ones. This is especially true when his commercial practices, those filtered through his BLK/MRKT design firm and later through its offshoot Studio Number One, are examined. Rather than being able to be dismissed as simply money jobs or as evidence as the selling out of a previously rebellious artist, Fairey's treatment of contracted commercial work instead suggests an interest in expanding the influence and presence of his stock characters: the Andre face, the hybrid star, the OBEY logo, etc. As a related result of this, Fairey simultaneously makes himself more present. One can thus read his interventions as, at least somewhat, intentional attempts to continue the influence and presence of Shepard Fairey as a brand name product.

Fairey has argued that his commercial projects evolve out of financial necessity rather than sympathetic corporate leanings. Indeed, this is rationalized in statements such as:

> Would I like to be able to do what I do without having to occasionally do a job for, you know, Toyota or Coca Cola or somebody. Yeah, I would, I would. I don't necessarily want to help those companies. But there's a zillion people lined up to help them and if I don't they will. I'm not really affecting whether that company, you know… [It's not the case that] Coke runs out of business if I refuse to do their ad, but I might. You know what I mean... It's like, you just do the best you can.[76]

It is precisely these contractual agreements which sustain his art making practice. However, conversely, without his independent art projects and street art campaigns, which affords him a level of notoriety and presence in the cultural consciousness, these companies would not be seeking out Fairey for work. Indeed, he has acknowledged in the past that many of his early commercial engagements came about through companies seeking him out "because they liked a lot of the graphics I did for Giant. In a way, Giant alone never sustained my living but it definitely feeds the graphic design business, which does sustain my living now."[77] At this point in his career, however, it seems as if these commercial engagements go beyond either supporting Fairey's independent art projects or providing a different domain for Fairey to hone his skills as a graphic designer. Instead, they allow for the creation of Shepard Fairey the mogul: one who has built an empire while working within the very economic superstructure his original project seems to critique.

With corporate clients ranging from Heineken to Hawaiian Punch, Adidas to Universal Pictures, BLK/MRKT presents its mission as providing advertising solutions for products aimed at a youth-based market. According to their website, the company works "with our clients to unlock a brand's cultural energy utilizing effective and inspiring strategies; creative solutions that can penetrate the world of the ad savy consumer."[78] This "ad savy consumer" is the generation raised up on quick cutting music videos, personal credit cards for teenagers, and internet banner ads. Working their

---

[75] Ibid., n.p.

[76] "Interview: Shepard Fairey – 'Rise Above' Exhibition @ Merry Karnowsky Gallery," *By Osmosis t.v.*, 2008, http://byosmosis.tv/interview-shepard-fairey-rise-above-gallery/ (12 March 2008).

[77] Nieratko.

[78] "History/Mission," *BLK/MRKT*, 2008, http://www.blkmrkt.com/blkmrkt.html (12 March 2008).

aesthetic around existing corporate monikers, the typical BLK/MRKT design mines street art visual cues as an organizing graphic motif: freely drawn spray-painted or crisply stenciled text in the case of a Nissan commission; degrading poster paper backgrounds in the case of an Adidas campaign; urban hip-hop stock elements and figures for a DC Shoes brand project.

However, as part of the rhetoric of their promotional skills, the company proclaims that "We maintain an acute understanding of cultural climates and a dedication to precision research to insure that campaigns we are involved in appeal to the hard-to-reach trendsetter without alienating the general consumer."[79] Who is this "hard-to-reach trendsetter?" By the very nature of being a trendsetter, should not this to-be-identified individual remain impervious to advertising campaigns inflected with a hip-hop sensibility and a predilection towards skateboard culture, which by now have themselves become banal aesthetic tropes? Perhaps instead it makes sense to read this declaration of the company, which was cofounded by Fairey with Dave Kinsey in 1996, as wishing to continue to perpetuate a mystique of cool, rather than admitting that they now step in line with dominant consumer codes.[80] Furthermore, despite Fairey's departure from BLK/MRKT and his subsequent founding of Studio Number One, his second commercial graphic design agency, the mission of each company seems to come from the same core philosophical foundation. According to the Studio Number One website, the company "creates bold, graphic media that stands out amid the urban clutter, beautifying the environment while stimulating the public with innovative design solutions."[81] Meanwhile, the client base is comparable, reflecting again an interest in youth culture and alternative rock: Red Bull, Linkin Park, Virgin Records, and Slacker Personal Radio are just a few of their clients. Furthermore, several companies, including DC Shoes and Adidas are represented by both firms.

The graphic motifs employed by each company, for which one point of origin is Fairey's Obey the Giant campaign, cannot be read as part of some larger culture jamming project. Instead, these companies moves the design and elements derived from and fostered through the initial Giant campaign into the mainstream commercial market. The cottage industry that Fairey has built, with protensions into commercial design, magazine advertising, and art sponsorship, has resulted in a sullying of the mission of the initial Andre project. In the case of Fairey, the "problem of recuperation" described by Lasn is compounded through Fairey's success as a cultural and commercial mogul, responsible for the creation of not only BLK/MRKT and Studio Number One, but also the Obey Giant company and clothing line, the periodical SWINDLE, and the art galleries

---

[79] Ibid.

[80] Prior to starting BLK/MRKT, Fairey, Kinsey, Andy Howell, and Philip DeWollf created First Bureau of Imagining, or FBI. However, this endeavor seems to have quickly failed due to creative and administrative infighting. BLK/MRKT emerged in the wake of this collapse as an alternative graphic design firm with the same general mission.

[81] "Philosophy and Services," *Studio Number One*, 2008, http://www.studionumber-one.com/main/about/ (12 March 2008).

BLK/MRKT Gallery and Subliminal Projects. This network is strengthened through the cross-promotional endeavors running between these linked units.[82]

In an interview conducted with advertising and graphic design historian Steven Heller, Fairey indicated that he is conscious of the potential lifespan of his Obey project. He stated that

> I do still think Obey has legs, but the longer it's out there
> and the more popular it gets, the more it becomes absorbed
> into the dominant paradigm, even if it's fighting the whole
> way. In some ways, Obey can run parallel to the system,
> utilizing aspects and subverting others, but eventually its
> familiarity will render it impotent—it will becomes
> wallpaper.[83]

However, there seems to a significant difference between the concerns of Lasn and those of Fairey. While Lasn's argument proposes the limits of consumer culture critique due to outside forces, Fairey's project becomes undone as a result of his own intervention. Fairey, through his hyper-cultivation of the cult of Andre and through the inclusion of his stock figures throughout the works he has produced, both non-commercially and commercially, has made the Andre image lose whatever subversive power it initially held.

The two domains are inseparably intertwined in Fairey's art practice. Indeed, the mutual support of the Giant brand imagery and his commercial graphic design works comes to head in an exhibition such as the "Art of Giant and BLK/MRKT" held at the New Image Art gallery in the spring of 1999. The show included artists who at the time were, and in some cases are still, connected to Fairey, either through his Obey project or through BLK/MRKT itself: Misha Hollenbach, Cleon Peterson, Dave Kinsey, and Gerardo Yepiz. Indeed, in the promotional material for the show, the individual aesthetic of the particular artists are suppressed in favor of Fairey's iconic star logo. Centrally located on the gallery announcement, the star cuts into and dominates the works of the other four artists, suggesting both the prominence of Fairey as well as the suppression of the other four in favor image of the "corporation."[84]

---

[82] Perhaps the clearest example of this is Studio Number 1's contractual engagement as editorial design house for SWINDLE magazine and marketing firm for Obey Giant, as well as physically housing the gallery Subliminal Projects in its Los Angeles office space.

[83] Fairey, *Obey: Supply and Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey*, 94.

[84] The use of the term "corporation" is not an arbitrary one, and is in fact supported by Fairey's own remarks. In an online interview he noted

> One of the cool things is that as my design business and my art and
> clothing and everything I'm involved in the magazine I do, Swindle, as
> each of those things grows, I'm able to provide jobs for people doing
> something really cool and creative and it's amazing the sort of, you
> know, Obey Giant, Studio Number 1, Swindle ecosystem that exists
> now. It's like, it's awesome… I think there's about 40 people in total
> making a living off of various entities I'm involved in.

He is the chief executive officer providing and overseeing employment of a network of subordinate creative individuals. "Interview: Shepard Fairey – 'Rise Above' Exhibition @ Merry Karnowsky Gallery."

On this ascent in popularity of a previously subculture graphic vocabulary, Donald Kuspit has noted that "insistence on marginality is the cornerstone of their vanguardism, for the marginal is the last-ditch defense against decadence."[85] However, the transfer of a style from its place of origin in an underground subculture to the domain of commercial and popular acceptance is not the product of a unilateral move. He argues instead that any "appropriation of the marginal by the mainstream is dialectical, in that the marginal is legitimated by the mainstream and the mainstream acquires the aura of authenticity and integrity supposedly innate to the marginal."[86] However, Kuspit does indicate that once accepted, this "marginal art becomes merely another shallow novelty, losing its import as a symbol of the subject. Marginal art serves this historical craving for dead novelties—that is, the ideologizing and objectification of novelty."[87] Despite the fact that mainstream commercialism "needs to aggrandize a 'lowerclass' art in order to feel 'upperclass,' what ultimately happens is the commoditization of the formerly marginal, thus bringing about the ultimate obsolescence of the work.[88]

Through their appearance on surfaces in the public domain, Fairey's stickers and posters have become part of cultural phenomenon. What started as an undergraduate joke and an experiment in meme transmission has ultimately been transformed into a recognizable signifier of 1990s anti-commercialist discourse. However, this development cannot be labeled as a wholly organic one: Fairey has helped this along through the shrewd marketing and promulgation of the Andre logo and the "OBEY" message. Indeed, through the selling of t-shirts, skateboards, and other paraphernalia associated with teenage boy culture, Fairey is able to foster a consumer base that may not have access to the urban centers in which his stickers appear. Indeed, through his website obeygiant.com and the retail-based offshoot of it obeyclothing.com, as well as through agreements with other online commercial printing agencies (e.g. MODA3, Karmaloop, and Misery Loves Co.), the possibilities for the strictly formal appearance of the Giant brand logo is able to spread. Disassociated from any sense of militant intervention into the public sphere, "OBEY" becomes another brand-name clothing design label, with its associated graphic paraphernalia. In a similar manner to the way that Ralph Lauren has marketed his lifestyle clothing brand using a polo rider and horse and how the French company Lacoste is now recognized through the simple appearance of an open-mouthed crocodile, Obey clothing brings to the fore the Giant head, patterning derived from currency, and stock portraits intended to be subversive imagery of militant revolutionaries.

Furthermore, Fairey recently has been branching out into developing limited edition collectibles using many of the same pictorial elements derived from his posters. Translating his two dimensional works into a three dimensional form, Fairey has argued that these collectible toy products allow him to create affordable art using alternative means. Targeting a younger population of art collectors, traditional media fall by the wayside, causing Fairey to observe "It's interesting how resistant the art establishment is to a lot of these new ideas, but the people, it's supply and demand, the young people are embracing it

---

[85] Donald Kuspit, "The Appropriation of Marginal Art in the 1980s," *American Art* 5, no. 1/2 (1991): 132.
[86] Kuspit, 134.
[87] Ibid., 136.
[88] Ibid., 134.

and eventually everyone else will have to fall in line."[89] This is the impetus for collaborations with companies such as the Hong Kong based Toy2R company. As part of their "Qee" collection, Fairey produced a series of small two and one half inch toys and a larger eight inch version of the same figure, combining his graphic staples with models consistent with other Qee collections. Produced were a set of bear toys: a black and white version with an Andre head, a red and white OBEY logo across its chest, and a hybrid star graphic printed on its back, and a fully patchworked and stenciled bear, presenting a jumble of many of the stock images from across Fairey's career. This is in addition to a cat figurine, in which the black Andre face is printed onto an already fully black body, save for a bright red and white OBEY logo, as well as red and yellow dog figure, equally displaying the OBEY logo.

In a collaborative project with Kidrobot, an American toy manufacturing company, perhaps most well known for their MUNNY series of toys, Fairey again recycles many of these stock elements. MUNNY toys are predominantly white vinyl figures, on which the purchaser is then encouraged to draw and decorate, becoming the ultimately expression of joining of DIY aesthetics and consumerism. Through an offshoot of the MUNNY character, DUNNY figures are also vinyl toys, with the inclusion of large rabbit-inspired pointed ears. For Fairey's collaboration with Kidrobot, a series of DUNNY figures were produced, printed with the face of "Giant Brother," Fairey's name for a figure derived from the 1950s film of George Orwell's *1984*. Printed in various shades of purple and yellow, two separate series were made: the first of three inch figures and, as was the case with the Qee series, a second larger eight inch version. It was this eight inch version which was limited to a release of one thousand, nine hundred and eight nine objects, a seeming nod to the year of Andre's—as well as Fairey's—creation.

Fairey, seemingly recognizing the potential for criticism leveled against the diffusion of his original project and message, has noted that "What I try to emphasize is the street art as the primary focus, not the clothing line. The clothing line is designed to augment the street art, not the other way around."[90] However, this statement is qualified by his observation that, "Coming from skateboarding and punk, where T-shirts are emblematic of the culture, I never saw it as a conflict of interest. I saw it as another canvas, another way to get the images out there."[91] This defense of clothing as canvas is not a novel one. Indeed, this sentiment seems to be echoing Keith Haring's remarks from almost a decade prior. Haring justified his selling of T-shirts through the Pop Shop as a valid product of his artistic endeavors "because they're like a wearable print—they're art objects."[92]

Haring, whose neon, biomorphic, fantastical forms now seem synonymous with 1980s New York street art and social activism, opened the Pop Shop in 1986 as a site of experimental artistic exchange between artist and community. The purpose was to make art accessible to a broad cross section of society, while still maintaining the integrity of the artist's mission. Haring recalled how "I wanted to continue this same sort of communication with the subway drawings. I wanted to attract the same wide range of people, and I wanted it to be a place where, yes, not only collectors could come, but also

---

[89] Lolla Lives, "Lolla Lives-Shepard Fairey–Webisode 3-Toys," *YouTube*, 2008, http://youtube.com/watch?v=BheDA4PVpU0 (12 March 2008).

[90] "Art Prostitute Magazine Interview."

[91] Ibid.

[92] Gruen, 143.

kids from the Bronx."[93] However, the danger with such a democratizing approach to art making is that the charge of pandering to a wider audience can be easily leveled against the artist. Haring reacted against this charge, noting that, in regard to works sold in the Pop Shop,

> The main point was that we didn't want to produce things that would cheapen the art. In other words, this was still an art statement. I mean, we could have put my designs on *anything*. In fact, *Newsweek* can out with a story on the Pop Shop that said we were selling sheets and pillowcases, which we *never* did! And we didn't sell coffee mugs or ballpoint pens or shower curtains.[94]

The adamant insistence on not selling coffee mugs indicates that Haring was aware of the potential for his art to be considered simply as directly feeding into and off of commodity culture. He noted that, early in his artistic pursuits, he decided that he "wasn't going to be a commercial artist…. I decided that if I was going to be an artist, *that's* what I was going to be!"[95]

In surveying trends in the past two decades of street artists, Adam Glickman notes that there is an awareness among them of the danger of "selling out" and simply becoming part of the larger economic machine that they strive to counter. In particular there is a heightened alertness in the past decade alone among artists who have

> grown up around the branding BS and see the danger of having their art turned into bubblegum ad campaigns. When MTV's current crop of punk bands are only one step removed from boy bands and rappers only rhyme about fancy champagne and hot tub parties, it's clear that the marketing has overpowered the message.[96]

If the 1980s MTV-generation of artists were inspired by the quick-cutting of music videos to stretch the boundaries of traditional media, the 1990s and 2000s MTV-generations have as their take-away message a consciousness of the prevalence and mainstream acceptance of the vapid, packaged cultural product. Devoid of a quality of substance or significance, commercially banal musical acts are able to sustain themselves by creating work that does not challenge social norms, but rather feeds into the proliferation of commodity consumer culture. Indeed, Glickman continues by noting that it is this reason that "many young artists are reluctant to admit that their tee shirts, stickers, album covers, etc, art 'art.' Their true art is saved for their canvases. The graffiti, stickers, and tee shirts are just marketing for their gallery work."[97] However, he is quick to point out that while this particular approach, although noble in its intent, is not the only reason for the conscious conceptual divide between "art" and the products of marketing strategies.

---

[93] Ibid., 143.

[94] Ibid., 148.

[95] Ibid., 24.

[96] Adam Glickman, "My Peer Cred Weighs a Ton," in *Sponsorship: The Fine Art of Corporate Sponsorship/The Corporate Sponsorship of Fine Art,* ed. Ryan McGinness (Corte Madera: Ginko Press, 2005), 21.

[97] Ibid., 21.

> Their response, I imagine, comes from the underlying
> desire to keep the art from being labeled. It is an admirable
> self-preservation of their scene, because once some
> journalist or critic (like myself) can manage to define the
> art, then it begins to confine the art, and once your work
> can be labeled or defined, then it can be manufactured and
> repackaged. And no real artists want their artwork to
> become fodder for next year's Levi's campaign.[98]

What is relevant to Fairey is that there seems to be no authentic or fundamental separation between the gallery work and his commercially contracted projects.[99]

Although Fairey superficially proposes a divide between those posters and canvases produced as part of his greater mission of cultural critique, the use and reuse of his graphic tropes across endeavors undermines this type of proposition. In an interview given in conjunction with the opening of a 2006 exhibition of his work at the Merry Karnowsky Gallery in Los Angeles, Fairey briefly sketched the elements necessary to become a successful street artist. He noted that one must "have the motivation to perpetually go out and find new spots and try to find places that are not in use, that won't get cleaned quickly."[100] However, this is then qualified with the statement that success, an ambiguous and ill-defined term in itself, is predicated on" whether they actually follow through, keep it going long enough for what they're doing to actually sink in, to have people to make a connection from one piece to the next to the next."[101] This notion of expansion and seeking out new surfaces for display can be understood as connected to Fairey's own pursuits in the commercial sector.

> Seemingly building off of this same idea, Rob Walker poses the question of
> instead of responding to the encroachment of evil branding
> into the supposedly pristine authenticity of the street by
> withdrawing, why not engage? If the idea of spreading the
> Obey image is to see how far the Obey image can spread,
> doesn't it make a certain sense for it to show up on apparel
> that is sold in chain stores?[102]

The answer should be yes, assuming that one is still interested in simply spreading the Obey image. However, at this point in Fairey's extended project, the image is no longer a self-sufficient ambiguous icon interceding in spaces of the everyday. Instead, through what appears to be a conscious insistence on including his trademark monikers on his creative output, whether they be in the form of the generalized, rectangular Andre face or as the star-inscribed face, Fairey is creating a totalizing effect in which even the farthest

---

[98] Ibid., 21-22. This idea of "no real artists" wanting to be linked to a corporate culture takes on additional resonance when considering the recent collaborative projects between more mainstream artists and clothing designers, such as Takashi Murakami's joining with Louis Vuitton to create limited edition bags and sponsor exhibits of the Japanese artist's work, or even, for that matter, Olafur Eliasson's recent sculptural works used in Louis Vuitton display windows in their flagship Manhattan store.

[99] In addition, Glickman's comment proves to be even more appropriate given that at one time Fairey's design company was hired to design a promotional campaign for Levi Strauss.

[100] "Interview: Shepard Fairey – 'Rise Above' Exhibition @ Merry Karnowsky Gallery."

[101] Ibid.

[102] Fairey, *Obey: Supply and Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey*, 323.

reaching and seemingly farthest removed products are still brought back to him as the producer. It is almost as though his project has been too successful. His presence is so pervasive that the appearance of any element from his grab-bag of go-to icons automatically signals his own presence, something seemingly actively courted by his willingness to participate in numerous interviews, many of which are archived on his personal website and recount the same mythologized account of his ascendancy to the level of a supposed pop culture scion. This act of self-cultivation of identity is compounded by his active participation and engagement in the publication of his own mid-career catalogue raisoné.[103]

As a final example of this blurring of the boundaries between his original Giant project and his more recent commercial work, an investigation of Fairey's proposal for an ad campaign with the soft drink company Mountain Dew seems to be illustrative. In the late 1990s, Mountain Dew endeavored to change their brand image, a practice common at the time among other companies aiming for a younger, newly solvent market of consumers. The choice of Fairey to redesign their logo was part of this larger initiative, which also entailed funding various extreme sports events and competitions, thus revealing their interest in courting the skateboarding, X-games, punk/alternative rock demographic. Fairey's firm was hired to design a new layout and logo for the aluminum cans. The end result was a modified logo, heavily influenced by street art and graffiti art visual vocabulary: the new design maintains the same green, red, yellow, and white brand coloring of Mountain Dew, but angles the boundaries of the logo so as to give it an added sense of vibrancy and literal edge. However, this was not the original proposed design. It is what not included in the accepted version that is most relevant to this study.

As told anecdotally by Fairey, the original conception for the can design entailed the same green amorphous background, but with an additional inclusion: a subtle suggestion of the face of Andre occluded in the background. The ultimate gesture in subliminal marketing, the Andre face would reveal itself only when the can was studied intently or when one's attention was drawn to it. In an interview with *Loud Paper*, Fairey described this proposed intervention. He noted that "It was subtle, but if I pointed it out to you, it would be like the Joe Camel thing, you would totally see it."[104] While this can be read as also an example of culture jamming—the true message of the message is revealed only when one looks behind the surface slogan—it begs the question just what is at stake would Fairey have been able to include this graphic element, should it have been granted design approval by the company. Aside from the obvious subversion of corporate advertising, it seems as though the can and the performative act of hiding his trademark symbol in the trademark of a Pepsi subsidiary product would ultimately become yet another calling card activity for Fairey.

---

[103] Both of these two items, his website and the published retrospective volume of his work, in and of themselves are not condemnable products, and indeed have served as invaluable resources for this project. However, each understandably represents a particular view of Fairey's mission over the past two decades, with a clear emphasis placed on Fairey as an anti-establishment artist working outside of some greater connected system of art and economics, rather than an artist working within this system, which he seems to be.

[104] Jeremy Xavier, "Andre is Everything and Andre is Nothing – Shepard Fairey," *Loud Paper,* 2008, http://www.loudpapermag.com/article.php?id=10 (15 March 2008).

In the age of the superstar artist, the age of the self-spectacle of Matthew Barney and Damien Hirst, audaciousness reigns supreme. To perpetrate such an act of subversion, in a medium reaching an audience of millions, would certainly push the image of the Giant into the mainstream. However, once in the mainstream, where else is there to go? Does this now push the graphic element as far as it goes? Can one rebel against one's own creation, and do so with any validity? It seems that the larger and more present the trademark images of Fairey become, the less they become about subversion and anti-corporate questioning. Instead, they must become about something else: they become the stand-in for the presence of their creator. Shepard Fairey the artist is collapsed with Shepard Fairey the self-promoter through the actions of Shepard Fairey the businessman. The result is not some great transcendence of the stranglehold of consumerism and false corporate messages. Instead, the result is simply the branding of the artist: the production of Shepard Fairey.

To label Shepard Fairey merely a sell out or corporate shill, one who has abandoned the romantic notion of the independent artist working free from commercial concerns, is too simplistic. The economics of the day require that Fairey somehow sustain a living apart from his independent, self-motivated, creative projects. Guerilla stickering and postering campaigns do not lend themselves to economic solvency. Indeed, Fairey has acknowledged this concern, noting that

> To me, selling out is doing things purely for the money without concern for the consequences to integrity. Let's face it though: money is freedom. For some, it's freedom to buy cocaine and cars. For me, my design earnings give me freedom to produce my propaganda work and travel to other cities to put it up. It also gives me freedom to keep an art gallery open that's never profitable. People often accuse anyone who does not fulfill their image of 'fine artists as suffering martyr' of being a sell-out.[105]

Fairey thus views his participation in the corporate world as a necessary evil: posters cost money, and working on advertising campaigns for large corporations provide him with the monetary resources to further his own project of culture jamming and exposing consumer brand lies. Thus the paradox of Fairey's project reveals itself: the contracts to work for corporate vendors materialize as a result of his original anti-corporate screeds. In addition, the profits derived from these commercial projects provide him with the financial backing to create more works condemning the establishment. Furthermore, his ascendancy to a place of cultural prominence and influence owes a great deal to these commercial ventures. The spread of the image of the Giant and its associated graphics are facilitated through the shared use of imagery in both his self-generated works and those produced for commercial advertising campaigns and limited edition collectibles. The continuity between personally creative and contractually creative is formed through the use of a consistent set of stock graphics. The cache of cool that pervades Fairey's Andre the Giant and Big Brother inspired projects carries over to his commercial projects.

At the same time, as the recognition of Fairey's project and icons increases, so too increases the recognition of the name Shepard Fairey. Indeed, much as the appearance of a Campbell's soup can automatically summons the related image of a slight man in a silver wig, or how heavily outlined, interlocking neon figures calls to mind the image of a bespeckled male with a can of spray paint, so too does the face of Andre now connect to its creator/promoter. Just as both Warhol and Haring merged the categories of an art of business and a business of art, capitalizing on the brand recognition of their names as a way of artistic and economic promotion, so too does Fairey market both himself and his endeavors. Indeed, the transition of the Andre image and star hybrid from undergraduate

---

[105] Fairey, *Obey: Supply and Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey*, 93.

joke to subculture icon to mainstream commercial product mirrors Fairey's own developmental progression. In this light, rather than viewing Fairey's work today as exclusively being about cultural questioning and the ambiguity of received messages, the images equally stand as markers for the presence of Fairey himself in the public consciousness. The anti-logo image of Fairey has become a logo for Fairey.

If, as Fairey suggests, his project is about raising consumer awareness and rejecting the passive consumption of mass media messages, then should not the same scrutiny be applied to his own work as well? Taking the cue from Fairey's manifesto, in which he describes a process of "revitalizing the viewer's perception and attention to detail," the repetition of his graphic inclusions figures across the different domains cannot be ignored.[106] It then seems possible to read Fairey's total endeavor as it exists today—inclusive of those works produced for gallery display, posters and stickers affixed to public sites, and works produced through his commercial design company—as part of a single continuous project. While the final outcome of his campaign of visual interruptions in the everyday still remains to be determined, at this point it appears as though Fairey's project has reached an inevitable plateau: with the proliferation of the Andre image, in order to continue his project of rebellion, Fairey must now create works that rebel against the Andre icon. A critique of the Obey project through the Obey project is all that remains. Anything else can be considered yet another action taken by Fairey to further imprint *his* mark in the cultural and economic discourse. Indeed, at this point in time, all of his current projects can be read as commercial projects, cultivating the Giant brand. To this end, that which is advertised through these projects is not the specific image printed on the poster or sticker, or even any message of consumer conscientiousness. Instead, the ideas of Shepard Fairey are being promoted: his social interests, his cultural ties, his political leanings, etc. Even more that this, however, it is the idea of "Shepard Fairey" that is being promoted.

---

[106] Ibid., n.p.

Bibliography

Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.

---. *Philosophical Papers*. London: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Bogart, Michele H. *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1995.

Brown, Stephen and Anthony Patterson. "Figments for Sale: marketing, imagination and the artistic imperative," in *Imagining Marketing: Art, Aesthetics, and the Avant-garde*, edited by Stephen Brown and Anthony Patterson, 4-32. London: Routledge, 2000.

Danto, Arthur C. *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Deitch, Jeffrey. "Why the Dogs are Barking," in *Keith Haring*, edited by Elisabeth Sussman, 78-88. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997.

Del Signore, John. "Gothamist: Shepard Fairey, Street Artist." *Gothamist,* 2008, http://gothamist.com2007/06/21/interview_shepa.php (3 January 2008).

Fairey, Shepard. *Obey: Supply and Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey*. Corte Madera: Ginko Press, 2006.

---. "Thank you, from Barack Obama." *Obey Giant: Worldwide Propaganda Delivery*, 2008, http://obeygiant.com/post/check-it-out#more-628 (5 April 2008).

Glickman, Adam. "My Peer Cred Weighs a Ton," in *Sponsorship: The Fine Art of Corporate Sponsorship/The Corporate Sponsorship of Fine Art,* edited by Ryan McGinness, 21-22. Corte Madera: Ginko Press, 2005.

Gowans, Alan. "Posters as Persuasive Arts in Society." *Art Journal* 44, no. 1 (1984): 9-10.

Gruen, John. *Keith Haring: The Authorized Biography*. New York: Prentice Hall Press.

Klein, Naomi. *No Logo*. New York: Picador, 2000.

Kuspit, Donald. "The Appropriation of Marginal Art in the 1980s." *American Art* 5, no.

1/2 (1991): 132-141.

Lasn, Kalle. *Culture Jam: The Uncooling of America^{TM}*. New York: Quill, 2000.

---. *Design Anarchy*. Vancouver: Adbusters Media Foundation, 2006.

Lipton, Ellen and J. Abbott Miller. "Line Art: Andy Warhol and the Commercial Art World of the 1950s," in *"Success is a job in New York…" The Early Art and Business of Andy Warhol*, edited by Donna M. DeSalvo, 28-43. New York: Grey Art Gallery, 1989.

McCormik, Carlo. "Power to the Posse." *Obey Giant: Worldwide Propaganda Delivery*, 2008, http://obeygiant.com/main_new.php?page=articles&article=a21 (3 January 2008).

Mitchell, W.J.T. *Picture Theory*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Nieratko, Chris. "'Always remember to Obey' The Art of Shepard Fairey." *Obey Giant: Worldwide Propaganda Delivery*, 2008, http://obeygiant.com/main_new.php?page=articles&article=i4 (3 January 2008).

Pincus-Witten, Robert. "Keith 'R' Us," in *Keith Haring*, edited by Elisabeth Sussman, 253-260. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997.

Poynor, Rick. *Obey the Giant: Life in the Image World*. London: August, 2001.

Rand, Paul. *Design Form and Chaos*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

RCF1, "Shepard Fairey: billposter." *Obey Giant: Worldwide Propaganda Delivery*, 2008, http://obeygiant.com/main_new.php?page=articles&article=i9 (3 January 2008).

Scott, Linda M. "Images in Advertising: The Need for a Visual Rhetoric." *The Journal of Consumer Research* 21, no. 2 (1994): 252-273.

Searle, John. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

Stallabrass, Julian. *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Varnedoe, Kirk and Adam Gopnik. *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art: 1990.

Warhol, Andy. *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975.

Xavier, Jeremy. "Andre is Everything and Andre is Nothing – Shepard Fairey." *Loud Paper,* 2008, http://www.loudpapermag.com/article.php?id=10 (15 March 2008).

"Art Prostitute Magazine Interview." *Obey Giant: Worldwide Propaganda Delivery*, 2008, http://obeygiant.com/main_new.php?page=articles&article=i2 (3 January 2008).

"Artists for Obama." *Barack Obama*, 2008, http://store.barackomaba.com/Artists_for_Obama_s/1019.html (5 April 2008).

"History/Mission." *BLK/MRKT*, 2008, http://www.blkmrkt.com/blkmrkt.html (12 March 2008).

"Lolla Lives-Shepard Fairey–Webisode 3-Toys." *YouTube*, 2008, http://youtube.com/watch?v=BheDA4PVpU0 (12 March 2008).

"Interview: Shepard Fairey – 'Rise Above' Exhibition @ Merry Karnowsky Gallery." *By Osmosis t.v.*, 2008, http://byosmosis.tv/interview-shepard-fairey-rise-above-gallery/ (12 March 2008).

"Philosophy and Services." *Studio Number One*, 2008, http://www.studionumber-one.com/main/about/ (12 March 2008).

"Shepard Fairey." *Obey Giant: Worldwide Propaganda Delivery*, 2008, http://obeygiant.com/main_new.php?page=articles&article=i7 (3 January 2008).