SOME CALL IT SUBVERSIVE: BARACK OBAMA'S CAMPAIGN USE OF SHEPARD FAIREY'S HOPE

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Some Call it Subversive: Barack Obama’s Campaign Use of Shepard Fairey’s

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To my mother, who instilled a love of the arts in me; and to my father, who proofed and edited every page. To my little sister who provided a constant source of encouragement and inspiration; I hope I can provide the same on your upcoming graduate journey. Finally, to Hank and Molly for always being my cheerleaders.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Some Call it Subversive: Barack Obama’s Campaign Use of Shepard Fairey’s Hope
by
Sarah Elizabeth Mitchell
Master of Arts in Art with a Concentration in Art History
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Shepard Fairey’s 2008 poster Hope has become the most widely seen and iconic image of President Barack Obama. This thesis examines the formal stylistic elements that informed the aesthetics of Hope and the socialized interpretations these styles and symbols had on the voting electorate in 2008.

Spreading virally through the Internet, Fairey's image adorned websites, stickers, posters, and billboards, all functioning to disseminate the man and the message; critically impacting the campaign. Appropriating the Associated Press photograph of Mannie Garcia and historical styles, Fairey created an icon and set into motion a grassroots movement that elected the forty-forth president of the United States.

The thesis begins with an introduction to literature relevant to understanding the role of image in society. It is reasoned that in an era of mass consumption there is merit in examining the social conditions and historic processes that contribute to the image’s appeal. The review investigates how knowledge is produced, visually across Hope, in the context of 2008. Chapter three traces the appropriated historical styles in Hope connecting the image’s reference to a grass-roots production to memories or notions of social movements of the past. The history of street art is traced to the origins of graffiti and is shown to inform Hope’s subversive image. A review Obama’s use of new media technology and the Internet augment a discussion of the candidate’s advertising and marketing strategies. The combined study of historical references in Hope and a survey of its use as a piece of viral marketing demonstrate how art is absorbed into the economic and political arena. Finally, the consequences of centering the candidate’s image over platform issues is shown to divert audience attention, crowding out a pertinent discussion of political realities and political issues. The study demonstrates how images influence the results of elections and compromise political dialogue.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

LIMITATIONS

Michael Ann Holly's essay *Patterns in the Shadows* discusses the writings of Michael Baxandall. In her essay she describes how art historical writing is derived from and empowered by a melancholic connection to the past through the historical art objects the discipline appropriates as its own. Holly argues that an art object may be all we have left of a former time and it is the task of the art historian to attempt to recall that lost period through the discussion of the object. The art object provides "reparation" for the absence of the past, while the art historian writes about the absent past through the enduring material presence of the work or art.

Baxandall grounds his work in an acknowledgement of loss and in the recognition of the passing of time according to Holly. Furthering this distance is critical theory's use of language which is insufficient and falls short of fully depicting the visual object. Writing about the form however offers consolation, which allows the recovery or attempted recovery of the meaning of an object that persisted through time.

Holly locates Baxandall's idiosyncratic brand of melancholic history writing to be in a lineage descending from Walter Benjamin. Benjamin understood the transhistorical connections between the historical object, which had outlived its time, and its contemplation by historians who longed for the past in the present. Additionally, Benjamin, like Baxandall, found language to impede the definitive writing of history because words unceasingly misrepresent images. This awareness of loss did not deter the two from discussing art, because, as Benjamin put it, "redemptive possibilities" were ever present in the interpretation.

Where Benjamin relied on allegory to explain or describe past objects, Baxandall maintained allegiance to the discussion of the art object, resulting in a cautious melancholic reading. While melancholia can be defined as a refusal to relinquish the unresolved past, the melancholia of Baxandall is an embrace of the departed object that contemplates the object’s form and history for redemptive consolation. Baxandall acknowledges contemplative
language can take something away from the work of art, but affirms that it can also offer "a system of concepts through which attention might be focused" on the object that would otherwise go unnoticed.¹ Although these past objects are forever beyond the capacity of present words to capture, melancholia allows us to recognize the inability of words and acts as a consolation. The only solution for an art historian writing about the past object is the recuperative powers of language. This allows the historian to mourn the past; although language always withholds something from the beholder it offers consolation and provides a focus for contemplation.

Holly argues that the subject of melancholia has not been widely addressed or discussed in art historical writing; instead melancholia is translated into a historiographic point of view. Baxandall encourages art historians to be more forthright and acknowledge their own melancholia and the limits of language in the description of the visual. Holly discusses the work of Baxandall to address the limits within which art history works. Through the writings of Michael Baxandall and Walter Benjamin, Holly delivers an allegory of art historical writing. Her writing informs us that a search for meaning in art is a search for meaning in oneself. Continually facing loss is a condition of life on earth. It is how one makes sense of that loss, that yearning or desire one is able to learn something about the self. The art historian's writing about a particular object is inevitably melancholic, language will continuously inhibit it and create loss, but that loss will be comforted through the act of writing or mourning. Recognizing an objective observation is not possible, this author finds it pertinent to acknowledge personal ideologies so that the reader has a more clear understanding of the writer’s own limitations and the scope of the thesis.

**PERSONAL SCOPE**

As a youth growing up in the conservative state of Texas my liberal parents and conservative peers instilled within me the importance of voting. My parents identified this right as an essential means of participating in democracy; in Texas every vote for the Democratic Party counted. However my conservative peers conditioned me towards this right

as a means of maintaining my individuality and identity; I liked being different, outside the norm. Every two years, during gubernatorial and presidential elections, I would “duke it out” with the kids in my class. I made sure to stay abreast on current events and political issues as much as any kid could. In actuality my knowledge of politics was encouraged by my dad who listened to National Public Radio most mornings while driving me to school and would read the newspaper at the dinner table. I also tried that, but the New York Times terminology was beyond my comprehension. As I grew older my interest in politics grew, leading to a deeper understanding and knowledge. Pursuing a B.A. in political science during my undergraduate studies, I interned in Washington D.C. at the Supreme Court of the United States in the fall of 2008.

On election night in 2008 I was living in the capital with around two hundred and seventy other University of California students in the UCDC center. The thought of being surrounded by like-minded liberal individuals had drawn me to California nearly four years prior; closing my final year of college with the most grass roots engaged election I had ever experienced seemed only fitting.

I remember the night like it was yesterday. Following a long workday I changed out of my constricting hosiery and slipped into my Obama-Biden campaign T-shirt to watch the election coverage. Huddled around the dormitory TV, my six friends and I watched as Barack Obama was declared the 56th President of the United States. The election was called at 11P.M. We were somewhat disappointed that it had been such a landslide, leaving little time for anticipation and speculation. Nonetheless a sense of pride ran through us, we had developed feelings of an intimate connection toward the candidate for whom we had voted. We couldn’t help but feel responsible for ushering in the anticipated ‘Hope’ and ‘Change’ that was to come.

Reflecting on the 2008 election over the course of this project has forced me to consider my relation to the Hope poster; furthermore it has forced me to consider my approach to the analysis of the image and how it positions me as a viewer, in relation to it. As a young politically engaged woman living and working in Washington D.C. I looked at Hope as a call to the youth vote, a call to all Americans to effectively impact the political process, altering the way the country was being run. How this knowledge was produced was never tangible, rather it stirred emotions impressing its message upon me. I acknowledge this study
sought to answer how and why I was so drawn to Barack Obama and his image. This study art historically traces the appropriated stylistic references Shepard Fairey incorporated, the catalog of conceptions and perceptions that stem from those works in the sociological and historical period of 2008, and the media’s dissemination of the image, in order to expose how meaning and value were produced in the context of 2008. Although the language of this study falls short of presenting a complete interpretation of the image, it nevertheless provides key insights and interpretations that contribute to a historical understanding of the image and the election of President Barack Hussein Obama.
CHAPTER 2

A CRITICAL ‘TAG’: APPLYING THEORY AND ART HISTORICAL METHODOLOGIES TO HOPE

The street art of Shepard Fairey has become instantly recognizable in shopping malls, urban city streets, and more recently museum exhibitions. This study presents a theoretically based investigation of the artist’s commercial and personal projects and the implications these projects have on one another. Fairey’s graphic work has received copious attention in the form of publications, exhibitions, and popular culture reference. Yet there are still considerable gaps in critical research and theory relating to the street artist’s style, manner of presentation, and the implications the artist’s commissions and commercial clothing brand, OBEY, have on his politically minded personal projects. The writings to be addressed in this chapter will confront how the meaning and value of Hope were produced, how it prompted reaction, evaded critical reflection, and ultimately influenced the electorate.

Shepard Fairey’s Hope poster (see Figure 1) is one of the most iconic images in recent history. Working from Associated Press photographer Mannie Garcia’s photograph (see Figure 2) of then Senator Barack Obama at a 2006 National Press Club meeting Fairey significantly altered the image by zooming in on Obama’s upward gazing face, visibly enhancing it through bold colors and adding the text ‘Hope’ in a blue frame running along the lower portion of the image. Fairey freely distributed the image on his website resulting in a wide and viral dissemination of the image. Fairey also used street art techniques to illegally post the image to empty walls of public spaces.

In a letter to Shepard Fairey, from Barack Obama, who was still a senator at the time, the now president states, “The political messages involved in your work have encouraged Americans to believe that they can help change the status-quo. Your images have a profound effect on people, whether seen in a gallery or on a stop sign.”

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the image’s message, a suggestion that Hope reminds the electorate, that as voters, they have the power to change society by changing leadership. In this sense, Fairey’s image legitimizes the representative democracy of the United States and its electoral system, in its endorsement of a major political party contender.

Fairey’s sleek graphics and choice of text create associations, connecting the visage of Barack Obama with the individualized hope of each viewer, a hope that seemed attainable through a vote cast for the Democrat contender. Factors contributing to this understanding include its proliferation in multiple mediums of stickers, wheat pasted signs, posters, and virtual file; the environment in which the image was placed, as an illegal wheat paste on the wall of an abandoned building, as a framed collectable, as a marker of identity in a social network forum; and finally the social and political context of 2008.

The influential nature of the visual image, specifically Hope (2008) formed the ideas expressed in this thesis. This chapter discusses the wide dissemination of the Hope poster in both print and digital form through a discussion of reviewed texts. Murray Edelman’s From Art to Politics explores the powerful influence that the signs, spectacles, and symbols of culture have on political behavior and political institutions. Edelman contends that art helps create the images from which opinion-shapers and citizens construct the social reality of
politics. Edelman's text demonstrates that Shepard Fairey's subversive associations with street art informed *Hope* and therefore imbued candidate Obama with a decisively different personality from that of President George W. Bush and opposing candidate John McCain, a difference much of the public found appealing. *Hope*, as an art image demonstrates the influence of perception on the political process. Walter Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility* is discussed in relation to the production and distribution techniques employed by Fairey. Benjamin described reproductive techniques as destructive of the aura of ritual and cult once surrounding art works. In the absence of any traditional, ritualistic value, mass produced art loses its aura and is strictly used for the practice of politics. However political *Hope* may be, the capitalistic monetary interest denies full audience participation and contemplation through a constant media flood, the viewer’s free associations are restricted, resulting in a control of the masses. Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* and its relevance in today’s technologically driven and media-savvy society augment the thesis that Obama’s associations with street art rebellion supplemented his iconic image and added to the distracting ‘spectacle’ of the media flood that reported the 2008 election. Through a discussion of Jean Baudrillard’s essay, *The Implosion of Meaning in the Media* it will be reasoned that the proliferation of signs and information *Hope* and the media circulated about candidate Obama led to a surplus of meaning, transforming content and meaning into *phantom content* or a simulated effect. Baudrillard writes that "there is no longer media in the literal sense of the term" (no other reporters than those that support the dominant system), however this idea must be further examined in the context of Internet technology. Though the Internet does allow for a mass dissemination of the message of the dominant system, it also provides a platform for the spreading of the "differential system of meaning". Finally, Baudrillard’s *Implosion of Meaning in the Media* and *Aesthetic Illusion and Disillusion* will be invoked to demonstrate *Hope*, aided by new technologies, abstracted Barack Obama into a mass-produced, mass distributed, and mass consumed illusion where his image and the interpretation of his image immediately become associated with Obama.

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4 Ibid.
simulated understanding of the man came to dominate. Johann Drucker’s article *Making Space: Image Events in an Extreme State* shows how Fairey’s image fails to offer an act of connection that takes into account the gap between image and referent, between images and belief systems. Drucker calls for images to offer a *refamiliarization* so that they register a significant impact on the viewer in our current image saturated culture. Fairey’s image does not show the connection between the image and the belief system surrounding and establishing it’s meaning. Following the methodology proposed by Drucker this researcher exposes the connection between the public’s perception of the street, the youthfully defiant act of street art and graffiti. The poster turns the white societies generalized fear of urban black men into a visually atypical icon of *cool*; a young electorate longed for someone cool. Related to the abundance of images, a discussion of the tactics of appropriation, re-appropriation, parody, and pastiche are considered.

**APPROPRIATION, PARODY, AND PASTICHE**

Political appropriation of symbols has always neutralized the power of the symbol. When Richard Nixon was photographed wearing jeans Levis were no longer a symbol of youth culture and rebellion; they had been co-opted.

Hope is a fusion of opposites; styles are interplayed and the cultural production is a mixture of commercial brand culture and political activism. Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken define “appropriation [as] an important historical practice in art making, in which the artist uses previously existing forms, images or sounds in new ways. The creative effort is defined by inspired selection and manipulation of found materials.” The new art is strikingly familiar, yet different. Parody is a similar strategy that falls under the category of appropriation. Fredric Jameson defines parody as a humorous mock of the original and differentiates this from pastiche, which he defines as “blank parody.” Film theorist Richard

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5. Brand culture has developed as a way to attract and retain customers by establishing a particularly appealing worldview that customers embrace as their own identity. Joining and participating within this commercial culture is a way to express to the world self identity and beliefs; simultaneously they welcome the brand into their world and enter the world of the brand.


Dryer opines this equates self-pronounced imitation that combines various source elements. Working from these definitions Fairey’s image reworks elements of the past, specifically falling into the category of pastiche revealing the impact of the highly saturated image culture.

_Hope_ has overtones of Soviet Constructivist advertisements and political posters. Additionally the poster conjures several associations that indicate appropriation of styles from multiple counter-culture heroes: the iconic image of Che Guevara, black panther posters created by Emory Douglas, the silkscreens of Andy Warhol, and the graphics of Lester Bealle. In this one image Fairey managed to collectively represent a multiplicity of styles and politics. The artistic liberties taken give Obama a broad appeal that comes pre-charged with meaning and associations.

**The Source Photograph**

Fairey transformed Mannie Garcia’s Associated Press photograph captured at a 2006 press conference concerning the genocide in Darfur. Fairey’s alterations transform the photograph into a new entity, in keeping with the practice of appropriation employed by other contemporary artists. Additionally appropriated is the poster’s style, color choices, and composition, which are openly borrowed from political art of previous eras. Although what is most blatantly copied or borrowed are the stylistic elements, the appropriation of the photograph landed Fairey in a 2009 Associated Press copyright infringement litigation.

The appropriation as an artistic device by Fairey makes a political statement. The original source material is not stolen or plagiarized; rather appropriation artists intend the viewer to recognize the referenced image or object hoping that the viewer will bring their original associations to the artist’s new context. Political statements are made by remarking on the source material, thereby altering the meaning of and actively commenting on the original. Fairey’s innovative alterations transcend the limits of all generic press photographs, altering a bland image into a passionate, grass-roots art piece intended to reflect the idealism of the subject.

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8 For more information see, Richard Dryer, _Pastiche_ (New York: Rutledge, 2007).
Most political candidates and their campaign teams rely on photographs to spread their image and message resulting in an over-abundance of clichéd and conventional images that bleed into the background. Fairey’s erasure of contextualizing detail presents Obama as an attentive and thoughtful leader. The poster is strikingly different from the AP image but the viewer is able to recognize the source image. The poster stands out while the photograph recedes into a stream of other indistinctive news images. Fairey’s graphic interpretation of the photograph recalls the news image only to ascribe a casual attitude towards it, securing Hope as an innovative and iconic image of candidate Obama. The use of street art conveys ideas of anti-establishment and “constitute[s] a political counter attack against the traditional mode of artistic creation and distribution in Western culture.”9 This finds relations to the candidates ‘Washington outsider’ status and promise of changing the way politics is run. Additionally the look of street art resonates with American youth, a technologically savvy constituency that Obama mobilized. Furthermore, Fairey’s status as a campaign outsider situates the novel stylistic rendition of the political candidate as a passionate piece of grassroots production.

**Pastiche**

While the photograph is appropriated, the aesthetic of Fairey’s poster is a pastiche of combinations that remix and play with preceding forms. Hope is a hybrid of previous styles and image standards. This citation and play results in a separate and oppositional style and value, reinventing past imagery and practices. Mixing the various stylistic elements does not aim to satirically mock or imitate those previous styles; rather Fairey references and combines these various elements (many of which will be shown to be elements of counterculture in Chapter 3) in order to communicate an aesthetic that creates a sign of cool, edgy and hip president.

Hope reveals the extent of our image-saturated culture. Identifying the pilfered historical combinations reveals Hope’s use of them to have little historical meaning; its haphazard combinations from various historical subcultures visualize a broad representation

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of diverse outsider movements. *Hope* piggybacks on the look of older movements in order to establish Obama as a democratic reformer. People embraced *Hope* for its novel street-art representation of a political candidate. Typical photographs traditionally publicize politicians as they hold babies or wave before the American flag. *Hope*’s photographic appropriation creates a novel image, free from traditional photo-op moments; in the posters novelty the sameness and saturation of the everyday news photograph is revealed.

*Hope* recombines historical elements, altering the original historical meaning in the present context. Appropriating and recontextualizing the artwork of others, *Hope* reveals that meaning is not inherent to an artwork; rather meaning is produced and interpreted within a specific time, culture, and place. Gaining meaning from the viewer’s knowledge of the historical moment, Fairey gave the hybrid form of the style a new meaning in the 2008 election. Mixing styles reflected the mix or fusion of personas that Obama was said to embody: mixed racial heritage, Ivy League educated, technologically adept, and accessible-made apparent by his frequent Black Berry use. The cross-fusion of red and blue, symbolic colors of the Republicans and Democrats, across Obama’s face represents him as a politician above partisan politics, but also evoking patriotic values. For a relatively unknown candidate like Obama, visual cues were important in presenting his political goals and ideas to the American public; the image played an important role in alluding to the candidate’s political ideology. The repeating presence of the poster served to instill ideas about the candidate’s characteristics and attributes, the poster became a symbol voters united around.

**MURRAY EDELMAN**

In his text, *From Art to Politics*, Edelman makes the argument that "art is central to politics," because art forms provide the objective symbols which aid in shaping political beliefs and discourses; objective in the sense that the image is thought to stand as an independent testament free from personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudice. In this section the influence of perception on the political process will be explored by turning to the role of art. Edelman describes the process of influencing opinion as a step-by-step process that builds off of socialized categories, the existing social order, memories, and environment.

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When reporting anchormen, politicians, and leaders shape events using words, terms, or visual cues that the public recognizes as carrying certain meanings or implications; the recognized meanings are socialized constructions that have been subtly introduced through the family, popular culture, and formal education. Political Scientist David Jackson defines socialization as “the process by which people acquire and hold political values.”

Schoolteachers introduce the United States government as a representational form of democracy where the nation’s leaders are selected in general elections by the people. Simultaneously students learn about autocratic governments where dictators gorge on absolute power. Nightly news stories reinforce these ideas with images of Americans at the polls or stories of displaced Cubans fleeing to America by means makeshift rafts. The entertainment industry crafts scripts, employ costume designers and special effects experts in its effort to evoke emotions of laughter, tears, fear, and hope. Through these fantastical story lines the public begins to link or create a short-cut association to an emotion or feeling when a certain word, term, or visual cue is used. A spokesperson will draw from a socialized category in order to appeal to the emotions of their audience. The word dictator carries emotional associations of ironed fist rulers; therefore a member of the public would classify a leader who is reported to be a dictator as a tyrannical authoritarian. Categorizing a leader with the term dictator rouses emotions and influence opinions and actions.

The art form, which Edelman describes as "written and oral stories, novels, romances, films, paintings, and other forms of high and popular art," provides a model to base the understandings of political ideas, language and actions upon. This author finds it important to add popular movies, television shows, websites, and blogs to the list of art forms as the entertainment industry plays an increasingly larger role in our over stimulated environment. A work of art may provide a way for the general public to understand and locate meaning in events that are often ambiguous and contradictory in nature. Deriving meaning from the "conduct, virtues and vices associated with politics" can be difficult for the public.

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13 Ibid., 2.
provides a way for the general public to understand and detect meaning in political events and discourses, which are often ambiguous and contradictory in nature. The subtle comparison or analogy of an art form to a present day event inherently transfers information or meaning from the familiar art form (either experienced first hand or distilled through pop culture or other renditions) to the current event, shaping the conception of reality. For example, Edelman suggests our present day conception of a heroic or villainous leader is informed by comparisons and associations made with images and narratives we take from literature, paintings, film, television, and other genres. Jackson offers the example of American’s responses to witnessing the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon: “it seemed just like a movie.” This sort of association or meaning is not an inherent aspect of the work; rather meaning is subject to alteration through varying interpretations and contemporary times. This can result in contradictory readings of literary characters as well as contradictory readings of past and present events and leaders. Although there is the possibility for contradictory interpretations, spokespeople, who invoke these narratives, are nonetheless able to push forward their aim or purpose by presenting their perceptions through a framed socialized categorical understanding.

The public does not challenge the construction of perception. Edelman argues that the art form or parodies of it found in popular culture, advertisements and other distilled forms, provide a simplified translation, making political and 'newsworthy' events more decipherable in their familiarity. These models of understanding daily life, serve the public as "catalysts toward confidence that the political scene is understandable, as opposed to the disorder, murkiness and contradictions that characterize much of everyday experience." Subtle uses of socialized cues or terms can heighten emotion or interest. The appearances of authority or credible expert, such as the adornment of a military uniform, the cloak of a judge’s robe, or the pomp and circumstance of congressional proceedings convey a sense of expertise, worthy of obedience. Edelman gives the example of the Rodney King trial. Although jurors viewed the videotaped events of police officers beating the unarmed African American with metal

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batons, they acquitted the three white and one Hispanic LAPD officers- a verdict found to be unjust by the majority of the public. Edelman positions the defense, presented by well suited ‘opinion leaders’, to be a shaped conception of the events. According to Edelman, the defense's discourse and imagery was understood as descriptive, as the judge, whom we already established to be a beneficiary of ‘appearance credibility,’ held their presentation of the case as admissible in the court of law. The jurors, as average members of society, did not have knowledge of the law, police procedure, or council procedure, and conveyed trust in the presumed expertise of council and court. Furthermore, the defense benefitted from socially constructed cues "that depict the police as protectors of social order against the violence of criminals" as well as stories that depict "blacks as violent criminals." This also allows the juror to maintain faith in the system and the police who are mandated the task to ‘protect and serve.’

Complicated events or those that bring into question the system affect the self-identity and the individual’s place within society. Revelations that there are flaws within society’s structure are difficult to digest, so people look toward opinion leaders to shed light on events. To remedy contradictions or push forward preferred claims, spokespeople frame their interpretation in the form of images, discourse, or narratives that place the characters of present day events in the role or category of older known and understood characters. Reliance on a familiar "pattern of reassuring tropes" allows the audience to digest, react, and move on to the next news story. Reference to art forms allows people a short cut to understand events and provides spokespeople with the tools necessary to stir emotions and persuade the public. The framing of an event is done in a masked fashion, leaving the belief that reported events and personal opinion rests on observation. The subtle use of the term leader in a lengthy address is rarely given a second thought by observers, and the leader in question is mentally associated the merit. The opinion leader is able to shape thoughts of reality while garnering the esteem and approval of the public for providing an accurate description of events.

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16 Ibid., 2.
17 Ibid., 123.
It has been established that political events, news stories and image meanings are constructions that draw upon a repertoire of art forms. The model the art form provides is bound to the ideology and purposes of the opinion leader. The U.S. voting public received multiple cues pertaining to Junior Senator Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential election. Members of the media, campaign managers, and other leaders shaped Obama into an icon of diversity by referencing familiar images, narratives, and analogies. In order to insure a receptive audience response, the media used terms and categories that reinforced the hopes and fears of its 2008 audience. For example, David Bernstein of the Chicago Magazine appealed to his 2007 Chicago readership when he positioned Obama as a reformer and advocate of justice in the praise of the candidate’s oratorical critique of the “Bush economic issues” during a 2004 radio address. Additionally, Obama, the spokesperson, established himself as a man of the people, stating he “may have a better sense of what’s going on in our lives and in our country.” These narratives and terms would only find an emotional appeal to the financially unstable or the middle-class American. These emotions formed beliefs and sparked action.

American’s are heavily reliant on the media for political information, and in the age of social networking Americans are fed a constant diet of instant information about Obama. Through an ever-expanding avenue of media in the form of television, print media, the internet, and the organic community of social network forums, which enable a dialogue of open exchange, much was shared about Obama. Shepard Fairey made Hope available for free download on his website, spreading the image and its importance around the world. Ellis Cashmore states "the social context, political landscape and the global typography" have provided the means to envision Obama as a diverse entity, appealing to a multitude of voters. With the Internet providing a platform to access and upload instant information, the image and conception of Obama grew at lightening speed. Edelman makes clear the understanding of the candidate is informed by individual purpose or motive and with the

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internet extending a broadcasting platform to all citizens, Obama morphed into a multitude of personae, creating a candidate that was based less on substance and more on the diverse image the media and average citizen began to read into him.

Hope imitates or appropriates extant styles, techniques, color choices and compositions found in poster art from previous eras and used for various causes. This deliberate act of borrowing iconic cultural renderings is a concept known as kitsch and, according to Edelman it plays a key role in informing reality. Drawing upon a history of poster art, Fairey's rendering interpreted presidential candidate Barack Obama through established paradigms of earlier art forms and contextual periods, such as Russian Constructivist graphic imagery, posters made by the Atelier Populaire, the graphic image of Revolutionary Che Guevara, imagery by Black Panther Minister of Culture Emory Douglas, the work of Andy Warhol and graffiti works. The borrowed nostalgic elements provide clichéd models, shaping the public’s perceived notions of Obama. The candidate conceived through a recirculation of visual elements, which will be outlined and discussed in chapter three, convey and subtly push forward Fairey's aim to elect Obama as a leader of innovative change rooted in a progressive tradition.

The iconic image and simple tagline of 'hope' became a producer of multiple meanings for each viewer. Fairey’s original run of posters read ‘Progress’ and featured Fairey’s signature OBEY star, associated with the artist’s ‘Andre the Giant has a Posse’ street art campaign, within the Obama sunrise logo. The logo was removed at the request of the Obama campaign and the text was changed to the ambiguous terms 'Hope', 'Change', and 'Vote'. The most well known version featured ‘Hope’ which stood to be interpreted differently by each voter; as each voter had a personalized understanding of what they hoped Obama could provide as president. The term hope was especially appealing in the context of the faltering economy of 2008 and the dissatisfaction American’s felt with the Bush administration. As a challenger to the current administration’s political party, Obama benefitted from his ‘outside’ status and as such, Americans gravitated to him as new type of leader, and optimistically looked toward the future with ‘hope.’ Additionally, terms applied to the candidate during the election season were just as varied and poised to present Obama as a multifarious entity. The modifications of Obama’s skin tone to the patriotic colors of red,
white, and blue erased any signs of racial classification and rendered Obama as a man of the people, a representative of all Americans.

The faint blue cross hatching lines across the lighter side of Obama’s face and the heavy blotches of color that omit the detailing features of Obama resemble older print reproductions that would have been seen in newspapers or screen prints. In this sense Hope plays homage to the past modes of communication, to a simpler time when information was not as instantaneous and invasive, using modern modes of digital reproduction. This subtle nod to the past acts as a categorical shortcut that allows viewers to mindlessly respond and identify a message within the image of Obama, which is then directly associated with Obama the man. Behavioral psychologist Robert Cialdini describes these shortcuts as automatic triggers that develop from psychological principles or stereotypes people have learned or have been socialized to accept. Exposure to these shortcuts starts at a young age and as such they are deeply ingrained within people and have the ability to automatically influence. The shortcuts allow the public to quickly classify all the immediate news and information according to a few key features that allows them to function more easily within society. However these shortcuts eliminate the need for cognitive function and as a result people simply react. This understanding of the psychology of influence allows us to better understand why the signifiers of Hope are so readily related to Obama the man.

Other influential factors of Hope are its original placement in the street and it’s nature as a piece of street art. Shepard Fairey’s reputation as a subversive figure makes him appealing to those who identify themselves as being outside the corporate system. Fairey asserts that his agitprop imagery, often accompanied with the text OBEY, is intended to awaken people to the influential aspect of advertising and encourage their refusal to obey. Fairey’s placement of imagery in the street is illegal and subversive in its effort to take back the public environment that is littered with billboards and bench signs advertising a life of consumption. Hope provided an unconventional image and form of Obama that challenged established categories, images, and presentation typically used to advertise a presidential candidate, sparking interest in many young voters. The mounting disapproval of the Bush

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administrations handling of the flagging American economy and the controversial policy of holding international terror suspects outside the protection of US law at Guantanamo Bay gave rise to skepticism concerning established social and political strategies. People were looking for something completely different and they found that in the Obama image. Fairey’s image of Obama as a hopeful icon of change was ahead of general opinion, contributing to the image and the man’s evolution into a symbol of rebellion and belief in Obama. This particular meaning of Obama and Hope is not inherent according to Edelman, instead it is a reflection of “particular conceptions and particular ways of experiencing contemporary times.” Fairey’s image was successful in the context of 2008 because his image enhanced the common perception that America was in need of some change. The viral spread of the image and it’s placement in the street helped to yield “new perspectives and changed insights” into what America needed from its president.

The setting of the urban environment offers a symbolic contribution of clarity to act. Political actions are often ambiguous and reflect social strain; the setting of the act helps the viewer to derive meaning from the events. Publicized places are symbols that remind people that they share a common heritage and a common future. For most Americans the Oval Office symbolizes the power of the presidency and is a reflection of public will. A photograph of the incumbent president seated behind the official Resolute desk in the yellow oval room can suppress distrust of him and the institution. The symbolic meaning of a particular place is a widely held belief that reflects psychological needs for clarity, order, and predictability in a threatening world. The street is a place of the marginalized or disenfranchised. Placing a candidates image in the street extends to Obama the symbolic meaning of leader or unifier of the disenfranchised, and many felt down and out in hard financial times.

The illegal placement on the street also extends to Obama the symbolic meaning of rebellion. Hope’s placement outside noted or abandoned public buildings connotes discontinuity amid the system that seemed to be continuously running things into the ground.

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23 Ibid., 52.
Fairey’s discontinuity provided a symbolic ‘hope’ for ‘change’ and therefore people felt their actions, choices, and vote could be revolutionary in altering a flawed system. The image created a bond among American’s whose voices had been marginalized during the Bush administration and both the urban and suburban street became the ground to ‘organize’ and theoretically take back. *Hope* also existed as a downloadable image on the web. People were encouraged to apply the image as their profile picture on various social networking sites. Substituting *Hope* for an individual’s own image extends a feeling of connection and self-identification with the candidate. Feelings of similarity to another individual produce emotions of liking, which then make it easier to influence an individual’s action, such as securing a vote.24

The visual image allows us to digest more information quickly and grabs our attention with bright colors, bold lettering, or digitally altered photographs. They act as active agents within our society and culture, causing our emotions and behavior to react in particular ways. With the spread of web technology and the increase of social network participants, the visual image has had an increasing ability to saturate and spread, inflicting its influence and dominance over a society that is experiencing information overload. Shepard Fairey’s *Hope* added to this plethora of images and converted Obama into a cultural icon, whose multiple image meanings became more appealing then the man himself. As the overload of images is so extreme there is no way to ‘clear a space’ for a new message; the only possibility is to subvert older images.

**WALTER BENJAMIN**

Benjamin’s *A Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* addresses how the function of art changes when it is mechanically reproduced. He envisioned the mass media’s emancipation of art from its ritualistic cult value, transforming it into an instrument for political and social change. Benjamin argued that reproduction creates a distancing effect, where the viewer was no longer in awe of the artwork and the illusion of reality is disrupted.25 Without the dependence on the art form’s ritual value the viewer is able find a

distance between self and the art form. Benjamin states that this distance is beneficial and allows us to rethink and reflect on the complex processes of our sensory and cognitive interaction with the world.

Without the presence of an art object’s aura, art has the potential for politicization. Benjamin determines that the politicization of an artwork can have a negative effect, but lauds its ability to pose political questions on the nature of use for the reproducible image. Benjamin addresses how individual works mediate the complex process by which we perceive, act upon, and function within the world. In order to maintain the distance that allows us to reflect upon the mediation of reproduced works it is necessary for people to become familiar with the political and epistemological potentialities of such art forms and maintain a heightened presence of mind.

Our contemporary times have demonstrated how the influx of art forms or visual imagery reproduction has acted as a foil to cognitive reflection and a heightened presence of mind. Reproduction opens an image’s potential for political purposes. The original meaning can be transformed through constant iterations, until it becomes short hand for something more general. The increasing amount of information and imagery that the public encounters everyday has made it impossible to consciously reflect and make informed decisions while going about day-to-day tasks. If individuals had to stop and critically analyze every news story or photograph they encountered they would be reflecting all day. It has become necessary to identify certain features that enable a quick understanding so that one may precede and make decisions. Through the influx of images and information, made possible through reproduction, such as web technologies, the public is unable to maintain a heightened presence of mind. The free market allows corporations open channels to advertise and market products. This constant barrage of images and information makes it impossible to critically engage with media stories, advertisements, and political action. Members of the media, politicians and graphic designers play into this by reproducing and referencing former narratives or symbols in such a way that they loose their meaningful referent. In an era of reproduction, art has the potential to control the masses.
GUY DEBORD AND SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL

Guy Debord, a founding member of the Situationist International, attacked the dialectical materialism of society in the 1967 work, Society of the Spectacle. Situationist theory includes a strong anti-statist message, but is not limited to a critique of the state. The group found a much broader cultural problem and attempted to transform ordinary life through a total critique of advertising practices, consumerism, the education system, art, and the everyday life. Debord found a rationalist critique of capital to be impossible stating, “if it is to master the science of society and bring it under the governance, the project of transcending the economy and taking possession of history cannot itself be scientific in character,” as a rational critique would remain trapped in the ethos of capital itself. The Situationists and Debord proposed a truly revolutionary critique that had to work outside the rational system of capital to change daily life. The Society of the Spectacle explores the construction of situations, détournement, unitary urbanism, psychogeography, and the inclusion of play, autonomy, and critical thinking to live alternatively. Shepard Fairey’s street art will be examined as creating situations or practicing détournement on advertisements. Détournement refers to “the practice of symbolically altering a text or image so that its original meaning is radically subverted, or possibly even reversed.”

Debord’s Society of the Spectacle offers a critique of late capitalism as a society entranced with spectacle; social relations have been reduced to their abstract representation, or their image or spectacle. Debord states, “The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacle. All that was once directly lived has become mere representation.” Debord argues that people no longer define or find value within themselves through interaction, experience, and action, rather people arbitrarily assign a commercial and societal value to themselves through the consumption and display of material objects. Society has invested so much power in material objects that they have become the means through which self-confidence

28 Debord, Society of the Spectacle, 12.
and identity are established. Life is reduced to an accumulation of goods and appearance where the spectacle disguises the superficiality of life, thus promoting more consumption and the corrosion of the social.

Debord argued that capitalist society uses spectacular features like news, propaganda, advertising, and mass media to conceal the capitalist degradation of the lived life. In 1968 France, students at the Nantarre campus of the University of Paris recognized the accumulation of spectacle as a substitute for life experience and initiated an uprising that factory workers quickly joined. The protesters took up the Situationist gestures of détournement using pre-existing media in order to create a different aesthetic with a new meaning. Détournement also refused to work with the political economy of commercialization; the aim was to reinsert the symbolic and rid society of semiotic-capital-value. Rejecting exchange-value the student led protests called for the re-evaluation of art and cultural forms as everyday life through the creation of situations. These situations, also known as symbolic gestures included graffiti on the walls of Paris (a situation that would require one to re-evaluate their environment), a workshop creating silkscreened signs of protest (these posters rejected the commercialization of art embedded in the art market and placed authorship on the group as a whole entity), and speech on the street in order to spark a symbolic dialogue that was immediate but also a ‘spectacle,’ or a counter-culture gesture to challenge the simulation of capital-exchange-value traditionally associated with public speech.

Another tactic intended to challenge ones environment is the dérive, or a short walk where destination is determined by desires. Dérive relates to the Situationist’s study of psychogeography, which considers the effects one’s geographical environment has on one’s disposition. Psychogeography considers how the privatization and policing of public space effects individual’s interactions with one another and their urban environment. The aforementioned tactics consider how the urban territory is a contributing spectacle itself. Proposed situations of détourné and dérive rob the power of signs and sign value by subverting capitalist culture. Working outside the system’s terms through means independent of the power structure, students aimed to expose the power of the system to be a power only signified and not actually contained.
Shepard Fairey’s authorial intention is similar to the concept of détournement. Fairey’s Giant project symbolically altered the gesture of advertisements, which increasingly inundate the citizen’s visual field. Fairey created 1989 sticker, “Andre the Giant has a Posse,” mocking his skateboarding friends “who travel[led] in cliques called posses and unthinkingly decorate[d] their skateboards with corporate logos.”

The photocopied sticker centers a grainy photograph of Andre the Giant from the shoulders up flanked on the left by the hand-written text ‘Andre the Giant has a Posse’ and on the right by the former wrestler’s height and weight 7’4” 520LB. The sticker has no clear message or meaning but its widespread posting resembles the reach of an advertising campaign. Without any clear product Fairey hoped the sticker would encourage the viewer to question its purpose and in effect other forms of advertisement.

Fairey’s work has since expanded and continues to build upon this practice of exposing and subverting consumer culture’s methods of propaganda; however, the artist’s venture into a commercial clothing line, OBEY, as well as his commissioned commercial projects for his former guerilla marketing firm, Black Market, and his current design firm, Studio Number One, work in accord with the economic and political structures that permeate spectacle. Although the artist reasons, “the ultimate success of giant is commercial embrace because this demonstrates that the unaware consumer, as opposed to the hipster in on the joke, has been subversively indoctrinated,” the artist is still participating in the manipulative practices of advertising and consumption, an act that runs counter to the welfare of the postmodern fragile ecosystem and in accord with ‘the society of spectacle.’ He has made himself a capitalist by selling to a “rebellious” sector of consumers. He has been co-opted.

Fairey’s original ‘Andre the Giant has a Posse’ manipulated visual codes in a specific time and in a specific place that produced a critical result. While Giant was anti-advertising, today Fairey’s tactics and antics promote a product and a brand. Fairey claims his projects, Giant and OBEY, serve to critique the ubiquity of marketing and advertising campaigns,

encouraging the viewer to question advertisements and consumption. While Fairey satirizes propaganda and advertising he simultaneously participates in the system by adopting the same codes for his commercial work and apparel line OBEY. Aware of the public’s visual literacy, Fairey drives home his manifesto by using the look of authentic culture to garner authentic results; his work has semblance with an angry anarchist, yet he “believes capitalism is a way for hard work to yield reward.”\textsuperscript{31} The artist is attempting to challenge the system on its own terms, thereby adding to the spectacle. Many artists who began as critics of “the system,” such as Cindy Sherman, are now the art market’s major brands.

Fairey’s Soviet Constructivist inspired marketing campaign for Saks Fifth Avenue’s 2009-spring season debuted just after Obama’s inauguration. \textit{Adbusters} argued the campaign undercut the renewed political participation the Obama campaign ignited with its message of change.\textsuperscript{32} However the critique failed to realize that \textit{Hope} worked within the same systematical terms (that people have been conditioned to respond) to encourage social activism; \textit{Hope} functioned in the same manner as the Saks campaign. By designing a novel brand image for the Obama campaign, Fairey revealed the potential for civic action under the guise of consumption. Fairey’s image captured the attention of millions of global citizens in a way that no other campaign image has been able to do; its novel packaging transformed the election into another marketing campaign, and the visually literate public knew how to react. If \textit{Adbusters} is going to damn the Saks campaign for its mindless promotion of consumption then it can neither place \textit{Hope} on a pedestal nor “bask in the light of cultural transcendence,”\textsuperscript{33} because both campaigns utilized the same tactics of commerce. If anything, Fairey’s Saks campaign, debuting just days after the inauguration, serves as a tactical revelation showing people that \textit{Hope}’s strategies are one and the same with popular viral marketing campaigns.

Although Fairey’s manifesto claims to make a statement about societies tendency to follow suit, his work adds to what Debord referred to as the “false choice of spectacular


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
abundance.”34 Fairey’s work adds to the thick layers of spectacle that entertain with flashy graphics. Captivation makes critical examination impossible. Additionally, Fairey’s OBEY and Giant products cannot function in the same way as they did before Fairey’s rise to national acclaim; with his tactics and anonymity exposed his gestures become transparent and tedious. But most clearly opposed to Debord’s theories is the branding of Giant and OBEY as alterative lifestyles. Fairey positions Giant and Obey as products of ‘choice,’ based on their juxtaposition to competing lifestyle brands. Debord postulates by participating and using the codes of advertising, Fairey’s projects are just like the others. The false juxtaposition of products serves to mutually reinforce the overall spectacle, the overall profit, the overall control; Fairey’s critique is trapped in the ethos of capital.

JEAN BAUDRILLARD

Jean Baudrillard’s writings provide a theoretical underpinning that clarifies how the public’s media-saturated consciousness understands Hope as an embodiment of the man. In Simulacra and Simulation Baudrillard theorizes the postmodern world has shifted from a state of spectacle, as Debord termed it, to one of simulation, where reality is replaced by signs and symbols. As capitalism triumphed in the postmodern age, society has become more caught up in the play of images. Those in power manage demand and steer consumption through the manipulation of images. Society organized around the cultural modes of representation that simulate reality; the individual’s self worth and his or her relation to others is signified and determined through commodities displayed; thus giving more power to the sign than reality.

Contemporary capitalism and advertising practices proliferate the dissemination of sign and sign value through mass production and mass consumption. Civilization has made it its goal to satisfy every man’s desires; each man has his own identity, own needs, and own desires. Society produced needs through socialization and conditioning; in the postmodern society a ‘need’ is a desire to find meaning in one’s life and to stand for “something.” No longer do people outwardly serve a purpose through craft production. Satisfaction through hard work does not come when things are easily won in a society of plentitude; instead

34 Debord, Society of the Spectacle, 40.
satisfaction in the postmodern society comes from the perceived buying experience. Temporary feelings of power and worth accompany the satisfaction of getting what you want. Induced to buy into the system of objects that satisfies needs (organized around models and signs that are propagated through media images and the pressures of society); self image is built through associations with consumer goods: societal integration through consumption.

Individuality and self-purpose discovered through the reality of the lived experience plays second fiddle to the more appealing sign or image that gives immediate satisfaction. Technological advancements in communication and image enhancement allow media to provide experiences, information, and images more intense and more involving than anyone could encounter in the banal everyday. These hyperbolic and plentiful representations of a mediated world dominate perception and constitute the postmodern condition of the hyperreal. In the hyperreal state, the public prefers the simulated image and “the real is abolished.”35 Where reality disappears and the false sign value dominates, the differential systems of meaning implode; therefore everything is the same. As simulations proliferate they cross-reference. In this “circular set-up” images and information from one media are reflected from another, neither source mediates or gives meaning, instead information is distributed and absorbed.36 The neutral content enters a person’s consciousness where the individual references their memory bank of other simulated images to find meaning. Meaning, however, cannot be located in the hyperreal as everything is the same, a socialized, contrived sign of neutrality.

The media and the public exacerbate the implosion of meaning. Information is distributed on a 24/7 news cycle that continuously needs to be refreshed and updated. Viewers demand the diversion or escape from everyday life that the entertaining spectacle provides. Postmodern media meet society’s demands for consumer culture entertainment by turning everything into media spectacle and the public wants nothing more than spectacle, to divert or escape from the daily life. The image explosion and data overload is never mediated. There is no longer “a power mediating between one reality and another, between

35 Baudrillard, In the Shadow, 99.
36 Ibid.
one state of real and another—neither in content nor in form,” news is a flood of abundance. The same information repeats across media platforms, neutralizing content and dissolving any possibility for distinct positions in its flood. The proliferation of disconnected and unmediated information inundates and overwhms the viewer who becomes numb to it all, incapable or apathetic to producing meaning.

Consider the example of Barack Obama in the hyperreal context. Barack Obama became the most visible presidential candidate in the history of the United States; the Internet enabled the simulation of the man to spread at lightening speed. As a relatively unknown candidate Obama’s image was a blank slate open to popular projections. The flood of unmediated images, including *Hope*, allowed the visually literate public to conceive of a president tailored to their own hopes and fears. Which one is more preferable the image or the man? For most of his electorate it is the one which garnered him more votes, the image. One’s mind can discern there is a human Obama and there is a poster Obama, but continued interaction and exposure to the image results in the immediate association of the image with the counterpart’s life. Obama the man is imbued with the characteristics the image offers the man.

Art, once a sphere of potential difference and opposition is now absorbed into the economic and political arena. *Hope*’s aestheticization of Obama is novel and rises above the deluge of information and images encountered in the 2008 election. Baudrillard lament’s “art has no distinct existence,” when the ‘everyday’ (including campaign imagery) is falsely aestheticized. Badrillard would resent how *Hope* aestheticized a didactic form of political propaganda, rather than encouraging one toward a state of awareness.

Baudrillard states that art is supposed to subtly rouse its audience from a mental slumber. Fairey makes the claim that his art awakens people to the flood of advertisements, which manage consumption. However Fairey’s commercial art and clothing line, OBEY, participates in the capitalistic system that categorizes individuals, managing the look and needs. The repeating presence of *Hope* was less than subtle in 2008, it existed across multiple

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37 Ibid., 102.
media platforms captivating audiences. It succeeded in lulling people into the socializing concept of the electoral system and the prominence of the candidate. Fairey’s endorsement of the candidate imparts an internal enrichment that endorses the system and adds to the perceived authority of the vote.

The image legitimizes the democratic form of government and the electoral system which people are conditioned to believe makes the United States the most “free” state. If Fairey’s image were to awaken viewers from an unconscious robot-like trance it would raise questions about the propagation of images and issues and candidate’s avoidance of taking a stand. Instead the image’s appearance recalls conditioned concepts of America, freedom, and healthy counter-culture rebellion. Recognition of these signs conveys a feeling of purpose and belonging, the viewer is compelled to participate and vote. However Hope only simulates power and freedom by borrowing from a historical repertoire of patriotic and counter-culture visuals. Mirroring the memory bank of society, Hope, is given a patriotic and counter-culture meaning based on its visual similarity to former visuals stored in the collective consciousness.

Fairey’s acts of altering Obama into an icon legitimate the then senator, just as those of prominence and worth before him have had their picture aestheticized and broadcast. Transforming the candidate’s image created a symbol of authority. A public familiar with Fairey’s commercial line OBEY, found his iconic portrait of Obama to be a check on the system because the artist’s manifesto proclaims itself to be a challenge to the marketing dictates that encourage the public to ‘obey’ and consume. The style of Hope is similar to the style of the OBEY commercial products and therefore triggers similar associations and feelings of trust as a check on the capitalistic system.

The identity of artist confers particular authority to an individual. Baudrillard states that there is no longer a “sublime nature of art”, or a “profound belief in art” although those ideas are still associated with items labeled as art.39 To those faithful brand followers, Fairey is what Robert Cialdini defines as an individual with “superior access to information and power, and it makes great sense to comply with the wishes of properly constituted

\[39\] Ibid.
authorities.”

Fairey, as a counter-culture authority, imbues the relatively unknown and ‘outsider’ candidate Obama as a legitimate authority. Those who identify with the OBEY brand and the artist Shepard Fairey find it advantageous to heed his advice and investigate the candidate further. Society has accorded ‘value’ to loyalty when it is directed to ‘legitimate’ rule and therefore an individual who identifies with a candidate who appears legitimate has an added layer of self and social value. An individual who adorns their car or social network profile with the Hope image associates himself or herself with candidate Obama. This in turn increases the public prestige of that individual through association.

The American public found Hope, which legitimized Obama, to be a sufficient enough reason for endorsing the candidate. Fairey, identified as a legitimate check on authority, allowed citizens to stop thinking and start reacting to the captivating and immanent presence of the image. The poor economy, the unstable social conditions at Guantanamo, and the Iraq war served as constraining circumstances that pressured individuals to react. Without sufficient knowledge and discussion about the candidates in the media, individuals turned to image ‘shortcut’ that instructed them how to act in the situation.

**Johanna Drucker**

Baudrillard claimed there was no hope for a meaningful art nor a critical reading of its forms, but Johanna Drucker finds optimism in an associative reading of art that considers how visual images create meaning. In her essay, *Making Space: Image Events in an Extreme State*, Drucker reads images as events rather than entities to expose value production. This refamiliarizes viewers with the structures that embellish visual images with a false reality and meaning. The goal of this method is to create a space that makes viewers aware of the complex power structure so they may live alternatively. Drucker’s method of reading images regarding Hope expresses late capitalism’s culture, creating a more thorough understanding of the context by defining arts relationship to labor, social and cultural relations, as well as the creative skill of the artist.

Drucker describes the current condition of culture as a “full blown terror industry,” where all language, image, media, and discourse align with the message of the powerful,

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incapacitating the image’s ability to accurately represent the referent. Those managing the system of beliefs use the aforementioned cultural forms to conceal the deception and repression to such a degree that individuals voluntarily submit to authority that goes against their well-being. To combat the systematically produced illusion, Drucker tasks the reader of ideological value to identify how viewers are situated within networks that produce them as subjects. Diverging from Baudrillard, Drucker establishes what is in an image is not entirely simulacra, but is “connected to the lived experience of persons, peoples, organic beings, within cultural, political, and vulnerable ecological spheres.” This reinstates merit in interpretation as a worthwhile intermediary in the generative process, a more reasonable, less extreme stance.

Drucker terms this type of reading as refamiliarization showing what viewers know but have forgotten about the dynamic processes of cultural and symbolic production that establish value and meaning. In this reading images are to be conceived as events, rather than the received convention that imagines images as things that are in-themselves static, material, or self-evident. When conceived of as an event one recognizes the codependency between the system and the image and the viewer.

Consider the fashion portraits of Cecil Beaton as events. Beaton turned to portrait photography to gain access to aristocratic privilege, which was just beyond his reach. His fashion forward portraits of the elite flattered and pleased his sitters, winning him praise and admiration, as well as an entrée to society. The cultural forces and interests of the affluent and fashionable, coupled with Beaton’s desire to ascend the social ladder, drew upon systematized ideals of beauty, fashion, glamour, grace, and elegance which in turn defined the networks of power; the mutual co-dependence granted power to Beaton and his sitters. His photographs of the British royal family shaped their public image into one of splendid regality through the creation of idealized visual scenes and the use of props, demonstrative of their authority to reign.

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42 Ibid, 30.
Reconceptualizing these images as an orchestrated event offers a distanced perspective that reveals the connection between what is shown (a staging area where illusions are crafted) and the lived experience of people within the cultural sphere of accepted appearance and style. Such readings dismantle the perceived self-evident nature of the image, which attempts to blind the viewer with socialized ideology. Image grants power and the image is dependent on the royal family to give it meaning.

Cross the Atlantic to present day, *Hope* is shown to reinforce the mediated system from which it emerged. Studying Obama’s images through *Hope* and other redrawings or repaintings is a way to refamiliarize the viewer with the process through which his image is produced. Drucker encourages viewers to ask how the art form, *Hope*, is defined in its relation to social and cultural relations, market value relations, and the skill or creative act of appropriation by the artist.

*Hope* brings into focus connections between postmodern fine art and the image industries. The poster addresses issues of appropriation and fair use. Fairey used an Associated Press photograph, altered it, and repositioned it within an information system different from that of the original photograph. The instant graphic aestheticization of Obama is a novel take on campaign imagery and rises above the deluge of information from 2008. Fairey’s innovation reveals how numb or apathetic the public are to bland news images, while his involved transformation begs a second look and is interpreted through associations. Erasure of the contextualizing details make Obama look unique and stylistic choices associate the man with the counter-culture brand OBEY, an information system familiar to youth. Fairey lends Obama his own stylistic image -mindful opposition and healthy rebellion, as well as artistically and culturally engaged. This was an appealing personality to a nation whose principles Bush had compromised during the passage of the Patriotic Act, the assurance of Iraq’s nuclear armament, the detention of hundreds at Guantanamo Bay, and the repeal of environmental standards. Furthermore Fairey’s artistic interpretation also lends him the authority of an independent supporter of the disenfranchised citizen (an ideology of his OBEY line), revealing the codependency of the generative process.

Fairey’s act of appropriation reveals other systems of codependency when considering the resulting lawsuit. In February 2009, a public statement issued by the Associated Press accused Shepard Fairey of copyright infringement. Fairey responded by
suing the Associated Press, by seeking a court declaration that he had not violated the AP’s copyright. Fairey’s actions prompted a countersuit by the news cooperative that declared Fairey’s actions a threat to journalism by failing to credit and compensate the organization. As the lawsuit progressed, Fairey retracted his statement and confessed to fabricating evidence and destroying evidence of using the AP photo. Fairey stated that he had assumed he was using a cropped version of an AP photo and therefore had significantly altered the image in accordance with faire use; however Fairey had actually used an AP photo that was a zoomed in image of Obama. What resulted was a battle over property and free expression that was settled in civil court with all parties agreeing that neither surrendered its view of the law. Both parties settled to share future profits secured from Hope posters and merchandise; the AP provided no added compensation to the contracted photographer Mannie Garcia; proof of the AP’s desire for monetary compensation over fair compensation and attribution to it’s photographic journalists. Additionally the AP and Fairey will collaborate on a series of derivative images that Fairey will create based on AP photographs. Fairey’s legal woes continued in criminal court for his destruction and fabrication of evidence involved in the civil proceedings; the state secured two years of probation for Fairey, three-thousand hours of community service, and a $25,000 fine.

The alterations Fairey made to the news image significantly changed the image into a unique form, in keeping with the established understanding of fair use. The affirmative defense under the copyright act states that the work does not violate copyright if the work is used: “for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship or research.” The implications of the image and lawsuit reveal the contingent relations of systems, exposing the force of AP’s interests and power in controlling and profiting from their images. In a press release defending their lawsuit against Shepard Fairey, the AP president and CEO Tom Curley stated,

The journalism that Associated Press and other organizations produce is vital to democracy. To continue to provide it, news organizations must protect their

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intellectual property rights as vigorously as they have historically fought to protect the First Amendment.44

The AP, as a mediating system of production, publicizes the photograph as ‘journalism’ and the photograph served to reinforce the AP as a journalistic medium. It also reveals the mediating power the AP has over the news, the way the news is reused (for example, to inform other ‘reporters’ and bloggers who distill the information), and to what degree it can be interpreted. With the increase dominance of the Internet, newspapers have had to significantly cut their reporters and staff, resulting in an increased reliance on AP source material. Although the AP is not considered to have a ‘monopoly’ control over the news in America, the organization’s mounting dominance in daily periodicals and the strict legal control they exercise over content demonstrates the shrinkage of different voices.

Additionally made apparent is how market value is constructed; the potential value of Fairey’s poster is a set of conditions and processes that the settled lawsuit was to define. In September 2009, after the criminal case was decided, AP released a statement saying the case “serve[s] as a clear reminder to all of the importance of fair compensation for those who gather and produce original news content.”45 This statement establishes the news media’s authority to control information through the law. Fairey’s appropriation raises important questions about consent, public space, and fair use.

Revealing how Hope is defined in its relation to social and cultural relations further refamiliarizes the viewer with value production. During the 2008 election Fairey distributed 300,000 stickers and 500,000 posters, not to mention the countless Internet downloads and satirical spinoffs; Hope was known everywhere. Display or associations with the image imparted a civic-minded and politically involved consciousness on the part of Obama’s supporters. The image’s medium, street art, conveyed a postmodern aesthetic of cool rebellion and grassroots inclusiveness, while the broad message of ‘hope’ appealed to frustrated Americans. The ideology of those in authority (media, government leaders, artists)

framed the narrative of Obama, as a publically transcendent figure, in touch with the hopes of the people, and committed to progressive ideals, by using images to shape public response. Such a reading *refamiliarizes* the public with how the image played off of conditioned visual associations that produced and maintained societal roles of authority and subjugation.

Although working within the power structure, Fairey’s image event also has the potential to reveal the power of the people. Fairey utilized typical branding tactics to entice the public, the appearance of authentic cultural production, brand logo, and specialized designs for niche supporters. These packaging strategies got people to participate in democracy by ‘selling’ them an image, a candidate. Social activism under the guise of consumerism generated public reaction, but it also has the potential to ‘reveal the power of the people’ so that they might critically engage and create future action.

Drucker’s associative reading of *refamiliarization* resituates *Hope* as an event, offering space to recognize the media’s image control and profit that perpetuates scenes of knowledge. Reading *Hope* in this way provides the space to reflect and recognize how the power structures use images to produce and maintain power. Revealed are broadly connected networks that constructed candidate Obama, because the image was viewed as a *thing*, as the man, as an entity not to question.
CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORY OF THE POLITICAL IMAGE

Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. —Karl Marx

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852)

Stenciled in red, beige, and blue, Barack Obama has the distant, upward gaze of a visionary leader. The iconic image of the Democratic presidential candidate, Hope, originated as a mixed-media stenciled collage in acrylic, but Shepard Fairey widely circulated it as a glossy offset poster-capable of fast production at minimal cost. Working from a generic Associated Press photograph by Mannie Garcia, Fairey’s artistic liberties give Obama a broad appeal that comes pre-charged with meaning and associations. The multitude of borrowed stylistic elements interact and play with preconceived image standards of political campaigns and street art, resulting in a cultural production that fuses brand culture and political activism.

Imagery of the present is often best understood when viewed through the perspective of the past. This chapter explores the historical transformation of revolutionary imagery to multimedia image. Examples from the eighteenth through the early twentieth century art movements provide a more complete catalog of visual communication styles in relation to historical, social, and cultural contexts. Shepard Fairey’s iconic image of political candidate Barack Obama borrows formal techniques, styles, design, color choices, and compositional layouts from prior eras of art and the tradition of political broadsides. Among the references appropriated are: an image reminiscent of printing press production; free distribution techniques, like that of handbills; the urban street as a canvas; and conceptual gestures, like those of Barbara Kruger and other ‘culture jammers.’ Contextualizing Fairey’s work both art historically and within a visual history of political imagery offers a thorough exegesis of the various elements that comprise Fairey’s stylistic response to contemporary events and bears
witness to the role of visual culture in political discourse. *Hope* is studied and situated within the lineage of art history.

*Hope* appeared in the 2008 primary election as a reference of the social realism and utilitarian art movement, originally championed by the proponents of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The stylistic imagery of former ideologies and political philosophies served the style of *Hope* if not the message. The political sphere has often emulated advertising practices and bolstered support for war efforts, revolutions, and government entities. This survey discusses the works of Dada, Cubism, Situationists International, Atelier Populaire, and the protests against the American invasion, occupation, and destruction of Indochina in the sixties and seventies. Emory Douglas, the Black Panther party’s Minister of Culture’s influence is examined as is Jim Fitzpatrick’s rendering of Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara. A review is presented of U.S. Presidential-candidate imagery created by artists outside the realm of the traditional campaign. A relation to Barbara Kruger’s tactics is recognized in Fairey’s insertion of art into the social realm as a method of protest and public education. The chapter concludes with a review of Fairey’s OBEY campaign and a formal analysis of *Hope*’s stylistic and contextual references.

**CUBISM**

Fairey created a mixed media collaged version of *Hope*, titling it *Barack Obama* (2008). Collage is a style and method of art making initiated by Cubist artists between 1908 to 1914. The Cubists invention of *papier colle* (pasted paper) opened up new possibilities of altering the pictorial surface through the unconventional addition of nonpainterly materials. Avant-garde artists, such as Picasso and Braque, working at the end of the nineteenth century, developed a system for depicting space and volume known as analytic cubism. Cubists analyzed objects, breaking images down and creating the effect of a scene observed from various positions. Formal compositional elements, such as the overlapping, tilting, and shifting of forms at the surface of the image, gave the illusion of limited depth and apparent volume; cubists suppressed color to focus on pictorial space. The simultaneity of these works succeeded in depicting several views of the same object. For example, one section of a fruit bowl is seen from below, another in profile and another from the opposite side. These pictorial innovations reflected contemporaneous theories of time and space propounded by
mathematician Henri Poincaré, philosophers Henri Bergson, Friedrich Nietzsche, and ‘stream of consciousness’ proponent William James.\textsuperscript{46} The new imagery brought new insights to the increasing speed, disjunction, and chaos of urban life.

Rejecting determinism, materialism, and positivism’s assertion that events are determined by prior states and that the only authentic knowledge is based on positively verified sense experience, the cubists altered representation. Cubists used the concept of simultaneity, eliminated perspective, and transformed pictorial space in response to one’s own subjectivity. Art historians Patricia Leighten and Mark Antliff connect the formal elements of cubism to be profound responses to aesthetic, philosophical, and societal changes in the early twentieth century and describe simultaneity as a pictorial device representative of the antirational concept of time developed by Henri Bergson.\textsuperscript{47} Bergson advocated that individual reality is composed of memories, these past experiences presently exist within the consciousness, and as such reality is formed from each individual’s experience and intuition of the world rather than an objective analysis.\textsuperscript{48} The Cubist exploration of simultaneity also aligns with Poincare’s notion that all geometric models are conventions, not absolutes, thus the Cubists rejected the art tradition of representing a Euclidean single moment in time and a single point in space.\textsuperscript{49} Following a Nietschezen expression of individual will, Cubists declared their freedom to transform pictorial space in response to their own subjectivity and that of their audience. The deformation of time and objects in terms of size, shape, and scale deconstructs materialism’s assertion that reality is strictly composed of substantive matter and energy. The subjectivity of the cubist works open up reality to a plurality of meanings and interpretations based on memory, imagination, and sensory experience.

Fairey’s use of multiple stylistic and formal elements has the capacity to organize a variety of affective and rational responses on the part of the audience, similar to the cubists attempt to promote multiple meanings within a single work. While the cubists employed

\textsuperscript{46} Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten, \textit{Cubism and Culture} (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 71.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 71-72.


\textsuperscript{49} Antliff and Leighton, \textit{Cubism and Culture}, 71.
simultaneity, Fairey’s image combines former artistic and commercial styles; the compositional features, circulation across time, space and medium, and “varied appropriations by diverse actors, all within a rich intertext of images, speeches, commentary, and other texts”\(^{50}\) results in varied interpretations of *Hope*. The Cubists pieced collages together from news articles and flyers. The items they repurposed gave further insight and voice to the evolving fast-paced life. Fairey’s collage, assembled from newsprint and brand logos from his for-profit commercial line OBEY, resembles a twenty-first century corporate endorsement or sponsorship of the candidate.

Picasso and other cubists rejected tradition, and institutions of power by incorporating symbolic forms of anarchism: real world materials, fragmented images, muted colors, which allowed artists to make esthetic and political comments. The materials of the collage rejected the tradition of oil-on-canvas and critiqued the craft tradition and the sanctity of the artist’s hand. Fairey’s stylistic rendition functions in a similar fashion; the artist’s style relies on the concept of challenging mass media and its technologies by using the look of alternative initiatives. Fairey’s look of “do-it-yourself” (DIY), such as outmoded hand silkscreens, appealed to those seeking out something unique and special in a society where so much is mass-produced or digitally printed. The look of low tech caught the eye of the American youth, associating it with independent or alternative lifestyles, counter to the high tech precision of big business and corporations.

The cubists’ formal breaks with traditional art were an attack on society’s traditions and norms; Fairey’s references are nostalgic and therefore serve a different purpose. *Guitar, Sheet Music, and Wine Glass* (1912) is Picasso’s anarchist reaction to the Balkan War. In Figure 3, the guitar, the sheet music, wine, and the newspaper are elements connected with the meeting place of anarchist and pacifist ideas; bohemians would find the visuals familiar and feel a connection to the work. In the bottom left corner of the image is the newspaper clipping from *Le Journal*’s November 18, 1912 edition. The headline reads “La Bataille S’Est Engagé” (the battle is engaged), literally referring to the outbreak of war in the Balkans, as well as a nod to his gesture of subverting high art by including a mass produced

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newspaper. This symbolic meaning positions the newspaper clipping as a descriptive wall text- the avant-garde artist has initiated a battle with high art. A guitar appears to hang on a wallpapered wall, which subverts the traditional exhibition of fine art. Fairey’s use of fragmented corporate OBEY logos is a nod to a style, abandoning Picasso’s intention for collage; nevertheless the present day visually literate viewer found a nostalgic connection and interest. Fairey does, however, defy the traditional expectations for the display of art and encounters in public space.

A tendency toward simplification of presentation and an emphasis on form at the expense of coloring, typifies the work of cubists such as Picasso. While analytic cubists were

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submerged in the analysis of basic and powerful volumetric forms, the Orphic cubists were concerned with beautiful objects, patterned arrangements, and problems of contour and light reflections. Art historian David Craven remarked that Fairey’s use of broad color planes resembles those of Cubist painter Robert Delaunay.52 While analytic cubists such as Picasso suppressed the emotional aspect of color, Delaunay’s method of capturing light on canvas explored the dynamic interaction of color harmonies. Orphic cubists dispensed abstracted subject matter and sensuous color, while maintaining recognizable aspects of form, to communicate meaning and convey sensation.

Craven states that Fairey’s use of flat colors creates a level plane that “heightens the focus and sharpens the tone, in contrast to the vague ground of the bland news photo” that Fairey referenced.53 The work of the cubists created new dimensionalities that were not taken from visual reality, but created in accordance with the proportions and colors the artist thought best conveyed the message. Fairey’s use of flat color operates similarly to orphic cubism’s ability to create new forms and colors resulted in an innovative distortion of reality. Bold use of color abstracted Obama to convey an energy and diversity of the candidate that voided any racial indicators of skin tone. Guillaume Appollinaire, a contemporary of Cubist painters and the man who christened the term “orphic cubism”, defined it as a painting style that created “new structures out of elements which have not been borrowed from the visual sphere, but have been created entirely by the artist himself, and been endowed by him with fullness of reality.”54 This statement demonstrates the artist’s ability to mold and morph the image into a constructed meaning or reality where aesthetic pleasure and a structured resemblance to reality is the subject. The constructed reality and the aesthetic pleasure tangle into a perceived reality in the viewer’s minds eye.

53 Ibid., 645.
**CUBIST CONCLUSION**

By invoking stylistic similarities to cubism, collage, and assemblage, *Hope* operates in visual associations of modernist’s breaking down of barriers between art and life. Additionally operating within the generally more problematic relations between modernism, popular, commercial, and political culture. The stylistic developments of Cubists were integrally connected to contemporaneous events, theories, and cultures that profoundly altered French society and inaugurated the 20th century. *Hope* inclines the viewer to think it works in a gesture similar to Cubist’s advancement of the theories of relative knowledge, allowing the viewer’s experiences, memory and imagination to construct an idea of the figure and meaning of the image. But *Hope*’s contextual significance is drawn from its influences and orchestrated meanings. As a global interconnected society, people are exposed to similar visuals; their associative reading of the symbolic element is drawn from our socialized networks and scenes of knowledge. Through socialization and pop culture parodies, the public becomes familiar with the meaning and message of such stylistic homage. The reference to Cubist tendencies is a hollow borrowing, using the style without the same forceful convictions the original practitioners intended. (This is not to say Fairey lacked political convictions but that he failed to encourage the public to take an analytical and critical look at the political campaign and its candidates.) The symbolic visual’s meaning comes pre-packaged and pre-determined. Fairey’s reference to cheap modes of mass production, his innovative color selections, the erasure of race, and the eradication of political polarization displayed on Obama’s face trigger a shortcut reaction that Americans found appealing.

While cubist’s rejection of the traditional medium of oil-on canvas critiques the sanctity of the artist’s hand, Fairey’s work capitalizes on this idea of the artist. Making Obama into an icon by removing detailing features is a gesture that instantly makes the man more appealing to the public. ‘Iconizing’ (making into an icon) someone is recognized by the public as a stamp of approval, the icon is instantly considered to be someone of merit and worth because an artist has chosen to render them in such a fashion. *Hope* was especially viewed as a ‘stamp of approval’ with the youth, who identified with the counter-culture message of Fairey’s trademark ‘Andre the Giant’ motif.
The faux collage built off the socialized understanding of the form- an image built from contemporary real world elements. The Obama image (and therefore the man) appeared to be a product of news stories that no doubt pointed a shameful finger at President Bush and a positive projected ideal of intellectual media exchange discussing Obama’s campaign promises, such as expanded health care and educational funding. The poster image and message became emblematic of a surge of disenfranchised ideals and beliefs owing to frustrations with the Bush administration. Obama’s image instantly became associated with the ‘hope’ for ‘change’ Americans wanted in 2008.

**DADA**

Dada was an artistic response to the atrocities of World War One. Zurich became the unofficial capital of the Dada movement after 1915 as those escaping war sought refuge in the war neutral Switzerland. Many intellectuals escaping war assembled at the Cabaret Voltaire for dialogue, poetry readings and art exhibits. Those involved in the Cabaret Voltaire attacked traditions and preconceptions in Western art, literature, and language. European languages discredited by European thought as the language of propaganda encouraged support and enlistment in the war. It was determined that the thought process produced by language needed to be repudiated and revolutionized. The reason and tradition that ruled Europe for centuries had shown itself to be bankrupt as it produced the carnage of the war. The proponents of Dada found civilization to be unworthy, the rational needed to be supplanted by the irrational (such as nonsense syllables), stereotypes needed to be broken, categories needed to be eradicated, and conventional ways of thinking needed to be altered: a return to tabula rasa was proposed.

Poems read at the Cabaret showed the arbitrariness of language by demonstrating poetry and music to be sound, any sense found in the art form is conditioned through patterns and signs. Listening to Dadaist Hugo Ball’s poem “Karawane” one is convinced that it makes sense, but it does not since it’s nothing more than sound. The poem, however, shows rhetoric can be convincing as it can convince a world to enter into war. When preforming at the Cabaret Ball wore a silver costume that was soon thereafter thrown away, the ephemeral object or event offered an attack on the Western tradition of art, which was sold, purchased, and archived in hallowed museum collections.
At the beginning of the twentieth century, newspapers were the gatekeepers of information and were the primary means of shaping popular culture. The advent of photography and offset lithography allowed readers to see news and leaders first hand, rather then through the editorial eye of a drawing. At this time in Germany publications devoted exclusively to photography began to appear which told stories through photographs and caption. Articles accompanied by a single photograph gave people a sense of first hand knowledge. The photograph’s seeming exactness in duplicating life allowed others to feel as though they had attended. Many artists referenced the image and text found in printed press, cutting up and rearranging in order to subvert and challenge the language of the gatekeepers. Dada artists who created collage works proposed a subversive concept to alter the intended purpose and message of the press by using the newsprint imagery and text against itself.

While Dada artists used foundational images to subvert a constructed truth projected by those in power, Fairey takes the accuracy of a photograph and turns it back into editorial drawing. This graphic transformative process is what John Armitage and Joy Garnett call “an instant and involved conversion of a foundational image into a novel entity.”[^55] Fairey’s image considered in this context operates similar to the way photographs did for Dada artists. In today’s image saturated world, the public has become numb to the multitude of images, even when they bare witness to atrocities; however, the sparse novelty of the news photograph in the 1920s made the image stand out as reality and truth.

Images inundate society, running together and aborting what is viewed. Society has become accustomed to shocking and sensational images that they are now inured to images placed before their eyes. Dada demonstrated how appropriation could be used as a powerful strategy for intervening in the mediated representation of reality found in the newspapers and magazines in the 1910s and 1920s. Tristan Tzara and Kurt Schwitters cut out words of newspaper articles and rearranged them, rendering war propaganda nonsensical. John Heartfield created photomontages that decontextualized the media photos of Nazi Germany in order to reveal the horrors of fascist atrocities. Berlin Dada practitioner Hannah Hoch

juxtaposed the mass media’s construction of the ‘new woman’ in an effort to expose media’s attempt to commodify and belittle women.

Artists referenced the popular texts and imagery of their day as a commentary intended to break traditions and change the world. Dada’s intended goal was a state of mind that would dislodge one from the populace’s comfort zone and challenge taboos. The use of images from their surrounding environment was iconoclastic, or worked against the icon; breaking the original intended meaning of the image or text. Dada artists took essential steps towards conceptual art, like Marcel Duchamp who sought to put art back in the service of the mind, removing the object as the focal point.

Shepard Fairey’s on-going OBEY project experiments in a similar vane where the ideas and discourse provoked by the object are stressed and the object is viewed more as a catalyst. Fairey terms his work as an “experiment in phenomenology” or “the process of letting things manifest themselves,” described by German theorist Martin Heidegger.56 Responding to the control of public space by advertisers and government, Fairey’s urban art work short circuits expectations of these environments and encourages the public to pause and consider the effect of controlling public space. The poster and sticker imagery of Fairey suggests ‘obeying’ images forced into our daily environment to be an uncomfortable convention. Challenging expectations of art and the environment people are encouraged to discuss and question mediated reality. OBEY and Hope reference Dada tactics and advertisements insertion into the public space as a means to cultivate chance, the chance encounter with an illegal OBEY or Giant emblem enables the viewer to draw their own conclusions and understandings.

THE AGITPROP IMAGERY OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

In the wake of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia the victorious Bolsheviks (Communist Party) ruled that art must serve the state. Greatly influenced by the pure form of Suprematists, the practitioners of Constructivism used pure geometric forms to rid the mind of contingencies and to solve the pressing problems of society. In 1919 El Lissitzky created the graphic lithograph Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge (see Figure 4) in support of the

Revolution. Lissitzky’s propaganda poster makes use of Suprematism’s design—luminously colored squares, rectangles, circles, and triangles are placed over a divided background of black and red—in service of Revolution by giving political symbolism to the shapes. The small text in the upper left corner reads “Klinom Krasim”, translated as ‘with the red wedge’, symbolic of the Red Army of the Revolution. The small text in the lower right corner reads “Bey Belych”, (‘beat the whites’), symbolizing the counter-revolutionaries. The large red ‘wedge’ or triangle, which symbolizes the Bolshevik Revolutionaries, is angled so the sharp point penetrates the heart of the anti-revolutionary Whites. Represented by the white circle two arched rectangles act as gates and are composed of thin patterned lines yielding to the approaching Reds. A smaller red ‘wedge’ and other red fragmented shapes appear to chase
after smaller white fragments referencing the Red Army’s ability to splinter off and chase after the counter-revolutionaries.

Constructivists rid their art of figuration and founded a new artistic vocabulary celebrating technology in the service of the Russian people and the betterment of their circumstances through the production of useful objects and products. Abstract design was adopted to convey political and social messages through easily recognizable visual symbols. Graphic art, architecture, and design were fields in which the Constructivist principle found broad application.

Between 1917 and 1923 graphic artists created over three thousand posters to spread the message of the Soviet Union’s new political and social ideology to the masses.\(^5^7\) Formal geometries, san-serif typography and colors symbolic of the state (red, black, and white) described emblems of the new regime. The geometrical shapes resembled the mechanical aspects of modern industry. The uniform look of mass produced print advertising complimented the technological advances and the perfected uniformity of factory production. Alexander Rodchenko’s colorful advertisements for the state airline Dobrolet showcase the country’s transportation advancements with precise lines and angles forming simple but recognizable propellers and wings.

Text and imagery worked in harmony in order to captivate the illiterate; seventy-five percent of Russia’s citizens were unschooled in the period after the Revolution.\(^5^8\) Engaging, even humorous text, paired with concise visual elements like san serif fonts, arrows, emitting rays, exclamation points, and question marks directed attention and held it long enough for viewers to absorb the meaning of the message. Graphics succeeded in simultaneously selling the product and making the citizen an integral part of the state. Bolstering the support of the state was not only important from an economic standpoint, but also politically as the Communist rise to power was still in the advent.

Artists sought new ways to educate and influence the consumer and citizen in an effort to build a society in which the individual was to be subsumed for the collective good.

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\(^5^8\) Ibid., 45.
Rodchenko advocated propagandizing state institutions to build up the proletariat who had suffered under the three-hundred year tyranny of the Romanov regime. Working with writer Volodia Mayakovsky, trademarked as “Mayakovsky-Rodchenk Advertising Constructor,” the two combined graphic imagery and catchy rhymes to promote the improved working conditions and technical developments as well as a cultured existence. While creating an ad for pacifiers Mayakovsky wrote of propaganda as a means to reeducate and improve lives:

I wrote a poem about a dummy, ‘Ready to suck till old age comes.’ This text roused indignation, but let me tell you, as long as dirty rags are stuffed into the mouths of children in the country, propaganda to spread the use of dummies is also propaganda in the interest of a healthy generation and for civilization.59

Beginning in the 1500s babies in Europe and Russia sucked on rags called “sugar tits” or “sugar rags” filled with meats or breads.60 However, at the end of the civil war, in 1921, the majority of Russian people did not have meats or breads to fill their baby’s rags. The economy had collapsed, factory production had fallen eighty percent as compared to prewar levels, and thousands died of famine.61 Mayakovsky addressed the lingering struggles of people still heavily reliant on pre-Revolutionary mindset by creating a new, ideologically conscious Soviet citizen. The government and Constructivist artists were dedicated to political and social education through the new technologies of mass communication (radio, film, posters, photography) and mass production (rubber refinement produced healthier pacifiers).

The poster (see Figure 5), created for the state-run brand, Rubbertrust, advertised the ‘dummy’, or pacifier. It was developed using a stock caricature figure of a baby assembled from geometrically proportional shapes- circle, rectangle and square- bright colors, and bold text. The advertisement features a seated geometrically proportional baby that has a mouth full of pacifiers. The baby is bald and its head is disproportionately larger than the rest of the body. Within the circular head are three white circles composing the eyes and nose. The

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60 Sumi Makkar, Ruby Natale Andrew, and Liza Draper, *Pacifiers Anonymous: How to kick the Pacifier or Thumb Sucking Habit* (Minneapolis: Mill City press, 2010), 26.

figure has heterochromia, the perfectly circular irises are different colors, one green and one red. The iris colors are opposite the facial colors, making the eyes appear to move and energetically look around. Within the small nose is the hammer and sickle emblem, connecting the Soviet state to the consumer good. The mouth is the largest of the facial features; it holds within its contrasting green and red lips an assortment of pacifiers, old and new. Explicitly contrasting the state offerings with older offerings allows the customer to reflect on a less developed time and find comfort in the new environment that provides healthy choices and security. The neck, torso, and arms of the figure are rendered as a thick,
black cross, outlined in white. The cross resembles a turtleneck and in its geometric shapes references the Constructivist clothing design that emphasized utility by incorporating large pockets or thick wool for warmth. The hands are white and rendered as five sharp, pointed fingers, set off from the horizontally extended arms. Two legs are angled down and toward their respective right and left orientations; they jut out from behind the lower portion of the black torso.

The figure is set upon a symmetrically divided background of flat green and red. The figure’s face, legs, eyes and mouth are symmetrically divided along this line of color; the left portion of the face and leg are red and positioned over the green background, while the right portion of the face and leg are green, situated over the red background. This diametrically opposed color scheme of green and red creates maximum contrast and maximum stability delivering visual interest and a sense of order. Further enhancing the image and figure is the white color that outlines the figure, making him pop off the flat background. This overlay of colors conveys a dramatic dynamism that energizes the texture. The rhyming text enhanced the image’s energy.

The advertisement addressed a collective, proletarian audience in its bold graphic idiom, where message and design reinforce each other. The rhyming text by Mayakovsky is translated as, “Better teats or dummies Never were nor are. Ready to suck till old age comes. On sale everywhere. Rubbertrust.” Pacifiers are not the only things being sold in this image; the regime itself is propagated as a supplier of great innovation and manufacture. Rubbertrust, as a state-run brand, positions it’s pacifiers- and in association the state itself- as providing products that better customer’s lives. The text reminded the customer of a difficult past and foresees an advancing future of promise through the state’s investment in technology. It is presumed that the continued reliance (until “old age”) that a Rubbertrust pacifier (traditionally a comfort for a crying infant) could provide a child is better than that of a mother’s “teat”, thereby positioning the state as a mother figure.

The State intended to assume the role of parents, many of whom had been killed during the Revolution or who were convicted enemies of the people, leaving a large number

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62 Ibid., 102.
of children orphaned. Furthermore, influential posters such as this one set to re-educate the population in a manner that would be better than actual parents, who could ‘manipulate’ their children in the ways of the world prior to the Revolution. The advertisement’s dual marketing of product and ideology implies ‘Mother Russia’ will provide enough nourishment, education, and advancement for all her comrades from birth to old age; a communal life where the family would die out and the state would intercede was planned.

This idea of communal family or living is not just exhibited in this poster, Soviet planners intended families to transition into more communal lifestyles beginning at the basic level of the home. The Narkomfin Communal House was originally conceived to have a communal block, where adults would lodge in a small sleeping area that had a shower and small study area, while their children lodged in a separate children’s block, although never constructed, these plans intended to restrict familial interaction to mealtimes in the communal dining hall. Ideas of a communal lifestyle were intended to promote efficiency and loyalty to the State. Notions of a united and productive people were ideologies Constructivist artists aspired to proliferate and promote.

Although calculated- advertisements were designed to promote the Communist ideology and state products through a combination of visually bright text and images, the Constructivist legacy endures well after the collapse of the regime. Successive generations of artists have referenced the instructive imagery; ironically enough the Soviet’s Cold War rival found the style useful to educate rural Americans during the Depression. There is a noticeable similarity to the instructive posters of the Work Projects Administration imagery of Lester Beal and, of particular relevance to this study, the work of Shepard Fairey.

The color division of the ‘dummies’ ad is also used in the Hope poster, where the background and Obama’s abstracted face, has a multi-toned complexion, set off from the flat background with outlines and hatching. Additionally the bold, san serif font directly connects the text with Obama’s visage, a visual- literary connection Constructivist artists worked to

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create. Fairey’s reference to Constructivisms simple and bold imagery creates a definitive connection between the ‘hopes’ of Americans as fulfilled by a vote for Obama. Fairey’s liberal borrowing of Constructivist graphics works to construct an intriguing image, necessary to sell a president. The saturation of Hope’s message was hard to miss during the 2008 election; the bold and iconic image functioned to legitimize the relatively unknown contender to the voting public, a function similar to the vetting process political parties require potential contenders to undergo. The ubiquitous image endorses the candidate and the electoral system by fetishizing the commodity of candidate Obama. Although the new Soviet Union strove to circumvent the fetishizing of the commodity, something Fairey has clearly done with Obama, the Constructivist’s work certainly fetishized the state.

Constructivists intended their work to serve a social purpose, rejecting the notion of ‘art for arts sake’. Fairey picks up those same ideas in the service of democracy to encourage voter turnout. Soviets constructed advertising and imagery with a utilitarian purpose: the image served a dual role to sell goods and promote the image of the State. The Soviet imagery and Fairey’s image both function to instill faith in the state; the commercial and political reinforce one another. Although Fairey is not explicitly selling something to American voters, the vetting of a political contender by a prominent member of urban subculture appears to be an ‘outsider’ check on the system which encourages trust in politicians and donor contributions.

**PROTEST**

The sixties are more than merely the homeland of hip, they are a commercial template for our times, a historical prototype for the construction of cultural machines that transform alienation and despair into consent.

—Thomas Frank

*The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*

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65 Fetishized as defined by Jean Baudrillard. Fetishization of objects involves an over-determination of the object’s social value through a discursive (visual or written) negotiation of the capabilities of objects that stimulate fantasy and desire for the object.

66 Fetishization in this context is meant the largess of social value that inflates the meaning and desire of the object or commodity. The Soviet government strove to avoid this in their implementation of a communist government.
A heroic alternative counter-culture emerged in the 1960s as a critique of post-World War II life. The war politically transformed the world: in the 1950s Italy built a shaky democracy. The U.S.S.R. and the United States divided Germany and Italy, the Soviet Union erected Communist regimes, while Americans attempted to counter this influence by increasing individual access to personal property and capital. During the sixties political and cultural activists and theorists, members of the youth subculture began to question capitalism’s professed promises of individuality and free choice. Many found capitalism and American politics to be imperialistic, controlling society through the constructed social value of commodities and capital.

**Student Protests in Paris, France; May 1968**

Student Protests erupted in France in May of 1968 to challenge the universities role in a technocratic society; the students strove to deny the assumed identity roles society thrust upon them. Students at the University of Nanterre, France formed strikes and walkouts throughout the campus to express frustration and anger over the misuse of university funds and outmoded dormitory rules, separating males and females. The university was shut down in response to the student protests, thus igniting student demonstrations at the Paris Sorbonne University. Students at the Sorbonne stood in solidarity to protest the closure of Nanterre and the expulsion of several of its students. The Sorbonne administrators called in the police, classes were suspended, and students took to the streets proclaiming the territory as their own. In the ensuing days factory workers and union leaders joined the students in the liberation of society from perceived totalitarian authority that stratified and imposed identities. Within ten days students and workers had disrupted the activity of the country by occupying factories, the streets, and universities.

Protesters were sympathetic to the Situationist International viewpoint of creating theoretical and active situations in order to reflect upon the social climates of the urban society and environment. The Situationists developed a Marxist critique on aesthetics and politics that addressed the accumulation of commodities in advanced capitalist societies. The group’s leading proponent, Guy Debord warned of the spectacle nature of late capitalist society. Clothing, film, music, and other forms were no longer a dynamic venture of independent expression; rather capitalism recognized the profitability of cultural forms and
exploited them. To combat the overly visual and alienating aspects of society, the Situationist’s promoted the creation of urban situations to alter expectations and change society. For such a change to take place Debord wrote that it couldn’t be done through the same system of the dominant order. He called for critical symbol, capable of communicating to all in order to break the power structure that elevated spectacles and tradition.

The students and factory workers responded and unified their efforts to create ‘situations’ through the creation of graffiti text and political posters furthering their cause. Striking faculty members, students and factory workers occupied the Ecole des Beaux Arts to form the workshop Atelier Populaire (The People’s Studio), in the art school’s lithography department. The lithograph and silkscreen posters were designed with a simple aesthetic and a motif that responded quickly to the issues, and challenged the power hierarchy. Themes of the posters addressed the grievances of factory workers, critiques of the mass media and government intervention, and university student issues. Posters were selected by a general assembly based on fulfillment of two conditions: “Is it politically correct?” and “Does it convey its ideas well?” however posters created by factory workers were immediately sent to print. Anonymity of the artist was essential; posters were stamped with ‘Atelier Populaire’ to assert the unity and equality of students and workers. It further functioned to deny the bourgeois notion of the artist as an independent and creative genius and reveal how supply and demand established value and fostered competition. The freely distributed posters operated outside the mediated confines of the media and marketplace, signaling the movement’s antagonism toward the commodity.

The studio itself was an important aspect to the cause as it allowed everyone to participate, riding any hierarchical division. Addressing these issues through the populist art medium challenged conventions in a medium extending back to the French Revolution when printed political images were used to appeal to the sans-culottes. Art directed to the masses challenged the tradition of ‘high art’ and opened a dialogue with all, blurring constructed identities to oblivion. These art posters demonstrated that culture was not separate from

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politics, but rather art and culture are frequently coopted and used to reaffirm the power structure.

Posters created in the studio used Situationist tactics of *detourné*, “the rearranging of popular sign-systems in order to produce new meaning,” and *derive*, “a short meandering walk determined by one’s desires” allowing an individual to become open to experiences and feelings encountered in the everyday. Students used the tactics of *detourné* to turn President Charles de Gaulle’s chastising *chienlit* (chaos, like that encountered at a masquerade or carnival) comment against him. Responding to the student protests de Gaulle used the term as a pun stating, “*La réforme oui, la chei-en-lit non,*” (Reform yes, shit in bed no). The term originated in the 16th century novel, *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel* by Francis Rabelais and referred to the medieval carnival that allowed peasants to disregard conventions- ‘to shit in bed’. The students created a silhouetted caricature of de Gaulle (see Figure 6), featuring the general in his military *kepi* (the military cap worn by de Gaulle) with his arms raised, as if frantically halting traffic, below him the text reads “*La Chienlit c’est lui!*” (the chaos is here!). Michael Seidman states that this poster functioned to mock de Gaulle’s “out of touch and totally unhip” remarks during a May 1968 speech; the poster in effect uses the expressions of the capitalist system to create new, ulterior meaning.

The Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (CRS) or the French riot control security are portrayed in a poster that eliminates all but the defining features of the officer’s uniform. Distinguished by his helmet, his goggles hollow out his eyes resembling a skeleton, his raised baton is ready to strike, omnipotent from any retaliation as he cowers behind his recognizable round body shield, newly emblazoned with the Nazi ‘SS’. The Atelier subverts the image of the CRS by aestheticizing the officer as the walking dead and associating him with the unthinking atrocities the SS inflicted upon the Jews. Furthermore the image recalls Otto Dix’s lithograph, Stormtroopers Advancing Under Gas, from his 1924 series, War, which

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69 Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, 139.

70 Ibid.
warns about the horrors of war. The Atelier’s poster solicited the sympathy of the viewing public and warns that the government’s forces were using violence against its own people.

Students created posters to reinsert their own language and meaning of society and everyday life by effacing societal identities and uniting to end social structures. Posters were installed on blank walls or over advertising space under the cover of night so that “Parisians
would wake up the next morning and see the issues at hand.”\textsuperscript{71} Posters and graffiti on traditionally blank wall space were intended to capture the imagination and instill awareness.

A poster featuring two men, one dressed as a student, the other as a factory worker reads “\textit{Le meme probleme. La meme lute.}” (The same problem. The same struggle). This poster brackets down the societal separation imposed by dominant systems of government. This image like many others produced in the factory attacks the capitalist degradation of life, of people, and of images circulated in the media. Unlikely placement on a blank urban wall gave force to the irony and caricatures employed by the posters. Furthermore, the communal production of the poster in the factory explored unitary urbanism of the street and society by critiquing the status quo of a prescribed role and the experiences of everyday life through unique and spontaneous encounters and novel approaches to work.

The Situationist International and the actions of the Atelier Populaire in May of 1968 had a profound impact on the visual as well as conceptual gestures of \textit{Hope}. The Situationist’s creation of new maps and the protester’s occupation of traditional ‘off-limits’ facilities and the celebration of graffiti and poster-art were intended to make use of the urban landscape in order to stimulate social change. The Situationists celebrated the communal exchange of property and destruction and negation of social divisions. Fairey’s \textit{Giant} imagery appears to advertise, but does not have a product, as such it forces people to question their surrounding and the thousands of commercial images that bombard their daily lives. Originally, OBEY successfully operated in this cultural zone of questioning because the anonymity of the artist and the unexposed guerilla methods could successfully challenge traditional expectations of an environment. Posters created by the Atelier Populaire resituated public space traditionally used for advertising; instead of selling something, \textit{les affiches} amplified a voice of leading defiance that promoted a cause and not a commodity. As OBEY became a commercial entity, internationally sold to youth and ‘subculture’ markets, it’s methods were exposed and it lost its ability to critically engage the audience to question public space. As it sells a product, OBEY and Fairey’s other stylistically similar projects no longer invite the same intrigue that causes the questioning of environment. Furthermore, the

gestures of street art have been culturally pilfered and reappropriated, in the form of
corporate guerilla marketing tactics, to such a degree that the gestures of negation no longer
critique or attempt political intervention. As Fairey’s OBEY and Giant projects descend from
and are informed by previous gestures the impact and resonance of those expressions fade
over time from overexposure. Debord and Gil J. Wolman point out “since opposition to the
bourgeois notion of art and artistic genius has become pretty much old hat, Duchamp’s
drawing of a mustache on the Mona Lisa is no more interesting than the original version of
that painting.”72 It is necessary to reveal the underlying power structure at the heart of an
image. As such, Hope’s tactics operate in accord with the nature of capitalist production.
Using these gestures to promote a political contender, Hope demonstrates how government
benefits from cultural politics to promote their aim and authority.

Che Guevara

Obama’s iconicity (term used in linguistic and semiotics) has grown to a scale that
rivals the image of Dr. Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, Cuba’s Minister of Industry in the 1960s. The
photograph of Che Guevara taken by Fidel Castro’s official photographer, Alberto Korda in
1960, has long stood as an icon of revolutionary politics. In the 1960s Che’s image was an
emblem of rebellion and dissent, today it has been reduced to vague associations of anti-
establishment politics and is more often then not used as a surrogate for real activism, even a
marketing tool.

Working for the daily newspaper, Revolucion, Korda snapped the photograph at a
Havana memorial service for victims killed in the explosion of the French freighter Le
Coubre (see Figure 7).73 Photographed from below, Che’s eyes are lifted and he appears to
gaze up and out over the mournful crowd. Korda described Che’s demeanor on that solemn
day as Fidel Castro spoke, as encabranado y dolente, “angry and pained.”74 The
photographer’s original photograph did not solely frame Che, rather Korda recognized the

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74 Ibid.
iconicity of Che’s appearance after developing the film and decidedly cropped out the side profile of an anonymous man and the leafy fans of a palm tree. The photographer named his portrait *Guerrillero Herico*, heroic guerrilla fighter.

*Hope*’s source image, taken by associated press photographer Mannie Garcia, focuses on the then-senator Barack Obama in a state of contemplation as he directs his attention to the discussion of the crisis in Darfur at the 2006 National Press Club. Angled up, Garcia’s lens captures Obama as he attentively leans forward and cranes his necks to catch sight of a speaker. Photographed at austere moments, both Obama and Che are framed from below and capture a facial pose that reveals three-quarters of the face, a view that Roland Barthes
describes as “suggest[ing] the tyranny of the ideal.” Specifically addressing images of political candidates, Barthes states framing the face in a manner that angels it up and slightly turned conveys ideas of a superhuman, omniscient leader. With an accessional gaze, a divine light illuminates the brow, blessing the men with the knowledge to look ahead and bear witness to a place “where all political contradictions are solved.” The cropped images focus and redirect the attention to the stirring display of emotions on the men’s faces, revealing insight into the personality of the men; listening fosters democracy and equality for all. They become something better, something other and the viewer is inspired to support the man in leadership. In the photographic similarities Fairey’s poster derives a sense of visionary progress that Che Guevara’s writings encourage and a sense of hope that the public placed in the young leader during the Cold War.

Korda never copyrighted his accessional image of Che. The relatively free reproduction of the photograph has played a crucial role in disseminating Che’s image and message of anti-imperialist struggle, as well as the image of ‘revolutionary martyr’ thrust upon him. In 2000, Korda sued the British advertising agency Lowe Lintas and photography agency Rex Features for using the image of the revolutionary to sell Smirnoff Vodka. Although Che’s image had been freely used for forty years, Korda found the capitalistic use of the photograph to be counter to the ideas of Che, trivializing the historical significance of the revolutionary and his image. The ad agency defended the use of the photograph, arguing the photos ubiquitous presence in the public domain meant that no one owned the copyright. In the end Korda was awarded $50,000, which he then donated to a children’s charity. Shepard Fairey similarly made Hope available for free use and Internet download, propelling the image and presumed message of candidate Obama to great acclaim. Unfortunately the image’s popularity sparked interest in the origins of the source photograph landing Fairey in a great deal of legal trouble. Failing to obtain the rights for reuse from the

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76 Ibid.
Associated Press Fairey was embroiled in civil and criminal charges that spanned the course of three years. The artist unsuccessfully argued a defense of fair use, but continues to advocate for the right to reference and comment on images forced into the public’s view; an argument similar to the public domain defense of Lowe Lintas.

Che’s image rose to recognition when Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli used Korda’s photograph as the book cover for Che’s diary of his Bolivian expedition; a poster based on the Korda image was created to advertise the book. Although Che’s youthful good looks and anti-establishment long hair were visually captivating attributes, the revolutionary’s activism and ideas were respected and proselytized. Che’s denouncement of the Soviet Union found appeal with artists and academics in Europe whose confidence in the Soviet Union was failing. Additionally, Che condemned the brutality of United States imperialism, gaining him the respect of radical students in the United States and abroad. After Che’s untimely battlefield death, Fidel Castro and others referred to Che as a martyr, spreading his image even further as a symbol of student struggle and international protest.

Che’s image spread exponentially when young Irishman, Jim Fitzpatrick, used Korda’s photograph to create a high contrast poster of Che. Deleting the detailing features of Che’s face, Fitzpatrick created a half-tone image that was easily and cheaply printed. Fitzpatrick printed posters in red, white, and black and sent them to left-wing political groups across Europe, where student protests and demonstrations erupted in 1968. Not too longer after the poster was made, Prague Spring and the student and factory worker protests in Paris occurred. It appears that Che provided the symbol for change that protesters demanded.

Che’s image endures today, but without the same moral convictions and symbolic regard. His face serves a political brand image, promoting the political appeal of whoever uses it. Furthermore, affixing Che’s image to countless forms of merchandise has proven to be a profitable venture. Michael Casey explores the key role Che’s image plays in bolstering the support for an individual or ideas in his book Che’s Afterlife: The Legacy of an Image.

79 Ziff, Che Guevara, 15.
80 Ibid.
Remarking on the post-Berlin Wall capitalism that proliferates in today’s world, Casey states successful promotion of ideas and goals starts with marketing strategies that create *brand* resonance. Fidel Castro did just that after Che’s death; standing before a blown up *Guerrillero Heroico* Fidel spoke to an inconsolable crowd about the heroic legacy of their fallen comrade and of the evils of imperialism. In that moment Che provided a powerful image to Fidel’s revolution. Internationally it provided a means to participate, express solidarity with others, and to define a personal identity. Casey draws parallels between what the Che image stood for in the 1960s and the political brand of Barack Obama; both men offered definite ideas, appealing values, and goal oriented strategies to an unsure public. The myriad of slogans, imagery, youth-focused ads, music videos, and the “Korda Che-inspired” posters of Shepard Fairey offered an Obama that packaged political ideas and emotional appeal. The political brand of Obama “sold” well because American’s found appeal in the socially liberal values, like the eradication of ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’,81 the proposed policies for health care, tax reform, and foreign policy.

Fairey’s poster is stylistically similar to Jim Fitzpatrick’s graphic rendering of Korda’s Che Guevara photograph. Fairey has taken note of the powerful affects of abstraction and the loss of visual information that accompanies it. In his signature OBEY image of Andre the Giant, Fairey’s photocopied photograph of the former wrestler, renders the face in dark shadows and lines, revealing only the barest features. Fairey utilized similar austere strategies in *Hope* by rendering Obama in a patriotic palate. Such simplicity is memorable to the viewer, making the image iconic.

**Emory Douglas and the Black Panther Party**

The Black Panther Party, founded in the United States in 1966, was actively involved in the black power movement and US politics during the 60s and 70s. Organized in Oakland, CA to protect African American’s and their neighborhoods from police brutality, the organization established their Ten Point Program, stating their goals and objectives. The

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81 DADT was U.S. policy from 1993-2011 that prohibited military personal from discriminating against closeted homosexuals serving in the military. The policy also barred openly homosexual or bisexual individuals from military service.
organization succeeded in altering American’s perception of African Americans through an aggressive form of self-defense, a proactive rhetoric, astute political maneuverings, including welfare programs, and a flourishing cultural exchange.

The party understood the importance of solidarity in forming an accurate and uniform cultural identity. Embracing the revolutionary Che Guevara, the movement adopted his trademark black beret. The party recognized the power involved in marketing a positive visual imagery. The party appointed Emory Douglas as Minister of Culture and assigned the task of designing imagery for the party’s weekly newspaper that advanced their causes and mission.

Douglas’ images have a quality of abstract symbolism and stylized representation that communicate specific instructions and knowledge. Combining drawn figures, cropped photographs, solid colors, and bold lines the messages of the images are clear and direct. An image of a pig dressed in a police uniform was legible even to the illiterate, as was the poor black man at whom the pig pointed his rifle. Images of the black community perpetuated by the media, narratives of a poor, unemployed, violent, and sexually charged people, were oppressive and inaccurate; the party worked to reverse the public image of African Americans. The Black Panther Party imagery undertook two goals to reverse the thoughtless media representation. In publishing their own image, the party offered a proud, affirmative vision of strength and respect to the black community. Additionally, the images raised fear and a different sort of respect from the white community. The Black Panther Party presented African Americans as proud, organized, and an armed community unwilling to endure the status quo. Douglas’ images confirmed an image of solidarity and racial pride, frightened most whites, and angered the establishment elites.

Active party participants wore the uniform of the revolutionary beret, black leather jackets, black gloves, and read the weekly newspaper, *The Black Panther*. The newspaper informed its readership on events not covered by mainstream news sources, such as police brutality, lawsuits waged against local law enforcement and city government, and updates about the party’s welfare programs. The paper often sensationalized reports by including a great deal of visual imagery to emphasize their points. In volume II, number two from May 4, 1968, short regional stories inform readers how local municipalities suggest white Americans arm themselves with guns for protection against civil rights riots. Artfully
positioned above the stories is a photograph of a white husband and wife who arm themselves and their two sons with heavy artillery, the caption reads “WHITE CITIZENS ARE ARMING THEMSELVES all over the country and organizing their communities not for self- defense, but for the outright slaughter of innocent black citizens.” The slanted rhetoric and militant family portrait serve the Panther’s efforts to rouse indignation and outrage in readers to fight back against the oppressive white majority.

Image editorials, layout and design for the paper were the handiwork of Emory Douglas. In each issue the young Minister of Culture fashioned a poster insert for readers to display in their homes or businesses. The imagery created by Douglas gave African American’s a visual and tactile rallying point to unite. The poster’s adopted themes that represented the Party’s community work served as a means to empower people with pride and call attention to social injustices.

Douglas’ image of Fred Hampton (Chairman for the Illinois chapter of the party) installed strength in him through textual effects that radiate from behind the close-cropped face (see Figure 8). Chicago police had recently killed Hampton and this interior collage-poster created for the Black Panther weekly was intended to commemorate his life and death by spreading a sense of urgency within the community. The gradations of geometrically bold black and blue lines surrounding Hampton pulse from the image, growing darker as they move away from the young activist. The interplay of rounding angles of the figure and the bold lines of the background move the viewer’s eye to the center of the energy, Fred’s face. Radiating out from a close up of Hampton’s head to the upper left corner is the quote: “You can jail the revolutionary, but you can’t jail the revolution…You might murder a freedom fighter like Bobby Hutton, but you can’t murder freedom fighting.” The movement of the lines emanate up and out of the young orator, moving the eye to the figure and the text, connecting the man and the quote, visual and textual ‘evidence’ of his influential role as an advocate for the Party. The paired text and image build a case in the public’s mind to take up the cause and expose the institutionalized brutality that killed the young leader whose oration had served the movement.

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The close-up-accessional view of Hampton’s face, positioned in the lower left corner, shows a three-quarter view of his face, similar to so many other preceding leaders and similar to the image of Obama used in Hope. The viewer gets a sense of vision and potential to lead. Rendered in a monochrome of blue shadows and highlights, Hampton’s mouth is open as he passionately speaks. Overlaying the close-up is a black and white photograph of Hampton, shown from the torso up. The photograph catches Hampton in the act of passionate oration as he raises his arm and points to the crowd. The image rouses the spirit of Hampton
one last time to situate the power of the cause and the future of racial equality with black Americans. Deftly positioned by Douglas, Hampton’s pointing hand lays over the open mouth of the up close image of Hampton. The positioning of the two photographs confirms the message that Hampton expects the black community to challenge the establishment and demand equality; he commands the community to act. Even in death, Hampton points out that the struggle continues but with the efforts of all in the black community ‘liberation can’t be murdered.’

Fairey’s image uses the textual and visual devices of Douglas to encourage the participation and involvement of all dissatisfied Americans. Young voters in the 2008 election gave Obama the edge needed to win the election, 66 percent of registered voters under the age of thirty cast a ballet for Barack Obama.83 The electorate had no recollections of politics nostalgic for the rhetoric of John F. Kennedy, it did not recall Jim Crow laws or segregation in schools. These same voters were not familiar with the imagery of Emory Douglas. How does one explain this perplexing ability to read, understand, and find Fairey’s style so familiar?

The recognized capacity of the style to inform was noticed and repurposed in later graphic renderings that served later issues and more commercial interests. Fairey’s 2009 poster for immigration reform entitled We are Human, Girl features a young girl standing before a radiating background of alternating solid blue and shaded blue stripes. She smiles and holds a bouquet of roses in her right hand and holds her left hand in fist of defiance at her chest. Her cream colored hat reads in a solid blue text, We are Human, her shirt says Stop the Raids and below her in a flat running banner IMMIGRATION REFORM NOW! Fairey’s poster resembles Emory Douglas’ poster from the August 21, 1971 edition of The Black Panther titled We Shall Survive Without a Doubt. Douglas’ poster portrays a smiling black child who gazes up into a bright future, reflected in the glare of his sunglasses are photographs of children at the Oakland Community School. Imposed above a radiating pink background are two black children, one with a Black Panther salute. Douglas’ compassionate

image served the cause of African American dignity and liberation. Fairey’s image refashions Douglas’s image to serve the pressing issue of immigration reform, however both artists blatantly borrow the look of a radiating rising sun from former Japanese print artists.

Fairey’s image references Douglas’s powerful imagery of community building by presenting Obama as a nonpartisan leader. Obama exudes the message of “hope” as the colors of patriotism mix and interact on his visage, representing him as a man of neither party, but as a man of the people who has the ability to lead a nation weighed down by polarizing political parties for too long. Emphasizing Obama’s accessional gaze is a gesture similar to Douglas’ cropping of Fred Hampton, but updated to the requirements of a leader in 2008. Fairey carefully selected an image of Obama that bestowed an attentive and thoughtful demeanor, while the Black Panther Party Community looked for a leader to forcefully advocate and encourage. The electorate in the 2008 election looked for a leader that would be impartial to party leaning and be responsive to the needs of the people. The running-banner text HOPE serves any and all interpretations, unrealistically implicating Obama as a leader within whom people can place their emotionally-laden hopes. Douglas’ image of a pointing Hampton implicates the black community as necessary participants and activists within the cause, Fairey allows Americans an easy way out of the 2008 economic downturn by simply placing their hope in one man; an appealing option for apathetic Americans who traditionally do not vote.

THE FINE ART OF POLITICS

Political figures have historically employed the creative renderings of fine artists while also relying on the marketing and branding techniques of advertising firms and their graphic designers. Artists occasionally feel drawn to a political election or cause independently creating a narrative imagery that bolsters their political persuasion. The advent of television changed the political campaign and the presentation of candidate platforms which freed artists to utilize the poster for creative candidate branding through symbolic representation. Examples from the past fifty years include Shepard Fairey’s creative output in support of candidate Barack Obama.
Ben Shahn

Ben Shahn’s *Peace* poster (see Figure 9) from the 1968 election was made in support of Minnesota senator Eugene McCarthy who ran against incumbent President Lyndon Johnson for the Democratic presidential nomination. Only four years prior Shahn sketched a satirical cartoon of republican candidate Barry Goldwater with a toothy grin and over sized glasses that declared “Say No to No Sayer, Vote Johnson.” Responding to the American experience four years later Shahn threw his support behind McCarthy who entered the race to pressure the federal government, controlled by the Democrat party, to withdraw support of the Vietnam War. Running on an anti-Vietnam war platform McCarthy garnered youth support, many longhaired hippies ‘got clean for Gene’ in order to campaign door-to-door. Shahn’s *Peace* poster, featuring a multi-colored dove, echoes McCarthy’s sentiments to end the war, fostering a much-needed time of ‘peace.’

![Image of Ben Shahn's Peace poster](http://library.artstor.org.libproxy.sdsu.edu/library/iv2.html?parent=true (accessed December 19, 2012)).

Although McCarthy did not win the Democratic nomination, Shahn’s social realist inspired design contributed to a social dialogue that engaged political issues. While working
during the Depression Shahn developed a social realist style of representation that abandoned abstract forms for social realities and symbolism. Challenging the pretentious notion of art, Shahn enthusiastically took on commercial projects and illustrated advertisements, using his art to communicate and engage with his audience. Shahn’s *Peace* poster is communicative propaganda for a cause believed in, intended to inspire social change. The McCarthy campaign did not retain Shahn; Shahn used his talent to independently support an anti-war candidate. As an alternative graphic, Shahn’s work was freed from the constraints of a campaign. Shahn represented McCarthy’s anti-war platform with the dove, a symbol and message of peace that resonated with the 1968 electorate.

**Andy Warhol**

The following presidential election in 1972 bore witness to another politically minded production. The Democratic party asked Andy Warhol to contribute an artwork in support of the George McGovern campaign; sales of the image raised forty-thousand dollars for the campaign. Perhaps inspired by Shahn’s 1964 poster made in support of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Warhol’s *Vote McGovern* poster (see Figure 10) takes politically minded liberties in his rendition of Nixon’s portrait taken from the 1969 cover of Newsweek. The poster features Nixon with a nauseating green and bilious blue complexion; he has blue jowls and a green forehead while his lips are reactive yellow and his eyes a sallow yellow. He is set before a complementary orange background and dressed in a pink jacket and red tie; the clashing chromatic intensities negatively distort Nixon. Jarring color contrasts serve Warhol’s symbolic message jabbing at Nixon as “Tricky Dick.”

Warhol’s colors satirically recall Nixon’s ghoulish appearance in the 1960 Presidential Debate. While television had worked to literally cast shadows over Nixon’s platform and appearance in the 1960 election, Nixon emerged in 1972 with a campaign team which marketed the political candidate like a consumer product, improving his image and altering the public’s impression of the man. Joe McGinnis wrote in his expose of the Nixon marketing campaign, “They shielded him [Nixon], controlled him, and controlled the

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atmosphere around him.”

The Nixon campaign staged question and answer segments and orchestrated advertisements, which “are successful because people are able to relate them to their own delightful misconceptions of themselves and their country.” Nixon’s appearance in the televised 1960 debates broadcast the power of the image; Nixon’s perspiration gave him a sickly pallor, his heavy eyebrows cast dark shadows over his eyes, and his unshaven appearance all worked against his favor. Warhol’s poster plays with this past image of Nixon, the yellow eyes give him a gaunt appearance, the blue jowls are reminiscent of the beard and

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86 Ibid., 116.
the green hues recall a Nixon who was ‘green around the gills.’ Warhol’s techniques mirror Nixon’s media manipulations that alter impression and rouse emotion; both make the statement that truth is skin deep.

After Nixon won the election the IRS forced Warhol to pay a gift tax on Vote McGovern, however this didn’t stop the artist for creating a fundraising image again in 1976. Warhol created multiple prints in support of Jimmy Carter’s campaign, referencing Warhol’s Polaroid photographs of the candidate. Warhol created a loose outline drawing of the candidate’s most basic features with a subdued palette of black and white. The artist also created a more colorful image of the candidate that features Carter under the marks of the loose outline. Curator Sharon Atkins states that Carter’s commission was aimed at associating the candidate with Warhol’s celebrity appeal and “was a very directed attempt… to reach the younger voters, and the voters of New York.”

This candidate-artist association finds direct parallel in Obama’s relations with popular street artist Shepard Fairey.

Robbie Conal

Robbie Conal’s 1988 oil painting CONTRA DICTION is a vilifying image of President Reagan, attacking his administration and policies. Conal considers himself a “guerilla artist” who distributes non-sanctioned political art directly to the public. The artist transformed his painting of Reagan into a run of posters that he illegally posted around the Los Angeles area in 1988. Although CONTRA DICTION is not a campaign poster, it is a socially engaging response to the political climate of the 1980s. Shepard Fairey, too, incorporates themes corresponding to the political realities of present day, citing the influence Conal’s acts of civil disobedience, satirical humor, and communicative style on his artwork. Fairey finds Conal’s attack on Reagan’s dealings with the Contras as “a beautiful way to combine art and politics.”


89 Dooley, “He Might be a Giant,” 48.
Conal’s oil on canvas portrait is an unflattering image of President Reagan (see Figure 11). An upper and lower running border sandwich Reagan’s weathered face between the humorous pun CONTRA DICTION. Conal’s oil medium builds thick opaque layers of heavy-almost runny-paint lines, expressive of the sagging weight of Reagan’s flesh. The impasto technique of Conal’s muted black and white palette gives the portrait of Reagan a three dimensional quality. The painting’s texture catches the natural light of the room in which it is displayed, adding an unflattering highlight to the incised wrinkles. The paint takes on an increased substance as the impasto layers give the sagging weight of the face a gruesome reality. The lined puddy-like texture of the skin finds contrast in the smooth yellow background, emphasizing the unhealthy waxen sheen—an almost post-mortem purple color—found in the folds of Reagan’s furrowed face. Reagan’s chin and jowls run together in the curving contours of Conal’s paint. The president’s mouth is slightly pursed but open, leaving a few snarling bottom teeth visible. Gazing heavily to the right his eyes can’t seem to catch sight of what he looks for; his stiffly centered neck restricts him. His gaze is directed to the immediate right. The curving black lines that compose the president’s hair are set off with a glaring white shine that allude to the placement of overhead lights. Additional lights illuminate the left profile of Reagan’s face, casting shadows under his jowls and right check. The modest compositional frame of the CONTRA DICTION border serves as an illuminating text denouncing Reagan’s public lies. Conal’s light exposes the ugliness that the smoke screen and mirrors of media artfully conceal with make-up, lighting, and the scripted spin of colloquial English.

Conal’s painting responds to the Reagan administration’s 1985 political scandal of the Iran-Contra affair. The text CONTRA DICTION is a satirical play on words referring to the ‘diction’ Reagan used to conceal the trading of arms for hostages with Iran, the illegal arming and funding of Nicaraguan Contras, and the contradiction Reagan himself embodied by lying to the American people on national TV. In 1985 the Reagan administration facilitated the sale of arms to Iran in the hopes that seven U.S. hostages would be released. A portion of the money from the sale of the weapons was illegally funneled into the arming of Nicaragua’s right wing Contras fighting the Sandinista regime. The simple composition makes the politics and humor of the adversarial portrait clear, enabling a public dialogue about the abuses of power.
Addressing issues of public relevance, Conal translated his painting into an off-set lithograph poster in order to communicate directly with the public. Violating the municipal code Conal and a team of like-minded volunteers took to the streets wheat pasting *CONTRA DICTION* on public walls and electrical boxes. His minor form of civil disobedience creates room for a discussion of political and ethical crisis in a world full of Nike ads and movie posters. Contrasting the official public art (commercial ads) of postmodern society, Conal’s *CONTRA DICTION* caught the eye of Shepard Fairey who encountered the attack on Reagan’s public lies on an electrical box outside of MOCA Los Angeles in 1989. After witnessing Conal’s artful and humorous political critique, Fairey realized “that’s the kind of thing I want to do.” Fairey’s art continues to expand upon the simple and direct visuals that

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90 Shepard Fairey, “(1) Shepard Fairey @ Idlywild Arts Academy 2/10/12 (P.1),” YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma3551zlXwI (accessed September 10, 2012).

91 Ibid.
incorporate witty humor and illegal protest to call attention the political, social, and economic realities of the day.

Steven Heller notes the importance of crafting graphic statements and messages that correspond to themes of contemporary relevance. The aforementioned art forms participate as a critical voice in political and popular culture. Although the posters did not always work to sway voters or change viewers minds, the poster form successfully interacts with the community to advance public awareness of pressing issues.

**POP**

During the “swinging sixties” Pop art emerged in America to the disdain of art critics who advocated the strategies of abstract imagery, expressive of individual emotion. Clement Greenberg, an influential critic, condemned pop art’s low brow reference to commercial and popular culture. As mass culture expanded, pop art challenged high art and low art through an interpretation of the surrounding social environment. Pop artist Richard Hamilton addressed the saturation of mass media in everyday life in his 1956 collage *Just What is it that Makes Today’s Homes so Different, So Appealing* where the tape recorder and television have taken over the home; the mediation of American life by beautiful people and consumer goods is depicted. Succeeding pop artists further explored the theme of consumption within the capitalistic system.

In 1962 Andy Warhol critiqued the multiplicity of monotonous choices provided by mass production in his Campbell’s Soup installation at the Ferus Gallery. Warhol lined up thirty-two soup can canvases at eye level, in a presentation similar to the display of a grocery store shelf.92 The Campbell’s red and white label was virtually unchanged since 1900, so when Warhol recreated it in 1962 the can was instantly recognizable. Fast-forward to 2012 and it is rather apparent that Warhol’s fame has endured well beyond his predicted “fifteen minutes”; in 2012 the artist’s iconic style has been used to update the look of a limited edition of Campbell’s soup cans with jolting hues Warhol’s and quip remarks.93 And while

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the collaboration revitalizes Campbell’s as hip, the major brand’s reappropriation of Warhol’s signifiers of cultural critique are negated.

Confronting mass production, Warhol’s cans demonstrate the façade of free market choice and its failure to offer sustained pleasure. Super market display within the walls of a fine art gallery reveals choice to be a perceived notion, exhibited in the similarity of each can’s appearance. Walking down a busy grocery store anesthetizes consumers, but lining up the canvas cans for study, illustrates that free choice between alternatives is an illusion. Human desire is held hostage to the endless disposability of commercial symbol mutation into varying guises. The continued reinvention of product labels, brands, and marketing ploys evokes longing and desire that will resurface when the consumed version becomes obsolete. The audience delights in response to the excess of American consumer culture.

Warhol’s artwork additionally responded to the gestural work of abstract expressionists that preceded him. Selecting subjects from newspapers, products from consumer society, and money Warhol challenged the concept of art work as a unique and individual expression. The assembly line production, the printed appearance, the use of stencils, and hands-off silk-screening techniques allowed Warhol to further distance the artist from the work. The creation of the ‘Factory’ mirrored the mass production of everyday objects, intending to offend a highbrow audience who had become accustomed to viewing art as a sensual vehicle for conveying emotions, the spiritual, and the psyche. Warhol’s gestures extended art to everyone, just as the advent of mass-produced factory goods ushered in a collection of trinkets and toys to fill the American life and home, but just as everything was available to everyone man experienced an alienation from his labor and life.

Warhol’s *Marilyn Diptych* (1962) explores consumer culture and confronts the hollow nature of the Hollywood icon (see Figure 12). Thomas Crow defines this hollowness as “events in which the mass-produced image as the bearer of desires was exposed in its inadequacy by the reality of suffering and death.”\(^{94}\) Created in the same year of the celebrity’s suicide, the pseudo-memorial, repeats Marilyn’s face across five rows of ten columns, divided in half by color. Warhol selected a 1953 publicity shot of the actress from

the film *Niagara*, cropping out any enticing animation. Confronting mass production, Warhol created an easily reproducible silk-screen. Crow reads the silk-screen diptych like a book, from right to left, a “dialect of presence and absence, of life and death.”\(^9\) The left side of the canvas pulses out broad color splotches that form an abstracted Marilyn over a gold background; her features are represented by bright colors naively laid over the black and white photograph. Viewing the canvas like a book from left to right, her fame begins as a star costumed under the bright lights of celebrity and fades to white.

At left she appears clownish, like a child who explored her mother’s make-up drawer, Warhol’s embellishments doll her up. The viewer recognizes this is not really Marilyn, but

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\(^9\) Ibid.
rather it is an applied mask; venturing to a deeper level the viewer recognizes the publicity shot is, too, a celebrity mask applied with an entertaining uniformity. The right side of the image is rendered in black and white, a blacked out heavy inking of the celebrity fades to an elusive and uninformative trace. The vertical column of heavy ink marks the transitions from life to death.

To the right, the celebrity mask is wiped and the young starlet succumbs to her own celebrity image, unable to reconnect with her reality, Marilyn inked herself out. The repetition of her image shows her clearly, but she is not really present, the constructed media images concealed her truth, she lost herself in the relentless public relations campaigns. The dark images represent death and offer shade from the prying public eye, only death frees her from the ever-present gaze of the media. Moving further left, the light images release Marilyn from the bonds of her mask. Like the image she is not visible, she is only able to be herself when freed from the confines of her appearance. Even in death Marilyn is not truly known, but lives on through her films, leaving only a trace of her media personae. Warhol exposes the inadequacy of mass production through the ironic displacement of Marilyn from erotic commodity to the suffering inflicted by commodity.

Warhol draws parallels between the hero worship of celebrities and veneration to saints and religious icons by depicting the Hollywood star in the form of a diptych. The diptych is a two-part painting or carving, traditionally intended for religious veneration and prayer. The Catholic Church was the prominent institution in the ancient world, instructing the laity in theological virtue and offering spiritual riches for faithful devotion and veneration. A modern day equivalent to the ancient church is the media; both instruct and inform. Referencing the ancient prayer altars and panels, Warhol uses the suicide of Monroe to expose veiled implications of modern day commodity worship and desire. Indirectly the artist touches on the temporary void material goods and celebrity worship fills. Society forever desires the latest and greatest gadget or celebrity, and the constant display in advertisements increases exposure to them and their messages.

Diptychs, traditionally used in the ancient world, are two plates attached at a center hinge so that the tablet may be folded and protected during travel or stand as an altarpiece. Diptychs were also used as prayer lists, commemorating the names of living figures within the church (on the left) and saints who have passed (on the right). Warhol draws a parallel in
the positioning of a colorful and lively looking Marilyn on the left and the fade of her dark demise on the right.

The religious devotion to saints is comparable to the modern canonization of the celebrity. After death a saint is commemorated with a ‘saints day,’ symbolized in an emblem representative of their living cause or devotion, and are forever venerated through the ancient search for relics. Saints find a modern day counterpart in the deceased celebrity. The ubiquitous presence and collection of Marilyn Monroe imagery, the emblem of her platinum coiffed hair and beauty mark, the conservation of her white halter-tie dress from the film the Seven Year Itch mirrors the ancient cult of saint worship. Further examples of this can be found in the upkeep of Elvis Presley’s former residence, Graceland, and the multitude of candlelight vigils held after the death of Michael Jackson. Warhol’s diptych canonized Marilyn in the church of celebrity, projecting the modern day ubiquity of her face; Marilyn’s image of old Hollywood glamour continues to be conjured, often through Warhol’s silkscreen. Warhol’s gesture demonstrates art’s ability to heighten attention and transform images to icons with a surrounding aura.

Warhol and the media’s representation of Marilyn transformed the starlet into a form beyond her reality based on visual sensation. The media transformed her into an icon of voluptuous sex appeal. Female photographer Eve Arnold captured her writhing between bed sheets, her bedroom eyes appear to be seductively directed at an absent man.96 In the Seven Year Itch Marilyn is dehumanized in her nameless role as the femme fatale temptress known as ‘the Girl.’97 Warhol’s use of poplar culture imagery acknowledges the mask of make-up, costume, and mass production as social and cultural agents that actively affect emotions and reactions of those who participate within the culture. Cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall reiterates: “It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them [people, objects, and things]- how we represent them-that we give them meaning.”98

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Strong similarities exist between Warhol’s *Marilyn Diptych* and Fairey’s Obama portrait. Both Warhol and Fairey cropped and decontextualized the images, and then experimented with colors and layers. Both successfully took images that were generic and through manipulations, the bland media images became iconic in the public mind; however, as Crow stated, Warhol’s work functioned to hollow-out the consumer icon and expose the media’s image reality and inability to convey a person or product’s true worth.99 Marilyn merely became a sex symbol or brand; Campbell’s Soup was to be consumed because the public was instructed to do so through advertisements. This negative view of American life and the public’s view of self through commodities is dramatized. Fairey used a combination of advertising and branding tactics to catch the viewer’s attention, in effect packaged Obama as a commodity.

Warhol exposed Marilyn’s media-produced meaning, while *Hope* produced a meaning of Obama as heroic and visionary. Closer parallels between the work of Shepard Fairey and Warhol are found in their respective challenges to traditional systems. Warhol’s art presented a challenged to the upper echelons of fine art by referencing imagery found in popular culture, advertisements and the news. While Warhol critiqued capitalism he also involved with an attack on abstract expressionism by denying personal gesture. Transgressions are associated with the artist’s use of mechanical means of reproduction, which eliminate the concept of one-of-a-kind artisanal good. Fairey’s graphic imagery and street art tactics challenge the traditional methods of presidential campaign techniques and the exhibition of fine art. Critic Steven Heller stated, “Given the mediocre sameness of most graphics for contemporary political campaign, which are usually laden with patriotic clichés—red, white, and blue, stars, stripes, eagles—their unceasing redundancy has a numbing rather than rousing effect.”100 The unique appearance of Fairey’s image in the political context extended a popular appeal as an atypical presidential candidate; Obama benefited from this contrast with the preceding administration and the Republican Party.

Fairey actively coopts the look of older methods of reproduction when contemporary modes of photocopier machines, computer production, and laser-jet printing make mass production more efficient and uniform. A beneficial contrast considering the supposed advantages of high tech government surveillance and satellite systems used during the Bush administration that incorrectly detected weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Fairey’s cooptation of a retro-look or style is a critique of the presumed transparency of mass media and the informing capabilities of their technology. Lisa Cartwright and Stephen Mandiberg argue that Fairey’s look of low tech and free use replicates the way political posters were printed for protest and dissent in mass culture during the 1960s. The faint hatching lines on Obama’s face could be said to resemble the imperfections and color splotches that resulted from silkscreen production. Fairey consciously imbues his image with the signifiers of silkscreen prints and the reproduction technologies of past poster and print media. Fairey was able to associate discontent for the Bush administration and its use of mass media technologies by referencing historical styles popular when people rallied and demanded change. Creating the look of mass media alternatives, Fairey invokes nostalgia for hippies and protest, encouraging a massive mobilization of election participation. Hope functioned as a rallying cry for people to feel connected to a long line of social and political protest dating back to the 1960s; Fairey’s referenced styles gave Obama a meaning that made his supporters feel they were supporting a meaningful cause.

**CULTURE JAMMING**

Culture jammers contend that current cultural, political, and social values have increasingly been altered and manipulated by prevailing commercial interests which seize culture, overwhelming the public environment with corporate logos, sponsorships, icons, and images. This is nothing new: in the 1940s the Frankfurt school and its outspoken critic Theodore Adorno warned of the impeding advancement of the capitalist produced “culture industry.” Culture jammers and activists confront the culture industry with unrestrained hostility through a variety of communication strategies and tactics that seek to momentarily

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rouse society from the branded commercial environment. This is an art on the edges of what might be considered a ‘non-art,’ yet its cultural engagement is effective political intervention because it responds to an analysis of contemporary connections to culture and society.

Negativland, an experimental music group and art collective, coined the term *culture jam* in 1984.102 Using the tactics of détournement first applied by the Situationists, artists and activists alter and interact with their environment. These socially engaged artists reinvent trademarked logos, billboards, and advertisements, or reveal a product’s ‘true cost’ to the environment and human labor, or expose the media as a corporate rather than public domain. These strategies uncover the deeper truths and elicit a response breaching the fundamental role of compliance generated by media. Projects use humor, sleight of hand, and design to appeal to viewers who are indoctrinated into a privatized and controlled visual world.

**Silence = Death**

Rearticulating the Third Reich’s emblem for homosexual, six gay men confronted the consequences of the President Reagan’s denial and avoidance of AIDS. In 1987 they began posting a provocative poster throughout New York- a pink triangle on a black background that read ‘SILENCE = DEATH.’ These men repurposed the pink triangle from the Nazis to relate the killing of gay people during World War II to the Reagan’s refusal to acknowledge the AIDS crisis resulting in mounting infections and death. The SILENCE = DEATH project took direct action and declared in its manifesto “silence about the oppression and annihilation of gay people, then and now, must be broken as a matter of our survival.”103 The men turned the triangle to an upright orientation, altering it in a way that gave the pink triangle new meaning. The formal Nazi symbol of humiliation was transformed into one of powerful resistance and solidarity. The project donated the design and slogan, SILENCE = DEATH, to the non-profit service organization ACT UP, it endures as a symbol of gay pride and liberation.104

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104 Gregg Bordowitz, “My Postmodernism,” in *The AIDS Crisis and Other Ridiculous Writings, 1986-
Barbara Kruger

Other forms of cultural engagement target corporate entities and their advertisements. Advertising enters the consciousness of individuals everyday without their permission, yet it commands public address, Fairey says this makes it “fair game for vandalizing and critiquing.” Appropriation artists, like Fairey critique an entire regime of image production. Artist Barbara Kruger reworks the look of advertisements in a way that re-familiarizes the viewer with its strategies. Acutely aware that in advertising the word is the image (logo) Kruger combines word and image to expose the strategies of deceiving certitude.

Barbara Kruger’s art work challenges gender hierarchy, dominance, and control through the pervasive look of advertising. As a former advertising designer, Kruger understands the power of words and images to arouse desire, enforce stereotypes, and encourage consumption. Extending across class lines and socioeconomic spheres, her art is a public art that engages with its surrounding social environment, the message dependent upon those systems for meaning.

Kruger’s style combines found mid-century black and white photos with bold italics text in Futura typeface. The text is laid over blocks of vivid red, black or white backgrounds superimposed over the images. The resulting eye-catching visuals draw the viewer’s attention to pressing issues. Photographs appear to represent or convey the traditional message of advertising, but the juxtaposed text is counterintuitive to the viewer’s presumptions, resulting in an exacting critique of the psychology of advertising. Her short and direct phrases are easy to understand and instantaneous in impact. The narrative questions the agenda of images as they construct and define societal expectations.

The superimposed text creates a confrontational discourse between the viewer and the image with the use of pronouns. Personal pronouns such as “I”/ “we”/ “you” are ‘shifters,’ as these words can refer to anyone; however, in Kruger’s terse discourse pronouns must be directed at someone. Pronouns are used to invite the viewer into the discourse and pictorial

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105 Dooley, “He Might Be Giant,” 42.
space. Kruger directly addresses the viewer to force them out of their normal frame of reference and consider an interpretation from an outsider perspective. In her 1981 untitled piece, “Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face,” the viewer is forced to consider whose gaze and whose face (see Figure 13). The photograph features a female statue in profile, as a statue she is frozen, her gaze and body cannot move and she cannot hide from judging glances or onlookers. This piece speaks to the power of the male gaze and the subjective exploitation forced upon females. Kruger’s piece reveals the subliminal messages of media images that define a woman as beautiful only if males gaze upon her. On another level the image also reveals the socialized acceptance, even female desire to be subjected to the objectifying look of a man. This piece introduces doubt into the certainty that women traditionally give advertisements that construct social ideas about beauty, self-identity, and consciousness. The short phrases paired with imagery are parodies of advertisements that expose the intervening ideology of the cultural power structure.

Kruger’s work often engages with public space to engage and subvert the market structure in a manner that is accessible to many. The 1989 untitled piece featuring the face of a female model and the text Your Body is a Battleground was used as a poster of protest for the march on Washington for women’s rights and abortion rights movements. The female’s face is divided down the center, the right and left reverses from positive to negative, and from top to bottom the text divides the face into thirds. The dividing line drawing parallels with the polarizing choice a woman has to make when considering an abortion. The image additionally draws parallels to the objectified standard of symmetrical feminine beauty, revealing the media images held before society are grossly unattainable. The Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio commissioned Kruger in 1990 to reinvent the piece for display on a billboard. Kruger replaced the image of the model with a closely cropped picture of a female’s worrisome face, angled horizontally to allow for probing scrutiny. The text Your Body is a Battleground cut across the center of the billboard, dissecting between her eyes. The female’s eyes and red block text block directed attention to the neighboring billboard which advertised a pro-life agenda. The billboard displayed an eight week old fetus and the message “Alive and growing: heartbeat, brainwaves, fingerprints, feels pain.” The distraught female in Kruger’s billboard appears to react to the emotionally probing prolife
message and visual. Using the look of advertising, Kruger calls attention to how images are used to enforce societal norms.

Kruger’s method of appropriating the style of advertising calls into question image production. Kruger pairs juxtaposing image and text to challenge the value of certainty and truth invested in photographs and advertisements. Involving the viewer through the use of pronouns erodes the passivity of the viewing public and reveals the cultural power structures. Shepard Fairey finds Kruger’s method of grabbing people’s attention to be an effective form of social engagement; he stated, “She is one of my biggest influences. My OBEY logo and the Supreme logo were inspired by Kruger’s work. I owe my red, black, and white color
palette to Russian Constructivism and Barbara Kruger.¹⁰⁶ Fairey’s own projects probe into
the public domain to expose and undermine marketing. Like Kruger, Fairey involves the
viewer by presenting the short assaultive phrase-OBEY that captures the viewer’s attention. Pronouns are absent, but the jarring phrase entices the viewer to wonder ‘Obey whom or what?’ Appropriating the look of advertising, Fairey’s methodical quotation suggests a consideration of advertising strategies, as well as consideration of an item’s use or exchange value, introducing skepticism into it’s appearance of naturalism.

**OBEY GIANT**

Shepard Fairey’s seminal graphic is *OBEY Giant*. The graphic transformed a black and white photocopied image of professional wrestler André René Roussimoff, better known as Andre the Giant, into an iconic black and white outline featuring the word OBEY. Born out of a skateboarding prank, *OBEY Giant* evolved into what Fairey considers an experiment in Heideger’s concept of phenomenology-awakening people to a sense of wonder about their environment. As the image spread internationally by an underground army of skateboarding kids *OBEY Giant* was adopted by a sizable cult following. While Fairey dabbles in his own commercial ventures, and accepts commercial commissions he maintains these projects do not compromise the sanctity of *OBEY Giant*’s message to encourage people to question the dominating commercial presence in public space. Contrary to Fairey’s claim it will be argued that his commercial ventures function as another form of corporate advertising propaganda and therefore work against the original intentions of the *OBEY Giant* project.

Fairey created the ‘Andre the Giant has a Posse’ sticker in 1989 while a student at the Rhode Island School of Design. The sticker features a portrait of the late Andre the Giant that has been messily scrawled over with a perplexing message ‘Andre the Giant has a Posse,’ accompanied by the wrestler’s intimidating seven-foot-four-inch height and 520 pound weight (see Figure 14).

The inexpensive and quickly made sticker facilitated the wide dissemination of the image and message to members of the public. The ability of the sticker to be mounted

anywhere and the small size allowed “Andre’s posse” to conceal the sticker and nonchalantly post it in the most unlikely of places. It’s presence and ambiguous meaning in public and private places caught attention and initiated an open dialogue with the public; questions like ‘what does it mean?’ and ‘where does it come from?’ arose among a curious audience.

The photocopy quality of the image creates less than an exact copy; lines are indistinct and uneven causing the thick runs of copier toner to bleed creating shadows and silhouettes. The sticker frames a mug shot-like portrait of Andre the Giant whose massive size is emphasized by the uneven border that hugs and contains Andre’s broad shoulders. The wrestler’s size is further emphasized by the descriptive text of his height and weight in the
upper right corner. His blank expression takes on a menacing appearance when photocopied. The dust particles on the copier screen transfer as black specks on the image adding blotchy details that consume the image detracting from the detailed character. The photocopy subsumes all particularizing facial information visible in the photograph to heavy dark shadows that fill the space above and below Andre’s eyes, forming the appearance of a mask or eye-black grease often worn under the eye of athletes or military snipers to reduce the glare of the sun. When photocopied the wrinkles across Andre’s forehead, the smile lines framing his mouth, and the lines around his chin are no longer signs of an aged man’s expressions, instead they compose the bold recognizable features that make the sticker so memorable and iconic. The darkened features simplify the photograph resulting in an intimidating appearance that gets people to look again.

The perplexing sticker made its way around the country as thousands of skateboarding enthusiast ordered Fairey’s sticker out of the back of skateboarding magazines for five cents. Fairey’s image evolved in 1998 when Titan Sports (now World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc.) threatened to sue Fairey for violating their trademarked use of Andre’s likeness. Fairey ‘obeyed,’ their request by reducing the portrait of Andre to iconic black outlines focusing around his eyes, nose, mouth, and chin (see Figure 15). Fairey added a running red border below Andre with the dictate OBEY in bold italics font. The recreated OBEY emblem adorns numerous prints, posters, and street walls in urban areas, as well as the shelves of high-end boutiques in the form of Fairey’s commercial venture, OBEY clothing.

**OBEY Clothing**

From the onset of the OBEY Giant project Fairey screen-printed and sold his designs on t-shirts. Later in his career he designed clothing items and accessories under the label OBEY. Fairey’s clothing line has expanded into a lifestyle brand that features clothing and products that are fashion-forward, but are void of the thought provoking emblem and message that is the cornerstone of Fairey’s project in phenomenology. Each item of Fairey’s commercial clothing line is sold with an attached OBEY manifesto (discussing the project’s interest in awakening people to marketing ploys through the use of ironic dictate OBEY).

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When sold on clothing that promotes a brand lifestyle the manifesto serves as empty rhetoric concealing Fairey’s pervasive command to ‘obey.’ Such a forthcoming dictate as ‘obey’ is recognized by the audience to be ironic, to convey a meaning that is opposite of its literal meaning, however Fairey’s OBEY project promotes a literal meaning to ‘obey’ and purchase his consciousness raising products. Working in a similar vein to advertising and marketing of corporations that co-opt skate culture and create youth brands Fairey is simply offering another product, another lifestyle alternative. The original intention of OBEY was to awaken people to marketing campaigns around them and while the project has the potential to encourage opposition to forms of authority the project simultaneously promotes the alternative OBEY product. OBEY enters the public’s subconscious through continued
exposure and functions as other advertising campaigns, especially when attached or related to Fairey’s commercial product line of the same OBEY name.

**Product ‘Alternative’**

Fairey insists his project undercuts advertising through a broad message or warning that corporate advertisements continually insert itself into the public’s subconscious. He intends the ironic OBEY dictate to be a message that awakens people to the manipulative power of advertisements. As the OBEY project has grown to recognition Fairey has experienced commercial success with the aforementioned clothing line and his design firm called Studio Number One, which utilizes his signature agit-prop style to create marketing campaigns for corporations. Fairey sells his eye-catching graphics and guerrilla strategies to mainstream entities such as Absolut Vodka, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Motorola thereby stripping the cultural value and subversive nature that was once part and parcel to the street art aesthetic and message. As a result of Fairey’s commercial ventures and guerrilla marketing’s capitalization on street culture the *OBEY Giant* message has evolved from a warning into a product ‘alternative.’ Fairey’s ‘alternative’ expresses an aura of counter-culture idealism that warns the viewing public about the manipulative powers of image and word, but operates under the same dictates.

**Fame**

The high contrast visual OBEY catches the attention of a wide audience as it forcibly inserts itself into the public landscape. At its inception Andre was as an inside joke with Fairey’s skateboard friends. The sticker that began with no inherent value or meaning grew to a global phenomenon. Fairey insists his sticker has no defined meaning, but that it is open to individual interpretation; however his 1990 manifesto does identify the ‘type’ of OBEY enthusiast as a rebellious member of society. The image has risen to critical acclaim and the artist has been lauded with praise and invited to contribute in museum exhibitions. Fairey has also received copious amounts of attention from an adoring mainstream public which supports his commercial endeavor OBEY clothing. Fairey as a celebrity artist draws parallels to the acclaim of Andy Warhol. Such acclaim is nothing new in the art world but it is important to ask what it means for a rebellious street artist figure to be publically recognized,
to produce at a massive scale, and to collaborate with mainstream media. Furthermore it is important to consider how Fairey’s personae and projects affect the contentious nature of street art and artist.

Joshuah Bearman states “Fairey is a victim of his own success,” the popularity of his projects, his style, and his products run the gamut of becoming a lifestyle brand.\(^\text{108}\) The street artist’s visibility and contact with the media makes it difficult, if not impossible to preserve a renegade status. Fairey’s corporate commissions that utilize his guerrilla tactics expose the mainstream to the underground mediums of defiance, which debilitating the challenging critiques of the market system. Fairey’s forthright visibility and corporate interactions have a crippling ability to neutralize the counter-culture production of artist’s using the contextual urban environment to undermine private interest and marketing to make a critical statement.

**Manifesto**

In his 1990 manifesto Fairey refers to the comfort of “owning a[n] ‘[OBEY GIANT’] sticker” (which today can translate to any of his production adorned with the OBEY emblem) provides in “its familiarity and cultural resonance… a souvenir, or keepsake, a memento.”\(^\text{109}\) Fairey even qualifies those band wagon followers who “have often demanded the sticker” because it “provides a sense of belonging.”\(^\text{110}\) The artist categorizes those who have “embraced” the sticker as “rebellious,” in doing this Fairey provides consumers a postmodern-capitalist identity by owning an OBEY product.\(^\text{111}\) He provides an even greater sense of belonging and meaning to those willing to promote the product by “furthering its humorous and absurd presence” of undetermined “antiestablishment/ societal convention.”\(^\text{112}\)

The social value invested in OBEY is closely associated with other advertised products. Fairey’s guerrilla street campaigns get people to take a second look in their bold aesthetics and out of the ordinary placement. He uses figures that are “used and abused as


\(^{109}\) Fairey, “Manifesto.”

\(^{110}\) Ibid.

\(^{111}\) Ibid.

\(^{112}\) Ibid
symbols, but without telling the viewer how to feel about them.”113 The images are graphically bold and attractive, but without clear directives their value and integrity wanes. Fairey insists the image’s value or “antiestablishment” sentiment comes from its illegal placement on the street, (Fairey likes to quote Marshall McLuhan’s “The Medium is the Message) however it is difficult to believe that such an enigmatic symbol is capable of undermining the system. Especially when there exists a blatant continuity between the styles of his street art campaigns and his commercial guerrilla street campaigns produced through his former BLCK/MRKT design firm and current agency, Studio Number One.

Although Fairey’s commercial projects do not defy the system of commerce his themes of social relevance inspire activism. His work initiates a public dialogue that has the potential to transcend the two-dimensional medium on the city block. Fairey works from within the system to encourage critical thought and discussion. But just as it has the power to inspire activism it has an equal potential to strengthen the capitalistic system and, to follow Thomas Frank’s argument, the commodification of dissent.

**Hope**

In 2008 Shepard Fairey created Hope. The street artist and guerrilla marketer created a series of posters in support of Barack Obama’s candidacy for president in 2008, most notably the red, white, and blue HOPE poster. Fairey’s original design for the 85x55cm poster positioned the candidate above the word PROGRESS and embedded an OBEY GIANT emblem over the Obama logo adorning the candidate’s lapel. The positive response to the poster lead the Obama campaign to commission a recreation of the poster with the Obama logo and the words HOPE and CHANGE, as to avoid potential political ramifications for the illegal distribution of the PROGRESS print. By the end of the campaign Fairey had produced and distributed over 300,000 posters and 500,000 stickers to be publically displayed in support of the candidate, with all proceeds going back into the campaign and towards efforts to reverse California’s Proposition 8, banning gay marriage.114

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114 Fairey, “Manifesto.”
Fairey initially ran 350 prints of the poster that were sold on his website. Sales funded another run of 350, which were placed on California streets two-weeks before Super Tuesday. At a February 2008 rally at UCLA posters were distributed to Obama supporters who held them up and cheered as cameras panned across the crowd, making the image visible to a national audience. Fairey’s website allowed free downloads and people instantly began posting it to their social network forums to symbolically show support for the candidate. Fairey’s poster communicated Obama’s message in a clear and inspiring way that was easily and cheaply reproduced and distributed to the masses.

Reconstructing Obama’s visage with a patriotic palate of pale blue, red, and cream establish connections between the candidate and American patriotism; associating the values of the nation with the values of the candidate. Furthermore, as the first African American presidential nominee, Obama’s campaign was unavoidably linked to a discussion of race. The replacement of his natural skin tone with red, white, and blue eclipsed the matter of race, making it a non-issue, instilling a sense of national pride and patriotism, a misconception that American society had moved past slavery, issues of segregation, and racism.

Fairey’s visual abstraction uses thick angled lines to identify and compose key features of Obama’s face, which are simplified by layers of color to achieve the look of light and shadow. Fairey outlined Obama’s face in a heavy black line that bleeds into the shape of his hair and the form of his suit jacket. Oversized cartoon-like hatch-marks serve as shading along the hairline above the candidates left ear. The candidate’s features are flat and composed of thick black lines that simplify and reveal the most basic facial characteristics, the nostrils, the upper lip, the eyes and eyebrows. The simplicity of the image accommodates a broad and complex message of “Hope” that stretches across the lower quarter of the image in the same pale blue that composes the left portion of the background and the highlights of Obama’s face. The bold san-serif Gotham typeface eliminates unnecessary embellishment to the letters. The simplicity of the image leaves space for the viewer to contemplate and infer their own conception of “hope” for a new presidency and America. In this sense the image, and therefore the man, becomes synonymous and intertwined with each individual’s “hope” during a tumultuous economic period.

The expressive image oscillates warm and cool colors that swell and build to fill Obama’s features and form the shadows that give him a shallow perspectival depth but a
mounting volume. The symmetrically divided background is a flat expanse of blue on the left and red on the right creating a limiting visual plane. The background provides a balance to the contrasting hues as well as a balance between the color’s symbolic associations to the Democratic and Republican parties respectively. The relationship between the elements creates a unity of form that extols the poster’s subject above partisan politics, a unifier of the nation and divided political parties.

Fairey’s stylistic similarity alludes to a nostalgic message for a return to a simpler better time. The exacting precision and perfection of campaign media imagery today creates an artificiality too far removed from citizenry, viewers respond favorably to and relate to the imperfection of Fairey’s older screen-print-look. It implies smaller and localized production and the sincerity of an honest artisan rather than the plastic and perfected feel that viewers are skeptical of and equate to corporate large-scale productions.

Fairey’s endorsement responded to a growing mood of political disillusionment that swept both the middle class and the poor in the United States in 2008. The National economy already flagging had been severely depressed in the months leading up to the election. Cycles of production exceeded sales, joblessness began to rise, personal credit began to swell, and the real estate industry collapsed. This resulted in widespread bankruptcies, foreclosures, and staggering unemployment among the middle class. A downtrodden nation thirsted for change and a leader who would renew their faith and hope in America.

**The Man, the Image, the Myth**

The media focuses on candidate image during elections, rather than on issues, to engage with a public uninterested in political maneuvering. Constituents find politics too far removed from daily life, difficult to understand, or are simply uninterested in the double-speak, mudslinging, and dirty dealings that typify present-day politics. Candidates and their campaign teams fashion appealing campaign images, speaking engagements, and advertisements focused on candidate’s positive characteristics and attributes to gain public appeal and votes. These carefully packaged campaign images are tools that substitute a candidate’s discussion of issues and political ideology for idealized versions of the candidate’s image. The images gain enough prominence to edge out important issues such as foreign diplomacy, war, energy alternatives, health care, the economy, and social issues.
W.J.T. Mitchell argues that images have a “social or psychological power of their own”\textsuperscript{115} and Fairey’s powerful visual icon of the relatively unknown Obama elevated him to iconic, popular culture status that caught the attention of the nation. The \textit{Hope} poster shaped the perception of Obama and influenced voter’s reception of the candidate.

The poster as a form of street art provided Obama associations with a radical art movement and the rhetoric of anti-establishment. Street art as an art form resonates with the youth of America, many of whom had prior exposure to Fairey’s OBEY GIANT projects. Street art wheat-pasted onto walls competes with corporate advertisements for the passerby’s attention. Street art’s illegal presence is an aesthetic intervention that works in opposition to authority and provokes a discourse with the passerby concerning the presence of authority. This discourse differs from advertisements, which trespass the passerby’s space, forcing their messages, and subjecting viewers to psychological ploys that create desires for consumption. Street art engages in a two-way communication of free expression that is typically denied in the rigid environment of private-public space. Street art’s anti-authority image was the perfect way to frame the Democratic challenger who ran on a platform of change. Just as street art opposes the public’s forced encounter with corporate advertisements, Obama opposed Bush’s authority that protected private over public interest. Private interests protected included Cheney’s public energy-policy revisions made with oil executives and the awarding of a seven-billion dollar, five year, no-bid contract in Iraq to Halliburton. Furthermore Bush favored FEMA’s downgrade into the Department of Homeland Security and the banning of photos of soldier’s flag-draped coffins in order to control the image of the Iraq war and real cost of engaging in armed combat. Furthermore, youth familiar with the OBEY GIANT project were aware of Fairey’s pointedly direct antagonist views against the Bush administration.\textsuperscript{116} The public, especially young Americans, found the poster’s street art affiliations to symbolically confirm and embody Obama’s message and owning a poster provided feelings of inclusion in a cause larger then themselves.


\textsuperscript{116} Fairey created several antagonist posters and street art displays directed at President Bush’s policies and administration.
The media promoted Obama’s image as a contender outside the traditional conventions, pointing to his reliance on the technology of his Blackberry, his campaign etiquette of refusing to play dirty politics, his casual open-collar dress, his racial hybridity, and his use of technology. Obama’s outsider status found appeal with voters who were disenchanted with the way government had been run during the two-term Bush presidency. Many people were looking for someone to change the way political elites ran Washington.

Fairey’s visual tool played an important role in providing cues about the candidate’s ideology as well as the type of leader Obama would embody. Fairey adopted advertising’s aesthetically appealing and unique imagery that attracts attention and second looks. Continued exposure to the image creates an unconscious desire in the viewer. Fairey describes his art’s rebellious character and message creating an aura of progressive idealism around his projects attracting an anti-establishment youth following that validates and conscribes to his manifesto that encourages suspicion of everything.117 Hope, in its stylistic similarities to OBEY GIANT imagery and its viral grassroots dispersion, transfers Fairey’s righteous and relevant aura to Obama by association. The Hope image and idea took on a life of its own, serving as a rallying point for supporters; its grassroots origins inspired many people to political engagement channeling energy into action.

Hope’s Grassroots Appearance

It could be argued that Fairey’s initiative to undertake such a project speaks to the inspirational rhetoric and platform of Obama. Such a testament to Obama’s popularity might be true; however, Fairey’s motivation to create his first poster in support of a major political party contender was not born completely outside the Obama campaign. Although Fairey and the Obama campaign contend that there was no affiliation between the two when the first PROGRESS poster was made, Fairey had actually discussed the idea with Yosi Sergant, a friend who worked as a media consultant for the Obama campaign at Los Angeles based Evolutionary Media Group. Sergant encouraged Fairey, who expressed support for Obama, to create one of his iconic graphic images in support of the Democratic candidate. Fearing he might do more harm than good Fairey sought approval of his initial PROGRESS print from

117 Fairey, “Manifesto.”
Sergant and the Obama campaign before he produced and distributed the poster. Given the go-ahead from the campaign through Sergant, Fairey sold copies of the poster on his website and posted the image in the Los Angeles area. Only after the poster garnered a positive response did the Obama campaign become directly involved with Fairey’s production, asking him to alter the message to “HOPE” and to place the candidate’s logo within the frame. At this point Sergant and Evolutionary Media Group disassociated with the Obama campaign to pursue a direct relation with Fairey and his Obama print editions.

Sergant and Fairey worked together to spread the image in the state of California and then spread the image to other states with upcoming primary elections. Additionally the pair worked to spread the image on T-shirts, stickers, and bus bench ads. Collaboration with New Orleans artist Megs resulted in a bicycle spoke card that was sold for $1 in Oregon before the state’s primary.118 Statewide 37,582 Oregonians pedal to work and the state’s metropolitan hub of Portland is number one in bicycle commuting which made the bicycle spoke card an obvious alternative to bumper stickers and sold Obama’s image and his alternative energy policy to a proud niche community of cyclists. Such innovative marketing techniques appear grass-roots and find appeal with a voting block who support local, grass-roots, anti-establishment alternatives and this is why the Fairey-Sergant collaboration marketed itself as unaffiliated from the campaign and instead as a positive piece of spontaneous grass-roots support.

Lawsuit

The lawsuit brought against Fairey for the use of Mannie Garcia’s photograph clarifies what fair use means in today’s digital age. Although the parties settled out of court, the terms of the settlement for the appropriationist artist do not bode well for other artists working in a similar medium. The settlement calls for Fairey to share all past and future profits from the Hope image with the Associated Press, Fairey has had to promise to never use another image without retaining proper approval from his sources, and he has agreed to

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embark on a collaborative series of artworks based on Associated Press photographs, neither the artist nor the Associated Press backed down on their rights to the image. The decision to settle the case was largely due to Fairey’s falsification and destruction of evidence pertaining to his source image and may have weighed heavily on the artist’s decision to settle the case outside of court.

The resulting settlement of constraining ramifications does little to protect artists working in derivative media. However it is possible that such a decision could possibly inspire artists to create more self-produced imagery and media rather than referencing existing forms. But this is unlikely as sampling, referencing, and appropriating are easier than ever with the use of the Internet and give artwork the biting edge that the public enjoys.

This case points to the increasing amount of control and power the corporate entity and their product has over the individual. Many artists throughout history have engaged in fair use and artistic reference. Marchel Duchamp drew a mustache and goatee on a postcard picture of the Mona Lisa. He added the letters “L.H.O.O.Q.” which reads as a pun when pronounced in French to form the sentence, “Elle a chaud au cul,” (she has a hot ass). Duchamp references Mona Lisa in order to comment on the ambiguity of gender in da Vinci’s painting, a comment that would not have come across as well had he not used a well known existing art form. The only problems Duchamp encountered were the art scene’s critical comments, lambasting him for his transgression of art. As Fairey’s case has shown artists working today have limited freedom to repurpose and engage with their surrounding “culture” and media, which are protected under expanding copyright law.

**CORPORATE COMPROMISE**

Shepard Fairey’s Hope poster is a definitive example of appropriation as it borrows the style of existing imagery and a mundane news photograph as a source image to build upon. Fairey insists it is his style, his eye for detail, and skill of how to make something catch a viewer’s attention, to make an image iconic that drives the interest in his work. The artist intentionally borrows to comment on his surrounding environment to encourage people to question the seemingly “natural” or accepted presence of advertisements. However, the flaw in his ethos and it is the transformation of the cultural critique into the commercial brand of OBEY’s success. Fairey’s humorous and subversive comments on media’s exploitation of
everything, including the questionable use of art for commercial profit, looses its biting anti-establishment critique when the OBEY GIANT project is appropriated by its own practitioner to turn a profit for the OBEY clothing line.
CHAPTER 4

FROM GRAFFITI TO STREET ART

Graffiti emerged as an art form forty years ago after the challenges to the American political elite fostered by the Vietnamese victory in the Indochina war, the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973 and the stock market decline of 1974. These economic and political challenges signaled the decline of the American dream that had seemed viable in the preceding decades. The 1960s experienced advancements in civil rights, increased influence of the women's movement, heightened concern for the environment, increased space exploration, emerging counter-culture, sexual liberation, gay pride and recreational drug exploration. Unfulfilled promises of the idealism experienced in the sixties, an economic recession, and the increasing ubiquity of advertisements were directly related to the emergence of graffiti in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Graffiti’s innovators were teenagers who scrawled their names, pseudonyms, and visual indexes on the walls of private, public, and abandoned buildings, housing projects, subway yards, and trains. Graffiti writers worked together in ‘crews’ to create an open-air gallery in downtown New York City. Their visual language focused on the self-identifying message of the individualized signature rendered with spray paint. Writers and their crews communicated with other writers through the visual medium inviting the innovation and evolution of graffiti’s style. As the writing styles evolved and New York City’s mayor John Lindsay began cracking down on illegal graffiti artist display included the indoor gallery space.

During the eighties the downtown New York City art world assimilated graffiti and its related art forms (such as hip hop music and break dancing) into the wider culture. Gallery shows displayed graffiti works on canvases and sold them to graffiti world outsiders. Entrance into the gallery world spawned a new subject of focus; rather than the graffiti writers name being the central object of contemplation an image came to occupy center stage accompanied by a small signature.
Street art evolved from graffiti. Carolina A. Miranda defines street art as “the catch all used to describe not-always-legally-installed stickers, posters, stencils, murals, and 3-D sculptures.” Street art’s visual image communicates with and responds to the environment of the street while maintaining prominence within the museum and gallery space. Shepard Fairey’s street art descends from graffiti, rooting Hope in a subversive and anti-authoritarian tradition. Action induces reaction and Fairey’s counter-culture Hope is a reaction to proto-reactionary graffiti that emerged in the 1970s, as well as a reaction to the renewed idealism and message of hope that Obama expounded. Fairey’s use of the graffiti style shares the ideological and philosophical roots that ultimately shaped graffiti: making one’s presence and message known while responding to oppressive authority.

**HISTORY OF GRAFFITI**

Scholars trace graffiti’s origins to sixties Philadelphia. The expressive medium quickly spread to surrounding metropolitan areas, including New York where it emerged in direct relation with the ubiquity of advertising, the economic recession, and cuts to arts education in New York City public schools. Youth in New York and other metropolitan areas attacked the streets with aerosol cans and in the seventies they assumed visual control over subway trains, allowing their signature letter-based style and presence be known around the city. Asserting their presence within an urban environment where they were marginalized, young people opened a debate over the meaning of public space by inserting graffiti over and around the proliferous advertisements and signs that polluted the city. In 1971 The New York Times captured graffiti writer Taki 183’s sentiments towards the city’s sanctioned order when he asked, “Why do they go after the little guys? Why not the campaign organizations that put stickers all over the subways at election time?”

Graffiti artists engaged in a struggle over the role of creative production in public space and the role of authority that determines what is legal and illegal in this space. As a strategy outside the regulatory system of control graffiti is able to actively resist the system’s
sovereignty. It intervenes in the public sphere using alternative forms of signage and media to traverse naturalized ideas of the purified and ideal community. The hegemonic culture responded to graffiti, labeling it as unsightly and unwelcome vandalism. This reaction concealed government’s true intention to stifle the voice and individual expression that criticizes authority and prods viewers to consider new ways of thinking about public space and who controls it.

At its inception, graffiti flourished in marginal urban areas where police presence and surveillance were lacking. The tumultuous political climate of the seventies and eighties gave people a reason to make their names and voices heard. Disgruntled and let down, young writers made their presence known by repeatedly ‘tagging’ their name across the urban landscape. A lack of resources and funds resulted in lax policing of loiters, homeless people and young graffiti writers, but by 1972 in New York Mayor John Lindsay had launched the first “war on graffiti.” Although police presence increased in the following years, hasty young writers found ways to quickly assert their presence in the community. The portability, affordability, and vast color options of spray paint, markers, and spray-can tips allowed young writers to cover large surfaces as they painted under the pressure of being caught.

The illegality, the visually cryptic words and names and accompanying thrill felt after the completion of a work identified the writers as a subculture of resistance. Writing on white-washed walls or empty subway train walls counters the image of ordered authority. Graffiti empowers the writers to respond and react to the conditions of their community, the media and advertising that saturates their environment, and the constructed identity thrust upon them by self-ordained and sometimes elected figures of authority.

**Graffiti Terminology and Graffiti Styles**

Graffiti writers create in public space. To spray paint or render graffiti on a public or private urban canvas is referred to as ‘writing’ and those who create the graffiti are called ‘writers’. The symbolic communication offered by writers, or practitioners of graffiti can be strictly aesthetics, a vandalistic thrill, or a message of one’s worth. Often writers create personal narratives that address their experiences and interactions within the community and the world around them in the form of ‘pieces’ (short for ‘masterpiece’) that resemble large-scale murals or small spontaneous ‘tags’. A ‘tag’ is a writer’s unique signature rendered in
marker ink and is a visual signification of his or her presence. Writers aim to have their ‘tag’ adorn every borough and enclave within a city. The ‘throw-up’ is a quickly scrawled short name of three characters that adorns the outside of trains. Quantity is more important than quality when it comes to ‘throw-ups’; writing can be degraded by being called a ‘throw-up’ if it is poorly written and was not intended to be a ‘throw-up.’ A writer takes more time to stylize a ‘piece’ typically spelling a name or short phrase. The ‘top-to-bottom’ refers to writing that spans from the top of a train car to the bottom, but not the entire length of the car, while an ‘end-to-end’ and ‘whole car’ cover the entire length of the car.\footnote{All descriptions of writing styles are explored in more detail in Craig Castleman’s \textit{Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York}.}

Writers select a pseudonym to represent them as well as conceal their identity. Often these names are made up words that string letters together based upon aesthetically appealing letter combinations. These haphazard combinations show aesthetics to be weighted over meaning and decipherability, situating graffiti writing as a genre strictly legible to other writers. Accompanying imagery serves as a visual component of the writer’s presence and is often a testament to his or her skill. Considered an illegal act of vandalism a graffiti writer often works under the cover of night and in haste as to avoid a run-in with law enforcement. Writers laud those who are able to quickly compose a visually stunning and imaginative large-scale piece that “demonstrate[s] a clean and controlled technique” where the spray paint does not run or drip.\footnote{Craig Castleman. \textit{Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York} (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 26.} Combined, the visual imagery and signature work towards graffiti’s task of saturating the city, which in turn draws attention to the ubiquity of advertising and forces people to acknowledge the presence of the marginalized writer.

\textbf{Policing Graffiti}

Various city ordinances in urban areas in the United States in the seventies and eighties criminalized graffiti and street art as a violation of public space. The criminalization often took the form of racist and class-based policing of particular subjects. The graffiti problem was often attributed to “youth out of control,” most of whom were among racial minorities. Elites labeled young graffiti writers negatively, alleging these artists did not
respect their environment. Mayor Lindsay related the surge in graffiti writing “to mental health problems” and encouraged cooperation with schools and parents to implement an educational program. Demeaning labels applied by government officials and Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) were perpetuated by the mainstream media creating a rhetoric that discouraged any challenge to the established system. The term graffiti implies petty scrawls on walls and vandalism and insists there is only one accepted and legal avenue to criticize the dominant ideology. Propaganda campaigns encouraged youth to forgo challenging the system; instead they were told to “make your mark in society, not on society.”

In the early seventies Mayor Lindsay and in the late seventies Mayor Ed Koch implemented wars on graffiti. Both mayors positioned graffiti as an urban problem, spending millions of dollars to buff the ‘unsightly’ tags from the cityscape. The only goal was to solve the ‘problem’ of the city’s appearance by making the police and themselves look in control of a city they deemed ‘out of control.’ In the early seventies youth graffiti was not a punishable offense under New York law but an offense barred by the MTA, the governmental controlled agency that regulates the public transportation in New York City. If an offender was under the age of sixteen the MTA’s only power was to chastise the youth, but adults could be charged and sentenced to up to one year in prison. As the presence of graffiti began to increase the city government enacted tougher legislation to control the expanding graffiti “epidemic.” Under Mayor Lindsay’s 1972 legislation graffiti became a punishable offense, but without the monetary or social resources the New York City courts were left impotent to address the mounting graffiti presence and without the courts enforcing harsh punishments there was little deterrent for graffiti writers.

Craig Castlemen interviewed members of the police special unit formed in 1975 to gather information for the purposes of eradicating graffiti. Agents of the special unit told Castleman the police “infiltrate” by dressing in plain clothes and socializing with writers.

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124 Propaganda poster discouraging graffiti from New York City.
125 Castleman, Getting Up, 135.
126 Ibid., 162.
Officers created a graffiti database of writing styles, writers, and reasons for creating graffiti. In 1981 Mayor Koch implemented a new plan to include chain link fences with barbed wire interspersed with German Shepard watchdogs. Although the police amped up issuing citations and the arrests of writers few resulted in mandatory graffiti clean up and even fewer resulted in prison time. The costly planning and programming proved ineffective when paired with an overloaded court system and the young writers desire to spread their name and message.

As the policing of graffiti began to criminalize its practitioners the art form simultaneously segwayed into the gallery space where it took on styles attributed with today’s street art. The commercial implications of graffiti in the gallery space are considered.

**Graffiti Moves Indoors**

During the seventies and early eighties graffiti writers and gallery curators brought graffiti into the interior walls of the gallery space. Street artists transformed New York’s SoHo district from a relatively abandoned factory venue to a hip artist enclave where artists established studios and galleries flourished. Gallery owners sought to capitalize off the relatively new artistic expression that was quickly becoming a “hot ticket” trend in the New York City art world. The graffiti form was transfigured onto the canvas and was sold to meet the demands of those looking to adorn their interior spaces with the subversive imagery of the street. Art Historian Anna Waclawek situates this commodification process with City College student Hugo Martinez’s organization, United Graffiti Artists (UGA).127

The UGA aimed to support the writer’s creative process and encourage a legal environment that could sustain the medium as a profitable profession. To this end, Martinez and the UGA supported writer’s move to the canvas and into the gallery in order to promote and popularize the new art form in a more conventional forum. Members of the UGA exhibited their first gallery show at SOHO’s Razor Gallery in 1973. This forum allowed writers to interact, collaborate, and share ideas enabling them to strengthen their art form and solidarity within the street and formal art community. The Nation of Graffiti Artists (NOGA) branched off from UGA and founded a workshop where they could hone their skills and

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practice their craft. Their leader Jack Pelsinger organized their first exhibition in December 1974 at Central Savings Bank.\textsuperscript{128}

**Graffiti in the Gallery**

Graffiti continued its transition into the gallery space in the 1980s. Stephen Ein’s Fashion Moda gallery opened to South Bronx writers in 1978, offering empty gallery walls for artists to display this aerosol medium. In 1981 Patti Astor and Bill Sterling opened the Fun Gallery in New York’s East Village, offering graffiti writers a place to congregate and display the fruits of their labor.\textsuperscript{129} In 1980 Fashion Moda partnered with the artist collective Colab for the first official inclusion of graffiti in the art world at the exhibition entitled Time Square Show.\textsuperscript{130} Jeffery Deitch commented on the exhibition:

> If you trace the history of art in the 80s, you will find that the show was responsible for bringing all the elements together. It mixed graffiti artists, feminist political artists, and all kinds of new people together like Keith [Haring] and Kenny [Scharf] who weren’t a part of any group. It literally forged the uptown-downtown union that is responsible for many of the most interesting developments in art today.\textsuperscript{131}

The following year the Museum of Modern Art’s affiliate, PSI gallery, exhibited graffiti works on canvas in the exhibition New York/ New Wave.

In 1983 the Sidney Janis Gallery exhibited the ‘Post- Graffiti’ show and included the works of early street art stars Keith Haring and Jean Michel Basquiat. Waclawek notes that the use of the term ‘Post’ in the exhibition title characterized the transformation of graffiti, now affixed to a legal and sellable canvas, to an art-world-worthy movement. This exhibition lumped varying writing styles under a catchall graffiti umbrella and abandoned graffiti’s traditional focus of the writers name for bold imagery. Burgeoning ‘underground’ art stars Keith Haring and Jean Michel Basquait worked outside the traditional form of name-based graffiti writing, instead their illegal and legible renderings explored social and political

\textsuperscript{128} Castleman. *Getting Up*, 128.

\textsuperscript{129} Jeffrey Deitch, *Art in the Streets* (New York: Skira Rizzoli), 57.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 59.

topics, and included self-conceptualized drawn figures rather than appropriated popular
culture characters drawn upon by graffiti artists.

**Graffiti: Art World Blockbuster**

The booming economy of the early eighties resulted in new art world collectors and
investors. Banks began to accept art as collateral and corporations began to amass large
contemporary art collections. Collectors found interest in the newly “discovered” graffiti and
its newly christened “artists.” Graffiti began appearing everywhere: on T-shirts; record
covers; Blondie’s Rapture music video features graffiti and the infamous graffiti artist Fab 5
Freddie; dancer and choreographer Twyla Tharp incorporated graffiti into the stage set of one
of her productions; Keith Haring designed a 1986 Absolute Vodka advertisement; in 1987
the book *Spraycan Art* was published; European galleries imported the works of graffiti
artists and often flew them over for gallery openings and exhibitions.132 Previously in the
street Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat’s aesthetic and conceptual gestures moved into
the gallery where they shocked, entertained, and awed the New York art world of the
eighties.

Similar to graffiti the work of Haring and Baquait present an organized and unified
principle image and a visual vocabulary of indecipherability to those not privy to their inner
circles. Basquiat’s text is legible to the average viewer, but the writing jumbles words, omits
words, and crosses through words in a manner that makes little sense. While graffiti writer’s
constructed stylized writing to connect with the other writers, Basquiat’s work combined
figuration and text to deconstruct the world around him. Keith Haring developed line drawn
figures in white chalk on the blank black advertising billboards in the subway. His
hieroglyphic-like drawings addressed social and political issues, such as the war on drugs and
the publically ignored AIDS epidemic. Neither artist wrote in the iconographical style
employed by writers; their visual vocabulary was a style developed on their own and applied
without a crew. As graffiti became more popular the art world sought out forms and

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132 Sheri Candler, “Twyla Tharp’s Deuce Coupe,” Joffrey: Mavericks of American Dance Film,
messages that could be comfortably be housed in the interior space and packaged as a product.

Graffiti’s movement away from the street and onto the canvas removed the irreverent commentary that challenged public space and stimulated debate. A writer’s name on a canvas is not as impactful as when seen on a public wall, it is on the street that graffiti holds the capabilities to transform the urban environment by provoking thought and dialogue in its ‘out-of-place’ appearance. On the street the writer’s name affirms his presence within the community and creates new perceptions of specific places. On canvas graffiti writing signals an alternative, unknown culture in its illegibility, but allows outsiders ownership of the form in its collectability.

**GRAFFITI TO STREET ART**

Street art derives from the culture of graffiti writing as it is often an illegal and secretive practice, but it visually differs. Graffiti relies on letters, while street art explores the meaning of figures, abstraction, and symbols while exploiting formal art techniques, such as stenciling, printmaking, and painting. The imagery of street artists is less cryptic than graffiti and is therefore more accessible to members of the public, making it a more mainstream endeavor. Graphically, design images are able to communicate through a visual language that often replicates or subverts familiar signs and symbols of the everyday urban environment. Contemporary political and urban social issues inspire many street artists. They also respond to the ever-increasing number of visual images and advertisements that function to promote and sell goods that provide the consuming public with an artificial self-confidence and sense of self. Street artists intervene in the cultural landscape of the city to encourage reflection. The visual logo, symbol, slogan, or picture offers a competitive medium to counter the noisy and chaotic environment of information overload. Street artists often mock the “overload” by caricaturizing it.

Art viewed outside the confines of museum or galleries appears out of place and shocks the viewers expectations, inviting them to see and experience the urban environment in a different light. The street artist Banksy creates work he labels as “brandalism” which functions to question the role of public space in a capitalistic society. Banksy’s work serves
as an unlikely commentary on advertisers access to public spaces in the name of profit, while street artists and their practices are often criminalized.

Banksy along with other street artists like billboard hacker Ron English and street and commercial artist Shepard Fairey elevated the street art medium. Their clever tactics and witty satirical jabs at authority have changed the public’s perception of work that was once considered vandalism. Graffiti was formally an inclusive art form where text and imagery were only understandable to those within the graffiti circle. Street artists have opened the genre and made it accessible and reader friendly. William Haugh, director of *Juxtapose* magazine remarked, “Street art is like the new punk rock- it’s entering the mainstream.” With more people able to relate to the anti-authoritarian imagery, the genre has quickly garnered respect, admiration, and co-optation. Instead of being classified as vandalism, street art has increasingly been viewed as a radical art movement worthy of criticism and acclaim.

Street artists create new forms of expression and negotiate the world in a reflective, clever, and political manner. Numerous museums and galleries display the work of artists who are part of the ongoing development of contemporary art as it intersects with graffiti, the street, animation, popular culture, and the visual environment of the city. The interplay signifies cultural crossovers between art forms found in the street and questions posed in the contemporary art world. Street arts entrance into the museum space simultaneously situates the genre within the art historical cannon and opens the museum establishment to the collection and preservation of popular culture and commercial form; a potentially compromising endeavor for both.

Street art by nature is an ephemeral art form, constructed from short-lived materials. Waclawek discusses the experience of an urban painting “as a transitory process, inextricably tied to the work’s meaning as an element of a city’s changing composition.” The temporality of much street art visually translates the experience of being part of the city. In the museum space street art becomes over-exposed and disables the art form’s ability to function in the same shocking subversive ways. Therefore the relocation of street art from the

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134 Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 91.
street to the museum or auction block alters the artist’s intended cultural encounter for the 
viewer. Street art at the auction block is a primary example of the cooptation and corporate 
world demand that so many artists rear against. A number of works by the street artist 
Banksy have been removed, bricks, mortar and all, to be sold at record setting prices. While 
such an act counters Banksy’s humorous and clever messages of anti-establishment many 
artists, including Shepard Fairey, compromise the potency of their personal projects for 
profit-driven commercial endeavors. Corporate elites have taken note of street art’s clever 
tactics and have commissioned street art tactics for corporate product promotion and 
marketing. In effect the street artist’s personal project is neutered because the commissioned 
imagery serves a corporate interest that the personal project rails against. The artist’s 
contradicting messages reflect compromising light on the museum establishment.

Culture, including street art is quickly becoming industrialized and institutionalized, 
predictable and prepackaged in neat art exhibits where street artists only signify the voice or 
image of the disenfranchised. Art shows and museum exhibitions historically are the couriers 
of revered culture and when street art enters the gallery space it becomes apart of that 
cannon. When street art leaves the street and enters the gallery space its potent ability to 
interact is undone; graffiti’s original subversive meaning is repurposed for the art of the sale.

**STREET ART: ART WORLD BLOCKBUSTER**

Many museums encourage the movement of street art from the urban environment to 
the gallery and museum space by sponsoring the legal creation of street art on designated 
walls. In 2007 the Tate Modern in London presented six towering murals by an international 
selection of artists on an exterior wall. Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Museum included celebrated 
graffiti artist Barry McGee in their 55th Carnegie Invitational. At the Museum of 
Contemporary Art in Detroit McGee tagged a 110-foot word “Amaze” on the exterior of the 
museum structure. The Pennslyvania Academy of Fine Art exhibited a solo show of street 
artist Epso in 2007. The Museum of Modern Art and the Brooklyn Museum hold in their 
collection the fragile paper, linoleum, and woodblock prints of street artist Swoon whose 
cutout pieces cast shadows on a city for public reflection.

The Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary art appointed Jeffery Deitch, the former 
New York City art dealer from the for-profit Deitch Projects which represented graffiti and
street artists, as its director. Under Deitch’s direction, the museum curated the 2011 ‘Art in
the Streets’, the first major museum survey of graffiti and street art in the United States. The
former New York art dealer represented the estate of the late Keith Haring, a forerunner in
the eighties graffiti movement, and more contemporary street artists such as Swoon, Epso, Os
Gemeos, and Barry McGee, all of whom where included in the 2011 exhibition. It is highly
controversial that Deitch mounted a major museum show of artists he sold to his clients. This
helped ensure the value of art works he sold as well as the stature and potential profit of his
client’s collections. ‘Art in the Streets’ represented over 90 graffiti and street artists and a
record-breaking attendance for MOCA at 201, 352 visitors.\textsuperscript{135} Deitch came under scrutiny in
2012 after ousting chief curator Paul Schimmel, a much respected scholar in the art world,
and appointing himself as curator. Many in the art world, including former MOCA board
members Ed Ruscha, Catherine Opie, Barbara Kruger and John Baldessari (all of whom
resigned after Schimmel’s departure), complain that Deitch has “courted celebrity sizzle and
populist appeal at the expense of serious scholarship.”\textsuperscript{136} Critics point to exhibitions like ‘Art
in the Streets’ and the Dennis Hopper retrospective that followed the late actor’s death.\textsuperscript{137}
However heated the debates in the art world, street art continues to be a popular and
profitable form at auction houses, where it sells for record prices. The London based auction
house Bonhams and Philips de Pury & Company’s London branch have hosted auctions
devoted exclusively to art found on or made for the street. The commercial popularity of
street art in the mainstream and the response of art aficionados and historians to Deitch’s
populist approach to the museum continue the debate between high and low. It also raises
further questions of the sanctity of the museum space, which is to be academically objective
not swayed by the incentive of money. The sanctity of the museum space is threatened just as
commercial profitability threatens to compromise street art’s message.

\textsuperscript{135} Miranda, “Art in the Streets.”

\textsuperscript{136} Reed Johnson, “MOCA Director Jeffrey Deitch Defends ‘Seriousness’ of Shows,” \textit{Los Angeles Times},

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
The insertion of art in the public sphere creates new interpretations of the landscape and when street art is placed in a museum or gallery the work begins to loose its political force. Walter Benjamin says, “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be… The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.”\textsuperscript{138} Street art made for the interior gallery space lacks the most meaningful component, the urban street. Street art speaks to all passersby; its style is simple making meaning immediately perceptible while its witty juxtapositions in the environment make its message current and urgent. Street artist Bansky’s provocative paintings on the Israel’s 425-mile long West Bank barrier reminds the world Israel is separating the Palestinian people with a massive concrete wall deemed illegal by the United Nations. Banky’s piece features two small children, with sand buckets and spades, looking through the wall to a tropical paradise. The painting is powerfully impactful because of its site-specific nature, without its placement in the street the painting would be negated to graphic aesthetics.

When street art leaves the street and enters the museum the piece does not have the same wit, illegality, or anti-establishment message attributed by the location. Philosopher Nicholas Alden Riggle writes in the Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, “By pulling them [street art] from the streets the curator eliminates their material use of the street, thereby destroying their meaning and status as street art.”\textsuperscript{139} Street art’s presence on the street although illegal, empowers it with a sense of mystery and intrigue. In order for street art to remain a subversive act it must remain an illegal gesture of a subculture that is a part of society, yet outside of it.

**CORPORATE STREET ART**

Street art has become a mainstream art form that descends from graffiti and has become a way for companies to brand and market their image. Advertisers use the look of graffiti to capture the edgy appeal youth desires to emulate. As an artistic practice of a


subculture it questions notions of public space and the rampant commercialization of the public environment. Using simple graphics to deliver messages street artists are able to capture not only the attention but also the admiration and respect of viewers. Street art’s broad appeal garners second looks so it seems only natural that corporate culture appropriates the look of street art as a selling strategy. Often the street artists and writers explore commissions and projects with corporate entities or establish their own design firms. The use of street art in marketing commercial products, in addition to environmentally friendly eco-products, locally grown produce, and handmade goods, confirms the latest cultural fad to be a socially conscious and anti-consumerist customer.

Graffiti and street art directly opposes the capitalistic system of production and consumption. The art has an ephemeral presence that lasts only until the government buffs it out which eliminates the possibility of the art form being bought or sold or collected by a museum. Furthermore the art form responds to the clutter of advertisements that direct consumption by adopting similar strategies of corporate marketing which it then subverts. By saturating the city with a personal message, marks, or logos the street artist disrupts traditional ways of viewing advertisements and encourages members of the public to consider how they are assaulted by marketing ploys. In their attempts to criticize the hegemonic culture street art and graffiti make the corporate ploys look powerfully manipulative and inauthentic. Recognizing the popularity of street art and graffiti’s unauthorized interventionist tactics corporations and brands began to seek out its authentic aura of credibility.

Many graffiti and street artists work with or create their own commercial brand designs and logos. Companies recognize street art signifies authenticity and subversion against authority figures, an appealing impression to young people. The co-option of the underground look captures an edginess that connects consumers to the brand because it transfers that same look to the young person’s self-image. Arrays of products are marketed using street art and graffiti designs. In 2009 Shepard Fairey collaborated with Levis to design a street art inspired line. As part of the collaboration Fairey put up posters of his art and tagged the *Obey* image on the street outside the store. Levi’s sponsored the collaboration of posting street art in the city. Fairey was an attractive partner for Levi’s because of his transgressive image. Sarah Banet-Weiser and Marita Sturken remark Fairey’s “reputation as
an artist of the street is crucial to his value as an artist,” the illegality of his work subjects him to occasional arrests which turns out to be a “badge of marginal status that has market value.”

Also in 2009 Fairey designed the advertising campaign for Saks Fifth Avenue’s spring ‘Want It!’ catalogue. Fairey created bold designs in red, white, and black that was reminiscent of Soviet Constructivist graphics and his street art imagery. In one advertisement that features a model diagonally inserted over two intersecting red banners the text read in a bold font, “Arm Yourself With a Slouchy Bag.” The model raises her hand in a fist of solidarity and blankly stares ahead, a pose similar to those seen in Alexander Rodchenko’s photographs. French street artist Fafi co-brands her voluptuous female figures ‘fafinettes’ with MAC cosmetics and Adidas footwear. Both Fairey and Fafi transform their street art into selling points for corporate merchandise. Fairey’s counter-culture image extended the same rebellious appeal to Obama in the creation of Hope.

Artists who create pieces for companies or collaborate with them, like Fairey’s work with Levi’s, find it to be a positive interaction that benefits both parties. In the 2005 catalogue for the ‘Sponsorship’ exhibition that surveyed the link between artists and corporations commissioning their work Shepard Fairey wrote, “sponsorship benefits both parties and compromises neither.” Although he acknowledges sponsorship can suggest exploitative aims he assures “[art is] in no way tainted by a corporate agenda” in such a partnership. When working with companies the artist is capable of funding and supporting his or her own projects, free from reliance on “grants from governments, families, or institutions.” However working with corporations invites profit driven goals and eliminates unbiased support for the arts. When working with entities whose “primary goal”, as stated by the Sponsorship catalogue, “is to make money” the artist forfeits his image as an innovator with an uncompromised vision and surrenders the message of his work to the goals


142 Ibid.

143 Ibid., 13.
of the corporation—“making money.” Artists offer an insightful and ‘pure’ personal vision that breaks down when there is a monetary incentive; when the artist becomes advertiser.

**The Implications of Corporate Street Art**

Tagging or stenciling a name, logo, or symbol on the street carries traces of the artist’s presence to the urban space. This creates circulation of alternative dialogues. Early practitioners and even those today respond and interact with political and economic aspects of a space. The early forms of graffiti and street art disrupted and destabilized the exclusive narrative of the city that subjugated the voices of those who challenged the system outside of its accepted venues. As the prominence of graffiti’s signature tag evolved into the street artist’s symbolic logo writings on the street have been met with increasing praise. Companies looking to improve the image of their brand have caught onto the public’s appetite for all things socially conscious and have forged alliance with street artists in order to influence their niche audiences. Corporations use the look of street art to appear cool or transgressive. The establishment attempts to fool the consumer, through appearance, into thinking they are not apart of the establishment that strives for more sales. Although these corporate/artistic alliances compromise the medium it is important to recall the transient nature of street art as it shifts and molds its look and meaning in relation to the environment. This constant state of flux means that although street art and graffiti provide an edgy hip credibility to today’s commercial entity that commercial “pap can become the basis for tomorrow’s culture of resistance.” Although graffiti and street art have been appropriated for commercial sales it is possible that the form could be re-appropriated by activist artists and used against corporate entities.

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144 Ibid., 9.

CHAPTER 5

THE ROLE OF NEW MEDIA: A LOOK AT NEW MEDIA CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND ITS IMPACT ON PRESIDENTIAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Inasmuch as photography is an ellipse of language and a condensation of an ‘ineffable’ social whole, it constitutes an anti-intellectual weapon and tends to spirit away ‘politics’ (that is to say a body of problems and solutions) to the advantage of a ‘manner of being’, a socio-moral status.

—Roland Barthes

Photography and Electoral Appeal

The technological evolution of television, Internet, and social networking enabled the wide dissemination of HOPE and the image of President Obama. The image’s effect in conveying its message is directly linked to its capacity to be reproduced and exist in multiple places. This discussion begins with the Kennedy/Nixon campaign, the first modern campaign, which demonstrated the impact the televised visual image has had on elections. Obama’s innovative use of the Internet paralleled John F. Kennedy’s progressive use of television in 1960.

Developments in mass media and technology since the sixties generated cultural movements at the national and international level. The movements have the ability to grow and spread at lightening speed. Today the internet allows for individuals to connect with people and groups who have similar interests regardless of how geographically diverse by way of virtual messages or discussion boards. The interactions go further than virtual discussion. As new media scholar Clay Shirky notes Internet group “members become convinced they share enough to want to get together in the real world.”146 The Obama campaign seized upon this idea by creating MyBarackObama.com where supporters could

contribute money and develop community groups; the site successfully promoted over 200,000 off-line events in support of Obama.\textsuperscript{147} The Internet has enabled communication that is simultaneously widespread and intimate. The technology changed the way constituents interact with politicians. New media scholar Leah Lievrouw states, “the proliferation and convergence of networked media and information technologies have helped generate a renaissance of new genres and modes of communication and have redefined people’s engagement with media.”\textsuperscript{148} People now experience an interactive two-way dialogue with media systems and are able to use the media to seek out niche groups and create real world connections.

**THE EMERGENCE OF THE TELEVISION**

The popularity of electronic media in the sixties shifted voter’s focus to the candidate’s appearance, personality, and character. Prior to the advent of radio and television, candidates were known exclusively through stump speeches, print journalism, and broadside posters. Although political messages continue to be communicated verbally and in print, visual communication proved to be most important in the marketing of a candidate. Visuals catch the viewer’s attention and deliver the candidate’s message in a simple and direct manner.

The television’s broadcast of the candidate’s images makes people feel close and involved with the candidate. In 1956 sociologists D. Horton and R.R. Wohl introduced the term ‘parasocial interaction’ to describe the way in which individuals believe that they know someone, typically a celebrity encountered through a one-way channel such as the television screen, without actually knowing them.\textsuperscript{149} These feelings of relations are most common with celebrities or other public figures that are only seen in two dimensions and heard through amplified channels. Television provides the viewer an assumed level of personal contact with


presidential candidates and therefore the public forms impressions of them based on personality criteria.

Television revolutionized journalistic coverage of the presidential campaign in 1960 and altered the public’s assessment of candidates. For the first time the television granted the candidate access into the American voter’s home suggesting an intimacy that was capable of influencing the viewer’s perceived closeness to the candidate and their likability. Frank Biocca states that the location of the camera from the candidate gives the viewer an unlikely close connection to the candidate and “activates social codes associated with that physical location.” The camera angles simulate intimate spatial relations positioning the viewer in close contact to the candidates. This close contact causes the viewer to personalize the candidate, assessing facial expressions and tone of voice as they would any individual encountered in real life. Steven Seidman asserts the television emphasizes the candidate’s physical appearance and ‘character’ overshadowing campaign issues and party platforms. The abundance of images empowers the politically uninformed individual to assess candidates based on the attributes of personality and physical appearance. The candidate’s image, a criterion American’s felt qualified to examine, became the defining issue in political campaigns.

Theodore White’s *Making of the President 1960* points to the key role the television played in determining the victor of the first presidential televised debate in 1960. The live coverage of the debate was viewed by over 60% of Americans, an average of seventy-seven million individuals. Surveys revealed that for those viewing the debates at home Kennedy appeared to be more in tune to the American public and declared him the victor, while those listening on the radio reasoned Nixon had won the debate. This discrepancy can be attributed to the visual personification of the candidates.

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Historians agree that Nixon’s physical appearance and demeanor during the first debate greatly affected viewers impressions of him. Prior to the debates Nixon was hitting the campaign trail hard, giving speeches and meeting with constituents. By the time the first debate was to begin Nixon was exhausted and recovering from an illness. His grey suit did not translate to television well making him appear to blend into the background while the bright lights caused him to perspire heavily and without makeup he appeared washed out giving him a sickly pallor. Nixon’s bushy eyebrows and deep under eye circles, along with his five o’clock shadow cast a shaded darkness over his face, giving him a haggard or even angry appearance. Aside from his appearance Nixon addressed Kennedy and the moderator in a traditional debate-style that failed to address or make ‘eye contact’ with viewers at home. His shifty-eyes made him appear allusive and untrustworthy. Kennedy focused his responses to the viewing audience through eye contact with the camera making him appear honest and warm. He was tan, toned, and athletic in appearance. His team of consultants made sure to select a flattering dark grey suit that provided a crisp contrast to the light gray background while the assistance of a makeup artist livened his television image.

The debate resulted in personality rating changes for both candidates; Nixon was viewed as less wise, experienced, and strong than he had been before the debates. Kennedy’s image improved tremendously after the debate; by simply appearing on the stage with Nixon and holding his own, Kennedy was able to crush Nixon’s accusation that his youthful and inexperienced opponent was incapable of assuming the role of president. Through the debate the public came to view Kennedy as a “competent, dynamic, and quick thinking candidate.”

Two days after the first debate The New York Times addressed the new importance of image in the election. Nearly all voters surveyed in Los Angeles found Kennedy’s physical appearance to be better than Nixon who had appeared “haggard, tired, and nervous.”

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man in Topeka, KA commented he was “shocked at Nixon’s appearance—he looked tired and worn.” These responses demonstrate the emotional impact the image and television media can have on the viewer. The television offers an element of distortion; subliminal effects such as camera angles, lighting, and clothing that can effect the viewer’s reception of the candidate. The 1960 campaigns manufactured candidates by manipulating media technologies.

**Advertising Strategies**

The year Nixon and Kennedy met at the polls eighty-eight percent of Americans owned a television. For the first time television played a major role in providing key national exposure and campaign advisors responded by allocating the majority of political advertising dollars to modern media. The way one communicated on television became critical to one’s electoral chances: pronunciation, tone, accent, smoothness of delivery and image were important factors. The 1960 election was a watershed year for modern political marketing. The live election coverage ushered in a new reliance on advertising experts and political image consultants.

Campaigns hired a full range of professional experts and consultants as the political party bosses had decreased influence over the candidate and the election. Kennedy and Nixon’s campaigns followed a typical twentieth century campaign model, which Dennis Johnson outlines in *Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century*. Campaigns charged consultants with crafting the strategy of delivering the campaign message to the voters. Consultants studied polls, focus groups, and dial meters (voters twist a dial to register approval or disapproval for specific aspects of a speech) to better gauge the public’s concerns in the crafting of the message, but constituents were never directly involved. The television

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157 Ibid.


became the campaign’s chief medium of communicating; both Kennedy and Nixon made use of this modern tool to broadcast ideas to the American people and to create a public image. Although television dominated visual communication, direct mailing, radio, billboards, phone banks, and print journalism maintained an important and prominent presence. The cycle of print journalism—morning, midday, and evening editions—directed the campaign cycle of crafting messages, listening to opponents, and responding in kind. This delayed cycle allowed campaign consultants to take time to carefully respond to news events and opponents, this was important as much of campaign work and television advertising was based on experience, guesswork, and instinct. Campaigns relied less on individual donors because the majority of fundraising was done through big-ticket events where financially influential donors would give the maximum amount permitted by law. This resulted in a spectator public who had little input or choice in elections as interaction was limited to small groups of party volunteers, and the few who donated to campaigns.

Kennedy’s campaign hired image consultants to advise him. A well-oiled publicity machine kept information and photographs flowing in the news media and presented Kennedy as a handsome family man and a charismatic war hero who had recently won the Pulitzer Prize for Profiles in Courage. Kennedy’s theme, “New Frontier,” embodied the search for new knowledge, new beginnings in the Cold War, and the appeal of the unknown ‘new decade’ that was on the horizon. Consultants designed posters featuring a smiling Kennedy accompanied by the slogan, “A Time for Greatness,” referencing Kennedy’s theme of changing the ineffectual Eisenhower/ Nixon administration. His catchphrase, “Let’s Get America Moving Again,” was youthful, and infused “vigor and activity” into the campaign. This youthful vigor radiated out of Kennedy at the first televised debates.

Kennedy’s “Leadership for the 60s ” poster consists of a simple design of the young candidate smiling and gazing ahead into an undefined future. His face is overlays three horizontal bands of red, white, and blue; the top red band reads, “KENNEDY FOR PRESIDENT,” and the bottom blue band in smaller font features the leadership slogan. The

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161 Trent, Friedenberg and Denton, Political Campaign Communication, 62.
candidate’s face is framed slightly off center revealing a three-quarter view that Roland Barthes describes as, “suggest[ing] the tyranny of the ideal.”\footnote{Barthes, \textit{Mythologies}, 91.} His face is partially highlighted with a “heavenly” light as he looks ahead into a future that the public cannot know, placing him in the realm of a “higher humanity.” He became something “other” and something better, instilling him with a public trust that desires his leadership. Kennedy’s campaign team successfully built a legend or aura that stirred emotions and support around the charismatic figure.

**Nixon’s 1968 Advertising Strategies**

Television and its visual influence drastically impacted the 1960 election and all those that were to come in its wake. Joe McGinniss’s 1969 in depth study of Richard Nixon’s 1968 bid to the White House, \textit{The Selling of the President} showed Nixon and his team of consultants planning his entire 1968 candidacy around manipulating television. Nixon’s media consultant Roger Ailes stated “TV has the power now” and belied the editorial press.\footnote{McGinnis, \textit{The Selling of the President}, 66.} McGinnis quoted Nixon’s advertising and creative director, Harry Treleaven admitting advertising agencies successfully spent billions on conditioning the American public to accept and respond to blatant commercial advertising.\footnote{Ibid., 78.} However the campaign spent a great deal of time and money crafting and controlling the uses of television in order to promote Nixon’s image as a ‘presidential’ one. Nixon’s best and most prominent speechwriter Raymond K. Price emphasized that television’s pliability conveyed the positive impression of Nixon appealing to the emotions of voters. Price asserted that because voters are “lazy” and “uninterested” in making an effort to truly understand politics it was easier to gain votes through a positive impression than through contemplative reason.\footnote{Ibid., 38.} Price noted that reason required the voter to agree or disagree, which required too much research and investigation into the candidate; a positive impression of personality was much easier, it

\footnote{Ibid., 78.}

\footnote{Ibid., 38.}
didn’t require intellect. Avoidance of engaging the intellect led to efforts to rouse malleable surface level emotions; strategies that exploit emotions continue to expound.

**STILLS USED FOR NIXON**

In 1968 market research showed voters desired their president to be personable, thoughtful, and compassionate; Nixon was found to be cold, so his image was changed to match a national ideal.\(^{167}\) The Nixon campaign did not worry about changing the man but they focused on producing symbolic commercials that made him appear warm.\(^{168}\) A 1968 campaign commercial for Nixon paired his voice with still images, selected to represent traditional American values and faith in democracy. Creative director Treleaven hired television cameraman Eugene Jones to create the commercial advertisement with a valued artistic dimension. Jones designed the sequencing aesthetics of the images to create juxtapositions that resulted in relationships and dynamism among the photographs. The Nixon team intended the images to overshadow the words extending a fresh and lively dimension to Nixon through association.

Jones’s assistant Jim Sage recognized the historical magnitude of using stills to persuade and contacted the Museum of Modern Art to suggest an exhibition of the commercials.\(^{169}\) As a relatively new propagandistic endeavor, Sage described the commercial’s creation of an overall image that abandoned substantive rhetoric. Nixon only attained a positive impression because his verbalizations resonated with the meaning of the images. The museum declined on the basis of the films use of trite clichés. Unfortunately the museum missed an unparalleled opportunity to visually expose the hijacking of artful aesthetics for political gain. Such an exhibition could have served to educate and inform the public about the techniques of manipulation and persuasion so that they may have been better equipped to avoid such crafty ploys. It is possible the curators had less an understanding of the process than they do now and it would have proved most difficult to mount a publically funded exhibit that endorsed or attacked a candidate.

\(^{167}\) Ibid., 80.
\(^{168}\) Ibid., 81.
\(^{169}\) Ibid., 85.
The campaign used images and symbols to engage people’s emotions. The visual image is more quickly comprehended and more readily retained than verbal ones making its exploitation for political and economic gain easy and frequent.

The deregulation of television in the 1980s enabled advertising agencies to create even more symbolically simplified “dumbing-down” emotional messages. Opponents of deregulation say broadcaster’s few public service programs and impetus to seek profit violates the Communications Act of 1934 which requires broadcasters to operate in the public interest. The Nixon campaign and following campaigns use advertising to reshape the concept of truth, images are used to shape the impressions of personality and replace the discussion of issues. Ultimately the American political candidate and system has become a well packaged and merchandized product that makes the public “think they’re getting something worthwhile,” but actually operates against them.170

**THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CAMPAIGN**

While the television projected the importance of a candidate’s image and an illusion of intimate closeness to unprecedented heights in 1960, today Internet technology provides an even greater feeling of connection to the candidate as it opens up a truly interactive two-way channel of communication.

The ways campaigns are run have changed a great deal since 1960. Consultants continue to play a dominant advisory role however their strategy development integrates online technology and media that welcomes constituent input and ideas into the core of the campaign. Campaign advertising continues to promote messages over the radio and television but amplifies to Internet media channels including email, blogs, YouTube, social media platforms, podcasts, interactive websites, microblogs like Twitter, and even cell phone text messages. The increased media presence results in a twenty-four hour campaign cycle that instantaneously updates and responds. Media technology multiplies the availability of research data which candidates increasingly rely upon to micro-target and guide their campaign message and image. Campaign fundraising continues to depend upon big-ticket donations like those of super PACS but as the Obama victory attests small amount

170 Ibid., 115.
contributions raised through online efforts have the potential to influence election results. The integration of new media technology has enabled greater citizen participation in twenty-first century campaigns.

**New Advertising Strategy: Branding And Image Marketing**

In the twenty-first century brands usurp the role of culture and individuals create, experience, and challenge personal identity through their brand affiliation; brands link people to lifestyles, politics, and activism. New media scholar Mark Deuze notes, “Culture is increasingly important to do business in the contemporary world” as branding, design, and mass personalization ‘culturize’ goods that are used “for identification, representation, and difference.”

Office seekers and political consultants recognize commercial marketing and media influence the political attitudes and knowledge of Americans and have adopted similar strategies. The entrepreneurial mode of candidate development combines a discussion of political and economic restructuring in a sound-bite rhetoric with cultural-creative strategies like image marketing.

Responding to the marketization of the social life consultants advise candidates to market themselves like products by creating a brand that is relevant to constituents and sustainable over the course of the campaign. The campaign establishes a consistent worldview and ethos that is branded through the marketing of images, or sign systems. The brand name, logo design, and unique slogan or jingles are portrayals of the candidate inline with the intended brand meaning. Obama’s campaign established the brand “Yes We Can,” which signaled a unifying call for grassroots activism and was enforced through the campaign’s message of hope and change. All elements reiterate and reinforce the message, ingraining it in the social mindset.

When customers connect to a brand strong affiliation and loyalty are forged. He or she integrates the brand image into the personal identity by labeling the self and participating in groups or activities characteristic of the brand; an Urban Outfitters customer will label the self as ‘alternative’ to social norms and will listen to music produced by independent record

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labels; an REI customer will label the self as an ‘outdoors enthusiast’ and will retreat to
nature. A 2011 *Economist* article points out that “people have a passionate attachment to
some brands,” and often define themselves through consumer goods.172 Political candidates
develop a brand image around themselves and their messages in order to establish similar
sustainable relationships with constituents. The candidate’s brand compliments the
constituent’s aspirations and moves them to identify with and promote the candidate.

The priority of a branded candidate is to maintain the image, which shifts focus from
leadership values to the projection of an ideal image. The branded candidate is at once visual
and material and restructures the political process by intensely marketing his or her persona
and image over issues and policy plans. The candidate’s public image supersedes any
substantive discussion transforming politics into a simulated value-exchange, with no
pragmatic value, like that of consumerism.

With the recent advance of communications technology, consumers are continually
bombarded with an influx of information creating a competitive environment for patronage,
money, attention spans, and information-processing capabilities. Images such as logos,
symbols, and pictures are effective shortcuts to reach the costumer. An image is capable of
presenting a complex body of information in a simplified, legible concept; it serves as a
repository of easily understood values and meaning. The proliferation of images to explain,
instruct, and inform attunes the viewer to recognize and classify according to a few key
features, making the viewer adept and versed in a visual literacy. Familiarity with visual
images begins at a young age: children are socialized to recognize red, white, and blue as
colors of American patriotism. The visual image provides recognition and/ or analysis of
persons, events, and situations encountered daily, allowing viewers to develop a response
based on visual trigger features they are able to define or decipher.

**Micro-Targeting**

Digital media technologies allow campaigns to develop strong personalized
relationships with constituents. Research data determines which images and sound bites will

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172 The Economist, “Logoland: Why Consumers Balk at Companies Efforts to Rebrand Themselves,” *The
effectively personalize the candidate and capture the public’s attention. In the era of social networking research data comes not only from public polls and peer-reviewed studies but increasingly from the voter directly. Individuals willingly contribute information to websites; questions are posed, not as privacy invasion, but as personalizing aids weeding through the excess. In 2008 Obama’s campaign maintained a database of information on voters who willingly contributed it when they signed up for his emails and blog. This refined research micro-targets specific audiences making the candidate appeal to diverse markets.

Micro-targeting is a direct marketing strategy that tracks personal information such as interests, party identification, and spending habits of individuals. This information is stored and segmented by sophisticated databases that identify potential supporters. Campaigns use this information to predict attitudes and behaviors in order to transmit the right tailored message. Personalized image marketing is embraced by a politically uninformed and information over-loaded public who only have time for trivial sound bites and images.

Social networks provide candidates with relatively cheap advertisement space that caters to particular niche audiences. The candidate is able to reach a robust and varied market by customizing his or her image to appeal to specific subgroups. Conditioned through years of exposure to mass marketed advertising campaigns people are bored with the deceptive ploys to persuade and entice. Tactics become transparent and a premium is placed on one-on-one direct marketing. In an era dominated by rigid top-down information structures that mass-produce media content, a transition to a connected feeling of specialized community is refreshing. Voters respond to these personalized messages with feelings of intimate connectedness making it more likely they will vote for the candidate. In actuality these are parasocial feelings, as they do not know the candidate.

In 2008 Obama’s campaign team developed strategies for candidate-voter connectedness. Graphic designers crafted unique sunrise logos for each state and various groups while maintaining an overall uniformity. Barack Obama’s expert use of social media tools enabled communication between the candidate and the public reinforcing his image as a man of the people. Obama’s website, MyBarackObama.com (MyBo) welcomed voter content and provided communicative platforms for diverse interest groups allowing them to personalize a connection to the candidate. Additionally, connecting with other users through messages and events made people feel like they were a part of the political conversation.
HOWARD DEAN AND THE INTERNET

During the 2004 presidential election, Howard Dean’s innovative use of the Internet and online communication proved to be a powerful and relatively inexpensive campaign tool. Online presence attracted a youth following who became invested in the candidate. The campaign tapped into the potential of the youth activists whose Internet know-how increased Dean’s digital presence. Dean was the first candidate to create a blog, which enabled constituents to share ideas and converse with the candidate. This web-based forum empowered the public as they submitted ideas toward the development of the campaign message; Dean promised to incorporate the best ideas. This was a revolutionary approach that abandoned the top down model for an open political exchange.

The social networking site Meetup.com was incorporated into Dean’s Internet strategy and successfully rallied supporters and campaign volunteers. Meetup.com was utilized to create local community events that would connect geographically close supporters who might otherwise not have known each other. These meetings helped to forge a passionately involved and connected base of Dean supporters. The Internet also proved to be a powerful fundraising tool that reached thousands of first time campaign donors. Communicating through his website and Meetup.com Dean was able to raise forty-one million dollars, the majority of which was in small increments of twenty-five to one-hundred dollars.\(^\text{173}\) Although the Dean team developed innovative Internet strategies the nation as a whole was not online, giving the strategies little purpose. Although Dean was unsuccessful in securing the Democrat nomination, his campaign laid the technology groundwork for future campaigns.

OBAMA’S BRAND INTEGRATION

Recognizing the potential of engaging support through the Internet Obama’s campaign team developed the most technologically savvy campaign to date. The public’s inclusion in the political process was revolutionary in empowering people to feel directly included and represented; Internet technology enabled a return to the sentiment of ‘power to

\(^\text{173}\) Johnson, Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century, 5.
the people’ at the grassroots level. This campaign image was developed through a social networking model that promoted and fundraised for the Obama political brand.

**Youth Activists**

Young people spearhead the twenty-first century’s transition to a socially networked culture. Obama tapped into this tech savvy demographic as a potentially powerful army of activists that had been relatively inactive since the sixties. The online medium and the candidate’s idealist message extended an invitation for youth participation. The tech savvy supporters lead key organizational aspects of integrating traditional campaign advertising, fundraising, and community building with online platforms. The Obama campaign brought in the twenty-four year old Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes to develop an online media presence that built upon and extended young people’s mastery and immersion in social media forums. Not only did sixty-six percent of the youth vote for Obama in 2008, they provided unparalleled support as active campaign volunteers.¹⁷⁴

Obama brought his message of change to the millions online, built a strong network of supporters, and provided the platform for self-organization and mobilization. Hughes developed Obama’s blog and website, MyBarackObama.com (MyBo), which established a breakthrough Internet presence. Within hours of Obama declaring his candidacy over one thousand groups organized through the website and by the end of the campaign thirty-five thousand groups had formed.¹⁷⁵ Informative MyBo profiles introduced the public to the senator, Michelle Obama, and Joe Biden.

**Connection Transparency**

MyBo nurtured feelings of connectedness to Obama and the campaign process. Supporters created their own MyBo profile where they posted personal information, responses to campaign news, and their election experiences. The platform gave each supporter a powerful voice; the campaign team monitored and responded to comments and

¹⁷⁴ Keeter, Horowitz, and Tyson, “Young Voters in the 2008 Election.”
questions and often shared the pictures, videos, and posts of regular supporters with the entire blog community. This feedback increased familiarity with the candidate, mimicked proximity to him, and validated supporters as important contributors. Although it was impossible for Obama to be this in-sync with his supporters, people nevertheless felt compellingly connected to him.

The MyBo technology and the campaign’s other websites (on platforms like Tumblr and MySpace) reinforced the campaign’s mandate to rally support offline. Announcing his candidacy, Obama called his supporters to action, stating, “This campaign can’t only be about me. It must be about us—it must be about what we can do together.” The Obama campaign created feelings of solidarity with constituents by encouraging participation through interactive features. The MyBo technology connected people who felt a shared self-conception, shared set of grievances, and shared identity empowering them to create active groups and initiatives. Membership in groups like ‘Veterans for Obama’ and ‘Teachers for Obama’ made the base of support seem smaller making their active support necessary to elect Obama. Those who participated in offline action and community building were rewarded with online ‘activity index’ points, raising their MyBo prestige.

Obama’s image was associated with an assumed level of transparency as he directly communicated with supporters. The two point nine million who signed up to receive campaign text messages were the first to learn that Obama had selected Joe Biden as his vice presidential running mate. This gave people a sense of inclusion, as integral parts of the campaign team. Obama’s email list of 13 million subscribers was used to bypass the media and directly engage with supporters. The campaign was able to maintain such a strong email base by personalizing email content. When users signed up to receive emails from the campaign they were asked what issues were important to them. This enabled the campaign to segment emails by issue so that users were kept informed about things they found important. This empowered supporters to speak confidently and accurately about Obama’s policy stances and message of change. Campaign volunteer Rahaf Harfoush reasons this turned Obama supporters into “Issue Ambassadors” who would share the information with friends.

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176 Dennis, *Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century*, 54.
This person-to-person exchange was vital, as “voters tend to use interpersonal communication to reinforce their ballot decisions.”\textsuperscript{177}

### Interactive

MyBo provided convenient interactive one-click mechanisms for people to donate, call voters, and sign up volunteers. Registered MyBo users could link accounts to Facebook so they could integrate friends and posts. This cross platform integration enhanced the person-to-person grassroots style. Facebook applications provided MyBo users convenient access to updates, videos, and campaign news directly from their Facebook page. The blog’s interactive features included a personal activity index that reported the individual’s reported to-date campaign efforts. Personal fundraising pages allowed people to message contribution requests to friends and family and featured a thermometer that peaked at their individual contribution goal.

During the primaries the Obama team recruited volunteers to work virtual phone banks. Working from home, volunteers signed in online where they were given a list of phone numbers to contact in support of Obama. The grassroots initiative also included Fightthesmears.com, a webpage created by the campaign, but run by supporters. The site encourages supporters to respond to incorrect or misleading accusations and set the record straight.

The campaign’s IPhone application provided an easy way to personalize political phone banks by integrating a person’s cell phone contact list into the app. Areas codes organized lists by battleground state. The app kept track of who had been called, so that no one was mistakenly called twice. After calls users were given the option of reporting their phone banking results; reported results of supporters or undecided voters were updated in a database. The GPS feature kept individuals informed on local political events, news media stories, issues, countdown, and donation numbers to encourage continued interaction and maintain a knowledgeable constituency.

\textsuperscript{177} Trent, Friedenberg, and Denton, Political Campaign Communication, 315.
Intimacy

The Obama campaign built relationships that felt intimate to voters. The campaign used communication developments to personalize messages, initiate two-way dialogues, and bypass media. Strategies fostered grassroots activism and fundraising.

Active communication with member initiatives online and by cell phone amplified and supported the Obama brand in local towns and communities. The campaign adopted an ‘opt in’ strategy of communication which delivered content only to those interested, increasing the likelihood of response and activity. Text messages informing about rallies and events occurring in a person’s geographical region were sent to those who opted-in with their zip code. Two-way communication was facilitated through text messages that allowed supporters to message the campaign questions.

The campaign and website encouraged supporters as activists and as ‘creatives’. Personal stories and videos of passionate supporters featured on MyBo produced a widespread community of intimacy. The campaign’s inclusion of user-generated video provided a fresh supply of new content from places the Obama video team couldn’t visit and helped instill a viral and personable quality that was not possible with official campaign content. This initiative got people talking about their financial situations, families, homes, and jobs and why they supported Obama. The stories built a welcoming and inclusive tone for all community members by addressing the issues and concerns of everyday Americans. Passionate supporters told authentic stories that provided uncommitted voters a means to relate and find a voice in the campaign.

Advancing technologies that have democratized the creative process facilitate adept user-generated content such as artwork, photos, songs, and music videos. The Obama team responded to the retooled producer/consumer relationship and established an environment that provided ideological and material support in the form of technological formats. For example, the campaign uploaded Obama’s speeches online so they could be reused and edited by supporters. MyBo provided a venue to publish that reworked content. User-generated videos were welcomed on the campaign’s YouTube channel, which featured 1,839
videos streamed by over 130 million viewers, decentralizing the control of the mass media.178 The campaign endorsed this production because it heightened Obama’s visibility, allowed people to engage with the campaign on their own terms, and gave people a sense of shaping the campaign process. It also enabled a personalized projection of meaning that connected users to Obama and echoed his grassroots strategies. The most iconic images did not come from professional images makers but from the activists he inspired.

**SHEPARD FAIREY’S USER GENERATED CONTENT**

Shepard Fairey’s self-funded production of *Hope* became Obama’s most visible icon. Fairey’s distribution techniques echoed Obama’s focus on interactive engagement, authenticity, and creativity. *Hope* was made available for free download on Fairey’s website allowing supporters to post it to their social network profiles like a digital yard sign. Fairey also disseminated the image as a piece of illegal street art. These illegal techniques and Fairey’s own brand image, which purports to be a check on mainstream politics and policy, appear grassroots, authentic, and welcome to other user input. *Hope* succeeded in heightening visibility and associating Obama with characteristics of ‘rebellion’, inspiring participation in those not traditionally interested in politics.

The world is a global village. Relations to others are not formed through families, heritage, or tradition, but through interest in similar consumer goods, brands, and popular media. The effectiveness of the *Hope* image and its message is directly linked to its capacity to be reproduced and exists as multiple mediums and environments. This reproduction and recontextualization alter the image meaning thereby appealing to a multitude of constructed cultural identities. Borrowing from familiar cultural symbols and visual trigger features Fairey’s poster has vast appeal. As it was digitally reproduced *Hope* spawned new meanings in new contexts stimulating new interest ultimately mobilizing people around the felt sense of common cause to elect Obama as president.

MICRO-TARGETING PERSONALIZES

Marketing strategists Al Reis and Jack Trout state in their 1986 book Positioning, “The only hope to score big is to be selective, to concentrate on narrow target, to practice segmentation.” Obama’s campaign updated this concept and used microtargeting to create and instill an individualized image of “brand Obama,” tailored to each specific mind. This was accomplished by developing an email initiative that delivered messages with “relevant and customized content for readers.” The campaign also geared graphics and messages to niche audiences, like women’s groups, Latinos, African Americans, teachers, and youth voters. Sophisticated web based research and database building allowed the Obama campaign to produce specialized compelling content that engaged connectivity and participation.

Obama’s perceived level of accessibility contributed to the grassroots financial success of the campaign. The campaign raised five million dollars through the MyBo Internet platform. The average contribution of the three million Internet donors was only eighty dollars. This was a return to people powered politics, and for the first time it was funded by average people and small donations. Although the campaign provided incentives to donate, like the opportunity to dine with the candidate, people were compelled to participate because he interacted with them through a transparent campaign process.

STYLE

Style is a key component of any political candidate’s public personae and appeal. Talking points, photo-ops, and personalities are orchestrated and guided by the ideals of focus groups and poll surveys. The visually literate public often finds the candidate’s demeanor and style as noticeably artificial image marketing, however Obama’s style appeared organic, arising without effort. Although his campaign team played a role in

182 Trent, Friedenberg, and Denton, Political Campaign Communication, 315.
guiding Obama’s style in terms of graphics, rhetoric, and dress, the campaign’s online organization opened the political forum and ceded a certain degree of control to the public. The public contributions built upon the candidate’s style and generated new heights of viral support.

As a relatively unknown candidate the campaign was able to create the marketing slogans, advertising strategies, image, rhetoric, and style in tandem with the candidate. Every element of Obama’s stylistic identity was masterfully conceived and consistently applied across platforms, message, and image. All stylistic and strategic elements reiterated his message of “Yes We Can”, an affirmation of grassroots potential. As a man of the people Obama maintained a hopeful and upbeat demeanor; the candidate avoided attack ads and smear campaigns, he dressed casually and rolled up his sleeves as often as possible, email messages from the campaign were brief and relaxed in tone, and his speeches were agile and current, connecting with supporters.

The style of presentation is important in raising the persuasive efficacy of advertisements and image marketing. The Obama campaign created an overall aesthetic theme cultivated across graphic and digital platforms. The logo connects with the campaign’s identity and message of change and national unity. The campaign’s logo resembles a sunrise over a field of traditional red and white stripes; the sunrise symbolizes a new day of dawning promise, while the field symbolizes new growth, the stripes a tradition of patriotism. An arching ‘Obama blue’ sky spans across the top, hinting at an ‘O’ for Obama; the light blue color is an innovative twist on the patriotic color scheme, anchoring Obama as an affective agent of change grounded in tradition. The logo is free of typography, setting it apart from typical campaign logos that center the candidate’s name.

Without an attached name the freestanding symbol is universal in appeal and echoes Obama’s idea of change. Adapting across demographics the logo spread across the nation at lightening speed as its brevity of expression captured the campaign’s ideals. The campaign transformed the ‘O’ in ‘Women for Obama’ into a Venus symbol, denoting the female gender, while the field within the ‘O’ transformed into lined paper for ‘Students for Obama’. These logos portrayed Obama as a diverse entity, allowing multiple niche groups to find a connection to Obama. Visually including distinctive groups Obama appeared to be actively
engaged and in communication with the people. This instilled hope in voters that as president, Obama would be an advocate for their various needs.

The campaign created a consistent aesthetic in the form of color palate and typeface. A traditional palate of red, white, and blue was updated with a lighter hue of blue, representing the fresh and novel innovations of a new leader. The combination of blue, symbolizing the democrat party, and red, symbolizing the republican party, illustrated the campaigns message of a unified nation. The campaign selected a simple san-serif typeface that maintained a bold gravitas. Gotham, a typeface originally designed for the American magazine GQ, was selected for its unassuming casualty that took on an authority when capitalized.

The reiteration of the campaign’s message in the universal logo, the colors, and typeface fix the image in the viewer’s mind. The elements are simple and capable of conveying the message in visual brevity. Graphic artist Scott Dadich noted the appeal of Bush’s “W” logo in the 2004 election stating, “American’s are conditioned to equate visual brevity with success and power. One need only look at the landscape of corporate America for confirmation: the Nike swoosh, the CBS eye, Target’s bulls-eye, and McDonald’s golden arches.”

Ries and Trout state, “The best approach in an over communicated society is the oversimplified message.” Reducing information enables connections with specific emotions involving fear, health, money, and safety; response to emotions is quick and done without thinking. The campaign’s media microtargeting focused on a target audience enabling them to send a specific message that spoke to a feeling his supporters already had. Their aim was to retie connections that already existed in the mind, those ideas of a democratic and virtuous leader who instilled hope by listening and responding to the people; new media platforms supported this through interactive two-way communication features.


184 Reis and Trout, Positioning, 8.
**MEDIA STYLE**

The media determine the meaning of events, elections, and politicians through their framed narrative. Recognizing the agenda setting role of the media the Obama campaign made innovative use of the Internet to manage and publish the candidate’s style and image; such aspects have no pragmatic political value but are nevertheless demanded by the public. The campaign team crafted a consistent message and graphic style of unifying change and people powered politics. Although the Internet provided an open forum of communication the campaign kept a close eye on the imagery and messaging associated with the movement.

The message of “Yes We Can,” affirmed the possibilities of people as they united under a common cause. Obama’s casual yet authoritative style supported his image as a man of the people and affirmed his ability to lead. Media sound bites and images of Obama’s tempered tone of voice, eloquent yet accessible choice of words, his energetic interactions with crowds at rallies, and his ability to casually interact and relax with regular folks translated well. Although Obama’s availability to the press was strictly controlled his Internet presence supported and authenticated the portrayal of Obama as a man of the people.

The proliferation of digital technology and media screens have made it possible for people to project their own ideas onto Obama. Throughout the campaign Obama made himself a mirror of the populous’ hopes. In his book, *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama writes, “I serve as a blank slate on which people of vastly different stripes project their own views.” In early 2007 when announcing his decision to seek the Democratic nomination, Obama stated, “This campaign must be the occasion, the vehicle, of your hopes and your dreams.” Obama made himself, his image, a mirror for a nation that sought change.

Obama’s diverse heritage and background- as an African American, as a white American, as the son of an immigrant, as an ivy league alum, to name a few-made it possible for a wide ranging audience to find a commonality with the candidate. Obama’s relatively unknown status at the start of the campaign added to this appeal. New media technologies spread Obama’s message and image to every demographic and allowed anyone and everyone to be creatively inspired by it.

The digital sphere allowed Obama’s image and message to be reproduced countless times across media platforms. Black Eyed Peas performer will.i.am reproduced Obama’s concession speech at the New Hampshire primary (Obama lost to Hilary Clinton) as a viral
music video that features a collage of Obama’s speech interspersed with clips of celebrities echoing his words in song and spoken word. The video, like other reproductions of Obama’s image, takes the speech out of context, thereby changing its meaning and value.

The public awareness of Obama grew as his image was broadcast on television, reproduced on the Internet and remade by individual supporters; he has easily become the most visible president in history. But this occurs to the detriment of the public. When the image proliferates and takes the place of issues there are politically adverse consequences. An image can automatically influence an individual who interprets meaning based on a few key features that classify it. A candidate holding a baby or volunteering with a charity is thought of as warm and personable. This ‘reading’ process is socially constructed and mechanical, or done without thinking. Consequently images can be exploited without the appearance of manipulation, especially when individuals are remaking the content themselves. People understand their reaction to be one of natural force, however specific tangible symbols illicit emotion and seduce viewers. The image can therefore lend itself to political manipulation, wedging out a more complicated and cavernous discussion of issues.

In Roland Barthes’s 1972 essay, “Photography and Electoral appeal,” he states, “Candidates offers us through their likeness… a type of social setting, the spectacular comfort of family, legal and religious norms, the suggestion of innately owning such items of bourgeois property as Sunday Mass, xenophobia, steak and chips, cuckold jokes, in short what we call an ideology.”\(^\text{185}\)

Obama was able to embody the personae which Barthes describes, but at an even more personable level, as Obama’s likeness was reinterpreted through the individual hopes of each American who voted for him.

The Internet encouraged participation and interaction in the general public. The Obama campaign benefitted from the online organization, interaction, and public contributions. Pooling together supporters in the form of networked groups allowed individuals to share knowledge, experiences, and resources in a temporary arena that converged for the shared goal of electing Barack Obama as President of the United States.

\(^{185}\) Barthes, *Mythologies*, 91.
The collaborative effort to create a shared content is what media and cultural studies scholar Axel Bruns terms “produsage.”\(^{186}\) Bruns goes on to state, “the produsage of society in itself turns out to be the underlying mission of the produsage environment.”\(^{187}\) That is to say that a need to communicate and bond create social environments that grow out of this collaborative effort and, as Clay Shirky states, allow people to gain a “sense of value just from participating.”\(^{188}\) The use of social tools to gather a base of supporters with common interest was an important supplement to giving purpose to participants and therefore an incentive to contribute.

**CONCLUSION**

Television and its visual influence drastically impacted the 1960 presidential campaign and all those that followed in its wake. The image became a key component and a deciding factor for the majority of the populous. The image’s potential to impact the campaign process is even greater through the use of the internet. The online forum has enabled personalized content that appeals to specified audiences and broadcasts the smallest voice to equal heights. Social networking tools have provided a hub where organization and real world action can grow. Although one can spread their own political stance and thoughts on the candidates, making each feel like an active participant in the election and politics, the prominence of the image across multiple screens yields unrealistic ideals of a highly accessible president, further removing the public from concrete issues. The rise of branding and image marketing raises the importance and prominence of the branded image’s role and turns the presidential candidate into a commodity that can be bought and sold. The president no longer becomes accountable to real issues, but to his image ideal.


\(^{187}\) Ibid, 316.

\(^{188}\) Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, 223.
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