

‘Double distinction’: an analysis of  
consumer participation in Apple  
branding

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## Abstract

This thesis aimed to understand the relationship between the Apple brand and Apple consumers. It presents an historical semiotic analysis of a selection of the Apple brand from 1978 to 2009 and in-depth interviews with Apple consumers. The interviews were then analysed thematically, looking at the ways participants employed Apple in the construction of identity. The thesis extends theoretical critical approaches to branding with the inclusion of participant interviews. Approaches to branding consider the role of consumers in brand production and ownership, but this thesis moves focus beyond abstraction to interrogate how much of consumer participation is predetermined by the brand. This was achieved by actually examining the ways in which brand consumers articulate the brand. In doing so findings showed that Apple consumers distinguish themselves from non-Apple consumers, but significantly they made a second distinction. For the first distinction, Apple consumers articulated emotional investment, superior aesthetic taste, and feelings of being part of an exclusive community. The second distinction is an articulation of uniqueness within the Apple community. This is achieved through creating a sense of critical distance from consumption via individual lifestyle and taste. Participants legitimised their understanding and relationship with Apple as inimitable. They deployed an individual reflexive strategy, to exert a sense of freedom from what Bourdieu refers to as 'the game'. Therefore, the thesis represents a response to contemporary branding theory in a rapidly changing consumer landscape. Double distinction highlights the symbolic efforts of the consumer to exert a self-representation associated with a higher condition and position in relation to, but independent of, the brand producer. This redefinition of distinction argues that Apple offers a point of enquiry into the relationship between structure and agency within brand design that may shed light on forms of contemporary consumption.

## Acknowledgements

*This is the moment of embarking. All auspicious signs are in place.*

In the beginning, all things are hopeful. We prepare ourselves to start anew. Though we may be intent on the magnificent journey ahead, all things are contained in the first moment: our optimism, our faith, our resolution, and our innocence. In order to start, we must make a decision. This decision is a commitment to daily self-cultivation. We must make a connection to our inner selves. Outside matters are superfluous. Alone and naked we negotiate all of life's travails. Therefore we alone must make something of ourselves, transforming ourselves into the instruments for experiencing the deepest spiritual essence of life. Once we make our decision, all things will come to us. Auspicious signs are not a superstition, but a confirmation. They are a response. It is said that if one chooses to pray to a rock with enough devotion, even the rock will come alive. In the same way, once we choose to commit ourselves to spiritual practice, even the mountains and valleys will reverberate to the sound of our purpose.

*Deng Ming Dao 1992*

~

I begin acknowledgements with Deng Ming Dao, because at the beginning of my PhD all things were hopeful. Since embarking on this journey there have been times when one or more of the qualities of optimism, faith, resolution and innocence abandoned me. I've had days where I thought I might just as well give up, but each time I made a decision; I chose to see it as a beginning and to commit myself to the thesis. I now understand that any moment may be a moment of embarking and how the rock comes alive.

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Date

## Chapter one

### *Introduction*

Contemporary authors of academic branding theory have given a great deal of attention to the way brands work as a source of meaning and value, and to how they work as mediums of exchange between brand consumer and producer. In particular, increasing attention has been paid to the role of consumers in the construction of the brand and to the extent to which consumers can be deemed to have agency in the development and maintenance of brand identities. Taken as a whole these recent enquiries into how brands actually work and how the properties of a brand relate to each other might be described as an ontological approach to the study of brands. This thesis, too, explores the ontology of the brand and contributes to this body of literature via a detailed case study of the Apple brand, but significantly this study includes Apple consumers. It explores the ways in which consumers are positioned in the brand and how they engage with and employ brands. It also explores what it means to participate with a brand, and the effect of consumer participation on the development of a brand. Through this case study of the Apple brand, the thesis provides more general insights into the inner ‘logic of the brand’ (Arvidsson 2006) in contemporary consumer society and, in particular, about the role of the consumer and consumer agencies in producing and sustaining brand identities. The thesis investigates the brand not as ‘a closed object’ but instead as an object that is ‘open’ (Lury 2004) and further explores how the Apple brand is implicated in social relations and identities. To do this, the thesis considers brands as ‘new media objects’ (Lury 2004, p. 6) and explores how the Apple brand might be thought about in this way, as the sum of different elements as it works over time. The thesis looks at how different aspects and stages of development in Apple branding themes and core brand messages work in relation to one another.

Much of the research on brands to date has been either theoretical or abstract, the limitations of which are a lack of scrutiny of ideas on sustained brand case studies. As the literature on brands has evolved, gaps have emerged where questions have not

been addressed around what consumers think brands ‘do’ and what *they* think *they* ‘do’ with brands. This thesis therefore fills a gap in the academic literature on brands and aims to provide an in-depth *empirical* study of the relationship between consumer and producer within the case of one well-known and iconic brand. Its originality lies in its inclusion of the consumer voice to better understand consumers’ relationship to and with the brand. Linking this understanding of brand consumption to the wider literature on consumption and identity, this thesis also provides an innovative understanding of the process by which brands and identities are mutually constitutive. The inclusion of consumer interviews also serves to fill an intellectual gap by extending the study of identity work in terms of the potential and limitations of consumer agency in brand production.

One element of considering consumers in this study involves thinking about the area of identity and to do this the thesis draws upon Bourdieu’s (1984) seminal work *Distinction* in some detail. As the title of the thesis suggests Bourdieu’s work is significant to the thesis as it draws upon and develops the concept of distinction to explain how the Apple brand works with the construction of consumer identities. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu uses the analogy of the ‘rules of the game’ to discuss a field and its practices. Bourdieu argues that the strategies that an individual may use ‘to act and to be’ in the world come from a person’s aptitude for understanding and playing ‘the game’. His work is very important in informing the analysis of consumers’ engagement with the Apple brand, and in understanding the ways in which consumers act strategically to try to dominate the field. In addition, the work of Giddens (1991) on ‘the duality of structure’ is significant in informing an exploration of structure and agency or, put another way, how brand and consumer may predispose each other rather than consumers being compelled to act in predetermined ways prescribed by brand logic. Giddens’ ideas, like Bourdieu’s, will help to interrogate arguments in existing branding literature that suggest that brands limit a consumer’s personal agency.

### **Why this topic? Situating the researcher**

The researcher's own experiences affect the research they do, from identifying their topic, to forming the all-important research questions and relationships with research participants, to interpretation of findings, writing up and analysis. In thinking about undertaking this research and the processes involved, I have had to consider the personal and professional meaning the topic has for me. As well as being a research student I sometimes work with brands in a commercial environment, as an analyst and strategist for global blue-chip brands. This has afforded me a professional insight into how the marketing industry can produce 'a rhetoric' of consumer participation, and the emerging business practice of 'measuring' online consumer engagement with brands. This gives me some qualitative appreciation and insight of theoretical ideas about how marketing might cultivate particular 'innovative and profitable forms of consumer participation' (Zwick et al. 2010, p. 167). This has inspired me to think about academic branding theory from a consumer perspective and to apply academic research methods and critical analysis, which is much less common in mainstream marketing.

### **How this thesis works**

In chapter two I critically review the work of contemporary branding theorists working from a sociological, media or cultural studies perspective to explore branding ontology. I illustrate the importance of Lury's notion of the brand as a new media object that has a dynamic sense of time (Lury 2004), which is drawn upon and developed later in the analysis of the Apple brand. In the same chapter, the section on brands is related to a later section on lifestyle and how lifestyle(s) may be exacting a type of consumption strategy (Maycroft 2004), a roughly thought-out approach to the things people choose to buy, a type of harmony of things, or a loose theme that makes sense to the individual. Since the thesis is interested in consumer participation and consumer agency, the chapter then explores the notion of participation and debates about the concept (Beer and Burrows 2010 and Jenkins 2006) that are relevant to the study of brands.

Chapter three examines work by authors who have already researched the Apple brand and produced a textual or semiotic analysis, or who have undertaken studies

with some empirical work. To complement the previous chapter, chapter three highlights the ways brands have been implicated in the dynamic processes of identity construction, particularly in the case of Apple. The chapter discusses how other authors (for instance Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001, Stein 2002, and Friedman 2005) have identified that the Apple brand is used as a symbolic resource by the brand community and as a cultural intermediary. Reviewing this body of work helps to inform the subsequent arguments developed through the brand analysis in this thesis, which relate to how Apple is expressive of culture, and how the brand might construct themes for the consumers that fit with their lifestyles. Chapter three serves to highlight that there is a shortfall in the available studies on Apple in that to date no in-depth academic analysis of Apple has been undertaken, which has incorporated branding texts over a period of time.

Chapter four discusses the methodological approach taken and methodological issues that emerge when conducting semiotic analysis of a brand and thematic analysis of consumer interviews. To investigate brand and consumer, tensions arise around how a brand producer might prescribe a reality, how a researcher interprets that version of reality, and what meanings consumers make with the brand. Saussure ([1916] 1983), and Barthes ([1957] 2000) are discussed in some detail here. This discussion provides an intellectual framework for the investigation on how the Apple brand may constrain the consumer in articulating themselves in particular ways and then examines how this is negotiable and subject to transformation. Much of the thinking underpinning the thesis is an exploration of the consumer as an active agent, rather than a passive cultural dupe. The chapter therefore highlights issues around processes of meaning making when thinking about reading meaning, and interpreting other people's meanings. The chapter also details precise methods of data collection; for example, the selection of branding texts, recruitment of participants and the use of computer-mediated online interviews, and explains how the methods of analysis are appropriate to answer the research questions.

Chapter five presents a semiotic analysis of the Apple brand from 1978 to the present day, focusing on examples of the brand from the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Different types of branding are examined including corporate identity, event marketing, a product launch, print, TV and internet advertising; product design,

homemade consumer adverts and surrounding online forum discussion, and Apple stores. This chapter is followed by a second brand analysis chapter, chapter six, focusing on Steve Jobs as the ‘personification’ of Apple. The analysis of Steve Jobs warrants a chapter of its own and is treated slightly differently to the other branding texts, because Jobs spans the entire time frame in which the brand has been examined, rather than representing a specific decade. Both chapters present findings on themes and core brand messages in the Apple brand and show how the brand has worked over a period of time. This will establish that there are predetermined ideas programmed into the brand, and links to chapter seven which presents consumer articulation of the brand. Chapter seven examines how Apple consumers relate to the brand. In particular, a thematic analysis of consumer interviews is presented which draws on Bourdieu and Giddens to develop the notion of *double distinction* as a means of explaining the movement between self-identity and group identity and how participants possess a practical mastery of the brand which enables the participant to situate themselves as ‘knowing’. This chapter is important in constructing an argument which questions the limitations placed on consumer agency in existing branding literature.

Overall this thesis analyses consumer participation in the Apple brand, to contribute a deeper understanding about that specific brand, whilst also contributing to the wider debate on how brands work. By taking an inclusive approach of using critical theory, semiotic analysis of branding material and thematic analysis of interviews, the thesis is able to explore the contemporary brand in detail, focusing in particular on the relationship between the brand producer and the consumer. By exploring brands in this way, the thesis emphasises the need to incorporate the voice of the brand consumer into the enquiry on brands for a fuller view of what brands ‘do’. Herein, in the thesis, existing theoretical claims about the limitations and restrictions of (brand) consumer agency are interrogated and the question of what constitutes participation from the consumer perspective is addressed. The study of Apple in the context of the wider theories of branding and consumption has facilitated an in-depth reflection on the role of the consumer in the make-up of contemporary brands which in turn informs the wider debates both about contemporary forms of consumption and about brands, as addressed in chapter eight, the conclusion. Chapter eight also explains how

the thesis extends to a new interpretation of the Apple brand using the work of theorists such as Lury, Arvidsson, Bourdieu and Giddens.

## Chapter two

### *Brands and branding, a conceptual framing*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter offers a review of existing academic research on brands and branding in order to provide a theoretical framework through which to examine the relationship between the Apple brand and Apple consumers. These works are taken as a theoretical lens, to set out some tensions to guide the study, and to provide a framework for investigating a specific case study of the Apple brand. This ‘inductive approach’ (Creswell 2003, p. 132) is both useful and appropriate to raise a set of questions at this point in time, which is later answered through analysis and discussion of the Apple Brand and its consumers.

The chapter begins by presenting an account of the history of the origins of branding and different practices within the marketing industry, focusing on those that are relevant to the study. The chapter then moves on to discuss critical approaches to branding. Brands are understood in this thesis as new ‘media objects’ (Lury 2004) and ‘indicative of information capitalism’ (Arvidsson 2006) in order to be able to interrogate the Apple brand and Apple consumers’ relationship with the brand over time. Whilst there are other academic contributions within the field of brands and branding (Holt 1997, 2004, 2006; Moor 2007; Littler and Binkley 2008; Schroeder 2009), Lury’s and Arvidsson’s work is discussed here in some detail as their ideas in the main are used to frame the ways brands are thought about for the purposes of this thesis. Other authors writing about brands and who have produced branding case studies (for example Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001, Stein 2002, Friedman 2005, and Bull 2005, 2007) are discussed in chapter three when thinking more about the relationship between branding as a cultural resource for identity and when discussing existing brand case studies, specifically in relation to the Apple brand.

This chapter discusses how lifestyle provides an important conceptual tool for contemporary brands and as such it begins the argument that lifestyles are articulated



in Apple branding material. In terms of the enquiry presented in this thesis, at this juncture, it raises the question; in what ways do Apple consumers employ the ideas about lifestyle offered by Apple as a means of expressing their identity? In this chapter the notion of lifestyle is linked to the work of Bourdieu (1984) and his key concept of *habitus*, to inform the claim in this thesis that the Apple brand facilitates social distinction. One of the areas ripe for investigation is that the Apple brand provides material form to a narration of identity, which is then specifically appropriated and adapted by the individual within the Apple community. Here, a critique of Bourdieu (1984) and Giddens (1991) is presented which supports later consideration of how a brand might work to signify exclusivity as a marker of taste as part of identity. Furthermore, Giddens' ideas on a 'duality of structure' offer a way to explore how human activity and consumer practice contribute to brand structure. His work also helps to provide a theoretical context to later arguments made in this thesis about how brands are a point of display for lifestyle and are indicative of the duality of structure that Giddens describes, as they are informative of both the conditions for and consequences of social interaction.

Bourdieu's seminal work *Distinction* (1984) is also discussed in detail in this chapter, first focusing on bibliographical points, which shaped his perspective as a philosophical sociologist and the intellectual lineage that shaped his definition of the concept of distinction, and then his exploration of the consumption habits and taste of the French middle classes. As the title of my work implies, the concept of distinction is imperative in the conceptual framing of this thesis and the section in this chapter on Bourdieu and *Distinction* goes into some depth to explain how his work informs the analysis in the thesis. The section also clarifies how the investigation here differs from Bourdieu's proposition on the relationship between taste and social groups (class).

In order to explore the relationship between the Apple brand and consumer participation, the chapter also examines the notion of participatory culture in the specific context of brands and branding. This is because one of the key questions to answer centres around whether consumers participate actively, or are they behaving in certain predetermined and governed ways? As a means of dealing with this the chapter looks to theorists (Jenkins 2006, Zwick et al. 2010) that interrogate not just

what brands do, but what consumers do, and asks, can consumer activity be considered part of the actual brand rather than a subsequent set of activities? The chapter considers whether brands are in part a consequence of consumer practice or *pratik* (Reckwitz 2002, Warde 2005). The literature examined and discussed in this chapter therefore constructs a scaffold for the response to some of the questions around participation. It contextualises the enquiry on how brands are important in the construction of identity for consumers and, as such, it raises questions concerning the extent to which consumers might derive a sense of ontological security and social distinction from consuming brands.

## **Brands and branding**

### **A history of brands**

This section discusses the origins of branding and different practices and shifts within the marketing industry. It considers trends in the way in which the branding industry has perceived consumers as well as consumers' relationships with products over time. The development of the Apple brand, the focus of this thesis, reflects many marketing industry trends and it is therefore useful to situate this study of Apple within the wider context of such trends. Apple branding demonstrates developments in practice based in print and TV advertising (1970s), through event and experiential marketing (1980s), product design as branding (1990s), online viral CGC (consumer-generated content) and spatial and environmental contexts (late 1990s-2000s).

A brand is the transformation of a product into an identity with a history and even a set of related emotions, or, as Danesi has argued, '[w]hen a product-commodity becomes a brand, its use value is supplemented by a number of further associations' (Danesi 2006, p. 3). This means a brand is 'both a physical object and a mental object' (Danesi 2006, p. 21). This transformation into both a physical and a mental object can manifest in the form of a logo, a slogan, product packaging, TV, radio, film, and internet/online advertising; as an event; customer services, and the architecture and overall ambience of the store in which it is sold. More recently in the web 2.0 milieu, on sites such as Facebook and YouTube, a brand might even take the form of the tone of online conversations or hyperlinks to related online environments.

These manifestations are what Holt calls ‘material markers’ (2004, p. 3). Such manifestations of brands create ‘associations, awareness, loyalty, origin and perceived quality’ (Pike 2009, p. 619) around a product, so that over a period of time ‘branded objects and branding processes accumulate histories that are social and spatial’ (Pike 2009, p. 620); but moreover, it is reasonable to state that brands embody the economic, the cultural and the political in addition to the social and the spatial.

The brand is by no means a modern invention. Batley (2008, p. 2) notes how brick-makers in ancient Egypt put symbols on their bricks to identify their work and to protect themselves against poorer-quality imitations. The introduction of hallmarking laws began in the seventeenth century relating to objects made from precious metal, tapestry and furniture, but branding as an industry really took off in nineteenth-century Europe alongside the emergence of consumer society and many well-known brands (Singer sewing machines, Coca-Cola, Bass Beer, Quaker Oats, Kodak and American Express) date from this period (Clifton and Simmons 2003, p. 15).

The 1920s was another significant period in the history of branding. Often described as the end of the progressive era’ (Slater 1997), the 1920s were characterised by ‘expanding mass production and the rise of national branded products’ (Leiss et al. 1986, p. 244). It was also a time when advertising-psychology and behaviourist studies became commonly used in an attempt by producers to understand more about consumer behaviour and forge closer relationships between product and person. The advertising agency J.W Thompson, which still exists today, famously hired a behavioural specialist in the 1920s (Nye 1975) who developed a rationale for emotional appeal such as ‘love’ to be associated with products (Arvidsson 2006, p. 44), thereby setting a precedent for other agencies. This is important when thinking about the idea that brand producers set about trying to create a relationship between products and people that facilitates some expressive activity from people when they consume. At the turn of the nineteenth century, manufacturer after manufacturer jumped on the brand-naming bandwagon and the 1920s led to a widespread perception of brand products as ‘signs’ which are ‘imbued with specific kinds of personal and lifestyle meanings’ (Danesi 2006, p. 1).

Post-World War Two, the middle class consumer culture particularly in the US coupled with the counter-culture movement and an increase in television-watching also led to pressure to differentiate goods and carefully target different consumer sectors. The 1960s is also a significant period because of changes in approach to consumer research, which began taking into consideration the concept of lifestyle. Lifestyle advertising is often thought of as a forerunner to contemporary branding (Arvidsson 2006). Lifestyle is an important concept in modern marketing and was influential in the development of the VALS (values attitudes lifestyles) programme developed by SRI (Stanford Research Institutes International) in 1978. VALS also drew on *Changing Images of Man* (1972), ‘...a controversial manifesto with deep roots in LSD-based research and the holistic consciousness movement’ (Markley and Harmen 1982, in Binkley 2003, p. 242) and which ‘... was based on the idea that it is possible to classify consumers into lifestyle-relevant psychological categories that affect their buying habits’ (Turow 1997, p. 46) by looking at personality types and buying habits. VALS was one of the dominant marketing paradigms of the late 1970s and 1980s used by the research analysts Nielsen, who grew to become a leading global commercial media and online research group and, as Binkley (2003, p. 244) observes, was used in the 1980s by many fast-moving consumer goods companies in America such as Avon, Timex, Sanka and American Airlines.

In the 1970s, lifestyle research emerged and became a popular method of examining and ‘categorising’ consumers, with Apple being one of the first companies to develop a marketing strategy based on this approach. The late 1970s is the period that housed a curious association between counterculture, and the development of the home computer and marketing, and is most notably documented by Roszak (1969, 2000) and Binkley (2003). This an incredibly interesting period in time, because the relationship between counterculture, home computing and marketing embody seemingly quite divergent ideologies, but also because California in the late 1970s provided the geographical environment in which Steve Jobs grew up. In addition, Jobs (with Stephen Wozniak), began Apple working within this Californian countercultural ‘scene’. In an interview with biographer Isaacson, talking about ‘the fusion of flower power and processor power’, Jobs said himself ‘there was just something going on there’ (Isaacson 2011, p. 57). Where this holds relevance for the

thesis and what has not been looked at by other studies is how this relationship is actually manifest in the Apple brand. Specifically, how do Apple consumers articulate it and how does Apple as a company employ it to manage some of the tensions of being a large profit-making transnational company within a capitalist system whilst drawing upon notions of alternative sensibilities within the brand? This is significant; as an argument is made in the analysis chapters that Apple signify the company countercultural roots in implicit ways. This perception of Apple being alternative and outside of mainstream capitalism; of being ‘different’, is important to Apple consumers and provides a source of distinction.

Marketing became multidimensional in the 1980s (Arvidsson 2006), not least because of new media environments, the growing use of satellite and cable and home video recorders. These new consumer services and products meant therefore that brand producers could not rely so much on terrestrial television and target advertising based on television scheduling to sell a brand. Consequently, during the 1980s, brand producers looked to product placement and customer relations to create common identities and communities. The period of the 1990s witnessed a huge boom in the branding industry, with many new, branding-only dedicated agencies in the UK and other parts of Western Europe and the US. For branding practitioners, the 1990s is synonymous with the Apple brand, realised through iconic Jon Ive product design with the iMac and TBWA’s seminal Think Different campaign. *The New Marketing Manifesto* and the John Grant method are indicative of branding practice of the period. Grant, a practitioner, tried to construct brands as ‘new traditions’, which Grant advised should offer the consumer a myth as a way of thinking about modern life. His method of branding recommends that like myths, brands are stories, which carry traditions. In modern social theory the idea of myth has been extended to new traditions (Grant 1999, p. 64). The basic premise for Grant's ‘*12 rules for building successful brands...*’ was grounded in the 1990s, where brands increasingly played the role tradition used to play by giving people ideas to live by. This is significant in terms of marketing method as Grant’s work is characteristic of the 1990s, a period when many branding professionals drew upon a university education or sought inspiration from academic methods such as semiotics (Lury and Warde 1997) to explore brands as ideological vehicles (Marion 2006).

From the early twenty-first century, brands have increasingly become the focus of digital marketing within web 2.0 environments. This necessitates a view that brands are the dynamic product of consumer and producer and the site of meanings. The marketing industry speaks of ‘conversations’ with consumers and consumer ‘co-creation’ suggesting a democratic relationship between consumer and producer, an understanding interrogated in this thesis.

This brief history of branding has highlighted some developments and shifts in the marketing industry to provide background and historical context for the case study of Apple presented in this thesis. From this it is clear that brands are indicative of, and somehow embody, the relationships between consumer and producer. In order to understand more of this and to be able to answer the questions already being formulated, it is also necessary to set out and explore the nature of a brand and exactly what a brand is. The next section therefore turns to authors whose work provides a critical approach to brands.

### **Critical approaches to brands and branding**

A business studies approach to brand analysis typically views brands as the static product of industry creatives and strategists, and sees consumer research into the context of these disciplines as a means to ‘discover’ what ‘effect’ brands have on the consumer and how brand producers sell their products. Marketeers’ chief consideration is whether particular brands are successful financially and this type of analysis is often based on assessing a return on investment measured in quantitative terms. As Schroeder (2009) succinctly sums up, ‘[b]rand research emerged from the allied fields of management, marketing, and strategy, which generally emphasize pragmatic models of brand ‘effects’ driven by quantitative analysis e.g. Keller and Lehmann, 2006’ (Schroeder 2009, p. 123). In contrast, critical theorists such as Lury (2004) take a theoretical approach to brand analysis which is grounded in a philosophical and social understanding of the economy and understands brands as indicative of how the economy is organised. Lury’s approach ‘reinserts the social into restricted accounts of the economy’ (Lury 2004, p. 6) and examines the fundamental

nature of brands; what they are and what they ‘do.’

Although there are many academic works examining advertising using media and cultural theory to analyse advertising examples (for example Jhally 1990, Stern and Schroeder 1994, Williamson 1996, Beasley and Danesi 2002), prior to Lury’s work there had been only limited critical enquiry drawing a clear distinction between ‘brand’ and ‘advertisement’. Advertising is only one manifestation of a brand and the two practices (advertising and branding) are not the same. An advertisement may include several instances of brand identity; it may contain featured products, incorporating elements of design and it may communicate a message appropriate to a brand core message, but an advertisement is an occurrence of branding, not the brand itself. It is meaningful to separate out advertising and branding at this stage in the enquiry because the two are so often conflated. For example, in the case of Apple (in partnership with the TBWA agency), the ‘Think Different’ advertising campaign is a well-known material marker of the brand and has perhaps obscured some other aspects of the brand such as customer service or product packaging so that people might conflate ‘Think Different’ advertisements as branding in and of itself.

In order to be able to interrogate Apple and examine the brand over a period of time it is necessary to take on board this ‘dynamic sense of time’ to be able to state what a brand is. Brands as objects are something ‘to which feeling or action is directed’ and they are *objective* in that they are the object of purpose or intention. Lury argues of a brand that ‘its objectivity also involves images, processes and products, and relations between products’ (Lury 2004, p. 1). As an object, the brand is the unifying connection between services and products - hardware, software, stores, customer services and so on; the brand is overarching and connects them all (Lury 2004, p. 1). The brand also embodies the relationship between all these things over time in that it is an embodiment of how services and products in part stay the same and in part change with innovations and changes in direction. Yet brands always somehow refer back on themselves, making reference to earlier incarnations and mediating both constancy and evolution. Therefore, a brand is reflexive in that this characteristic of consistency and evolution locates a brand within its own and particular context (Lury 2004, p. 1). This understanding of brands informs how Apple is being considered in

this thesis. The Apple brand has an organisational quality, an inner logic that connects products and services and embodies both brand innovation and consistency, and my analysis will go on to explore this and generate empirical data for discussion. This approach is used in part to explain how ideas and themes are offered to the consumer and how ideas and themes gain momentum and refer back on themselves as context. These dynamic and reflexive qualities of the brand are important in gaining a sense of the Apple brand architecture; how the Apple brand works and has worked over a period of four decades.

Another of Lury's key arguments about brands is that they act as sites of *interactivity*, which she distinguishes from *interaction*. The brand, she argues, is organised as a two-way platform for communication, but this is not a balanced or equal communication exchange between consumer and producer; instead, it is inherently asymmetrical. Between the two terms 'interactivity' and 'interaction' lies an ongoing power relation between producer and consumer, and interactivity 'stands in' for relations that prove more meaningful or impactful, if less convenient and tidy (Aronczyk and Powers 2010, p. 19). This is because interactivity defers critical reflection (also see Andrejevic 2009) because it replaces politics. Acts of communication by consumers such as joining a Facebook group are de-politicising in that brand 'interactivity' may encourage people to click, play, share, and engage in meaningful sociality, but such sociality in due course only really serves to integrate consumers into a brand rather than alter material conditions (Aronczyk and Powers 2010, p. 19).

Lury's argument suggests that consumer agency is of the temporal kind, and 'the idea' of agency can therefore be considered one that is frequently built into the brand experience, particularly within contemporary new media environments. As consumers we are asked to connect, to join, to create, and to share by brands; we are told by the marketing industry that brands are now 'participatory'. In effect, consumer participation seems to be ostensibly restricted within the logic or rules of a brand. This means that brand producers still decide the terms of debate, discourses and tools for communication, so consumers may only create in certain directions.



The indeterminacy of the objectivity of the brand is not absolute; uncontrol is not the same as lack of control. There is instead limited possibility designed into the brand; or as Callon would put it, the brand is a kind of 'lock-in'. That is, the brand is not an unfortunately deteriorated objectification of perfect flexibility, but rather the objectification of a manageable flexibility, of inter-determinacy within limits (Lury 2004, p. 151).

The notion of 'uncontrol' implies there is some self-determination by the consumer, but this not the same as having complete or full agency. The question of the extent to which consumers are 'locked-in' by a brand is a key focus for this thesis through its study of the Apple brand, which explores both how brand producers try to lock consumers in and how consumers respond to these attempts.

Arvidsson's (2006) theory of brands is also important for framing this research. His is a political economic exploration of the relationship between brands and information capitalism and is situated within the juncture of media and sociology. Arvidsson presents a neo-Marxist reinterpretation of use value and exchange value to understand brands and draws on various examples of brands from others' empirical studies and market research to illustrate his key arguments. His interest is in the growing use of home computers, the internet and new-media tools that he states have contributed to a progressively more media-concentrated culture. He describes brands as now comprising part of the overall ambience of contemporary living. Arvidsson theorises immaterial informational flow and examines how brands subsume and appropriate what consumers do and how, therefore, brands contribute to the current economic model. Considering these ideas about how brands work suggests some of the strengths and limitations of brand lock-in and the need to further explore to what extent and in what ways consumers may become locked-in and the potential ways they may resist inbuilt brand logic. Like Lury, Arvidsson describes brands as objects, and for him they too are informational in that they carry meaning. Arvidsson claims that brands are in fact part of the fabric of contemporary life, or 'propertied', meaning that they are controlled, pre-structured and monitored (2006, p. 82) to have financial value

for the producer. It is important to think about this in relation to brand lock-in, as it seems that Arvidsson is arguing that consumers may have a degree of agency, but that brand managers must make sure that such consumer activity fits in with and adds to the brand (Arvidsson 2006, p. 82). Capital is derived through the fact that brands have an inbuilt governing quality; brands have an 'ability to manage and program' (Arvidsson 2006, p. 13). Similarly to brand lock-in, this thinking posits that brands have an inbuilt logic and one of the things that brand producers 'produce' are the rules of engagement. Consumers, argues Arvidsson, are only 'posited to have a producerly attitude' (Arvidsson 2006, p. 82), and this is not to be confused with actually *being* producerly. Yet Arvidsson is clear that, for him, this 'producerly attitude' and consumer activity is nevertheless valuable - especially for brands in that it is appropriated as an ethical surplus - and, in the end, becomes a source of surplus value that adds to the financial value of the brand.

This thesis engages with the notion of 'a producerly attitude' in its investigation of the on consumers' relationship with the Apple brand. Although at this stage the thesis is not contesting brand lock-in or the brand's ability to manage and programme, it is interested in whether the implication of limitations placed on the consumer have been overstated and restrict consumer agency too much. The analysis underpinning the thesis will be to investigate if consumers articulate the Apple brand in ways set up by the brand, and whether they behave in ways that are predetermined by an inbuilt logic. The case study looks at the Apple brand over a period of time, so the ideas of the brand as a set of relations between products or services and a set of relations between products in time makes possible an investigation into how different instances of the brand connect as a series of relations, and how the Apple brand has both changed and remained the same over time. This approach is also informative of how the Apple brand as 'an interface' and 'a dynamic support for practice' (Lury 2004) offers a comprehensive relation between products, services and consumers; and at the same time offers a site for exchange. Furthermore, the ideas of interaction and inter-determinacy within prescribed limits inform the enquiry. These limits are understood here as the rules and resources explicit and implicit in the brand. Additionally, the ideas of interaction and inter-determinacy are especially interesting when considered in the context of the current marketing industry's hyperbolic regard for consumer sovereignty which is in turn suggestive of *unlimited* agency. There is a clear

marketing industry emphasis today on digital marketing as a new-paradigm. Statements from brand producers declaring a ‘free consumer’ ostensibly present a provocative challenge to contemporary capitalism and the traditional power relations between consumer and producer incorporated into the current mode of production. The rhetoric of a free consumer suggests that brand producers are somehow relinquishing control of the brand; and yet the notion of ‘brand lock-in’ undermines this argument in that ‘brand lock-in’ can be seen to contain consumer agency, with limitations apparently pre-designed into a brand, and particularly because of the recursive, reflexive logic of a brand.

Another key point in understanding brands is that ‘brands are an embodiment of the logic of informational capitalism’ and that brands represent in immaterial form [and actually sometime material as well], a way of understanding contemporary life and the current mode of production (Arvidsson 2006, p. 12). This means that brands ‘manage’ and ‘program’ (ibid). This is to some extent in line with thinking about how a brand presents a particular predetermined frame of action (Lury 2004), albeit slightly nuanced in that a brand is ‘a particular relation between action and meaning between what consumers do and what their action means to them’ (Arvidsson 2006, p. 8). These points reinforce the idea that the brand connects consumer and producer, but the focus on the brand as a relation constructs a brand as more of a coordinating entity, rather than as a frame of action that defines agents and separates actors out in the network. However, to restate an important point, Arvidsson has said that brand consumers are not completely free agents, because effectively they are *managed*. To be clear, this is important because while he is not arguing that brands are manipulating or mass-deceiving consumers, and although he says consumers are active, he still argues that brands represent a management strategy, as it were, because the consumer is in due course still guided to act in certain ways within the limits of the brand.

One element of brand engagement which relates to information capitalism is when the consumer is ‘social’, where they share ideas around a product, have beliefs and feelings facilitated, as well as discursive repertoires to express them with, and to participate in the reading and (re)mediating of particular values. Expanding on the points made about the subsumption of an ethical surplus, brand producers try to

‘exploit’ the ethical surplus to make profit, so the logic of informational capitalism seeks to subsume what consumers do (Arvidsson 2006). For instance, when consumers are social around a brand and when they share ideas around a product, they might actually produce a type of word-of-mouth marketing. This is actually a form of unpaid product promotion. For example an Apple consumer could say how much they ‘love’ the iMac or exclaim ‘how cool’ the iPod is. Thus consumers go to work, or, to use Arvidsson’s description (drawing upon Negri’s (1989) *operaio sociale*), they are a ‘socializing worker’, because communicative action is put to work and made use of in the mode of production. So, for the brand producer, ethical surplus is clearly a potential source of profit; but for brand consumers, one may speculate, value is more about the benefits of the human relationships, enjoyment and self-worth. Consumers are concerned with feeling good and trading immaterial forms of capital rather than remuneration. Value for the consumer is to be found not in pounds or pence, but instead in a common meaning, a sense of community or a sense of identity. Thus, for the consumer, as Arvidsson argues, value is relational.

Consumers’ activity is directly associated with identity construction in that brands are productive resources in identity work and sociality (Arvidsson 2006, p. 35). At present these activities are examined in current branding literature (Fuchs 2012, and Arvidsson and Colleoni 2012) as an analytic source to understand and debate consumer activity as – ultimately - a resource of capital in the economy. This is significant in the context of this thesis as it acknowledges the relationship between brands and identity and different types of value. For now, as well as framing the exploration of the logic of the Apple brand, these points about value inform this enquiry as they provide a discussion around use value and exchange value. However, my focus, with respect, is on understanding more about identity work, rather than to debate social economic organisation or interpretations of Marx. Here, the thesis is looking at how Apple consumers use the brand in the construction of identity. The points around identity and sociality from Arvidsson are deployed here to think about Apple consumers as a brand community. As insights they will instruct my thinking about how consumers are social around a brand. At this stage of my enquiry, one may contend that it seems that Apple products somehow make consumers feel good about themselves and that they have something in common with other people who also consume Apple. The idea of capital socialised here can be understood as human

behaviour being a resource that contributes towards an economy where brands are an embodiment of a new form of capitalism, because brands subsume and include fundamental behaviours (Arvidsson 2006).

Given the above arguments, one can think about consumers and what they do with brands as a starting point for considering of the notion of participation. According to Arvidsson, capital puts a price on, and makes financially tradable, 'the diffuse productivity of consumption' (Arvidsson 2006, p. 15). This leads one, once again, to think about consumer agency and the notion that, in the final analysis, brands always subsume the activities of consumers and that consumer agency is ultimately a financial resource for producers; an argument that is addressed in this thesis.

I have sought to reinforce a clear link here between the idea that brands embody specific relations between particular groups of consumers and particular products and as such argue that this may be understood and explored through the trading of capital and value. It has already been noted in the section on the history of the brand that, during the 1960s, lifestyle-research linked to consumer values and attitudes became prominent in connecting products to people, ideas, and emotions and shared experiences. 'In life-style advertising the product already featured an anticipation of a particular form of life' (Arvidsson 2006, p. 62) and lifestyle advertising during the 1960s (as a forerunner to contemporary branding) marks a significant shift in marketing's attention from the individual to social behaviours, consumption as a form of display and importantly the relationship between consumption and concepts of personal values. The next section explores the concept of lifestyle in the consumers' use of brands to produce both identity and social relations. This discussion concept of lifestyle is also included so that the concept may inform the brand analysis and be deployed to understand the relationship between the Apple brand and Apple consumers. In the discussion of brand lock-in, I have already noted a tension in the degree to which consumers are enabled and/or constrained in determining their own identities and lifestyle through their participation with a brand. This is explored further in this next section which deals with how lifestyle is linked to consumer practices and how a brand includes modes of consumption that are put to work as a productive process.

## **Lifestyle and the brand**

### **Lifestyle**

In his attempt to examine the multi-disciplinary origins of the term, Veal (1993) notes that the term 'lifestyle' is deployed by different academic disciplines in different ways, and that there is a lack of consensus across a range of disciplinary approaches even as to the way in which it is spelt and presented. In addition, the term lifestyle is used as an informal way and in common parlance as a means of categorising objects and effects, media - from ranges of clothing, special diets, self-help literature and magazines and to describe a subcategory of reality TV and television channels geared towards specific interests and groups.

According to Veal, one of the earliest deployments of the concept is in a chapter of *Economy and Society* (1871) where Weber discusses prestige based on 'honour and status groups' (Veal 1993, p. 234) and in which he detailed how a group is distinguished from the rest of society by a certain *style of life* such as religious practice, moral value and styles of dress. However, as Veal notes, while Weber did outline the function of lifestyle as means of social stratification, he did not define lifestyle as such (ibid, p. 235). Much later, the Weberian approach is expressed by Scheys (1986) arguing that lifestyle is a 'system of set symbols, or symbolic acts/behaviours associated with different prestige groups in society' (Veal 1993, p. 235). These are notable influences on how lifestyle may be understood in relation to the work of Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1984), which underpins and is central to this thesis. A detailed discussion of Bourdieu is covered in the section 'Bourdieu and distinction', but it is important to note that his understanding of lifestyle owes much to the influence of Weberian sociology.

As was argued earlier in the discussion of the history of branding, the concept of lifestyle first emerged during the 1960s when early market research began to draw on psychology to understand market segmentation (Arvidsson 2006, Moor 2007). According to Maycroft,

Although many definitions of the term are to be found in literature on consumption, and as components of the promotional culture of capitalism itself, a generic definition of the term can be arrived at: a reflexive, biographical project of identity-formation and self presentation, based upon the consumption of the symbolic dimensions of consumer commodities, particularly cultural products, services and experiences (Maycroft 2004, p. 63).

Maycroft's explanation is notable as it introduces some key points for consideration. In this thesis, lifestyle is taken to mean a process that expresses a mode (or modes) of living and an external version of identity that has 'project-' or 'story-' like qualities. When people consume they adopt a schema or a pattern that has coherence and is expressive of their material conditions and their interests and values. This consumption-schema can be used as an orientation tool and to express both a sense of self and a sense of commonality with others in social contexts. In explaining why this is useful, Maycroft goes on to state,

Some kind of 'project' or strategy is implied or explicitly claimed; a scheme that makes sense of consumer choice, reduces the anxiety that flows from having to make such choices, and provides a consistent framework within which consumption decisions are made, such that there is a consonance between the objects, services or experiences chosen and consumed (Maycroft 2004, p. 63).

The argument here is that the person who participates in lifestyle(s) may be exacting a type of strategy: a roughly thought-out approach to the things they choose to buy, a type of harmony of things or a loose theme that makes sense to the individual. This provides, as Maycroft puts it, 'a consistent framework' in and through the combination of their choices and it has a stabilising effect on aspects of the individual's sense of identity at the time, particularly their cultural identity: if it stops working for them, they rework the strategy, move on and look to new and different consumer goods (Tomlinson 1990, p. 5).

In achieving the aim of exploring the relationship between the Apple brand and consumer participation, it is necessary to understand something of why Apple makes sense to the consumer. What is so uniquely special about the Apple brand that the individual includes it in their strategy? Understanding lifestyle is instructive in building an argument as to exactly how and why Apple is so 'loved' and 'talked about' - essentially, why it is so successful. The concept of lifestyle is very significant in exploring brands and it is employed directly in this thesis to explore consumers' relationship to the Apple brand – first, via a semiotic analysis of Apple branding materials to identify key aspects of lifestyle being promoted by Apple and second, via an analysis of consumers' interviews which explores how Apple consumers relate to the lifestyles offered to them through branding and how they draw on aspects of this 'Apple lifestyle' to construct their identities.

In examining why lifestyle is a significant concept for both producers and consumers, the thesis also explores how lifestyle reveals of the dynamics *between* them, which relates, in turn, to wider debates about structure and agency. In his discussion of youth lifestyles, Miles (1998) explores how lifestyle is revealing of debates in sociology over structure and agency. He highlights the work of Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1984) in explaining two different approaches to *structuration*; structure and agency theory. Miles emphasises Giddens' notion of 'the duality of structure, the idea that social structures are both the conditions and the consequences of social interaction [...] In this sense, all social action involves structure and all structure involves human action' (Miles 1998, p. 19). Significantly, 'Giddens views structure as both enabling as well as constraining and structure for him are rules and resources that actors draw upon as they produce and reproduce society in their everyday interactions' (ibid, p. 20). Individuals use resources available to them to interpret and negotiate lifestyles. To explain how this is relevant to a discussion of brands, it is necessary to reflect back on brand lock-in introduced earlier. Brand lock-in is the idea that brands have rules, themes and interpretative repertoires pre-inscribed in them and that consumers' agency is constrained by these rules set out by brand producers. However, if a brand is to be successful, it must establish associations with the target demographic. If themes and interpretative repertoires offered within a brand are too inconsistent with the consumer's world-view or his or her aspirational self then the brand risks alienating their custom altogether. So, in one sense, brand producers must draw upon



existing human interaction. Brands are expressive of lifestyles, but this does not mean that brand producers invent and create lifestyles from imagination, even if certain lifestyles expressed in a brand may appear to have an arbitrary connection with the product or product function. Lifestyles as expressions of ways of being, ideas and identities articulated in and through brands must already have a basis in reality and social structures; they are not products of an imagination.

It may be argued that because brands are a point of display for lifestyle, they are indicative of the duality of structure that Giddens describes, as they are informative of both the conditions and consequences of social interaction. The implication of this point at this stage of the developing argument in the thesis is that, by exploring the brand from the perspective of both producer and consumer, it is in many respects a question of the relationship between structure and agency. To return to the ideas presented by Giddens above, they present a theoretical framework to consider dimensions of structure and agency. The notion of structure and agency is important to this thesis because it is interested in exploring if the Apple brand is enabling as well as constraining, and what resources Apple consumers draw upon as they produce and reproduce society and the social in their interactions with brands. The argument is that the notion of lifestyles will help to explore this terrain; terrain that is in turn substantiated through the analysis presented in chapters five, six and seven. Returning to the points raised around how brands subsume and include fundamental behaviours or 'capital socialised' (Arvidsson 2006), Giddens' duality of structure once again highlights a tension concerning how society is produced and reproduced, and may be revealing of how the social is produced and reproduced in brands. In order to explicate the notion of lifestyle and how it informs the investigation in the thesis it is now necessary to turn to the work of Bourdieu in some detail. As well as providing an empirically-based study that facilitated discussion of the wider structure/agency debate in sociology, Bourdieu is foremost to the present enquiry insofar as he helps us understand the implications of the notion of lifestyle, as his work deals not only with how lifestyle is a tool for identity, but moreover - and importantly - how lifestyle is used in situating identity in relation to other people, and positioning identity in a society.

### **Bourdieu and *Distinction***

The phrase *double distinction*, which appears in this thesis title, is a reference to *Distinction*, the seminal work of Bourdieu (1984). Before exploring this work in detail and explaining how the concept of distinction specifically informs the conceptual framing of the research for this thesis, this next section discusses in brief some relevant points relating to Bourdieu's biography as a young man and his scholarly influences. It is useful to briefly consider some of Bourdieu's background and education as he stated they had an influence on his work and in the context of this thesis, these points help to understand the development of *his* concept of distinction.

As a young man, Bourdieu's father left manual farm work to become a postman and was an active trade unionist and it is claimed well read in early twentieth-century French political thought (Robbins 2010 in Bennet 2010, p. 27). Bourdieu described his father as *transfuge* or 'socially mobile' and because of this he was able to send his son Pierre to boarding school to receive a formal education, one not typically obtained at the time in France by the children of manual workers. In memoirs published posthumously, Bourdieu has detailed how he viewed this early education at boarding school as 'an incarceration and a separation' from his familiar experience, for example being educated at school in languages (French and Latin), whereas at home with this family he spoke a Béarnaise dialect (Robbins 2010 in Bennet 2010, p. 28). In interviews with the French media, Bourdieu also reflected that his education engendered a capacity to empathise sociologically with different life experiences of other people. These biographical details are revealing of how and why Bourdieu formed an interest in how the formal structures of life (for example formal education) may be internalised, and then the external actions of agents (dispositions) might affect one's perceived social status and a sense of exclusion or inclusion to a particular social group. Themes of structure and agency, not surprisingly given his background, are substantial within Bourdieu's *Distinction* and form the basis of his key concept of *habitus* discussed shortly.

Having originally studied philosophy, Bourdieu began his academic career as an anthropologist in the field producing ethnographies of Béarn and Algeria, although of course Bourdieu is now widely regarded as a sociologist. Grenfell points out that Bourdieu's 'was a very particular type of sociology' (Grenfell 2012, p. 1), or what

might be described as a philosophical brand of sociology<sup>2</sup>, which is said (Grenfell 2012, Bennet 2010) to be influenced by his intellectual mentors, Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) and Georges Canguilhem (1904-95), ‘both of whom were philosophers of science’ (Grenfell 2012, p. 23) interested in representation and multiple ways of understanding reality. Informed by this intellectual lineage Bourdieu became concerned to move beyond what he described himself as an antagonistic opposition between subjectivism and objectivism and instead towards a ‘theory of practice’ by examining Kant’s critical philosophy ‘for the elaboration of a philosophy of science’ (ibid, p. 31) in *Esquisse 1977* which forms the foundation of Bourdieu’s mission to expose the social origins of all ‘objective’ accounts of the social’ (Robbins 2012, cited in Grenfell 2012, p. 31). Bourdieu’s work is concerned with a practical use of theory that advances ‘theoretic’, and in which theory should only be employed ‘to recover the practice of agents’ (Robbins 2012 cited in Grenfell 2012, p. 36), so that theory becomes a practical tool in a society, and leads to strategic action. These points about Bourdieu’s influences help to understand the intellectual context and point of view of *Distinction* in that it is a work which analyses not only theory but also practice in order to comprehend the social world.

Although this thesis makes no claim to offer work of a comparable measure to Bourdieu’s *Distinction*, it does follow some similarity in that the thesis is examining Apple beyond pure theoretic, because as well as using critical theory to understand Apple, this is undertaken alongside brand analysis and consumer interview. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu regarded his participants as ‘the clue, as objects of empirical study, to an understanding which lies *beyond* the individual’ (Bourdieu 1984, pp 21-22). Respectively, I am looking at how the participants construct and perceive their identity through their consumption of Apple, and at the same time I am exploring the ways this is enabled and potentially constrained by the logic of the brand in order to reach ‘an understanding of what lies beyond’ to study how brands work.

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<sup>2</sup> In terms of sociology Grenfell also argues that there is clear evidence of the influence of Marx, Weber and Durkheim in Bourdieu’s work in the sense that Marx (1818-83) was a radical philosopher as well as a social historian of class change, Weber (1864-1926) was concerned with how ideas shaped human action and Durkheim (1858-1917) investigated how different social organisation gave way ‘to distinct moral forces which had consequences for the way men and women thought and behaved’ (Grenfell 2012 p20).

Bourdieu's *Distinction* not only engaged with abstract social theory but also included a survey questionnaire carried out by extended interview and ethnographic observations in 1963 and 1967-68, where he examined how the subjects engaged in specific consumption practices. Bourdieu investigated a sample of 1217 people in Paris, Lille and one other small town in France (Bourdieu 1984, p. 5), and then used these data to form gradations of social groupings distinguished by their taste. He stated that

the survey sought to determine how the cultivated disposition and cultural competence that are revealed in the nature of the cultural goods consumed, and in the way they are consumed, vary according to category of agents and the area to which they are applied, from the most legitimate areas such as painting or music to the most 'personal' ones such as clothing, furniture or cookery...(ibid, p. 5).

In this way, Bourdieu explicated how - as cultural goods - personal, everyday goods as well as the more 'legitimate' cultural goods such as painting or music can be understood as symbolic resources that engender what he has described as 'cultivated dispositions' or *taste*. Notably, for Bourdieu, taste is related to a social category, which he specifically understood and described through a structured system in his sustained exploration of the French middle classes. Bourdieu's main thesis was that people who belong to the same social class tend to share tastes for all different types of symbolic and cultural goods and practices. He was thus able to present a detailed account of what he perceived to be French middle-class taste.

An important point about taste for Bourdieu is that it has a legitimating effect, which he claimed both unites and separates. He said, 'tastes (i.e., manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 49). This means that taste has a real-world effect and is not simply about what one likes or does not like. Rather, taste produces a type of declaration to the world about one's position in life in relation to others and is therefore a means of creating and sustaining social structure within a society. It is interesting how Bourdieu describes this phenomenon as having the quality of inevitability. Here I believe he is talking about how people

predictability justify their sense of self through asserting *their* taste over and above *others* to maintain a social order, or what he described as ‘the refusal of other tastes’ (ibid). Repudiating the tastes of others as ill-informed or inappropriate is a method of social-subordination. Indeed, he went on to argue that aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent and that aversion to a different lifestyle is one of the strongest barriers between different classes.

Bourdieu’s explanation of distinction relates to an important point of focus for the investigation of Apple and Apple consumers within this thesis. Bourdieu talked about aesthetic sense as *the* sense of distinction (ibid, p. 49) and how aesthetic stances adopted in relation to consumption choice like cosmetics, home décor or clothes are opportunities to assert one’s own social space ‘as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept’ (Bourdieu 1984, p. 50). These ideas are central for the exploration of the Apple brand in this thesis and are drawn upon to investigate how Apple consumers use the brand as a symbolic resource to create a sense of superior taste and aesthetic which, at the same time, creates both ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups - Apple consumers and everyone else.

Although this thesis is not an explicitly class-based study, it is very much concerned with social differences and hierarchy that are constructed through processes of brand consumption, making Bourdieu’s work on distinction especially significant. In particular, the concept of distinction is drawn upon to explain how Apple consumers engage with the brand to differentiate themselves from non-Apple consumers and assert a form of social superiority. However, the thesis develops the concept of distinction further to suggest that, through a process of ‘double distinction’, individual Apple consumers seek to differentiate themselves a second time - this time from other Apple consumers, to maintain a sense of distinct individuality.

### **Habitus**

Habitus is the sum of the experiences of one’s upbringing, environments and family situation, and formal and non-formal education. These external factors become internalised and then re-externalised as a set of dispositions from body language, body shape and appetite, to speech, temperament and outlook, so habitus is actually something which one puts into practice. Furthermore, it is not a concept limited to the individual - in fact in Bourdieu’s work the onus is on social grouping. This is very

important in how Bourdieu's work differs from this thesis, because his study provides a framework for different social groups, indicative of group mentality and revealing of class position within society. Habitus has a capacity to direct one towards a system of classification schemes. By drawing upon their habitus, people are able to align themselves with a particular social group while at the same time defining other groups as different and, in some circumstances, of a lesser social standing.

Habitus provides 'practical metaphors' to put what one knows into practice, or rather into specific material form. Bourdieu uses the example of handwriting to explain what he means by practical metaphors. Someone's handwriting may allow for inferences about, for instance, level of formal education and therefore allow one to make comparative judgements about a person and other people: but if a person is able to improve and emulate a certain style or level of handwriting it is possible they may 'trade-up' their position by simulating a level of aptitude, skill and formal education normally associated with good handwriting.

The habitus continuously generates practical metaphors, that is to say, transfers [...] or more precisely, systematic transpositions required by the particular conditions in which habitus is 'put into practice' [...] These practices, of the same agent, and generally all practices of the same agents of the same class, owe the stylistic affinity which makes each of them a metaphor of any of the others to the fact that they are the product of transfers of the same scheme of action from one field to another (Bourdieu 1984, p. 168).

Habitus is an important concept in this thesis and is drawn upon in the analysis of branding practices to explore both how Apple and its consumers create a sense of difference and superiority through the mobilisation of a particular aesthetic a particular competence with technology. Bourdieu argues that agents within the same class parallel or mirror each other in their practices, that they are following a scheme of action that produces a symbolic order of social distinction, and that people's tastes and their consumption choices are symbolic of class. He also argues that lifestyles are the products of habitus, which become sign systems that are socially qualified as legitimate taste (Bourdieu 1984, p. 169). This means that lifestyles are systems of meaning that signify and enable one to perceive a feeling of superiority over other

people. Choice offers inexhaustible possibilities for the pursuit of social distinction and Bourdieu claims none is more obvious than in the world of luxury goods and particularly cultural objects. This is because, for him, the relationships of social distinction are objectively inscribed in cultural objects.

If one considers a brand as a cultural object it makes sense to consider how status and social distinction are inscribed in a brand implicitly through the expression of lifestyle. The appropriation of cultural goods by consumers predisposes dispositions and competencies, which yield what Bourdieu describes as ‘a profit’ (Bourdieu 1984, p. 225) and a feeling that one is ‘justified in being (what one is), being what it is right to be’ (ibid). This means that consumers can gain a sense of satisfaction in their reading of brands and their ability to participate in practical metaphors. I refer to Bourdieu again here, where he has argued that taste relates to social categorisation and power relations. A brand signifies certain tastes and competencies and therefore can become a basis for legitimising identity. In their participation with ideas and themes constructed in brands, consumers are exerting social judgment about other people who are non-brand consumers. In exploring forms of distinction, the argument offered in this thesis is that Apple facilitates social judgment about others in more than one way and is used to legitimise identity among and above others in the same social group.

Furthermore, Bourdieu’s ‘being what it is right to be’ is considerable in exploring the relationship between brands and identity. This is because it refers to legitimising identity and brings to light the relationship between taste and social judgment, and ontological security. Bourdieu has argued that social identity is defined and asserted through difference and this is a legitimising practice of the dominant middle classes. While this thesis does not present a traditional class-based analysis, it is nevertheless examining the means by which people construct social positions in the formation of identity. Apple products tend to be perceived as high-end goods based on their pricing within the fast-moving technology goods market. Apple products are also often described by consumer, producer and cultural commentator in media and popular fiction as ‘tasteful’; possessing a distinct aesthetic, and as being different. This makes them distinct. Given the claims about Apple, it is essential to interrogate how the brand both produces and promotes such distinctions, and Bourdieu’s concept of

distinction is invaluable in this context.

To explore further that one is 'justified in being (what one is), being what it is right to be', one needs to consider more deeply the idea of ontological security in identity work. According to Giddens (1991, pp. 36-37), practical consciousness secures 'ontological security' for the consumer; it means that people are able to maintain a sense of stability and order in relation to their environment, their place in the world, and why they do the things the way they do. Ontological security is about a tacit acceptance of identity in part through reflexive awareness because, as Giddens explains, the act of choice [and performing taste] gives material form to a particular narrative of identity. In terms of consumption, this is the consumer saying 'I can explain why I have chosen x, y or z and such explanation helps me to clarify and understand who I am and who I am not, and therefore organise a world view and feel stable and valid within it'. Bourdieu's work therefore constitutes another point of entry as it provides a way of looking at the general relationship between brands and identity, and a platform from which to discuss why consumers participate with certain brands and why certain brands are so successful. More specifically, his work helps to explore consumer participation with the Apple brand. Bourdieu's work offers a theoretical underpinning to one of the areas to which this thesis seeks to contribute: by looking here at how brands facilitate social distinction it will be possible to theorise how brand consumers may perform such a distinction. At this stage I am suggesting that if a brand provides material form to a narration of identity, it might be one which is adapted to be peculiar to the individual within the brand community.

Bourdieu's work is additionally important as it relates back to debates on the concept of lifestyle. In contemporary society, lifestyle is implicit in notions of both individuality and choice for, as Giddens argues, the modern self is one that is mediated as a free self and one that is strongly influenced by commodity capitalism, so that identity in consumer society is translated into the possession of particular goods (Giddens 1991, p. 197). A consideration of the work of Giddens along with that of Bourdieu allows me to take into account the relationship between identity, lifestyle and choice. Giddens argues, 'commodification influences the project of identity and establishing of lifestyles [...] Market governed freedom of the individual choice



becomes the enveloping framework of an individual's self-expression (1991, p. 197). Why do consumers choose an Apple product over another make of technology? That choice, it is argued here, is largely to do with the brand and the fact that the brand cannot be separated from the technology; and that the use value cannot be separated from the exchange value. This returns us once again to questions of value and the trading of capital embodied in brands.

Interpreting others and displaying identity ostensibly appears to be of importance for consumers of the Apple brand; Apple is also known to be a signifier of style and are even joked about in the press as the choice of trendy and fashionable types<sup>34</sup>. Just as habitus is the expression of a person's formal and non-formal education and knowledge about the world, sometimes it is embodied in or objectified via purchased 'things' and 'objects'. Things and objects become an expression of taste that is tradable (cultural capital) and frequently expressed through consumption by engaging with lifestyle.

The works of Bourdieu and of Giddens are central to this thesis insofar as they help us to understand how far consumer agency is bound by the constraints of structure; they examine 'the agent's practice, his or her capacity for invention and improvisation' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 13) and, in Giddens' terms, relate to the idea that human activity has a transformational quality that shifts power relations. These two authors can be viewed as first-generation practice theorists (Postill 2010) who have informed the writing of more contemporary authors dealing with practice theory (for example Warde 2005). The consumption of brands as a form of social distinction can be understood as a form of practice in that practice is active; activities are performed and lived out by brand consumers. Practice is about taking part and sharing common experiences with other consumers of the same brand. For that reason, it may be

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<sup>4</sup> For example (April 2011) *Mac versus PC: the stereotypes may be true*. The story detailed Mac users' and PC users' tastes trends based on an unscientific survey. A comment from an anonymous poster to the CNN website 'joked' 'I came... to California... I saw... hundreds of skinny-jean wearing hipsters... I conquered... my fear of overpriced organic produce...' <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/TECH/web/04/22/mac.pc.users/index.html> [accessed 28 February 2013]

theorised and understood further by engaging with the idea of participation and notion of participatory culture.

### **Consumer participation and participatory culture**

What does it mean to participate, or to say a brand is participatory? To ‘participate’, one may say, is to take part and to share. So ‘participation’ must involve some activity; some doing and saying and at least some open distributing of information. In relation to brands this could equally be understood as a matter of practice (Schatzki 2001, Warde 2005), in that practice is embodied and is a nexus of activities that are mediated by objects and artefacts (Schatzki 2001, p. 11) to produce shared meaning. It should be noted, however, that not all brand consumers participate in the same way or to the same degree. The aim here is not to measure consumer participation, and neither is it to argue that all consumer participation manifests in equivalent ways for all brand consumers. In fact, participation can be viewed as consumer activity but one which manifests in a range of ways and degrees. Even if only a minority of brand consumers ‘participate’, this is still significant in considering brand structure and consumer agency because it is possible that participation might inform the way a brand evolves. This is indicative of Giddens’ arguments on the duality of structure; that human activity always informs structure. What I am interested in here is how this is played out through brands and consumers’ relationships with brands. Consumer activity, even if it represents a minority of brand consumers’ behaviour, must inform a brand, particularly given that it has already been argued above that brands are reflexive and dynamic.

A participatory culture is one where consumers or - more frequently - consumers as ‘users’ are involved in creating content as well as consuming it (Jenkins 2006, Beer and Burrows 2010). Following this claim, all brands on some level are participatory and consumer participation is not a new phenomenon. This can be argued because, on a simplistic level, a brand can only ‘be’ if a consumer takes part, and prior to the web 2.0 milieu, which consumer participation is so often associated with, consumers have already been involved in forms of activity. For example, consumers have been

recruited into processes of brand creation aside from actual consumption such as market research surveys or focus groups or by simply telling a friend they like a product. Consumer participation certainly is not a product of web 2.0; that said, however, what is interesting and significant to the study of brands is the form that participation takes within contemporary consumption as facilitated by digital technology and notably the notion of the 'open distributing of information'. When considering brands, participation returns us to issues of power, of structure and of agency. It also raises new questions about how digital technologies and digital marketing present some uncertainties about how consumer capitalism is evolving and incorporating participation, as the work of Arvidsson (2006, 2012) illustrates. To situate this enquiry in the broader context of participatory culture and consumer participation literature, it is perhaps helpful to précis the debates of particular interest from relevant authors such as Jenkins (2006), Zwick et al. (2010), Beer and Burrows (2010) and Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010).

Debates in this literature concentrate on how the current marketing paradigm attempts to harness consumer activities and critique how the new digital marketing industry, in effect, repackages appropriation into a type of emotional branding where the state of the relationship between consumer and brand is key. One of the outputs of consumer activity is a wealth of 'transactional data' (Thrift 2005), produced through everyday consumer transactions. This information, which is readily given up, often freely, by consumers, is then appropriated by brand producers. This information generates financial value for brand producers and might be understood, in Marxist terms, as an extraction of free labour. Despite claims of a redistribution of power into the hands of the consumer and rhetoric of freedom and creativity that 'seemingly' presents a crisis for late-capitalism, the *precise* nature of this crisis and quality of these consumer powers remains somewhat vague and unquantified in the literature. Zwick et al. describe how in their view, co-creation is constituted when companies provide 'technological resources' to cultivate particular 'innovative and profitable forms of consumer participation' (Zwick et al. 2010, p. 167). An example of this is the British fashion label and clothing producer Fred Perry with their 'Tell us your story' feature

on their retail website<sup>5</sup>. The Fred Perry consumer is unofficially put to work as an interpreter and ambassador for the brand, promoting core brand messages of heritage, music, and subculture. This, though, raises the question as to what meaning or consequence such participation has for the consumer and why consumers get so involved with the brand. Co-creation and sociality are introduced into the discussion and considered now in light of the earlier section on critical branding theory. As explained in the section on critical approaches to branding, interactivity is not an evenly balanced exchange between consumer and producer in terms of effect; instead it is asymmetrical. Interactivity - clicking, commenting, uploading, and sharing - may encourage certain forms of participation, but it is a form of participation without much real-world effect. In their participation, consumers engage in sociality but such sociality, in due course, serves only to integrate consumers into a brand identity, and as such is not likely to result in political action or authentic shifts in power relations between brand producer and consumer. This is perhaps the difference between Politics with a capital 'P' and politics with a small 'p'. It depends on one's definition of effect and of what is meaningful. However, in this thesis, I argue that consumer participation with Apple is in fact deeply meaningful to the individual and their sense of identity and that consumer participation is indeed immensely valuable - not just for the producer but for the consumer, too.

These debates raise several questions. Does participatory culture simply represent another means by which capitalism can extract surplus value from consumers or has power really shifted so that capitalism is now threatened by the *increase* in participation? Reflecting back on the notion that brand management is the 'vanguard of capitalism' as it seeks to subsume the productive autonomy of the social (Arvidsson 2006), there is a comparison with *The Rebel Sell* (Heath and Potter 2005) thesis as the mainstream seeks to co-opt counter culture for counter culture to become 'the system'. However, Arvidsson's work on brands goes further, to hint in his view that the forces of production are now becoming too advanced to be contained within capitalist relations. As both a force of production and as part of the social relations of

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<sup>5</sup> Fred Perry consumers are invited to send in photographs of and anecdotes about themselves wearing their Fred Perry clothing. For example Jim Darnell sent in a photo from 1981 eating lunch with a fellow member from his punk band.  
<http://www.fredperrytellyourstory.com/stories/profile/325/disease-a-break-in-recording>  
[accessed 20 September 2010.]

production, online consumer participation and creativity marks the next phase in this line of enquiry for him.

Key to this debate, and to its exploration through the study of the Apple brand, is the notion of value - both financial and relational - as well as the notion of 'value transaction'. The claim pursued in the thesis is that these forms of value, while often conflated in current debates by both marketers and academics, are actually expressed differently by brand producers and brand consumers,. This is interesting because the generation, exchange and exploitation of value is indicative of brand structure and agency debate and because value is an expression of power. In order to understand consumer agency it is necessary to examine the ways in which consumers might express their participation and commitment to social activities around a brand rather than just theorise this in the abstract. Moreover, the expression of value is theoretically under-explored in current debates on brand consumer participation from the perspective of brand consumers, instead focusing on how late-capitalism extracts surplus value from consumer participation. Authors are concentrating on arguing over interpretations of Marxist theory (for instance Fuchs 2012, and Arvidsson and Colleoni 2012) when instead, a useful and accompanying shift of focus should now be to the actual subjects of which these theoretical accounts speak, and how consumers perceive and talk about value.

The contemporary consumer society of experiences, online shopping, consumer review sites, social network groups and digital marketing is regularly understood in the literature to be representative of a participatory culture (for instance Beer and Burrows 2010). The boundaries between commerce, content and information are currently being redrawn (Van Dijk 2006). Indeed, Apple consumers can go into an Apple store to 'hang out' and 'have face to face chats' with Apple 'Geniuses'. They are also invited elsewhere to tick, like, leave a comment, join a group, share a photo and so on. In fact, contemporary consumers frequently participate in all these activities without being asked. Participatory culture is therefore an imperative topic of concern for sociology and media studies scholars in order to be able to understand more about contemporary consumer society behaviours (Beer and Burrows 2010). With contemporary brands manifesting in new ways over time and facilitated by

developments in new digital and online technologies, a definition of convergence is useful. This is particularly so when considering more contemporary forms of branding, for instance online discussions, virtual tours of branded retail stores and consumer-generated content positioned on YouTube in the analysis in this thesis.

Convergence may be understood as

the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want (Jenkins 2006, p. 2).

It has already been argued that the brand is a new media object and a platform, so the idea of convergence here helps one to think about brand consumers moving between multiple brand interfaces, and the concept of convergence indicates that a 'participatory culture' contrasts with an old fashioned view of passive media spectatorship (Jenkins 2006, p. 3) thus reinforcing the idea of consumer activity. Certainly, '[r]ather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other occurring to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands' (ibid). This is really a homing-in on contemporary shifts in cultural practices in part brought about by new media. In terms of the research here these ideas are used in this thesis to think once more about the brand as a new media object and how one may well consider how a brand is indicative of the blurring of consumption and production.

Whereas one might argue that brands have always been participatory to a certain extent, because they can only exist effectively if they are consumed, refusal of the separating-out of the role of consumer and producer is constructive. This is because convergence only really occurs because of consumer interactions. In terms of actual marketing practice, this is when the companies that produce brands want to create long-term relationships and a range of touch points across different media, and, as Jenkins has argued, these 'new models of marketing seek to expand consumers emotional, social and intellectual investments with the goal of shaping consumption

patterns' (Jenkins 2006, p. 63), a point made by high profile marketers such as John Grant in the late 1990s. Jenkins draws upon such marketing literature and paradigmatic shifts in practice in his descriptions and analysis and looks to marketing and business texts to help him examine brand loyalty. Interestingly, he does make reference to a speech made by Coca-Cola president Steven J Heyer in 2003 and also to the popular marketing title *Love Marks* (2005) by the CEO of Saatchi, Kevin Roberts.

Reflecting on the relationship between emotion and participation, it is important to note that there is, to date, no single academic enquiry which explores why Apple works so well as an emotional brand, or which explores the idea that brand participation is on some level expressed in emotional terms. Although not an author of participatory culture, Illouz's (2009) work on emotion and consumption may inform the analysis of how participants use the Apple brand to express their relationship with and position to both Apple consumers and non-Apple consumers. Thinking about participation in terms of the sociological aspect of consumption may also help us understand a little of the attitudes towards Apple products in emotional terms. Illouz claims 'commodities themselves are not so much material objects as they are cultural meaning that in turn provide access to emotional categories and experiences' (Illouz 2009, p. 380). This point from Illouz helps us to think about how emotion is a means by which people as 'consumers enact cultural definitions of personhood' (Illouz 2009, p. 383), meaning consumers draw upon the language of real relationships with other people. It may be said that Apple is an emotional brand and that people are emotional about Apple, but where this thesis moves beyond such previous work is in its systematic analysis of exactly how this seemingly emotional aspect of participation is achieved and expressed.

Returning to the idea of brand lock-in which can be seen to reduce and regulate consumer agency and act as a form of governance, one is brought back to the idea that forms of participation and rules and resources with which to articulate participation are 'apparently' pre-designed into a brand. As has been debated above, the notion of a 'free consumer' might best be understood as a business strategy where, as Zwick et al. have argued, 'the ideological recruitment of consumers into productive co-creation relationships hinges on accommodating consumers' needs for recognition, freedom,

and agency' (Zwick et al. 2010, p. 185). This thesis explores the relevance of this argument for understanding the Apple brand and its relationship to consumers, and seeks to understand branding practices, including consumer participation, in the wider contexts of debates structure and agency.

### **Concluding comments**

In order to address the aims of this thesis, this chapter has discussed and evaluated contemporary brand and branding theory and explored what a brand is and what it does. Part of this discussion has been a consideration of the relationship between brands and consumers, which has focused upon the issue of structure and agency as a key element of any investigation into consumer participation with a brand. From this, important questions are raised concerning, what does it mean to 'participate' with a brand? On what or whose terms do consumers participate in a brand? How much agency do they have to determine the meaning and relevance of brands for lifestyle and identity? How far are notions of 'brand lock-in' and 'brand logic' helpful for understanding consumer engagement and participation in brands? While there is much theoretical work that is pertinent to thinking about such questions, there is a real gap in knowledge arising from detailed empirical investigation. This thesis, based on a case study of the Apple brand, intends to help fill this gap in knowledge. A second important area, theoretically, concerns debates on lifestyle, social distinction and identity, and as I have set up in this chapter, with the work of Bourdieu and Giddens being of particular relevance for this thesis.

A further point of focus of this enquiry is around the subject of distinction. This chapter has set up the idea that a brand provides material form to a narration of identity and, through the work of Bourdieu, has raised the question, 'might a brand be adapted somehow to the individual as a form of distinction?' or put another way, 'is the assertion of individual identity on the part of the consumer a tactical move which may undermine the notions of lock-in and brand logic?' Before explaining the methods undertaken to achieve the aims of this thesis and before considering issues of methodology, at this point, it is now useful to think more specifically about identity in relation to a case study of the Apple brand. Therefore the next chapter reviews and



examines existing literature, which includes case studies specifically about the consumption of Apple, and looks more closely at the relationship between brands and identity work.

## Chapter three

### *The Apple brand*

#### **Introduction**

Apple is a significant global brand that provides a potentially revealing case study for the exploration of theoretical arguments about brands. To begin with, since the company's genesis in 1978, Apple were one of the first producers of technology and home computing products to develop a marketing strategy and to target a domestic market. The practice of branding is essential to the success of any consumer product today that one cares to name. Yet, back in the late 1970s when Apple were in its infancy, creating a creative brand around a technology product was pioneering, and their marketing of the Apple II to a non-hobbyist market can be considered radical for its time (Hertzfeld 2005). The fortunes of the Apple company that followed are well known to many, because of a proliferation of press, public relations, and popular non-fiction titles around the 'myth' of Apple (for instance, Sculley 1989, Deutschman 2000, Kahney 2006 and Isaacson 2011).

Apple is a company very well known for product research and development, such as the innovative desk-top and drop-down menu user-interface that emerged in the 1980s (famously licensed to Microsoft) (Sculley 1989, Hertzfeld 2005). In the 1990s Apple facilitated the incorporation of instant internet access into computer hardware with the iMac, and of course, the universally familiar iPod mp3 player, click wheel, and touch screen interface. Bearing these points in mind, Apple product innovations and designs are important to the way that many people interact with and experience technology interfaces. In addition, it may be said that, ostensibly, Apple constitutes something of a super-brand. It is regularly albeit superficially declared by the media and in popular culture as 'much loved' and at the centre of a thriving community with a network of evangelical users (Kahney 2006). Apple is often praised by the marketing industry

itself as an ultimate example or masterwork of contemporary marketing<sup>6</sup>. Although, arguably, much of what is said about Apple is supposed, rather than known, there is a body of academic literature that offers critical and theoretical enquiry into Apple on which to draw. This chapter examines work by authors who have researched the Apple brand. Their work collectively establishes some recognised themes in academic discussions of Apple; for instance, an antagonistic duality between Apple and non-Apple brands such as IBM and Microsoft. ‘Macs are better than PCs’, ‘Steve Jobs is God’, ‘Apple is cool’ and ‘Apple is beautiful’ are themes and statements one just might have overheard in an everyday conversation about the brand. Although not always substantiated, these are ideas about Apple that circulate in the ‘everyday’. This section of the literature review examines the varied work of authors who have produced actual studies on the Apple brand (such as Stein 2002 and Friedman 2005), and those who are particularly useful here also present some ideas about Apple consumers.

With the huge commercial success of the iPod in the mp3 player consumer market, it is of no surprise that there has been an increase of academic interest in the brand in the areas of popular culture, music and mobility, and cultural studies<sup>7</sup>. Some studies are duly noted here, for example Bull (2005, 2007) as one of the most comprehensive examples of studies of Apple iPod ‘users’, examining mobile lifestyles and contemporary listening practices. The works discussed in this section are important as many of their contributions serve to highlight some common-sense understandings about the iPod and myths about it that circulate in the everyday. Significantly the authors reviewed in this section offer a perhaps more focused academic perspective than more populist accounts and so their claims may be particularly useful in the context of this thesis.

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<sup>6</sup> For instance Apple/TBWA/Chiat Day won an Emmy Award from the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (ATAS). The advertising for Think Different also won a Belding, a Silver Lion and a Gold Lion at Cannes advertising awards.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that there is an emerging body of work, which examines the iPod as a learning technology (Berry 2005, Dale and Pymm 2009) and as an educational tool at the centre of shifts in pedagogical approach.

In chapter two I established how meaning is related to the consumer's self-identity, which is always being worked on as an ongoing project, rather than a self that is permanent and fixed. Brands are symbolic resources for identity (Elliot and Wattanasuwan 1998). This chapter considers how existing literature on the Apple brand has implicated the brand in the processes of identity construction (e.g. Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Chapter two looked at the concept of lifestyle and how it may be realised through symbolic materials such as brands that the individual uses to articulate an account of who they are, and which makes sense to them (also see Elliot and Wattanasuwan 1998, p. 132). This chapter picks up from the last to explicate identity and in order to engage with the more ideological dimensions of the brand by referring to the authors whose works have explored how it is that the Apple brand can be deployed to mediate ideas to do with self-identity. This has a particular role in informing the arguments developed through the Apple brand analysis I present in chapter five.

### **Studies of the Apple brand**

To date, much of the literature about Apple has focused attention on the idea of the brand community. Brand community may be defined as 'a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand' (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001, p. 412). In this understanding that draws upon an anthropological approach to community, brand communities have certain commonalities, which are consciousness of kind, a type of intrinsic connection that members feel and a collective sense of difference from other people who are not in the community. In addition, there are shared rituals and traditions and a sense of moral responsibility (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001, p. 413). Interestingly, brand communities can potentially form around any brand, but are probably most likely to coalesce around brands with a strong image, a rich and lengthy history and which face high competition (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001, p. 415).

The points above provide some initial direction when thinking about themes, which might be found in the analysis of Apple. These points about brand communities are considered when undertaking the analysis of the Apple brand in this thesis, along with

Muñiz and O'Guinn's discussion of the concept of neo-tribalism in relation to consumption practices. This is because literature relating to Apple has already identified that, to feel part of a brand community, there is 1) a sense of othering, 2) a rich and lengthy history and 3) that threatening competition is important. The analysis will investigate if these themes (although not exclusively) are present in the Apple brand and, if they are, how they have been constructed over time and across the brand. The analysis may also enquire, if these themes are not explicit in the brand, are they implicit and what might the significance of this be? Therefore Muñiz and O'Guinn's work is significant in building the arguments made in this thesis on how Apple consumers perform the double distinction, since it might be argued that these three points form elements of the double distinction.

Clearly, in this brand analysis, it is important to investigate the identified duality between Apple and non-Apple; one significant and consistent way in which the duality between Apple and non-Apple has been understood is through the notion of 'othering'. Several authors such as Muñiz and O'Guinn have cited Maffesoli (1996) where he talks of the assertion of the importance of 'the other' in community formation. His book *The Time of the Tribes* did examine brands and lifestyle, although Maffesoli's work does not mention Apple specifically. While Maffesoli did not write about the Apple brand, he is included here because brand communities are defined as they are typified by the shared cultures, experiences, social norms and so on, in the way that 'exotic', 'foreign' and 'primitive tribes in the traditional anthropological and ethnographic sense are described. As just stated, the duality between Apple and non-Apple PC users has taken on mythic proportions and the discussion of literature in this chapter has established that this is a key theme for those producing studies of Apple. Contributing to this, the analysis presented in the thesis take an innovative approach and looks at how this theme has gained momentum and evolved over time. Significantly though, it looks at the ways in which it is articulated and therefore kept in circulation by consumers. Maffesoli's work is pertinent here too to acquiring an understanding of the significance of community and shared meanings around Apple, and later how the iPod might work as part of the overall Apple brand.

This is because in particular the notion of *puissance*<sup>8</sup> regards tribes as momentary, refusing to identify with a political project, concerned only with the present, characterised by fluidity, occasional gathering, and dispersal. Although they are fragile, from the instant members of the tribe engage, they are the objects of considerable emotional investment (Maffesoli 1996, p. 76). The notion of *puissance* can be deployed when thinking about Apple to consider how in each era there is a sensibility, a style, which specifies the relationships people forge with others using the dynamic energy of the people. Maffesoli writes, ‘Within the mass, one runs across, bumps into and brushes against others, interaction is established, crystallizes, and groups form’ (Maffesoli 1996, p. 73). The notion of *puissance* is principally informative therefore in understanding how Apple manages the ideological tension between mainstream and non-mainstream.

The theme of Apple being *perceived* as an underdog has been identified in existing literature as a significant and recurring method of constructing the idea of ‘other’. Identifying how Apple is set up against ‘an other’, but through textual analysis, Stein (2002) and Friedman (2005) both discuss how the Macintosh advertisement in 1984 created a framing; a battle of an underdog versus a large unnamed corporate oppressor. Furthermore, Stein (2002) and Friedman (2005) contribute a critical look at the ways the Apple brand may have shaped, ‘a culture’s incorporation of new technologies’ (Stein 2002, p. 170). This earlier analysis of Apple argues that the 1984 Super Bowl advertisement represents a key rhetorical moment, which ‘speaks’ of freedom and revolution made possible by a computer that launched accessible computing for the non-expert public (see Stein 2002, p. 170).

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<sup>8</sup> A French term which translated means ‘energy of the people’. Maffesoli uses this term ‘*puissance*’ to discuss power and makes a clear distinction in his work between *puissance* and *pouvoir*, or institutional power (Maffesoli 1996, p104).

Stein claims,

In 1984, generating consumers' awareness of the computer outside of scientific or corporate realms and as something beyond a game console meant not only introducing a radically different personal computer to the market place, but also entailed transforming the social identity of the consumer into that of a personal computer user, at the time an identification held by few outside of a narrow work context (Stein 2002, p. 173).

In 1984 Apple were in part trying to address individual fears around technology. In effect, as far back as the 1980s, the Apple brand framed the key theme of consumer freedom, implying that home computing was not something to be frightened and that rather it could serve to liberate the individual (Stein 2002).

The above discussion raises some questions in the context of notions of the brand lock-in and structure and agency debates that were set up in the previous chapter: are, for example, autonomy and consumer sovereignty actually prescribed by the brand in examples of the brand other than '1984'? In what ways has this idea gathered momentum through time, and what does this mean for consumer agency? Stein's (2002) work is ahistorical in the sense that it focuses on the 1984 Super Bowl moment as an isolated example, 'an instance' of the Apple brand, although she looks in brief at the origins of the company and the cultural/political context of the years that preceded the advertisement, a period which, she claims, exhibited technophobia (see Stein 2002, p. 181). The 1984 advertisement was Apple's way of trying to manage technophobia and thus address what was perceived as a primary concern of the personal computing market at the time. In the 1980s there was a general fear in society around personal computing described as 'the shadow of HAL' (Friedman 2005, p. 106) referencing the machine with human consciousness in Stanley Kubrick's film, *2001*. Friedman notes that, back in the 1980s, IBM addressed fears around technology by employing a Charlie Chaplain lookalike in an effort to give the PC a human comedic face (see *ibid*). Meanwhile, 'What [Apple's] "1984" accomplished was to tackle the spectre of HAL head-on. It turned the confusing complexity of the Information Age –the ambivalence of Desk Set and 2001 – into a Manichean battle of good versus evil' (Friedman 2005, p. 111). Essentially, the Apple

brand and its technology were being bound together and so the brand was used by Apple to explain the technology to consumers. This detail is noteworthy because it supports one of the arguments made in the thesis that the brand and technology are complex and connected, and that the brand works as an interface for use and exchange. In retrospect, this point may be set in context with the idea raised in chapter two of a brand connecting products and services. Drawing upon Stein's remarks, the analysis in the thesis proves revealing of how the consumer's perception of computer technology has changed since 1984, and how the brand has and continues to contribute to the ongoing understanding of technological diffusion and adoption. This could serve as an example of brand reflexivity and also of a brand's dynamic relationship with time. It could also be informative to the analysis in examining how the Apple brand constructs the products as common sense over a much longer period.

Another key theme that has emerged from the literature on Apple is the idea that the brand offers religious or cult-like repertoires, which are important to the social identity of consumers. As well as indentifying themes to do with Microsoft as a corporate oppressor, Muñiz and Schau (2005) examined the relationship between brand, religion, and modernity through a five-year-long study starting in 2000 in the US, of a group of Newton users. An estimated 20,000 users kept the defunct technology in circulation at least until 2005. The study showed how although the Newton was dropped from the product line a decade before (1995), a loyal following of users remained. This is despite the problems experienced by users in getting replacement parts or having to suffer the derision associated with being an adopter of a quickly defunct technology. Muñiz and Schau (2005) analysed the experiences of Newton users and identified community themes around persecution, faith, survival, miracle, and resurrection. Religiosity is a theme that is first a product of the context in which this community operates but it provides a valuable insight in considering some connection between modernity, brands and technology; the idea that people need something to believe in beyond formal religion and that the Apple brand is one of those things.



Supernatural, religious, and magical motifs are common in the narratives of the Newton Community. There are strong elements of survival, the miraculous, and the return of the creator. We propose these themes are, first, a product of the context in which this community operates and, second, indicative of the very clear and resilient need humans have to believe in something or someone outside mundane reality (Muñiz and Schau 2005, p. 739).

The concept of modernity is conceptualised here as a decline in religion to a shift to a cultural emphasis on reason; this is somewhat understated, and the notion or understanding of 'brand' is rather oversimplified. Apple manifests itself within the investigation on the Newton community more or less as the name of the product. The thesis fills a gap here in examining the mechanics of more of the Apple brand, and how and why it works in a similar way, but I am doing so through both brand texts and consumer interviews, looking at much more of the Apple brand. Certainly these qualities of persecution, faith, survival, miracle, and resurrection are often referred to in press reports about the late Steve Jobs. There is also a sense of religiosity that envelops his personification. He is 'a messiah-like' figurehead that some consumers - one could argue - are devoted to (see chapter six).

Brand devotion is another way of thinking about why consumers develop such deep loyalty towards Apple that manifests as a 'quasi-religious' aspect of consumption (Belk and Tumbat 2005, p. 1). The genesis of Apple has in fact been likened to the structure of a classic heroic adventure myth, aligning it with similar key stages from the lives of Odysseus, Christ, and Buddha, such as the call to adventure, a wondrous journey and resurrection (Belk and Tumbat 2005, p. 1) with Steve Jobs as the central protagonist. '[T]hese key elements [of religiosity] seem to characterize Steve Jobs as he is construed in Apple's corporate mythology and in the minds of its true believers' (Belk and Tumbat 2005, p. 9). Other cult-like themes along these lines involve evangelising by Apple consumers, the converting of non-Apple users to their community, and satanic myth present in Apple's historic battle with IBM, and Microsoft.

The Mac and its fans constitute the equivalent of a religion. This religion is based on an original myth for Apple Computer, heroic and saviour legends surrounding its co-founder Steve Jobs, the devout faith of its following congregation, their belief in the righteousness of Macintosh, the existence of one or more Satanic opponents, Mac believers proselytizing and converting non-believers, and the hope among cult members that salvation can be achieved by transcending corporate capitalism (Belk and Tumbat 2005, p. 6).

Overall, what these arguments from existing works about Apple all imply is the notion that consumption of Apple carries quasi -religious symbolic meaning for the consumer, that these meanings are shared with other people, and that people are using Apple to categorise themselves in society. This notion links to the idea that the brand has an institutional dimension in much the same way that formal religion might be understood as an institution with rules and regulations, norms and practices. Participation with this, for the consumer, amounts to the investment of faith and helps to articulate a belief system (Belk and Tumbat 2005). These arguments are also informative for a much more detailed consideration of how Jobs fits into the overall brand. Also, these ideas about religiosity provide a framework for identifying and thinking about how interview participants might romanticise their social identity through their 'outsider' status. Do they also do this linked to and based on the fact that Apple is somehow an 'underdog' in the consumer's mind's eye? This may be because the company represents a small percentage of the overall personal computers, software and operating systems market, but it might also be to do with how such ideas are put forward in the brand and over time. 'Even though Apple itself is a large corporation, the Cult of Macintosh revels in the outlaw, anti-corporate, and rebellious spirit that form the romantic myths of Apple computer' (Belk and Tumbat 2005, p. 19). This helps one to think about the tension between the Apple brand and corporate capitalism. Although Belk and Tumbat have identified a key theme of the brand, that is the idea of 'a rebellious spirit' amongst Apple consumers, the work does not examine how the Apple brand performs as an interface which manages the apparent dichotomy between corporate capitalism and counterculture. The idea of the brand as a complex object is also relevant here (Lury 2004). The brand 'as interface' is vital to Apple being able to 'get away with' - one may say - being both a successful and profit-yielding transnational and yet still retain a countercultural status.

## **The iPod**

iPod, therefore I am? ‘To engage with an iPod also means that you become part of a universalized experience’ (Rhen 2008, p. 10). Indeed, the release and sales of the iPod (according to Apple sales figures<sup>9</sup>) significantly increased experience of and interaction with the Apple brand, taking Apple from being a producer known for computer hardware to the producer of a familiar object. There is no doubt that the iPod has made the Apple brand available to a broader spectrum of people. The argument made here is that as part of the overall brand architecture the iPod presents a type of disruption that is perceived by many as undermining Apple exclusivity.

Bull’s (2005) study of the iPod is one of the most useful, and is based on data collected from interviews with 426 respondents from the UK, the USA, Switzerland and Denmark. Bull used empirical data relating to the iPod consumer, and he focused solely on the iPod and was concerned with the relationship between music and mobility. The focus in this thesis with regards to the iPod is different. This thesis is concerned with where the iPod sits within the overall Apple brand architecture. I am interested in the extent to which the iPod incorporates Apple’s core brand messages, while at the same time presenting new ones. The marketing of the iPod somehow expresses something all on its own about the shifting power relations between consumers and producers. To substantiate this, the analysis in chapter five explores the iPod as a discrete brand and as part of the overall brand architecture, while also considering the relationship between members of the Apple brand community and those who own only an iPod.

iPod users create ‘spaces of freedom’ for themselves, and ‘a privatized auditory sound bubble’ (Bull 2005, p. 344) through the use of technologies that tie them into

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<sup>9</sup> In 2007 it was reported by Apple that they had sold 100 million iPod units world-wide. Apple has sold 46.5 million iPod touch units in the US between the device's introduction in 2007 and the second quarter of 2012. Quarterly reports published by Apple are available at <http://www.apple.com/pr/library/2012/07/24Apple-Reports-Third-Quarter-Results.html> [last accessed 02.02.13]

consumer culture' but, however, 'are not reducible to those technologies'(ibid). This idea describes how, through music, users create play lists or use the shuffle feature to evoke life stories and moods brought to mind through the music they select, as well as to navigate and order their relationship with the external environment they move through. This demonstrates how the iPod can be understood as a cultural icon of the twenty-first century, 'representing a sublime marriage between mobility, aesthetics and functionality, of sound and touch' (Bull 2007, p. 1). Here, Bull's ideas are useful and tie in with the themes about the relationship between freedom and consumption in this thesis - two notions seemingly at odds with one another. This thesis intends to ask new questions that focus on the Apple brand, including how Apple consumers use the brand to manage this ideological tension. Put another way, how might consumers negotiate this ideologically and ontologically via their relationship with and reading of the Apple brand?

Similar to Bull, but in less detail and without empirical evidence, Sexton (2009) considers the iPod as a digital audio player (DAP) and asks, why has the iPod been so successful since its launch? For Sexton, several factors stand out; 'design, usability, advertising and the launch in 2003 of the Apple iTunes store' (Sexton 2009, p. 104). This thesis extends this enquiry to look at how important the brand is in mediating the technology. On a simplistic level, what both Bull and Sexton do is identify that there is something peculiar to the iPod which sets it apart from other mp3 players on the market that essentially use similar technologies and perform similar functions. Surely this must mean it has something to do with the iPod as a brand and part of the overall Apple branding architecture? This is a question that neither of these studies has addressed adequately, although to be fair this was not the primary concern of either study. The intention is that the thesis informs such understandings of the iPod, and thereby provides a fresh perspective on what is significant and interesting about the brand and branding as a means of expressing identity and social distinction.

Other studies of the iPod adopt a business studies approach in which they aim to reveal consumers' preferred attributes for the iPod in order to inform other marketers (Reppel et al. 2006). However, this approach tends to neglect the potential riches to be had from a deeper analysis of the social and cultural dimensions of the iPod. For example, Reppel et al. begin with the claim, 'the most important aspect of this [the

iPod] success story is that Apple was able to extend the iPod market from the group of early adopters to the early majority without diminishing the product's cool factor,' (Reppel et al. 2006, p. 239). They then go on to focus on investigating customer preference for the iPod to try to understand how customers connect with it. This is very much done within a business studies tradition of market research.<sup>10</sup> The authors' discussion of the research methods and 'laddering technique'<sup>11</sup> used in interviews therefore takes precedence over a developed discussion of the actual data, although they do state in their discussion that the results are tentative. What is nonetheless useful about this study is its focus on issues of control (menus for navigation) and design. This tells us that the interface and aesthetic elements which actually *are* a form of branding (though not stated as such by the authors) are significant to users' enjoyment of the iPod. Reppel and colleagues claim that participants found the iPod easy to use and thus 'felt good' about using it in that the design was a key factor for users who describe it as a source of pleasure. Users also expressed a feeling of individuality somehow gained through using an iPod (Reppel et al. 2006, p. 249) although this was not expanded upon in the paper. Despite the limitations of the study, what is interesting about is that it highlights issues around the distinct Apple aesthetic being a significant part of the brand which is reflexively reworked into the brand as a discursive repertoire by Apple and may potentially be used by consumers as a source of distinction. More specifically, consumers' reading of the Apple aesthetic is an important marker of superior taste and a source of cultural capital.

The iPod today has been through several design incarnations and stages of product innovation since release (2001) and is now available to the consumer in many different models from *classic* to *nano*. It is actually useful to consider academic, peer-reviewed work written about the iPhone, in view of so much pseudo-philosophy written about the iPod. In addition, there is a strong familiar resemblance between the

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<sup>10</sup> They conducted twenty two online interviews and presented their results in a diagram that highlights 1) attributes that included control, storage capacity, design, connectivity, sound quality and reliability, 2) consequences that included simplicity, relaxation, comfort and speed, and 3) values that included feeling good and hedonism (see Reppel et al. 2006, p245).

<sup>11</sup> A semi-structured interview technique which draws on clinical psychology and is often used in market research, in which results are separated out into attributes, consequences and values awarded by consumers to a product. See Reynolds and Olson (2001), *Understanding Consumer Decision Making: the means-end approach to marketing*. Routledge.

two designs of iPod and iPhone that is at the same time consistent with and indicative of the Apple brand. Both iPod and iPhone as objects have a similar signifying design and user interface. During the period that the data were collected for this project, the iPhone had not even been released; therefore there were no instances of iPhone branding to analyse, nor did the interview participants mention its pending release during their interviews. However, like the iPhone, the iPod is customised through consumer choice: the choice of colour, a reconfigurable interface and personal content, and notably all of this is flexible at the click of the wheel or touch of the screen. Goggin's (2009) enquiry is an exploration of mobile phone culture and the focus of his findings is about the 'reconfiguring of design and habitus' (Goggin 2009, p. 243) the iPhone presents. He also notes the significance of third-party application developers which, he says, means 'the iPhone is being co-created by [more than] a range of cultural intermediaries than Apple itself, including software developers and users' (Goggin 2009, p. 243). This helps to think about a number of issues in the context of intellectual gaps in studies of the iPod, such as where Reppel et al. have under-theorised the idea of the individual and identity work. The iPod, as an element of the overall brand, might be an embodiment of individualisation and may in turn express personal experiences and preferences. How can the iPod be an embodiment of individualisation while so many people own one, and why does it 'as an object' present a kink in the overall brand architecture that seems to upset some Apple consumers precisely because so many other people own an iPod?

What is also of interest to the investigation at this juncture is how the branding of the iPod draws upon notions of subculture and 'othering' mainstream and popular music. How does this work ideologically for a product that is so ubiquitous; so common? Turner (2008) claims that, 'Effective advertising campaigns show hip and exuberant dancing shadows of individuals so rapturously attuned to the spirit of the music that connections to other people seem unnecessary' (Turner 2008, p. 151). The iPod can thus be said to embody a communal experience inasmuch as so many people own one; but it simultaneously offers a social discourse around the membership of a modern subculture based on alternative music consumption with an outsider status.

In terms of the overall Apple brand, the iPod could be perceived as a 'subculture' and the branding of the iPod draws heavily on the iconography of youth and music

subcultures particularly in advertising texts, the iPod brand certainly draws upon the concept of subculture. One of the most well-known and perhaps enduring examinations of subculture is that provided by Hebdige (1979) with his study of the subversive implications of the style: Teddy Boys, Mods and Punks, amongst others. For Hebdige, subcultures are characterised through their marginality; what they are *not*, as in, if someone is *x*, then they cannot be *y*. Their identity is defined in relation to those 'other' groups who they position themselves against such as parents, teachers, police, and respectable youth (see Hebdige 1979, p. 73). In terms of how the term 'subculture' is operationalised in this thesis, Hebdige is noted. The branding of the iPod in this way constructs an identity whereby, despite it being a near-ubiquitous consumer good, it is positioned as a marginalised object through its relationship with alternative music. Marginality is romanticised and this is important because the Apple brand somehow does this and depoliticises aspects of the music subcultures that it employs in the branding of the iPod. Marginality rather than being political becomes about displays of specialised knowledge about the world and demonstrating a level of competence and cultural capital.

One might well ask: is it the recognition and display of subculture rather than political effects that is important to the Apple iPod consumer? Earlier studies of Apple prior to the iPod took an anthropological approach to issues of display and how the brand community uses the brand as a symbolic resource. This is because, to make sense of the iPod as part of the overall Apple brand, ostensibly consumers seem to justify their consumption as alternative, whilst paradoxically behaving in similar ways to other people. This alternative-ness is also presented in a vague and apolitical way. This presents a somewhat antagonistic duality, which the study of the iPod in this thesis may be able to explicate.

## **Conclusions**

If we are to draw together the central themes about Apple that have already been identified in other studies, we can see that the Apple brand is bound up with technology, and the brand is somehow significant for Apple-as-producers to explain

the technology to consumers. What has not been drawn out in any of these studies is how the brand itself, as a new media object, is the significant connecting and coordinating entity in this process. This suggests that a study which includes an understanding of the ontology of a brand can advance knowledge specifically about the workings and inner logic of the Apple brand. Looking closely, there is a need to expand on these earlier studies of Apple to include a more comprehensive selection of Apple branding texts from different eras to fully understand how the brand has worked over time. Much of the work to date on Apple identifies particular themes present in the brand and takes into account symbolic and cultural meaning, but has not specifically looked at the ways in which consumers articulate the brand, the production of identities, or consumer participation in relation to the structure and agency debate. Furthermore, although authors such as Muñiz and O'Guinn discussed in this chapter examined Apple, they have chosen entry points around individual products, advertising texts or cultures of practice; not how the brand as a complex range of different media texts has evolved over a period of time. A focus on the evolution of the brand since the 1970s to the present alongside a semiotic analysis of the brand, and interviews with Apple consumers can, in combination, provide a more rigorous study of the Apple brand and Apple consumers than has perhaps previously been available.

Recurring claims from previous studies of Apple discussed in the section suggest that the themes of Apple as an underdog, Apple versus Microsoft, and religiosity within the Apple community are not just conjecture or media hype. Rather, they are established and important factors in what is already known about the Apple consumer's sense of 'being an Apple consumer'. However, there is a need to move the focus to include the iPod as the iPod clearly presents some intellectual conundrums. I have begun to argue already in this chapter that, as an element of the overall brand, the iPod might be an embodiment of individualisation and its consumption may be a means of expressing personal experiences and preferences. However, I have also suggested that such an argument might be problematic in the sense that the iPod is a universal object, so how can it be used for individuality? Because a lot of people own an iPod, some Apple consumers might feel it is of lesser value and that it undermines brand exclusivity. It is much less expensive to purchase



than an Apple notebook for instance and many more people own an iPod than a Mac Book Pro. A person is not 'unusual' if they own an iPod, so what does this mean for exclusivity and a sense of distinction? To explore this further, the analysis of the iPod brand and the consideration of the iPod as part of the overall brand draws upon notions of subculture and 'othering' mainstream and popular music. The concept of subculture has been set up for operation in the analysis. Discussing the relevance of the work of Hebdige (1979) on subculture and Maffesoli (1996) on tribus and puissance also provides sensitising concepts for investigating this claim.

The next chapter, chapter four, now explains the methods of data collection and data analysis, and provides detail on the underpinning methodology that informs the thesis and the specific methodological issues associated with undertaking the study.

## Chapter four

### *Methods and Methodology*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter sets out both the theoretical approach adopted in the analysis, and the methodological approach applied to the collection of the data studied in this research. The chapter describes the specific methods used- social semiotics and interview - and presents the rationale for these chosen methods, explaining why they are appropriate to meet the aims of the thesis.

To begin with let us reflect back on the ways the brand has been understood so far in the thesis, because in order to explain the chosen methodology and methods, it is important to restate the approach to brands taken in this thesis. The thesis aims to understand the relationship between the Apple brand and Apple consumers, in order to both complement and extend existing work on brands in general and on the Apple brand in particular. Chapter two explored the fundamental nature of brands; what are they and what do they do? The chapter explained that the brand is a ‘new media object’, which is a unifying connection between products and services. To précis, the brand as ‘a new media object’ is *objective* in that it can be the object of purpose or intention by both brand consumer and producer, and it has a dynamic relationship with time whereby it is reflexive in terms of consistency and evolution, and therefore provides its own context. Chapter two also discussed the idea from Callon (1998) that brands have an inner logic, which seemingly restricts consumer activity to a set of limited possibilities and stated that this thesis would subject this idea to scrutiny in the case of Apple. Callon’s central argument has been referred to as ‘brand lock-in’ and was further explored in a discussion of the ways that brands have an ability to manage and programme consumer activity (Arvidsson 2006). Chapter three examined how consumer activity is directly associated with identity construction and how the Apple brand can be considered a productive resource in identity work and sociality.

This understanding of brands as *a new media object, as reflexive and as having a dynamic relationship with time* has led to some central questions and lines of enquiry: how are consumers positioned by the Apple brand and how do Apple consumers

engage with and employ the brand? The thesis also asks what it means to participate in the Apple brand, and investigates the effect of consumer participation on the development of the Apple brand. Furthermore, the research is interested in whether consumers articulate the brand in ways set up by Apple and in ways that are predetermined according to this idea of brand logic, or whether they articulate alternative understandings of the brand.

These research questions require in-depth exploration of branding practices that involve both an analysis of branding materials and of consumer engagement with the brand. This is most effectively achieved by adopting an interpretive research philosophy (Gilbert 2010, p. 137), concerned with questions of ‘what’ and ‘how’. As a researcher, epistemologically, I seek an understanding of the world in which I live and I believe that individuals ‘develop subjective meanings of their experiences directed towards certain objects or things’ (Creswell 2003, p. 8). As Creswell states, ‘...meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas’ (ibid). The researcher’s intent is to make sense of (interpret) meanings others have about the world (Creswell 2003, p. 9). If one considers this type of claim to knowledge in relation to the understanding of brands outlined at the beginning of the chapter, one can argue that such an approach is highly suitable as it allows for an exploration of how brand meanings are constructed and for an interpretation of what one finds, and it allows for consideration of the generation of meaning as social, arising within and out of consumer interaction with the brand.

To fit with this epistemological view, collection methods were employed which aimed to produce data that sought to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning (Van Maanen 1983), rather than the ‘frequency’, of certain phenomena in the social world. As previously stated, those methods are semiotics and thematic analysis of interviews. The methodology in which these methods are situated is qualitative, and such an approach, as well as analysing the brand itself, has allowed me to focus on the two aspects of the consumers’ relationship to the brand - 1) how consumers are configured into the brand and 2) how consumers position the brand in relation to their identities as Apple consumers.

A qualitative approach is appropriate because a brand is not a consistent or systematic object. As I have argued, it is 'dynamic' and constantly evolving through time. Consequently it would be difficult to try to capture and quantify this quality of dynamism numerically and to try to reduce the brand trajectory into numerical data to 'measure'. Therefore, I chose to employ qualitative methods as a strategy for discovery, which has allowed me to analyse the brand in terms of consumer and producer and to elicit rich detail in order to explore the nuances of how the brand moves through time and the consumer-producer relationship. The qualitative approach values the consumer as an individual subject with 'an authentic voice' and provides more than answers to 'how much' or 'how many' questions (Silverman 2010 pp. 7-8). Indeed, it goes beyond mapping or measuring the development of a brand as a fixed or inflexible trajectory, and does not assume that consumer responses might demonstrate exact models of consumer actions. The decision to follow a qualitative approach has instead provided data and an in-depth analysis, which has enabled me to investigate Apple as a point of interconnectedness that embodies the relationship between brand and consumer.

Objectivity and truthfulness are critical to both quantitative and qualitative research traditions, but the criteria for judging qualitative research are different from those required for quantitative investigation. The research seeks a sense of believability and credibility based on coherence, as well as intuitive and felt knowledge (see Eisener 1991 in Creswell 2003, p. 199). Indeed, researchers cannot escape their particular view or experiences of the world and, as Gilbert (2010, p. 19) discusses, there is always an inclusive conceptualisation that includes the activity of researching something and the notion that the researcher is not simply observing from a position of detachment. This can be described as 'reflexive inquiry'. Reflexive inquiry prompts one to ask questions about what one is doing as a researcher. Introspection and acknowledgement of biases, values and interests typifies qualitative research today.

This thesis offers 'an interpretation', which necessarily reflects, to some extent, the subject position of the researcher. Qualitative research is by its very nature interpretative (Creswell 2003, p. 184) and, as Creswell goes on to state, 'the inquirer typically is involved in a sustained and intensive experience [with the subject] and the

participants'. The researcher makes an interpretation or 'filters through a personal lens' (Creswell 2003, p. 182). Related to this, Gilbert (2010, p. 19) states that as a researcher one must ask questions relating to one's motives as a researcher.

These points from Creswell and Gilbert inform consideration of my position as 'the researcher' and think through issues of epistemology. It is simply inescapable that factors of personal circumstances, history and culture provide a milieu for the inquiry, but this can be useful and positive rather than detrimental. In my roles as a brand practitioner, a part-time academic and Apple consumer, I have a critical sensitivity to the subject studied, with prior knowledge that has helped shaped the analysis. To explain, I have been an Apple consumer for at least a decade and this includes several years prior to beginning work on this thesis. I studied Apple as the subject of my MA research and I currently work as a branding practitioner. This work includes analysing, strategising and developing brands for 'blue-chip' and global companies. Through this work, and through authentic experience and engagement with Apple and with brands more generally, I was able to recognise some of the theoretical tensions between consumer and producer discussed in chapters two and three. My position offers me insight into, and great respect for, the consumer's role in brand production. In addition, these multiple yet connected subject positions proved to be valuable in considering the data collection and analyses, because they provided me with an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study in that I bring knowledge of both producer and consumer and thus awareness of structure and of agency on a practical, rather than theoretical, level. Put another way, as a brand producer, I have working knowledge of how brands are considered and strategised and how 'ideal' consumers and deliberate ideas are designed into a brand. Yet, as an Apple consumer in my own right, I have understanding and identification with other Apple consumers. Also, in my role as a consumer, I practice meaning-making and self-determination, acting within 'inter-determinacy within limits' and sometimes acting outside of them. I would argue that this has located me in a unique position alert to the tensions between structure and agency but based on pragmatic experience and observation, which has complemented rather than been challenged by critical engagement with theory. Nonetheless, and to be clear, ultimately, in my role as the researcher I possess a critical awareness 'of practice' developed through scholarship and in the context of producing this thesis. I discuss examples of how my position affected the interview

process in a later section of this chapter. However, one example of how my position positively affected the research is how, when I commenced the study I had already formed close contacts with people who write commercially about the Apple community and the marketing industry, and in the initial stages of enquiry this allowed me as ‘a researcher’ to access and disseminate material normally subject to several levels of gatekeeping (for example, transcripts from Apple marketing meetings).

Moving forward, the next section explains social semiotics, situated in context with a brief explanation of ‘the sign’ and broader semiotic theory. The discussion explains how social semiotic theory is an appropriate method for this thesis to meet the aims of the research.

## **Social semiotic theory**

The ‘toolkit’ required for the analysis of the branding data is from semiotics; the study of ‘signs’ which comes from a tradition that is grounded in linguistics, but one that has been developed to analyse other modes of communication such as: gesture, images and music. This section details what is understood by the term ‘sign’ and then discusses the distinction between traditional semiotics and social semiotics, social semiotics being the theory of method or ‘methodology’ unpinning the analysis of the branding material in this thesis. The section clarifies how social semiotics understands that there are potentially different ‘modes’ such as writing and image and colour, which do different kinds of semiotic work within a sign and this can be understood as ‘multi-modality’ (Kress 2010, p. 1) and that this concept of multimodality is intrinsic to social-semiotics; a theory which deals with meaning in all its appearances, in all social occasions and in all cultural sites (Kress 2010, p. 2). Since the analysis of the Apple brand needs to look at different instances of branding both as individual modes and interconnected modes, this theory of social semiotics informs the examination of how different examples of the brand ‘mean’, how they might ‘mean’ together and how they might ‘mean’ over time.

## **The Sign**

Signs are made up of ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’ (Saussure [1916] 1983). The signified is the mental concept to which the signifier (thing/object as it is perceived) refers.



*Figure 1 iPod Mini*

For instance, using Saussure's concepts, an analysis of the image of the iPod mini above would explain that the referent is the actual object in the world, a metal rectangle, with a screen and touch-pad wheel and the signifier as something that stands for something else. The signifier in this case is an illustration of an iPod Mini, (but it could equally be the written or spoken words, *iPod Mini*). The signified is the mental concept of an iPod that is generated in the mind's eye by the signifier. The notion of sign is created, Saussure argued, because there is a special relationship between the signifier and signified, and the signification process is related to the idea of what the mental concept of iPod Mini means in particular to the receiver or reader of the sign.

In thinking about the brand's dynamic relationship with time and how it has both changed and remained the same, the analysis needed to consider common-sense understandings about the world put forward by Apple and how the brand inserted certain ideas into the brand as historical truths. Barthes once argued, '*Persil* whiteness for instance, bases its prestige on the evidence of a result' (Barthes [1957] 2000, p. 37), which involves the consumer in a direct experience of the substance.

Looking at the relationship between signifier and signified, and also drawing on Saussure, Barthes reasons that *semiology* or the science of signs ultimately 'deals with values' and that enquiry of this nature is in effect looking at signs 'as tokens for something else' (Barthes [1957] 2000, p. 111). Through the example of passionified roses he argued that in applying Semiology one is not just looking at signifier and signified, but at a third form, the sign, which unifies the other two signifier (roses) signified (passion) in the creation of a sign (passionified roses) (Barthes [1957] 2000, p. 113). Added to which Barthes introduced the idea of a tri-dimensional pattern and a second-order semiological system. Namely the sign is the first system, but after that the sign itself becomes a signifier in the second, which is shifted, and Barthes calls this *signification* (Barthes 2000 [1957], p. 117) invested with a knowledge of reality that is not fixed, but open to interpretation.



Barthes elucidated this approach to meaning in his later work, *Image-Music-Text* (1977). He said,

[T]he literal message appears as the *support* of the 'symbolic' message. Hence, knowing that a system which takes over the signs of another system in order to make them its signifiers is a system of connotation we may say immediately that the literal image is *denoted* and the symbolic image *connoted* (Barthes 1977, p. 36).

Here Barthes is talking about moving beyond what he described as 'naive analysis' (ibid) of the first order meaning or the 'denoted' meaning, which is usually straightforward, obvious and easy to read; instead, he argued that there exists a second-level meaning, that which is 'connoted'. Barthes argued that the first order meaning – that which is denoted becomes a signifier for the second order. The first level or denotation is usually understood as meaning, whereas the second level connotation 'meaning at the level of myth' (Barthes 1977) is called signification. Whereas denoted meaning is usually stable, for instance anchored by surrounding textual clues such as slogans or copy in an advertisement for example, the reader is not usually confused or asked to work too hard to understand denotation, but connotation, Barthes argued is more mythical and symbolic, and depends on context and culture; 'that is culture[e] in the broadest sense of the word – that results in the association of ideas' (Rivière 2008, p. 24). This helps with thinking about different elements of the Apple brand in terms of associations and representations, and how aspects of the brand, which are analysed in this thesis, may mean or stand in for wider ideas. Barthes' work discussed here is also useful in terms of providing a vocabulary for understanding how meaning is constructed and transferred to Apple products via the brand.

In developing a definition, Randviir and Cobley (2010) clarify that 'social' semiotics stands in relation to traditional 'semiotics', but is also a reconfiguration of sign study as an appropriate means to study not just linguistics, but many phenomena of everyday life. They claim 'it [social semiotics] is a matter of critical sign study, which is aware of the specific and strategic ways in which signs are deployed in social formations' (p. 118). Social semiotics is also concerned with notions of agency in the making of meaning; that is 'signs as made and motivated through the choices made by

the agent' (Abousnouga 2008) (see also Hodge and Kress, 1988). That is, in social semiotic theory, the central aspect of meaning-making is the notion that signs are made in social interactions; they are 'motivated', not arbitrary relations of meaning and form, and become part of the semiotic resources of a culture. This line of thinking informs the analysis in the sense that social-semiotics asks what meaning is being made, and in who's interest, with what resources and in what environment? As an approach to analysis Kress argues that

*Social semiotics and the multimodal dimension of the theory, tell us about interest and agency; about meaning(-making); about processes of sign-making in social environments; about the resources for making meaning and their respective potentials as signifiers in the making of signs-as-metaphors; about the meaning potentials of cultural/semiotic forms. The theory can describe and analyse all signs in all modes as well as their interrelation in any one text (Kress 2010, p. 59).*

This enquiry looks at brands as objects and as stated in the sense that they are 'the object of purpose'. Chapter two also stated that as such they have objective-ness which includes images, processes and products, and relations between products, and that the brand is a unifying connection between products and services and that the brand embodies the relationship between all these things over time. Importantly, I have stated that this includes both producer and consumer and the thesis explores the relationship between the two, specifically through the notions of structure and agency. Reflecting back on the quote from Kress above, one can argue how a social-semiotic framework provides the means to analyse the brand within its own reflexive context both in terms of different modes or expressions of the brand, but also and significantly to analyse how meaning is made within the brand as a type of totality of meaning. Social semiotics also provides an analytic framework within which to consider the implicit directions of meaning 'potentially' inscribed by brand producer and how the brand is 'designed' as a platform for communication exchange between consumer and producer; and finally to later explore how the idea of agency is built into the brand experience through meanings implied in the brand.

## **Methods**

Two different types of data were collected and analysed -

- 1) A selection of Apple product branding from 1978 to 2007, analysed through social semiotics.**
  
- 2) Consumer interviews, analysed through thematic analysis.**

### **Data collection of branding material**

For the first stage of the data collection a selection of contemporary branding material from the late seventies to this decade was collated. The examples were gathered from a variety of resources: the special collection and archives at Stanford University library, the official apple.com website, the personal collection of Dr Gary L Gray at Penn State University, the online archives of The Digibarn Museum California USA, the macmothership.com which is an online advertising gallery run by an Apple enthusiast collective, the personal collection of Bill Kelley who is a former Regis McKenna<sup>12</sup> employee, and finally by donation from interview participants. This brand material came in a variety of texts and formats: photographs, jpeg files, video, quick-time movie files, hardcopy-print, illustrations, written texts and actual objects.

There were three considerations in selecting the branding material for analysis. Firstly, the need to select examples of the brand across four decades (1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s) to enable an analysis of how the brand had evolved over a period of time. The second consideration was to include a range of different *types* of branding to fit with the theoretical understanding of brands as manifesting in multifaceted ways from logos, advertising, retail environments and experiential events, to online consumer-generated content. This is linked to the third consideration, which was that the selection should be representative of the trends and shifts in branding practice relevant to the study (as discussed in detail in chapter two).

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<sup>12</sup> US marketing agency hired by Apple, 1970s to 1990s.

For example, the Super Bowl advertising slot first filled by Apple in 1984 works not merely as advertising, but actually on the level of event marketing and public relations, because of the context of its airing during a popular national (USA) sports game watched by a vast TV audience as well as those in the stadium, and the Apple advertisement subsequently became a news story and a public relations coup in itself. So, I purposely chose to look at this example because event marketing is indicative of the brand during this decade and trends in marketing during the 1980s.

Where the branding examples include written texts or voiceovers, these are in the English language and I purposefully chose examples of branding which were only released to American and British markets (although some of the more contemporary examples had a more global reach with dubbing or translation). The reason for this is because, in the earlier decades, Apple was in its infancy and still developing its market and a global market did not exist. Apple branded the products to appeal to a new emerging domestic market away from the idea that computers were only for IT hobbyists. In 1978 the Apple II was available to purchase in the UK and media planning was targeted at a demographic of knowledge workers with a high level of technological competence in niche publications such as Byte magazine. Apart from the UK, the market in Western Europe was small until 1984 when Apple released the first Macintosh and, even then, the target markets for branding were niche and narrowly focused on the USA, France, Germany and Japan (Sculley 1989, p. 134). Although Apple shipped to these European countries and experienced a boom in Japan in the late 1980s, it was not until economic growth in previously untapped geographic markets such as China, Brazil or Thailand in the early 2000s, or the huge success in the USA and the UK of the 1998 iMac, Apple's own branded retail outlets in 2001 (the first UK store opened in 2004), and the release of the iPod in 2001, that the brand became truly global with significant market shares. Up until the opening of the first Apple store in 2001 in the USA, Apple consumers had to go to third-party retailers such as specialist computer suppliers or high-street electronics shops to acquire new products. Another important reason for concentrating on branding materials with a UK or US reach was the need to include only those examples that the consumers interviewed (see below for recruitment) were likely to have engaged with. Table one below shows the branding examples analysed in this thesis according to decade, and describes the market context and the medium or media used.

**List of branding examples included in the thesis.**

	Date, market, media
1970s	
1. Introducing the Apple II	1978. Print media advertising campaign placed in Byte magazine, published and distributed in the US and distributed to UK specialised magazine retail outlets and individual UK subscribers.
2. The Apple Rainbow logo	1978. Corporate Identity. Image reproduced onto product design, product packaging, advertising, promotional merchandise, e.g. mugs, pens, sweatshirts. Distributed globally.
1980s	
3. The 1984 super-bowl slot (event marketing/advertising)	Originally broadcast 22 Jan 1984 during the daytime across national networks on American television during the super-bowl commercial break.
4. The launch of the Macintosh (event marketing)	1984 (restored video footage on QuickTime file) taken from Steve Jobs' in-house presentation to California-based Apple employees and stakeholder of the first Macintosh computer. The QuickTime file has since been redistributed virally via email and file-sharing networks amongst global audiences. Such a file was given to the researcher from a participant during the course of an

	interview.
5. The Picasso logo (product design/corporate identity)	1984. Developed for the introduction of the original 128k Mac. The logo could be found on the outer box (packaging). Individual elements of the logo were repeated on the boxes for other components: the keyboard, the mouse, and power cord. The logo was also reproduced on merchandising: baseball caps, T-shirts, and key-rings distributed to third-party retail outlets in the UK and the US for in-store product promotion, and at product innovation and sales fairs within the same geographical markets.
1990s	
6. The 1998 iMac (product design)	Released in 1998 on sale via third-party retailers until 2001, hardware designed by Jon Ive for Apple. Product distributed to UK, US, Japanese and Western European markets.
7. Think Different (multi-media above/below-the-line advertising campaign)	1997-2002 TBWA/Chiat Day produced advertising and print campaign distributed in magazines, cinemas, billboards and posters to UK, US, Japanese and Western European markets. The English language versions, which were distributed to the UK and the US, are analysed in the thesis.
8. Rebirth of Cool (print poster trade promotional)	1998-2000. Product promotional poster distributed in the UK and the US to

campaign)	third-party retailers to promote the sale of Apple products in-store and also at UK IT retail events and at annual International data-corporation - sponsored Mac-world exposition in San Francisco.
9. The Apple monochrome logo (product design/corporate identity)	1998-present. As an instance of corporate identity and product design this is globally present on - Apple hardware, software, corporate communications (internal/external), product packaging, merchandising and advertising.
2000s	
10. iPod Silhouettes (multi-media above-/below-the-line advertising campaign)	2003-2011. Chiat Day advertising campaign. Distributed globally.
11. iTouch/youtube (Internet user -generated content)	Distributed globally.
12. The Intel will be set free (multi-media above-/below-the-line advertising campaign)	Distributed globally.
13. Get a Mac (Internet advertising campaign)	Distributed globally.
14. The Fifth Avenue New York Apple Store (brand experience)	This is a fixed space in New York City, but images of the space are mediated and distributed globally via the internet, therefore the audience reach may be considered global.

15. Steve Jobs (public persona/corporate identity)	1955-2011 Media persona. Distributed globally.
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### **Analysis of branding material**

The branding material analysed is multi-modal (images, logos, advertising, videos, etc.); and includes tangible objects (iMac), places and spaces (the Apple store) and even a person (Steve Jobs). A social semiotic theory of multi-modality was employed which has two components as described by Kress (2010): the semiotic and the multimodal. The former attends to signs and the latter attends to material resources involved in meaning making (Kress 2010, p. 105).

Social semiotic analysis here includes theoretical assumptions about meaning making, which I have set out in the earlier part of this chapter in terms of how the Apple brand is understood in this thesis. The social semiotic analysis draws on some concepts discussed from traditional semiotics, principally Saussure's (1915 /1983) explanation of the sign, and Barthes' ([1957] 2000) work on myth, denotation and connotation, to explain how different aspects of the brand work as signs. The language of these authors - their key terms - is adopted in the analysis too. Their work is used to understand the Apple brand as a visual system of meaning and how, as well as individual instances of the brand, the distinct texts work together to make meaning over time from the seventies to the present day. This is to explore how the brand may be consistent and evolving at the same time; and of particular importance is to explore how it works as an object. As stated, the analysis is interpretative, which is why an explicit methodology of social semiotics is identified to ground the analysis and address questions of how meaning is examined. By looking at the notion of the sign and the study of signs to inform the analysis, it is possible to explore in depth how meaning is constructed in the brand and how Apple branding is a process of signification. The analysis took into account signification and the notion of the signified as this necessarily acknowledges the consumer too, since a mental concept must be generated for signification to take place. These ideas allow one to recognise in the analysis that the consumer is often implied and implicated in the brand.



## **Interviews**

The second phase of data collection involved conducting in-depth interviews with Apple consumers and took place mainly in 2007. Interviews are suitable when the researcher is ‘interested in understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events...’ (Taylor and Bogdan 1984, p. 98). Interviews rather than focus groups were chosen as a method; this approach may not have been expected from a thesis interested in branding (Morgan 2000) since brand practitioners since the 1980s and both academic and commercial marketing theorists often use focus groups to elicit a range of views about a brand (Krueger and Casey 2009), but focus groups can often lack depth of information (Gilbert 2010). Interviews are good for accessing experiential or subjective realities that, as Lindof (1995) argued, has made them a pre-eminent method in media and communication studies and other social sciences. Since the thesis is interested in consumers’ experiences of the brand, this made interviews the most appropriate choice of research method. It enabled me to elicit responses that explore individual experiences and interactions with the Apple brand in an in-depth way.

The majority of interviews were undertaken using iChat, enabling synchronous online interviews. In its most basic form, iChat appears to the user as text in speech bubbles on the screen. Each user enters text and the entire conversation is shown on both screens, rather like text messaging on a phone, although the exchange is faster. There is a more sophisticated version that incorporates the camera on a computer monitor with video-conferencing technology, so that iChat participants may actually see and hear each other in real time. However, basic iChat (text only) was chosen for several reasons: it meant that people with more dated hardware, who did not have a camera on their computer, could participate. Also, during the period where the interviews were conducted, the use of in-person (face-to-face) online communication tools such as Skype or Facetime and in-person telephone call technology was not as common or used as widely as it is now (2014). Also there was a worry that some people may have felt uncomfortable interacting face-to-face, via a computer and camera, with somebody they had never met in person. It proved to be a wise decision to opt for text only as there was a discussion on the Sussex Mac user group email thread about

the use of webcams. The content of this discussion revealed there are negative associations with an unwanted, unfamiliar gaze through a webcam, and discussions in the group hinted at unpleasant connotations of voyeurism and an invasion of privacy.

At the time of designing and conducting the interviews (2007), there was limited peer-reviewed literature available to inform the approach and use of iChat. On the one hand this made it an exciting method of analysis, but on the other it was somewhat experimental. This was dealt with in the first instance by several trials with the software and ‘dummy-run’ chats unrelated to the project to get a sense of the experience of computer mediated communication, and then secondly through conducting a pilot interview with ‘Hugo<sup>13</sup>’. The researcher also reflected on related literature on digital ethnography (Hine 2000, 2005) in the sense of the technology providing the context and culture, and finally reflected back on the method after conducting the interviews to consider some of the findings from the immensely useful online research methods module at the University of Leicester, which have only recently been made available through the ESRC TRI-OM funded project 2007-2009.

The most obvious point to note from the digital ethnography literature is that with text-only CMC, facial expression, dress, and body language are imperceptible. In some respects this prevents one from making assumptions about people based on the way they look and visual clues construed from their dress and clothing. In addition, people ‘talk’ differently online, incorporating abbreviations, such as np ‘(no problem)’, emoticons ☺ ☹ and text language, such as lol (laugh out loud), to address the expression of sentiment and emotion and to be able to communicate at a pace that is more in accordance with in person conversation (see Thurlow et al. 2004, p. 53). Depending on their typing skills, participants might be conscious of the length of time it took to respond to a question, so a deliberate point of reassuring participants that time was not an issue for the researcher was made and that they could take their time over their answers. Responses to questions were perhaps sometimes briefer than one would anticipate during an in-person interview, as participants did seem to prefer to give an immediate response to a question rather than disrupt the flow of conversation through typing a lengthy answer that the researcher would have to wait for. An hour

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<sup>13</sup> Hugo is a pseudonym. This interview was not included in the analysis.

for an in-depth interview is a substantial amount of time to request a participant to type (sometimes intensively) and to look at their screen, compared to an interview conducted in an 'in-person' environment which is physically less taxing. However, all the interviews lasted at least an hour, if not half an hour to an hour longer with some participants requesting that they continue because they were finding it interesting.

A common ground was established through the use of the Apple iChat software and Mac-hardware: using Apple products to talk about Apple was helpful as an unspoken and symbolic stimulus and for rapport-building. By taking an interest in the community and facilitating a time and space to discuss 'Apple', a sense of affinity and responsiveness was assumed. The participants stressed that the researcher belonged as one of them. Also, the participants who replied to the interview requests did so without incentive; the only inducement was 'to take part in the study itself', and it felt as if people were really willing, and even excited about their interviews. My position as a researcher affected the research in that participants who took part in this research were keen to contribute and were congenial to me as an interviewer in part because I was seen as someone with sound knowledge of Apple and of the Apple community-referring to me in an email thread that followed by request for interviews as referred to 'Our Chloe', the pronoun implying a sense of ownership and belonging. While this 'insider status' shapes the analysis in the sense that I have particular empathy with the participants, I have nevertheless been careful to maintain the critical distance required in academic enquiry.

### **Selection of interviewees**

The interview participants were deliberately recruited from a pool of committed and enthusiastic Apple consumers - individuals who participate in the Apple community and its user groups. The practical justification for this is one of access to a community and also because it was thought that the members of this group were likely to be very happy to talk in depth about their relationship to the Apple brand. This selection of participants made further sense because of the research focus on consumer participation. By associating with an Apple user group or community, such participants could be said to be 'participating' in the brand.

I approached Apple user groups in Sussex, London, the Midlands and Scotland and received forty responses. A selection was made according to typical stratification characteristics in a population such as gender, age and profession (Creswell 2003, p. 159) that was indicative of Apple consumers as a whole. I asked participants to provide some demographic information at the beginning of their interview. This information told me that the participants included both men and women, White, Asian and Black people and people who identified as lesbian or gay, as Christian, employed, unemployed and retired. They varied in age from early twenties to sixties. Participants for interview were also selected to include early adopters of Apple as well as more recent adopters. Therefore the participants represent a broad selection of the population of committed and enthusiastic consumers.

In his discussion of interviews and interviewing, Silverman (2010) argues that researchers must ask themselves: ‘ultimately, how many cases do I need?’, which in turn depends on the research question and researcher’s interests and identifying when the data start to repeat. In this research, the decision to undertake only twenty interviews was governed by several factors including a need to focus on detail and depth, rather than breadth, and by what was practical and manageable in terms of time and expense. The decision to undertake twenty interviews was justified when, in the event, data saturation was reached by the time this number was reached. At this point, no new themes were emerging and there was sufficient depth to, and variety in, interviews to produce a detailed thematic analysis.

A brief biography of each participant who is quoted is included in Appendix iii. Participant names have been altered to protect their privacy and replaced with pseudonyms to preserve a sense of the individual and a character. Written informed consent was sought and gained from each participant prior to interview.

Where participants were unable or unwilling to use iChat, they were interviewed in person. Two of the twenty interviews took place this way. This meant that people with an older product or who did not have easy access to the internet, or who just owned an iPod, but not an Apple computer could still take part. These in-person interviews were recorded using an mp3 Dictaphone and transcribed and typed up into word documents. Hand-written notes were also taken at the time.

Although I have included the accounts of the majority of the participants in the overall analysis, I have focused on just two participants in order to illustrate the double distinction argument in Chapter seven. This focus has enabled me to present the ‘fine-grained detail’ needed to support the arguments I am making using ‘intensive and extensive analysis’ (Silverman 2010, p. 22). These two examples of the ‘double distinction’ manoeuvre are indicative of a reoccurring theme across all interviews with these representing the clearest examples of the processes at work.

### **Semi-structured interviews**

The interviews were semi-structured and this approach was taken to gain in-depth material and individual responses concerning the Apple brand. An interview guide (see Appendix i) with key topics was used but each interview necessarily found its own path and rhythm within this. This was a beneficial strategy for discovery: a standardised approach with a set of fixed questions throughout would not have allowed for a personal response and would not have been revealing of the opinions of the participant. Since the research is interested in brands and self-identity, it was particularly important to encourage participants to talk freely about their relationships reactions to the brand. A semi-structured interview approach and non-standardised questions also allowed for follow-up prompting and probing questions when more depth or detail was required.

### **Thematic analysis**

The interviews were coded manually to reflect emerging themes. Themes are defined as units derived from patterns such as ‘conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs’ (Taylor and Bogdan 1984, p. 131). With regards to coding and choosing the theme categories, the categories used were an effort to capture the interview material and to try to establish a sense of the recurring patterns of meaning. A number of questions relating to themes emerged from the interview transcripts. These included: what terms are repeated, and recur? what questions are emerging from this,? and what might be learnt?

The interview data needed to be considered systematically. As Gilbert describes

(2010, p. 259), themes and concepts that are identified in one interview are compared and contrasted with another. Some of the themes could not help but be brought to the data before even knowing what the interviewee might talk about or what the data would produce; this is because certain themes such as ‘underdog’, and ‘creativity’ had already been raised in the preliminary stages of the thesis in the literature review.

Analysis proceeded following Creswell (2003) with the following assumptions and practices:

- Analysis is an on-going process involving continual reflection, not sharply divided from other activities in the process.
- Asking general open-ended questions of the data in developing an analysis from the information supplied by the participants by gaining a general sense of meaning and reflecting on overall meaning, to ask ‘What in general are participants saying’?
- Generating open coding, notes in the margin, recording of general thoughts, followed by an analysis of the data for themes and issues and closely examining significant statements.
- A detailed analysis with organising and highlighting ‘chunks’, segmenting sentences and labelling categories with a term, often based on the actual language used by the participant (*in vivo*).

(Creswell 2003, pp. 190-192)

Each interview was then coded three or four times by different themes that were identified: 1. Apple versus Microsoft, 2. Design, 3. Creativity, 4. Work, 5. Hobbies and Leisure, 6. Love, and 7. The iPod. Each transcript was then studied many more times while selecting quotations to include in the analysis. Consequently, the thematic categories were refined through interaction with the data. The process of coding only ceased when significant occurrences had emerged that comprehensively deepened the understanding of the data. There were mini assumptions and hypotheses about what

the interviews might reveal as the study progressed, but only those that were supported by the data were retained in the analysis, while those which were not were seriously questioned, or abandoned. As well as examining themes, because the research is interested in identity and the questions elicited personal responses about life experiences, there is an element of storytelling, which required consideration. In a sense, participants presented ‘stories’ about themselves. In carrying out the analysis, it became necessary to consider the purpose the story served and why the interviewee had chosen to explain their relationship with Apple in this way. These stories were a means of saying something about the Apple brand, but also about constructing their particular identities and a sense of individuality and therefore understood as articulations of lifestyle-projects. Finally, an interpretation of meaning was made based on and understood within the context of reflexive enquiry, along with knowledge from the literature reviewed in Chapter two.

### **Conclusion**

In order to research the Apple brand, understood as a new media object, it was necessary to adopt a qualitative research approach that enabled an investigation of meaning within the brand, both in terms of how meaning is produced in and through branding materials over time, and in terms of how Apple consumers make sense of the brand. The methods deployed were chosen in order to be able to interrogate examples of the Apple brand over a period of four decades, focusing on how Apple have both changed and remained the same over this period. In addition, in order to facilitate an examination of consumers’ relationship with, and participation in, the brand, it was necessary to find methods that accessed consumers’ experiences.

I have used social semiotics to ensure some systematic approach to the analysis of branding and to have a language to articulate how meaning is made within the Apple brand. I have argued that Barthes’ work on denotation and connotation is important methodologically to be able to examine how Apple has communicated some ideas as historical truths. The relationship between connotation and myth has been discussed here because it introduces the role of the reader into my enquiry. In the case of the study here, the reader is the consumer and the connotations that brands may carry require the activity of the consumer. Barthes is informative because his ideas help to

take into account the relationship between different instances of the Apple brand as a manifestation of culture and as part of a larger sign system. Therefore Barthes' ideas help the researcher to understand how different instances of the brand work together as a nexus and over time. However, moving beyond the work of the semiological figures Barthes and Saussure, I have grounded the analysis with a more contemporary and broadened social semiotic approach. This is so that the analysis of the brand as a sign has efficiency in everyday life and material culture and incorporates the consumer. Social semiotics also takes the approach to analysis beyond the interpretation of concepts and sound images in the mind, to a widened reach of meaning making across the brand and in the context of the brand itself.

Consumer interviews were included to examine what participants say about and 'do' with the Apple brand. Whereas a social semiotic analysis of branding materials can tell us a great deal about the 'logic' of the Apple brand - the assumptions, meanings and values inherent in the brand and how consumers are positioned in relation to these - only a detailed analysis of consumers' own accounts of engaging with the brand can provide the necessary insight into how far, and in what ways, consumers themselves accept and are 'locked in' to this brand logic. As the analysis shows, consumers' accounts suggest that not only do they (consumers) resist some aspects of brand logic but that, in so doing they may actively contribute to the brand in ways which are not necessarily predetermined by the brand. The following chapters substantiate these ideas with empirical evidence.



## Chapter five

### *A Semiotic Analysis of the Apple Brand*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents an historical analysis of the Apple brand from the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s using the approach described in chapter four. The chapter looks at each brand text in some detail to identify themes in the Apple brand and explore both continuity and change in this context. The Apple brand is considered in light of the discussions in previous chapters about the way brands work in terms of being both consistent yet evolving, and the ways brands have been described in recent branding theory in terms of interfaces and communications media. The analysis additionally explores how the Apple branding texts work as the sum of different products and services: the intention being that the question of how the Apple brand in itself may be considered a process in time, can thus be considered.

As already discussed, in examining the Apple brand, I am interested in the relationship and exchanges between the producer and consumer and the ways in which consumers can be said to participate in the brand. In order to address this, the analysis presented here looks at the branding texts and the themes they communicate so that later I can explore how consumers potentially articulate these. In chapter two the idea that brands are new media objects and have a multilayered character (Lury 2004, p. 6) was discussed. In this chapter I will present an inspection of the Apple branding texts as a means of exploring this multilayered character. In subsequent chapters, these findings are further considered alongside participant interviews. Different types of branding are thus examined: corporate identity, events, a product launch, print, TV and Internet advertising; product design, homemade consumer adverts and surrounding online forum discussion, and Apple store buildings. Each branding text and analysis is set in context with consideration for the history of the Apple company at the time the text was produced. Additionally, the analysis draws parallels with the ideas and theories outlined in earlier chapters to explore the ontology of the brand, to argue that Apple has both explicitly and implicitly

constructed recurring themes over the four decades under study and to investigate if Apple positions consumers.

## The 1970s

### The Apple logo

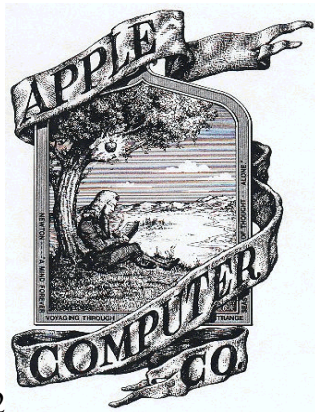


Figure 2



Figure 3

The first image of Isaac Newton sitting under a tree was designed by Ron Wayne (Raszl 2009), and was accompanied by the wordplay slogan 'Byte into an Apple' in an early edition of Byte Magazine in 1976 (see Digibarn Museum 2009<sup>14</sup>). Wayne was an early partner of Apple, but left at this time. As well as 'Apple Computer Co' on the banner there is a Wordsworth quote written on the frame: 'Newton...a mind forever voyaging through strange seas of thought'.

The sketch used is antiquated in style, signifying heritage and culture and therefore connotations of times gone by. This gives Apple by association a sense of 'history' even though it was a fledgling company at the time of the design. The scene makes associations with the significant event of Newton sitting under an Apple tree and working out the law of gravity; hence the overall connotation is one of scientific knowledge and an important discovery. The inclusion of the Wordsworth quote signifies high-level thinking via the content and semantic meaning and thus borrows from associations of English Romantic Poetry that are symbolic. Such meanings would not normally be associated with computing; and therefore elevate the overall

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<sup>14</sup> Online Apple 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary special collection <http://www.digibarn.com/history/06-11-4-VCF9-Apple30/images/index.html> [accessed 13.08.2009]

sign into the sphere of high-culture. Also, because the writing is so small, the quotation is very much for ‘those in the know’: a secret to be shared by the Apple community. The reader has to work to see it and understand it and is rewarded by their ability to know it is there and in their comprehension of what it means.

The second image is the logo redesign in 1977 by Rob Janoff. It is rumoured that Jobs and Wozniak felt that the Isaac Newton logo was too cumbersome to fit onto their products. Janoff’s logo denotes a rainbow-coloured Apple with a bite taken out of it. The bright primary colours connote diversity. On a second level the overall signified is of counterculture as the rainbow colours at the time were an iconic sign for the notion of counterculture, and the bright and simple scheme that Apple imagined would appeal to children (a claim made by the designer during an interview with Ivan Raszl) and thus would allow for inroads into the educational market. Steve Jobs also apparently wanted to include colour, because the use of colour was a major development and feature of Apple’s computer products (prior to this users had been used to black and white or green monitors, and black and white printouts). Overall, it can be argued that the logo is an arbitrary sign because it bears no direct resemblance to the technology itself, but stands instead for a set of ideas about countercultural sensibilities, inclusivity, creativity, knowledge and education.

**‘Introducing the Apple II’. Print advertisement for the Apple II 1977, illustration and written text**



Figure 4

The illustration in figure 3 depicts a middle-aged white man at a kitchen table working at the computer and a young white woman of a similar age at a sink cleaning up. The setting is made up of different signifiers such as the worktops, cooker (in the top, far right of the background), sink, and extractor over the man's head and table, so that the resultant overall signified of the scene is a kitchen, which connotes domesticity.

The woman in the background, engaged in a task at the sink, observes the man in the foreground who is fully engrossed at the computer. Their physical positioning within the composition (background, foreground) and respective gazes communicate something about their activities, i.e. that the man is absorbed, and this implies that what he is doing is interesting and captivating. In this sense the arrangement of the scene works as a spatial sign communicating that the man's activity in the foreground is the important action whereas the woman is an observer at the back.

This setup is rather reminiscent of 1950s-style advertising of domestic appliances, despite the fact that Apple's advertisement was produced in the late 1970s in an entirely different social context. Regis McKenna, from the marketing company that worked on the campaign at the time, spoke of trying to deliberately market computers as domestic appliances similar to, for instance, food processors. 'In August 1982, when Murray wrote the first product plan for Mac, he drew heavily on the appliance metaphor. But the marketplace didn't pick up on the metaphor and the analogy died a quiet death' (McKenna 1991, p. 192). In fact the 1977 advert was the subject of complaints. Bill Kelly, a Regis McKenna employee, described the initial consumer response, and subsequent changes to the advertisement. 'When this ad ran, Jobs got a letter from a woman in Oregon, who felt it was sexist, so the ad was revised for subsequent insertions to show a woman using a sophisticated display and a man (me) with a low-resolution. We got no further complaints'.<sup>15</sup>

The signification or myth itself in 1977 is not the same as it is today. The association between signifier (form) and signified (concept) is different – the signification

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<sup>15</sup> A full transcript can be found on Kelly's personal website <http://www.kelleyad.com/index.html> [accessed 25.01.13]

produces a new contemporary myth; that the relationship between the woman and the rest of the scene (sign system) is *passé*, since the idea that women are no longer considered to be more naturally predisposed to do chores than men, and that they can and do have an active relationship with new technologies, now circulates as an alternative. Interestingly, despite the protest, Apple decided to run the kitchen scenario set up, and opted to change the tag line from ‘ You’ve just run out of excuses for not owning a personal computer’, to, ‘The home computing system that’s ready to work, play and grow with you’. Apple also inserted a new photo into the second page of the ad, depicting a man and woman working at Apple II machines. This can be found in the bottom left of the page set up (see figure 4).

In figure 4 the signifiers are the man, his textbook, a woman, their desks, the Apple II computers, the activities on the monitor screens, and the blackboard. The signifiers are the mental concepts of the real-world objects which they invoke and together they create individual concrete signs within a sign system to produce a second level of signification of a unisex working environment. The myth is that the woman has a natural place in the environment, engaging in serious work, although again she is positioned in the background. She is using the creative feature of the computer, signified by the graphics on her monitor, rather than the technological function signified by the graph and low-resolution display on the man’s monitor. The signification is a gendering of the functionality of the Apple II.

The text of the advertisement included in the description, and in the specifications list in the right column of the second page has words such as ‘memory capacity, bytes, ROM 4K RAM, BASIC, EPROM, floppy disk interface, software, 8slot mother board, ASCII keyboard port, microprocessor 1MHz, transparent memory access, and composite video output’ and so on. This is technical language, the meaning of which is obscured without a prior knowledge of computer science. The language therefore speaks to a particular audience with technical know-how and mystifies the description for those consumers without prior technical knowledge. The technical jargon is persuasive, because it influences how the Apple II is thought about as a technical advance in computer technology.

The Apple II, however, is labelled as a ‘personal computer’, defined by what it is *not*, i.e. not just for IT professionals. This connects it to the home, to the individual, and to the personal, private needs of the user. The tag line suggests that the computer has a parallel biography to that of its consumer - ‘it’s ready to work, play and grow’. The ad goes on to say –

Clear the kitchen table. Bring in the colour TV. Plug in your new Apple II and connect to any standard cassette recorder/player. Now you’re ready for an evening of personal discovery in the new world of personal computers. Only Apple II makes it that easy. It’s a complete ready to use computer – not a kit.

This introduction gives the machine a social context in the home through the use of phrases such as ‘Clear the kitchen table’, and so domesticates the product. By using a gender-neutral personal pronoun symbolically ‘[*your*] new Apple II’, it tries to establish a familiar relationship with the consumer, connecting the Apple II to other everyday household electrical and audio/visual items. It says that the Apple II will open up new horizons, while providing meaningful insights via ‘an evening of personal discovery in the new world of personal computers’. It also reassures the consumer that this is simple, immediate and inclusive: ‘Now you’re ready... Apple II makes it that easy...It’s a complete ready to use computer’.

This opening paragraph of the text introduces the themes of familiarity, ease of use, acquiring new skills and the future, which recur within the rest of the text, along with additional themes of the family, education, leisure, organising information, and technical capability. By describing the straightforwardness and ease of use of the Apple II, the ad seeks to reassure the non-technical expert that they do not actually require expertise to use the computer, whilst taking care through the use of technical jargon and featuring of the board-only kit that they appeal to the hobbyist market. The language describes the multi-functionality of the machine capable of performing household tasks as well as technical, experimental or abstract ones. It can be incorporated into both domestic and professional environments for domestic and expert users, to perform both the familiar and the novel. The language constructs the Apple II as adaptable to the needs and requirements of the end user(s), and therefore as inclusive of a mainstream understanding of a nuclear family in the late 1970s.



children in most  
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as spelling,  
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the b

Figure 5

## Introducing Apple II.

### The home computer that's ready to work, play and grow with you.

Over the last few years, being in the office has been a lot more than just a job. It's been a place where you can do almost anything you want to do. You can learn a new language, play a game, or even watch a movie. Now, with the new Apple II, you can do all of these things at home. It's the first computer that's ready to work, play and grow with you.

Apple II is a computer that's ready to work, play and grow with you. It's the first computer that's ready to work, play and grow with you. It's the first computer that's ready to work, play and grow with you.

**SPECIFICATIONS**  
 • Management: 128K or 256K  
 • Memory: 128K or 256K  
 • Disk: 5 1/4 inch floppy disk  
 • Keyboard: 48 keys  
 • Mouse: Optional  
 • Expansion: 8 expansion slots  
 • Power: 100W power supply  
 • Dimensions: 17 1/2" x 17 1/2" x 11 1/2"

**apple computer inc.**

Figure 6

## The 1980s

'Introducing the Macintosh' January 1984 keynote address. Public relations event <sup>16</sup>



Figure 7



Figure 8

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<sup>16</sup> Viewed as a private QuickTime email attachment sent to me by a participant, but the same file can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgTW3R4FmHo> [accessed 31.01.13]





Figure 9



Figure 10

The scene of the Macintosh product launch presented by Jobs is set in an auditorium and, combined with his dinner suit attire, connotes that ‘a performance’ is taking place. The applause denotes a willing and eager audience. These signs work in combination, all operating within a social code to signify that this is a special occasion, and that something out of the ordinary is about to take place. This is reinforced with the canvas bag given a significant position centre-stage. It is tied with a ribbon signifying that its contents are special, and is lit as ‘the star’ of the scene by a spotlight. The position of the bag as the central object and the lighting construct it as special, and the subject of the action. The subsequent unwrapping by Jobs signifies that this is an important unveiling and launch of the contents – the Macintosh machine. The revealing of the contents is a ceremonious gesture – similar to uncovering a plaque, therefore transforming Jobs’ body language into a physical sign, denoting not just the undoing of a bag, but connoting an important discloser of its contents. This reinforces the suggestion that the occasion is an official moment.

The music, which accompanies the unveiling of the Macintosh, is taken from the popular, Oscar-winning film, *Chariots of Fire* (1981). The film is about the true story of two athletes competing in the 1924 Olympics. Its narrative incorporates the themes of the will to succeed and triumph in the face of adversity<sup>17</sup>. The theme ‘Vangelis by Vangelis’ is a mixture of a classical music genre with more popular, modern synthesiser sounds. The piece has a distinctive, momentous introduction that is synonymous with the film *Chariots of Fire*, and which, within certain aspects of popular culture, is considered an emotional, evocative piece. By using this music as an acoustic signifier, the presentation sets out to tap into central themes from the film, of triumph over adversity, the will to succeed as signified and to arouse an emotional reaction from the audience. The music also cleverly employs the audience’s cultural capital. The audience’s recognition of the music as the theme tune from *Chariots of Fire* allows them to draw a mental correlation with the film and identify the piece of music as an example of the crossover of high-culture (classical music and critical success<sup>18</sup>) and popular culture. By setting the revealing of the Macintosh in the context of the music, the action borrows associations from Vangelis of socio-cultural hybridism. This is a process of signification and, in making the association; audience members can enjoy the connotations at a higher, knowing, and more humorous level. Their identification with and understanding of the reference to popular culture allows the audience to share a cultural joke, about the triumph in the ‘personal struggle’ of the Macintosh and perhaps its social future as an object, crossing from highbrow to popular. It is a semiotic pastiche, representing the Macintosh as a cultured object, but comically, and ironically as one that does not take itself too seriously.

The word ‘MACINTOSH’ across the monitor screen not only announces and names the object, but the words ‘insanely great’ scribed across the screen using a ‘skywriter’, emphasizing that the Macintosh is to be understood as a brilliant ‘thing’, to the point of defying reason. The skywriter application (that produces the effect of the writing as if by an invisible hand) demonstrates a technical capability of the Macintosh, as well

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<sup>17</sup> Story synopsis and review at <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/444153/index.html> (accessed 10.11.06)

<sup>18</sup> The song won an Oscar in 1981 and was released on a successful LP  
See <http://www.vangelishistory.com/screen%2080-90.html> (accessed 21.11.06)

as the ability to communicate, perhaps ‘as if’ it is the result of the computer’s free will, even if it is in reality the result of some careful human programming.

The Macintosh runs a speech program during the presentation known as SAM – or software automated mouth (Hertzfeld 2005, p. 214), which converts text into computer-automated speech, giving the impression that the machine can actually talk. Again it is ‘as if’ the computer is thinking and communicating for itself, when actually it is the result of human programming and sound driver technology. It is not just what the Macintosh says that is signified, but also that as an object it has a level of human consciousness. ‘I’ signifies that Macintosh is more than a soulless, inanimate object, but instead has a personality. This is reinforced by the use of the first person pronoun, e.g. ‘I am, I thought, I met, I can’, and so on, also representing a level of conscious knowledge, or self-awareness.

The actual dialogue the computer produces uses implicature to set the Macintosh up in opposition to an IBM machine. This relies on the audience’s prior knowledge of the social/historical context of the genesis of the Macintosh. As Andy Hertzfeld, one of the original co-creators of the Macintosh describes, IBM sidestepped xerography technology (on which Jobs et al. worked), and originally passed over the personal computer in the early 1970s as it was too small to be used for serious work, before changing their minds and dominating the market in the 1980s. ‘In 1983 Apple and IBM emerge as the industry’s strongest competitors’ (Steve Jobs quoted in Hertzfeld 2005, p. 220). The Macintosh expresses what it considers to be a universal truth: that an IBM machine is too heavy to lift and therefore cannot be trusted. The idea that it is too heavy implies that it is unsuited to human needs, and is not reliable. The statement is able to insinuate a personable quality of the Macintosh machine; that it is light and portable, and again, that it can poke fun at its competitors’ weaknesses, and has a sense of humour about itself.

The Macintosh makes two references to Steve Jobs: first, during the demo of applications where a screen grab image is featured in Mac Paint and second, in the dialogue: ‘So it is with considerable pride that I introduce a man who has been like a father to me...STEVE JOBS’. Iconically it relates directly to the actual man Steve Jobs, but it is also symbolic of Job’s role. The image of Jobs in Mac Paint emphasises

his relationship with the presentation event, with the Apple Company, and with the Macintosh machine. The subsequent dialogue describes the Macintosh as experiencing the emotion of pride, and a parental attachment with Jobs as the creator/guardian. This implies an extremely close relationship, one of admiration and worth between man and machine. Since the Macintosh's actions are not really the result of real consciousness, but rather the result of human programming, one can infer that the meaning is perhaps the sentiment of the creator himself, or of the co-producers of the Macintosh. They are using the Jobs image as a symbolic sign to signify man's personal relationship with the computer as object, and the dialogue to establish a sentimental connection between the product and its producer, and ultimately the consumer.

The series of close ups during the presentation can be read to depict quite simply types of software, but working as signs they are able to signify and promote a second level of connoted meaning.

<b>Image/applications</b>	<b>Denoted meaning</b>	<b>Connotation</b>
Mac Paint	Image of a Japanese woman on the screen.	Creativity, artistic pursuits, design. The ability to create illustrations, images pictures, etc.
Microsoft Chart <sup>19</sup>	Text on the screen.	An alternative to paper and the typewriter. Time and space saving. The ability to store, edit and reproduce what would be normally handwritten or typed documents.
Microsoft Multiplan <sup>20</sup>	Blank spreadsheet page with rulers and margins, separated into columns.	Addresses specific professions such as accountants or print media. The ability to design page layouts for creative communication or

<sup>19</sup> Early predecessor to word for windows.

<sup>20</sup> Early predecessor to Excel for windows with some similar qualities to Quark – desktop publishing package.

		publication that would normally require printing press knowledge and skills. Also large data sets for mathematical calculation or organisation management of non-numerical input.
Calculator	Machine for mathematics.	Calculations need not be done through mental arithmetic or on a traditional calculator – the Macintosh can work them out.  The Macintosh can accurately ‘think’ in a mathematical way.
Certificate image	Specialist template for an award/achievement.	The ability for an amateur or professional to create professional-looking documents.  Does not require specialist knowledge to produce a professional finish.
Text Fonts	Different letters from the Western alphabet in different styles.	The ability to produce different styles of graphics and to be creative with text documents, which would ordinarily require artistic talent or skill.
Architectural illustrations from Macintosh art gallery	Specific type of technical image of antiquated buildings.	Addresses architectural and creative design industry. The ability to design or copy similar images and insert into page lay outs for creative communication and the ability to reproduce similar images.
Coding image	Technical data A computer language.	Addresses experts – i.e. computer programming software development industry, IT professionals.  Implicates Macintosh in developing

		new knowledge, and new products.
Image of Steve Jobs	A man thinking of a machine.	Reinforces object's (Macintosh) relationship with its creator (Steve Jobs).
Image of a 3D chess match	A game of chess.	Domestic users (possibly the family, children, friends), gamers, use of the computer for a pastime. Leisure, fun, etc.  The Macintosh's ability to 'think' on a strategic level.

Table 2

All the above examples work on an indexical level in the sense that they have a direct relationship to the actual objects, or their referents, i.e. the graphic icon in the Mac-Paint application of a paintbrush represents the computer's ability to produce a painting action. A graphic reproduction of a paintbrush is not really a paintbrush: it is a signified and denoted meaning. The meaning is taken as common sense, because it constitutes a socially established meaning. It is by agreement and convention that toolbox images, for instance, have come to represent the route to performing certain functions on a computer. The images are therefore also symbolic, through a seemingly random yet/albeit implicitly agreed connection/link to what the software applications are used for in the real world. Some of the examples such as the chess match and the calculator work iconically, because they have an accurate likeness to their referent, and can be easily correlated to a real-world object, but others do not. Symbolism requires the audience to read the sign within a cultural code, because the connection on one hand is seemingly random, but on the other hand is agreed within a specific culture. For instance, the image of computer coding does not bear any immediate resemblance to its end object, but a common sense understanding allows coding to signify production (via a computer), of an entity or actual real-world application of, for instance, software.

As signs the images go on to connote more about what the software's functions are and the social values connected to those functions. This is because the images are positioning their readers, and interpellating specific audiences. They ask the audience to recognise a particular association, desire or need such as the ability to be creative, and at the moment of engagement, to form a relationship with the sign. The images of the applications carry suggestive ideological meaning. When the audience connects with those connoted meanings and ideologies, the images succeed as signs, and have recruited their ideal audience. It could be suggested at this point that Apple are trying to 'create' a consumer. This can be thought about in terms of the idea that the brand is a new media object in the sense that the Apple brand is providing 'a dynamic support for practice' (Lury 2004, p. 6). To explain, the brand in this example is offering a physical interface - but one that is offering themes as recursive conventions for 'their' ideal consumer to articulate and therefore to follow Apple conventions and to extend the brand, thus also suggesting who the brand may appeal to and organising the ways in which they may talk about it. The brand, as it unfolds through the different types of software, seems to be set up as a frame of exchange between consumer and producer for the consumer to 'recognise' themselves as the 'ideal' Apple consumer.

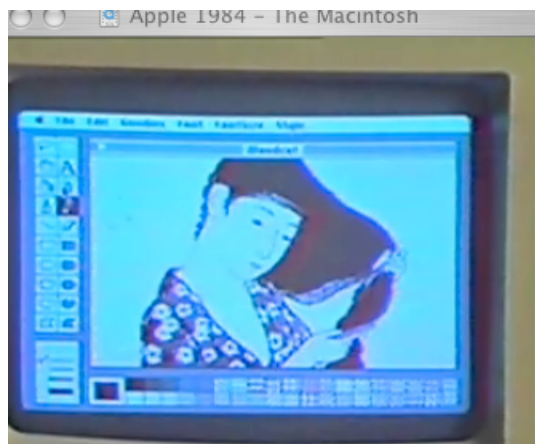


Figure 11

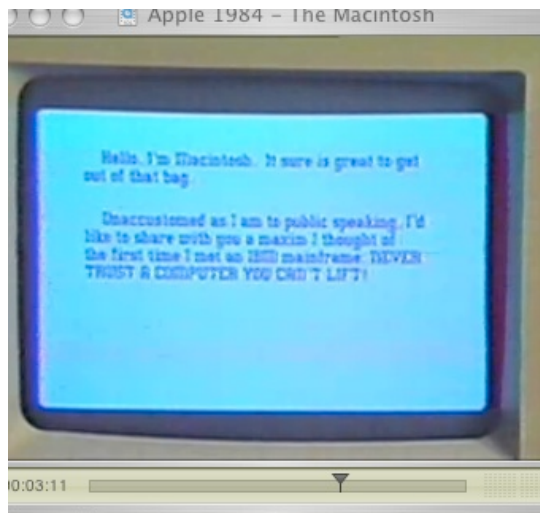


Figure 12

### The 'Picasso-style' logo



Figure 13

This incarnation of the logo is the work of Tom Hughes and John Casado, drawn in the style of the artist Picasso. It appeared on the Mac 128k in 1984, but was discontinued in October of 1985<sup>21</sup>.

The signifiers are the grey, yellow, red, blue and green coloured lines and the overall signified is an illustration of an impressionistic sketch of a computer and 'mouse' and

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<sup>21</sup> A larger version of this image can be found at <http://mactoids.com/macintosh-128k/> [accessed 31.01.13]



an Apple with a bite taken out of it. The lines combine to create an iconic sign and an indexical sign, since the overall effect has a likeness to the object it represents, and also a relationship to the object as the logo of the company. As a sign - the logo is a form of metonym, whereby the sign stands in as shorthand for a series of relationships and processes about who makes the computer; and is therefore the interface between consumer and producer.

The aesthetic style, which is a departure from the multi-coloured Apple-shaped logo appropriates an artistic movement and draws on associations of an iconic figure from the world of art and high-culture, namely Picasso. The codes of art and high-culture are expressive of an ideology that places value on elite taste and expert knowledge. Thus the reader is interpellated to 'perceive and appreciate' the logo in a certain way and mark themselves out by their understanding of it; this point clearly draws upon the transposable nature of habitus (Bourdieu 1984). Apple is re-imagining their consumer as one who has specific knowledge and cultural capital and in the production of text, Apple is therefore setting up the subject position of their ideal consumer. In their recognition and reading of the Picasso-esque style, the brand has invited that consumer to attribute these features of high art to the brand itself. This is a good example of brand performativity and an instance of a producer incorporating the consumers' knowledge and activity into the production of this specific brand text.

## The 1984 Super Bowl advert<sup>22</sup>



Figure 14



Figure 15

The film narrative centres on a lone female runner wearing red shorts, and a T-shirt with the Picasso logo on it. She is being chased by an army of marching soldiers through an industrial set reminiscent of tech-noir and sci-fi films such as Star Wars and Blade Runner. As she runs she is wielding a hammer and bursts into a grey, dimly lit auditorium full of blank-faced drones all staring straight ahead watching a screening. The screen shows a man's face in close-up, who talks about a 'garden of pure ideology' and collective ideas of 'one people'. The woman throws the hammer, smashing and destroying the screen. The concluding credits roll with a voiceover that says 'On January 24<sup>th</sup> 1984 Apple will introduce the Macintosh which is why 1984

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<sup>22</sup> A full version of the advert can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R706isyDrqI> [accessed 15.10.12]

won't be like 1984', making an explicit reference to George Orwell's doom-laden vision of a repressed society in his novel 'Nineteen Eight Four'.

The advert is included briefly here because it is such an important and talked-about instance of the Apple brand. As discussed in chapter three, Stein (2002) and Friedman (2005) have already undertaken textual and discourse analysis respectively, and are comprehensive in their discussions of this text. Stein has explored the role of the advert in the 'cultural discourse of new technologies' (Stein 2002, p. 169) and the relationship between capitalism and the rhetoric of freedom and revolution, whereas Friedman argues that the computer is re-gendered through the female character of the lone runner, and that the Mac can be identified with female characteristics such as emotion. He points out that the characterisation of the drones symbolises IBM. The drones represent "...bad technology – centralized, authoritarian...But we can be liberated from that bad technology by the good technology – independent individualized...the Mac" (Friedman 2005, p. 111).

Being hailed by the advertising industry as 'a masterpiece' and having won many awards such as 'Advertising Age Commercial of the Decade' and 'The Greatest Advert' of the last fifty years (see Friedman 2005, p. 110) means that the advertisement and event can now be read in this analysis as part of a socially constructed myth about the success of the Apple brand, and the understanding that the brand is held in high regard by brand practitioners. I would argue that today the text has an additional signified of heritage, connoting the success and leadership of the brand within the marketing industry itself. In 2004 the advert was digitally re-mastered to be shown one more time at Jobs' annual keynote address, but with a new detail: the woman wears an iPod<sup>23</sup>. What is significant about this is the evolution in the cultural meaning of the film. In 1984, it could be that the text was read as depicting what the technology could do for the customer, and this was implied through branding. Today, however, the film may be read as signifying the success of the Apple brand itself; it is now about the use value of the technology becoming subordinate to exchange value. In addition, it carries an overall signified about the success and competence of the TBWA creatives and marketing team. The 1984 Super

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<sup>23</sup> A full version of the 2004 re-master of the 1984 Super Bowl film can be viewed at [http://www.inlovewithapple.com/videopages/1984-2004\\_view.html](http://www.inlovewithapple.com/videopages/1984-2004_view.html) [accessed 21.02.13]

Bowl is indicative not only of a moment in time in terms of available technology but of the triumph of the Apple brand in a historical context. In terms of branding theory these points about the SuperBowl text show how the Apple brand has a self-reflexive structure of flow and the mutual social action of other social agents – in this specific case not just brand consumer but also industry. In this instance the practices of marketing are crucial to the performativity of the brand.

## The 1990s Mono-coloured logo



Figure 16

The Apple logo was updated again in the 1990s and clearly references Rob Janoff's 1977 design: only here, the rainbow colours have been done away with and replaced by solid colours – blue in the case of the figure above, but this iteration of the logo also appeared in orange and pink. This was designed to complement the 1998 redesign of the coloured iMacs (discussed shortly).

As Lury has already said of logos, they are an ident, a personality or a face and are a process with a long and complex history of the organisation of exchange; and the logo is an important aspect of coordinating temporalities. Because of the reference to the 1977 logo, the signifier is of the Apple corporate identity while conveying renewal. This change to the design of the logo, whilst referencing an earlier form is an example of the Apple brand self-reflexive structure, whilst also demonstrating a movement or a flow. As well as drawing upon earlier myths and stories that the Apple form embodies (discussed when talking about the rainbow version) it also works as an evolved sign, As an evolved sign, the logo signifies the company's behaviour; there has been 'an update', because though similar, it is different, from the rainbow colour iteration, but the shape is retained as a signifier and so represents something familiar to the reader. The new logo in figure 13 references the past, reflexively creating a sense of history by being an evolution of a previous form; but at the same time, because it has changed too, one can infer the company is firmly in the present. This communicates therefore that the Apple company is 'in touch' with the future and not 'stuck' in the past. At

this point it can be seen how the brand is moving in time dynamically, quite literally it reflects back and then moves forward.

### The iMac 1998 product design

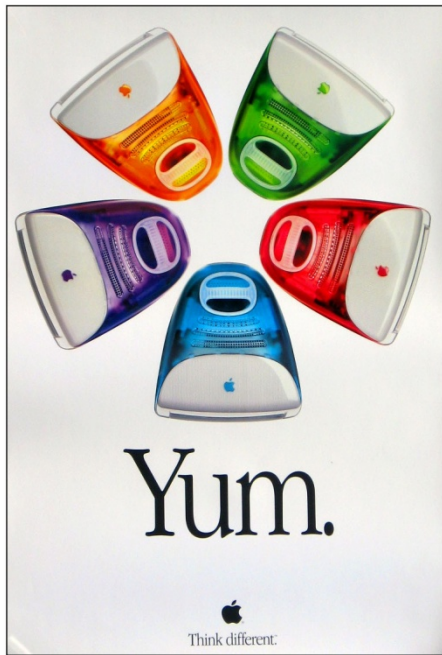


Figure 17



Figure 18

The computer featured in the two posters above figure 16 and 17 is the 1998 iMac. Prior to the iMac designed by Jon Ive, computers were traditionally almost always produced in off-white casing, so the rounded soft-edge iMac monitors were a significant innovation in design.

The iMac is an object which can work as a sign, in the same way a vase or object d'art might, to enhance an environment and communicate something about the preferences and cultural background of its user. As an object, the computer is colourful, cheerful and softer, fits with the user's personal taste to add something to the environment in which it is placed, and signifies lifestyle. The overall signification of the object is that the iMac is a fashionable item and that the consumer has choices about how they integrate the object into their home because of the range of colours it comes in. The user can display it as an object to represent their individual taste and personality, which means no more 'one model suits all'.

In the first poster (figure 16), the advert showcases different colours, with the text 'Yum', to connote that the machine is something delicious or tasty. It has been documented that Ive took his inspiration from boiled sweets when he designed the monitors. 'When Apple were putting together the iMac they went to great lengths, which even meant talking to boiled sweet manufacturers to see how they maintained vibrant colours in a translucent form' (anon<sup>24</sup> 22.07.00). This plays with the iconography of confection, and drawing on language normally associated with food refers to the desirability of the iMac, signifying that it is both appealing and 'whets' the consumer's 'appetite'.

The 'rebirth of cool' text in the second poster (figure 17) is a signifier that carries obvious connotations of style and taste; additionally it communicates a rebirth or a resurrection. In this sense Apple is being very knowing about the revolutionary aspect of the iMac design, claiming credit for the idea that computers can be cool. The phrase, 'the rebirth of cool', draws on the jazz music scene, as the terminology is often associated with music and various performing artists of this genre. The appropriation of signifiers from the American black jazz scene in the late 1950s into a

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<sup>24</sup> Jonathon Ive: Mr iMac Author Anon bbc.co.uk <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/2959278.stm> [accessed 11.05.08]

white Western version of ‘cool’ is explored in some detail by Poutain and Robins (2000), and one could argue that this is what Apple is implicitly doing with the text in this advert. Here, Apple employs being cool as a marketing strategy. This is because within Western Society it appears ‘cool’ is a quality that many of us find mysterious and desirable, indeed a quality that has in fact inspired a whole industry of cool hunting, (for instance as Gladwell’s 1997 New Yorker article documents). One of the ways people feel as if they can temporarily possess cool is via consumption and using goods as signs, both indexically and symbolically, so that in the instance of the iMac, cool is a manifestation of a schema of consumption related to lifestyle; a roughly worked out ‘system of things’ so that the consumer may communicate aspects of their lifestyle that signify ‘I am cool’.

### **Think Different Posters, TV and cinema**

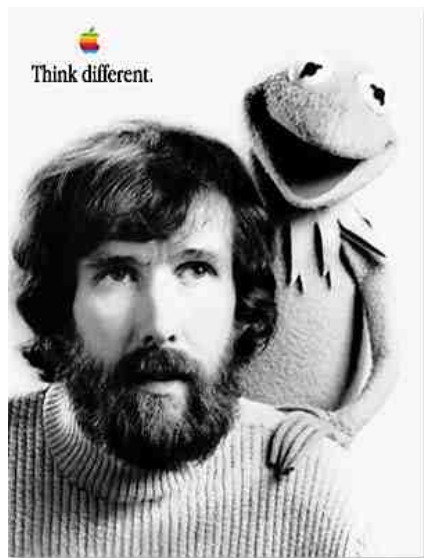


Figure 19

The Think Different campaign is the longest running instance of Apple branding. In the campaign Apple use well known figures such as John Lennon, Bob Dylan, Amelia Earhart, Frank Sinatra, Maria Callas and Jim Henson (featured in figure 18) who, in mainstream culture, signify creativity, rule breaking, eccentricity, quirky and independence. Apple has used the images of these people and exploited the appropriate cultural signifiers via codes of fashion, art, music and style. In doing so, it requires the ‘ideal’ consumer to draw on his or her own habitus and cultural capital in order to make a certain reading about what ‘different’ is. The argument here is that



this notion of difference is rooted in making judgments about other people and their common sense understanding of taste, because Apple are presenting a version of difference that suggest qualities of creativity, rule breaking, eccentricity and so on are aspirational, yet somehow simultaneously exclusive. Apple exclude people who do not fit into this ideal via connotation, inference and repetition of what is different, The simple brand message is –‘if you identify, you are different’, and in this inclusion the brand excludes a vague and unnamed other who is not creative, rule breaking, eccentric, quirky or independent in *Apple-ish* ways. Therefore Apple constructs a sense of superiority and exclusivity, and as the consumer reads the campaign, they may believe that they too may possess all these qualities.

In a New York Times interview in 1998, Clow, a member of the creative team on the Apple account at TBWA/Chiat Day said –

Think Different is, I think, Steve's original idea of the personal computer, a tool to allow you to think more productively. So Think Different, first, speaks to the dedication of personal computers. Think Different is: be creative, imagine something that hasn't been done before. It's the ‘change the world’ kind of challenge that Apple has always been part of.

As the quotation from Clow (the chief creative officer at TBWA during the time the brief was instigated) explains, from the point of view of Apple and the agency, the campaign was designed to rejoice in the ‘creative potential’ of the product, an idea that fed into Steve Jobs’ utopian claims for the Macintosh. The agency wanted to appeal to the established Apple clientele whom it had identified as ‘creative communities’, and explain that the campaign pays tribute to people who use creativity to change things, not by exploiting the individuals featured or by using their work, but instead by celebrating them (Elliot 1998).

The poem ‘Here’s to the crazy ones’ is inspired by the novel ‘On the Road’ written by American novelist Jack Kerouac and published in 1957. A copy of the poem can be found in appendix v at the back of this thesis. Kerouac is widely considered to be one of the most important authors of ‘The Beat’ literary scene.

‘[The Beat] movement [...] began in the early 1950’s with a small and tightly connected group of young writers who demonstrated a care-free, often reckless and unquestionably fresh approach to literature as well as a demonstrative social stance toward what was sometimes referred to as ‘The Establishment’ (Rumsey 2001).

The ‘Beat’ scene could be considered as a type of sub-cultural group or collective that included other novelists and poets of the time, such as William S Burroughs, the author of ‘Naked Lunch’; Ken Kesey, author of ‘One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest’ and leader of a group known as ‘The Merry Prankster’ famous for a psychedelic drug-taking road trip around the US in a painted bus. In an article given to The New York Times during the same year his novel was finally published, Kerouac gave this definition: ‘Members of the generation that came of age after World war II, who, supposedly as a result of disillusionment stemming from the Cold War, espouse mystical detachment and relaxation of social and sexual tensions.’<sup>25</sup> Kerouac is famous for his prose style of writing but in this excerpt he uses the grammatical convention of the symbolic pronoun in his use of ‘they’ to create a figurative group of the ‘crazy ones’. He then goes on to use the linguistic trick of using adnouns to both name and describe a particular type of person who is a member of that group such as misfit or rebel. The narrative produces the idea that the crazy ones are somehow unlike or outside the mainstream, which they do not value because they do not measure themselves by the same standard. Although positioning is tricky to pull off it is one that cannot be overlooked, because the consequence of this type of person is that they change things for the greater good. The poem is not just a construction of difference - it is a *celebration* of difference.

In using the poem Apple has applied a two-tiered appropriation. Firstly they have borrowed the cultural status of the author who is a member of a subversive subculture which has come to be (re)presented in popular culture as iconic of ‘hip’. Here Apple harnesses notions of high culture through its reference to literary intelligentsia. The

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<sup>25</sup> Original article by Gilbert Millstein September 5<sup>th</sup> 1957  
see Rumsey K 2002

work 'On the Road' by Kerouac is now regarded as a canonical text. Secondly the poem ties in with the types of people the advertising campaign has featured. Apple uses the poem as a backdrop to imply that Callas, Picasso, Ghandi and others are 'the crazy ones' and it is actually Apple who celebrates them and their 'differences'.



Figure 20

A notable inclusion in Think Different is Rosa Parks (1931-2005), the black African American seamstress and political activist, who is legendary for her refusal to give up her seat to a white man on an American bus in 1955. She was subsequently arrested and tried for civil disobedience, which set off a boycott of buses in the US State of Alabama that lasted for over a year in protest against racial segregation. As a result of the boycott the segregation of passengers on buses was revoked, and was finally deemed unconstitutional by American law.<sup>26</sup>

The use of the famous photograph of Parks on an Alabama bus stands out because it was one of the images that Apple used for outdoor/urban space advertising, conspicuously placing it on the side of a bus when they revived the campaign in the 2000s. The fact that the image was placed on a bus forty two years after the abolition of the segregation law is interesting, because it serves as an extra-textual clue to remind the audience of the circumstances of Park's inclusion among Apple's 'Crazy Ones'. It is a form of visual reiteration and the overall signified is about the

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<sup>26</sup>

See 'Biography' @ The Institute of Self Development - an organisation set up by Rosa Parks .  
<http://www.rosaparks.org/>  
[accessed 07.04.12]

achievements of Parks and other black Americans in the sense that not only is it taken for granted they *may* sit on the bus, but her face can adorn the side of a bus in an advertising campaign. Park's image is a symbolic sign as she has no obvious relationship with consumer technology or Apple products, but her inclusion in the Think Different campaign means Apple is tapping into the notion of courage and equality which they have 'borrowed' from Parks' personal story.



Figure 21

## The 2000s

### Aqua theme and Glass theme Logos

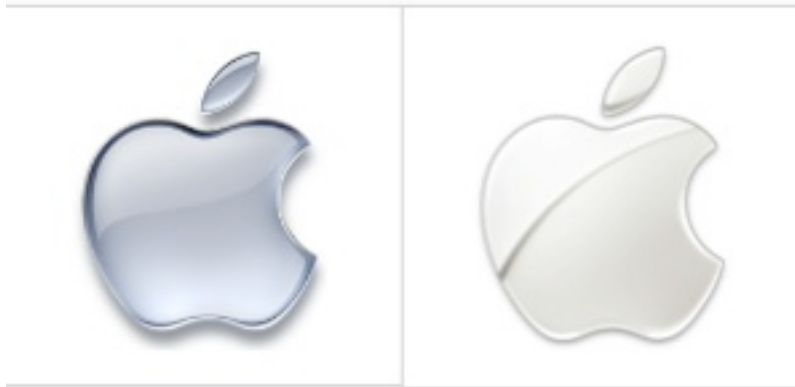


Figure 22

‘Aqua’ was used from 2001-2003 and ‘Glass’ from 2003 to present. The aesthetics of both of these images mimics the casing and overall look and feel of the Apple hardware at the time, and are - according to the designer - more graphic and modern in appearance than previous incarnations (see Raszl 2009) of Apple notebooks. The glass, chrome, modern and minimal appearance establishes significant aesthetic themes for the future look of Apple post-1998 iMac. This notion links to the dedicated Apple retail spaces which began opening at the beginning of the 2000s (to be examined below). The colours and resources (glass chrome, white and silver) used in the design allow the logos to both merge with and disrupt their external environment, and provide connotations of Apple existing everywhere, whilst unobtrusively blending into space and place.

As in the case of the 1977 and later mono-colours versions of the logo, the sign is symbolic because the relationship of an Apple to the products (computers and iPods) is arbitrary. It is indexical too, because the logo has a relationship with the materials used in the product designs and a historical relationship with the other versions of the logo, because it references the established corporate identity and existing logo shape. This latter feature or aspect of the logo, which refers back to earlier versions while also referring to modernisation and innovation, is embedded in the futuristic and minimalistic aesthetics. Here once again, via the logo it can be seen how the brand quite literally reflects back and moves forward.

The Apple logo is a very important part of the brand in that logos are a common example of brand awareness; for instance the McDonalds golden arches, and the Chanel clothing company's interlocked 'C's for Coco Chanel. The logo is an instantly recognisable sign that holds associations for the Apple consumer and works as a touch point like a *hyper-link* (Manovich 2001, p. 61 in Lury 2004, p. 12) providing access to more in-depth information about the brand.

### **iPod silhouette TV, cinema and internet advertising campaign. Wynton Marsalis<sup>27</sup>**



Figure 23

Marsalis is a famous American Jazz trumpeter originally from New Orleans. As well as being well known for his musical abilities he is famed for his philosophy of 'jazz music as a form of democracy' and for promoting jazz as an American cultural art form (see wyntonmarsalis.org 2009). The advert depicts a band playing their instruments to the track 'Spark' by Marsalis. There are several close ups of Marsalis' silhouette playing the trumpet with dancers wearing iPods totally absorbed by the music, moving rhythmically, and doing a traditional style of 'fast jazz dancing' similar to tap.

In this advert the iPod is clearly visible because it is the only purely white object, whereas everything else is in black or grey silhouette. Seeing the musicians and their instruments such as the double-bass and piano lends authenticity to the performance,

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<sup>27</sup> Full version of Wynton Marsalis iPod advert can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XX4SXnTw60> [last accessed 17.09.12]

communicating that these are ‘real’ musicians with creative ability, knowledge and talent, thus conferring a type of legitimacy to the scene. As the subject and the plot is ‘the jazz music’ and the characters are musicians, the iPod is an indexical sign because it is a music-playing device and its meaning is therefore relational to the narrative. By being inserted into the scene the iPod takes on the characteristic of ‘real’ music and by association gains authenticity and legitimacy.

The song itself is a signifier denoting jazz and some of the connotations of the genre as a subculture. The role of jazz is very important, because it incorporates a complex set of meanings about race and culture. The audience is asked to interpret the text within the cultural code of jazz; but to also make a specific interpretation about how race is signified. The signifiers of distinctive physical characteristics such as Afro hair signify that the silhouettes are of people of African-Caribbean descent. This works as a type of shorthand or metonym for the complex relationship between black identity, jazz and American history. The silhouettes denote blackness as race, but Apple is appropriating only one particular aspect of black identity, and so the overall signification and brand value being communicated is ‘hip’.



Figure 24



Figure 25

**The Intel will be set free. Television and internet advertising campaign.<sup>28</sup>**



Figure 26

The Kiefer Sutherland voiceover describes how the Intel chip will be ‘set free’ once it is installed into an Apple machine. It describes how PCs are ‘dull little boxes’, and inside a PC, Intel chips users are mundane, ‘performing dull little tasks’. The connotation is that through its liberation into an Apple machine the Intel will be emancipated, and the future will no longer be dull. Apart from what the voiceover actually says, the advert plays on the audiences’ prior knowledge of the Hollywood actor Kiefer Sutherland. Sutherland is best known for his role as Jack Bauer in the

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<sup>28</sup> The Intel chip will be set free. Advert can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxI0Gh9RbBw> [accessed 17.08.12]



successful cult television series '24'. The character Bauer is a counter-terrorist agent, who works for a US government agency. 24 is known for its high-tech '*mesenscene*', and the show had a product placement agreement with Apple, with many of the key characters including Bauer using Apple products to fight the criminals.

The 'liberation' of the Intel chip and the possibilities for the future are reinforced by the visual style of the advert. The space-age setting works as a means of signification, to suggest to the audience ideas of high-end technology and scientific knowledge and expertise. The chips are made in a uniform way that does not involve human contact, until the female scientist touches the chip, signifying a type of rescue.

The ceremonious action of removing the Intel from the production line by the scientist and it being raised up denotes its removal from a dull existence on the one hand, but goes beyond this by connoting that it is a significant act through focusing on the scientists' brief eye contact – a human act of communication - and finally the female's enigmatic, knowing smile as the Intel is placed in the Mac. This advert clearly continues to reinforce the rhetoric of a Mac/PC duality, by suggesting that PCs are dull, PCs do not signify the future in the same way Macs do, and they do not have the creative potential of a Mac. Furthermore the Intel chip is given human characteristics by the narrator. The Intel has 'personal circumstances' - it has feelings, and inside a Mac it has a future, etc. The facial expressions of the female scientist signify that a special event has taken place and, combined with the voiceover and narration, the ideas communicated are a rebirth and emancipation.



Figure 27

## The Apple Store Fifth Avenue New York City



Figure 28

Figure 28 is a photograph of the Apple flagship store<sup>29</sup> on Fifth Avenue in New York taken at night. Opened in 2006, according to Apple press releases at the time,

The 20,000-square foot location, which will be the first to operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, features a distinctive 32-foot glass cube that creates an attractive new destination on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue, one of the world's most popular shopping scenes'. A study done at Cornell University claimed that the building is the fifth most photographed landmark in the city, beating The Statue of Liberty (Scott 2009).

The structure is the signifier of a building, but the overland glass arrangement, which is see-through, allows a bystander to see the existence of a subterranean level through the glass, reminiscent in architectural design to the Paris Louvre art gallery. The illuminated Apple logo suspended in the middle signifies categorically that the building belongs to Apple. Drawing on connotations of a gallery, the building signifies more than a simple retail outlet; it suggests that this is a special creative and artistic space, and a landmark to be visited and admired. The materials used in the design allow the building to both blend with and disrupt the environment, coupled with the idea that it is both above and below; and set in the context of knowledge that it is permanently open, it allows for connotations of ubiquity. Reflecting back on the logo rebrand with glass and chrome, these are themes, incorporated in the logo and

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<sup>29</sup> Gallery of photos <http://www.apple.com/retail/fifthavenue/gallery/> [accessed 15.10.12]

branded hardware, which carry that logo. In terms of brand message, these physical architectural signs allow Apple to make claims of being everywhere whilst at the same time not disrupting or being intrusive to their surroundings.

This retail space is an example of the brand spanning different products and services, and inner and outer environments in the literal and metaphorical sense. The glass and chrome create an effect of here but not here. The building hints at invisibility but it can be seen. It can be argued that this translates as claims about the role of the merchandise and services inside the building technology, also reinforcing the discourse of 'good' technology: aesthetically pleasing, unobtrusive and facilitating work and leisure, asserting that Apple technology *permeates* all aspects of life, but does not *disturb* everyday life.

## 6. Get a Mac. Internet advertising campaign



Figure 29

The short skits involve two fictitious characters, PC and Mac (as shown in the screen grab above). Each advert has its own title, with a short scene between the two characters.

Three advertisements have been selected.

Their titles are

1. Trust Mac
2. Work vs. Home
3. Out of the Box

Each advert always begins with the characters introducing themselves with ‘Hello I am a PC’, and ‘Hello I am a Mac’, so the audience knows who is who. PC man is older than Mac man. He wears a formal suit and tie, shoes and glasses, and has a short, neat haircut, whereas Mac man wears jeans, trainers and a casual t-shirt or hooded sweatshirt, and has a slightly longer, unkempt haircut. The exception is in the ‘Trust-Mac’ example where PC man is wearing a hat and mackintosh, and a comedy nose, glasses and moustache. PC man’s suit is not a sharp or high-fashion garment, but rather a dull coloured (grey or brown), ordinary and slightly dated suit. The style and particularly the grey colour of PC man’s suit signify tradition and ordinariness.

The attire works as a signifier to the audience. In the case of the PC character’s clothing the signified is that of a formal, conventional and perhaps even reserved man, whereas the signified of the Mac is a casual, laid-back and comfortable man. Using their clothes to signify something metaphorically about their personality and mental state means that the characters are operating as signs within a code. Each discrete item such as shoes or haircut operates as a symbolic sign in itself, but they combine to create an overall look for the character, and so the entire character is a separate symbolic sign in itself. This means that as an overall sign, each character is functioning within a code, and (as explained in the methodology section) codes are expressive of particular ideologies. For example, there are certain ideas in Western society about what the wearing of a suit communicates. It indicates a person is dressed for work or a formal occasion and lends a certain seriousness or significance to the wearer of the suit, i.e. they have a role, a job or a formal task to perform. Another interpretation might be that wearing a suit is conservative with the implication that suits are restrictive. This is because of an opposite practice in offices that are more ‘relaxed’ or where creative work is carried out, and that allow employees to dress more casually.

The Mac man's clothing is much more casual by comparison and he looks comfortable and relaxed. If he is dressed for work, it might signify that he is ready for a certain type of work where the onus is on being comfortable rather than conventional, or in an environment that is free of rules such as having to wear a tie. On the other hand he might be dressed purely for leisure and relaxation time, which has nothing to do with work. The individual symbolic signs of jeans, trainers, haircut, etc together operate within a code; a different set of ideas based around views on leisure time, rather than a pure work ethic. It could also be read to mean the domains of work and leisure are blurred. Together, the two characters are able to communicate something else about each other, as they are set up as binary opposites; ergo they are defining each other in terms of what they, themselves, are not. This is reinforced by the style of language delivery and body language used by each character. Generally speaking, PC is more formal in these aspects than Mac.

The notion that certain types of clothing can come to mean more than what they denote can be understood through Barthes' theory of myth as described in the methodology section, in that Mac Man's and PC Man's meanings are constructed through clothing as a representation. Certain items and styles of clothing are adopted, appropriated and used in society at a specific historical or cultural moment, and by the sharing of certain ideas, thoughts and beliefs about those clothes, myths are built around them relating to how they are frequently understood.

The tables below show how the two characters 'wear' opposing signs and the themes they communicate.

<i>PC Man – formal</i>	<i>Mac Man –non formal</i>
1. Shirt	T-Shirt/sweatshirt
2. Shoes	Trainers
3. Glasses	No glasses
4. Older	Younger
5. Formal suit trousers	Jeans
6. Short receding hair	Shaggy unkempt hair
7. Tie	No tie

Table 3

<i>PC Man – formal</i>	<i>Mac Man –non formal</i>
1. Conservative	Liberal
2. Uncool	Cool
3. Work	Leisure
4. Conventional	Unconventional
5. Uncomfortable	Relaxed

Table 4

PC is suspicious that ‘someone’ is watching him and wants to conceal his identity, because he does not feel safe. Mac is sympathetic, yet mocks PC with his winking and refusal to adopt the spare disguise. The skit appropriates some well-known conventions from comedy with the deadpan delivery of the dialogue and by undermining PC through the ridiculous, i.e. PC in raincoat, comedy nose, and glasses. The story is that PC is worried, whereas Mac is relaxed and PC’s strange behaviour is the object of ridicule. The text disclaimer at the end of the advert explains that the Mac OS X operating platform is built with security in mind and protects user anonymity on the internet, whereas PC (Windows) experiences an onslaught of viruses and spam which it was not designed to cope with, implying that it cannot cope.

In the second example, ‘Work vs. Home’, the narrative is about Mac’s ability to have fun, and PC’s misguided perception of what fun is. Mac explains he is able to do all sorts of creative and fun things and PC responds by demonstrating how he would recapture a family holiday with a two-tone grey pie chart. Comedy is employed again as PC switches from formal language to slang, while Mac simply agrees that the pie chart transports him to the holiday moment. The implication, of course, is that it does not do this at all; it therefore relies on implicature and the ability of the audience to understand that Mac is flouting language rules by responding literally but intending an opposite meaning. The humour relies on a ‘knowing’ audience. The text disclaimer at the end of the advert promotes the free Mac software bundle consumers receive when they purchase a new Mac-iLife. It describes how iLife enables the consumer to create ‘amazing’ and varied projects.

The third example, 'Out of the Box', is about the two characters having just arrived in their boxes and what their plans for the future are. Mac is excited and has a lot of options. He simply has to get out of the box and then he is ready to get started, whereas PC is a little vexed, as he has to sort out some hard drive and software issues and then unpack additional parts from other boxes. Mac sees that PC is going to need some time to get himself organised, and as Mac is free to begin straight away, he leaps up and gets going. PC acknowledges he will be a while behind him. The text disclaimer at the end of the advert describes how PC software causes problems during initial set up, whereas Mac software is designed to be immediate and effective.

The analysis so far has described how the campaign tries to persuade new consumers away from PC use, to become Mac users and, one could argue, to perhaps reaffirm for existing Mac consumers of the reasons to be Mac, rather than PC. They are placed in the 'get a Mac section' of the Apple website, so this would indicate that they are intended for an audience of consumers who are browsing the online store because they may want to 'get a Mac', whether they are first-time Mac consumers or previous Mac consumers looking for a newer model. The adverts may be viewed by consumers visiting the website for other reasons or purchases.

The adverts function within the genre and sub-genres of comedy such as situation comedy, and comedy of errors. This builds an expectation among the audience that they will experience humour through the adverts, and that the PC is always the fall guy. The audience has to make inferences about PC and Mac, sometimes by what is not said, rather than what is explicitly said and through connotation and signified. There is no sympathy established for the PC character despite his 'victim' status, because the audience is always invited to empathise with the Mac character. Put another way, the audience is being interpellated and positioned into being the ideal consumer: 'the switcher', or the loyal Mac consumer who would never switch to a PC.

What each character says, how they say it and which language conventions or language 'rules' have been used contribute towards the overall message of these advertisements. Generally Mac man's use of language is informal and his delivery is

more casual or conversational than that of PC man. Examples of this are in Trust-Mac 1.7 Mac Man: 'No, [shakes head] PC. I'm good. I don't need them. You see I run Mac OXS 10 so I don't have to worry about spy-ware and viruses. So, umm, you should take them.' Or in Work vs. Home 2.3 Mac-Man: 'I'm into doing fun stuff, like movies, music, pod-casts stuff like that ', and in Out of the Box 3.7 Mac Man: 'sweet'. Although phrases such as 'I'm good' or 'into doing stuff' and the expression 'sweet' (meaning good), are not extreme examples of slang unique to a particular subculture, they communicate an informal way of talking that signifies familiarity and contributes to Mac's relationship with the audience. It means Mac is recognisable as somehow being more human by the way he talks, by establishing that he talks the same way people talk in everyday life to people that they are familiar with.

PC's verbal communication style is not overtly formal, but it is formal in comparison to Mac's, and it is when he breaks from this, particularly in the Work vs. Home example that it has the opposite effect. PC Man: 'I also do 'fun stuff' like time sheets and spreadsheets and pie charts'. PC has made a verbal error and humour is achieved through his misuse of language: PC does not understand the shared meaning of 'fun stuff' between Mac and the ideal audience. When PC adopts very informal expressions, such as 'hang-time' (pure relaxation), and 'just kicking it' (free time), the expressions leap out because they are in stark comparison to the established, more formal turn of phrase. They are awkward and unnatural, but only when placed against the way PC usually speaks. This casual terminology is out of character for PC, indicating that he is uneasy with their meaning. This communicates the implication that being a PC consumer renders one a little socially inept.



## Example: The iPod Touch. Internet amateur advert and surrounding user comments<sup>30</sup>

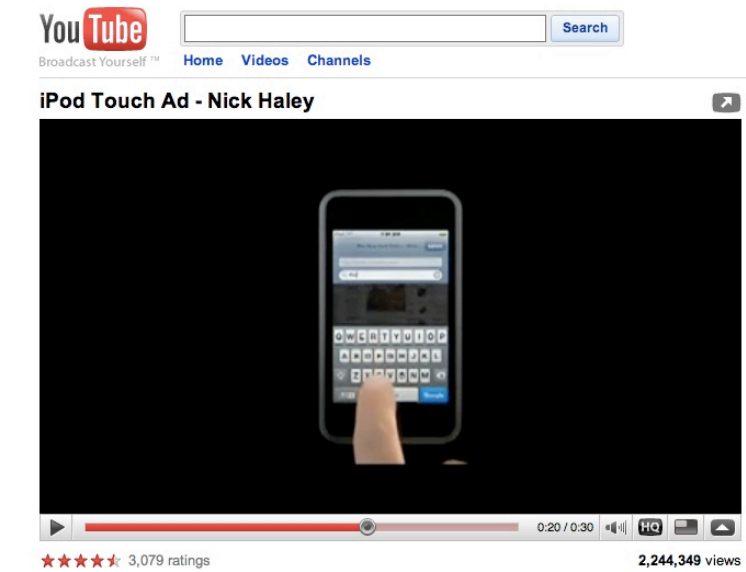


Figure 30

The screen grab in figure 28 refers to an advertisement made by an eighteen-year-old UK politics undergraduate from Leeds University, who posted it on YouTube. The link above is the original version. However, Apple saw it and flew the student out to ‘1 Infinite Loop’, Apple HQ in California, to remake it professionally with agency TBWA/Chiat/Day. The advert is set to a song ‘Music Is My Hot, Hot Sex’ by Brazilian band, CSS. The student said he was inspired by the lyrics of the song when he made the original ‘My music is where I’d like you to touch.’ According to an interview for the New York Times, ‘He based the visual elements on video clips about the iPod Touch (iTTouch) and other new products, which can be watched on the Apple Website. He uploaded his commercial to YouTube, where it received four stars out of a possible five and comments that ranged from ‘That’s awesome,’ followed by 16 exclamation points, to ‘Makes me want to buy one and hack it.’ The content and the music of the original remained intact. The agency simply polished the editing, upgraded the format and obtained the licence to use the music legally.

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<sup>30</sup> Hayley’s version may be found on YouTube [The iPod Touch advert on YouTube](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKQUZPqDZb0) (2007) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKQUZPqDZb0> [accessed 21.02.13]

It is a short thirty-second advert, with several edits in a very brief period of time. Visually, the fast pace and montage style emphasise the touch screen interface and the integration of various different technologies. It signifies ‘look at all the things iTouch can do’. It is quick, small, and multi-functional. All these different capabilities are literally at the user’s fingertips, ‘and look! the screen also does this cool horizontal vertical flip thing’. On an implicit level, it is about the integration of lifestyle and technology.

Apple has a history of appropriating different genres of music in the iPod campaign and tapping into and borrowing connotation from subcultures. CSS are a quirky Brazilian electro-pop group. The associations Apple draw on with a band like CSS are specialised musical knowledge and cultural capital. The iPod touch ‘is for those in the know.’ The lyrics to the song have literal and obvious denotation, i.e. music is everything, and therefore there is a direct relationship with the function of the iPod Touch, but there are also more subtle connotations at work in the context of the production of the advert. By plucking the student’s work from YouTube - crediting him and creating a buzz around it – Apple has drawn on the existing discourse of creativity and of consumer participation. It is not just an advert about the iTouch; it is an advert about shifts in the industry. Apple is saying ‘consumers are producers’ and we understand and value that. This is about inviting the consumer to have a producerly attitude and it is about rewarding that attitude.

Conversation on YouTube in the comments section ran for two years (since late September 2007) but was disabled in 2009. In 2007 YouTube members could leave informal feedback. Conversation is linear in the sense that only one person can speak at a time and other participants have to ‘listen’ and then take their turn to respond. It is a public conversation as anyone with access to YouTube can listen in. It is therefore really hard to determine exactly how many people are really participating as one cannot account for lurkers and listeners. Members of the conversation use it to find out information about the video/advert and are especially interested in the soundtrack. Participants provide information for each other on the author and on the making of the video, the origins of the band, the name of the song, if it is released, and so on. They

also discuss the merits of the iPod Touch product and rate the video overall as good or bad.

The discussion starts with a positive response to the video in praise of its creator. Other YouTube members also say what a great product they think the iPod Touch is, until one member says that the product is pointless. He/she is ignored, despite trying to underpin some of their argument with technical specifics. The other members notably rate this comment as unhelpful. Generally people want to show how knowledgeable they are about 'the story' of the advert, how it was made, and what happened to the author. They also want to demonstrate that they already know about the band and are familiar with the music.

Towards the end of the thread a comment appears –

the commercial, although it is a regular 30-second commercial, looks/sounds much much shorter and by the end of the commercial, people are saying, 'hold on, hold on. What was that commercial about? I really liked the music...so yeah that proves my point. This commercial sells that song and 'overrides' the concept of selling the iPod TOUCH. poor marketing concept...it has simply backfired...hahah

Although this comment was given two positive ratings some people disagreed –

(Reply) Dude, 900,000+ Views and U think it is a poor marketing concept? Give your head a shake! The ad is brilliant and it wasn't created by Chiat Day or Apple! It was created by a student! You are sadly mistaken on this one. I personally think this is one of the best ads I have seen in years from Apple, and I am no fan of that company. In 30 seconds, it says it all with a cool, hip sound that ties in perfectly with the product and what it is selling. I hope they paid Nick lots of money.

Although the first comment is correct in the sense that a large portion of the conversation focuses on the music rather than the iTouch – the first participant forgets

that one of the key functions of the iPod is to play music and, in igniting a discussion about CSS (the band), the conversation is still about the iPod and the Apple brand because of the association. The reply they get is derogatory and belittling: 'Dude...Give your head a shake'. The respondent uses the tactic of changing direction and showing that they have superior knowledge about Apple and the video. They pepper their reply with affirmative adjectives around the Apple brand, such as 'hip', 'cool', 'brilliant' and 'best', which about-turns the conversation onto a positive track and wins them favour with the rest of the participants.

The language is fairly informal with some colloquialisms and slang; 'this ad is so sick' (meaning good), and the general tone is very complimentary towards the video and the product – lots of praise and lots of flattery. There is a system on the thread where participants can rate whether the comments are useful or not. Notably, when anyone says anything negative about the iPod itself they are ignored by the rest of the people in the conversation and given a negative rating; similarly, when anyone makes a negative statement about the author of the video they are ignored. The members of this conversation also do not respond to bad language or even mild insults such as 'Dumbass'. In this way they are exacting self-governing social rules. The conversation is about passing judgement and giving feedback. Negative responses - however articulate and reasonably constructed - are unwelcome. The conversation is used to reinforce the extent to which visitors to YouTube like the video, and to create a sense of belonging and shared affirmation. It is also used as a space to display expertise, and share knowledge on Apple, on YouTube and on music. Within the conversation, through their comments, people are able to demonstrate their knowledge and membership of these three different but overlapping communities.

The type of language used indicates an approximate age for the conversation participants in the Generation Y group. Since negative responses are not particularly welcome in the chat, the conversation is not what it seems, and this can be deduced from the participants' behaviour, and the self-imposed social rules. The clues are in the reactions to negative comments and instances when the flow is interrupted. To begin with, the purpose of the comments appears to be to rate the video, to compliment and flatter the creator, and finally to sing the praises of the iPod.

However, the comments become about displaying knowledge, and familiarity with the music, familiarity with the folklore surrounding the making of the video, and finally with Apple. Young Apple consumers want to be perceived as knowledgeable about the product and this brings status. The more in the know they are, the higher the status and authority of the speaker is.

This instance of consumer-generated content can be considered an example of Apple branding, even though it is has not been created by the Chiat Day /TBWA team or Apple PR. It is a form of advocacy creating an identity and sense of community around the brand, yet it is the consumers who are promoting the brand on behalf of the company. Apple's endorsement of this shows an understanding about the role of technology and the relationship between the internet and participation. It signifies Apple's understanding of shifts taking place in the marketing industry in relation to digital marketing.

## **Conclusions**

Reflecting back on the claims made about brands in chapter two, this chapter has examined different examples of Apple branding texts from different decades. All these different examples of Apple branding illustrate Lury's claim about a brand being a new media object and, in 'its objectivity [,] also [involving] images, processes and products, and relations between products' (Lury 2004, p. 1). The analysis in this chapter demonstrates how the Apple brand is, in itself, a connecting entity, like a bridge, between many products and services. It is an object which connects to other objects and in its objectiveness embodies the relationship between them all. The analysis in this chapter also demonstrates how, in later decades, Apple refers back to themes from the past and deploys these references as an orientation technique for their 'ideal consumer'. Therefore, through the quality of reflexivity that creates its own particular context for the brand, Apple builds momentum through time; rather than remaining still or unchanging, it is clearly dynamic. An important question now is: is the Apple brand just providing the consumer with these themes as a frame of action or is it a coordinating entity between consumer and producer? In chapter two, I also considered the point that a brand connects consumer and producer as a coordinating

entity, rather than as a frame of action that defines agents and separates actors out in the network. Taking into account points raised from Arvidsson's (2006) work about the brand being a specific relation between action and meaning, at this point it is clear that Apple, as producers, are 'offering' the consumer signifying resources with which to read meaning and act. However, what still remains to be explored is how the Apple brand works as a relation or a link between what consumers do and what their actions mean to them.

A technique that remains significant throughout all periods is how Apple draws upon spheres of culture in their signifying practices and appropriates meaning from the world of history, politics, art and literature. This is the Apple 'brand culture', and Apple are presenting a symbolic universe defined by the brand identity. The analysis of the Apple brand presented in this chapter suggests ways in which brands offer forms of social distinction as a resource or a tool for consumers to draw upon. This can be thought about in terms of Bourdieu's (1984) arguments about how some forms of art are perceived to be inherently noble because they require a developed taste to appreciate them. Apple can be understood as setting up an overall sense of exclusivity when they offer interpretive repertoires for their consumers to engage with, which require specialised forms of knowledge and competencies. Appropriation of a work of art is 'a relation of distinction' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 224) but as Bourdieu argues, people like to believe symbolic appropriation has this 'kind of mystical participation' dimension to it, rather than being linked to, say, economics or education. Significantly, everyone and anyone has the ability to appropriate meaning or make meaning and so, according to Bourdieu, it is actually material appropriation which asserts a 'real' exclusivity.

Making particular readings of the Apple brand is about objectifying cultural capital and also about being 'in the know', and this exists through the fields of cultural production. The fields of cultural production are bound to the fields of social classes and are the site in which agents 'wield strengths and obtain profits proportionate to their mastery of this objectified capital' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 225). In the context of the analysis presented here, it raises the question of how far and in what ways consumers draw upon the Apple brand to wield strength, to elevate themselves and subordinate others through their taste. In chapter seven, which presents the analysis of the

consumer interviews, I will consider this question in some depth, by exploring how consumers' engage with the themes and interpretive repertoires inherent in the brand (and identified in the analysis in this chapter) and how they are actively engaged in negotiating brand meaning.

## Chapter six

### *Steve Jobs: the Personification of Apple*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents an analysis of texts on the late Steve Jobs (1955-2011). The analysis of Jobs warrants a chapter of its own and is treated slightly differently because Jobs spans the entire timeframe in which the brand has been examined, rather than representing a specific decade. Related to this point, Jobs is ‘a sign’ in the semiotic sense, and ‘read’ as part of the Apple company’s continuing process of communication as someone who presents an example of the continuous framing of core brand messages about Apple. Following this argument, in this chapter, the personification of Apple via Jobs is explored. He is considered throughout the analysis as a key element of the overall Apple brand, and as an example of the brand’s ‘dynamic relationship with time’ (Lury 2004). In addition, reflecting back on chapter two and thinking about the theoretical idea that a brand is a ‘new media object’ (Lury 2004), this chapter shows how the public persona of Jobs has unfolded and gathered momentum as part of the brand strategy. The chapter argues that many of the personal attributes and qualities that could be perceived by consumers as belonging to Jobs are actually interwoven with Apple core-brand messages. In this way, it is argued that Jobs be understood as a new media object and one that both embodies Apple and connects Apple products and services together.

This chapter will explore the ways in which Jobs represents information that is made available to the Apple consumer and information to which consumer feeling and action might be directed. Apple consumers may of course manage their own feelings around, and responses to, Jobs, but thinking about Jobs as part of the brand poses the question, ‘might consumer participation with Apple fit in with themes set up by his public persona and which are already consistent in the Apple brand?’ Although this chapter does not include an analysis of consumer interviews, it will begin the process of thinking about how Jobs, as a central part of the Apple brand, may be relevant for thinking about brand lock-in and consumer agency in relation to this. If Jobs is



understood as a new media object, how, in his objective-ness, does his persona presents Apple with an opportunity for manageable flexibility, offering the consumer repertoires with which to articulate the brand and with what limitations?

To explore these ideas and answer these questions the analysis is organised into five parts. The first three parts examine Jobs 2005 Stanford University address and include excerpts from the speech (although the full transcript of the speech is placed in Appendix iv). The fourth part of the analysis looks at his ill health and resignation from Apple from 2008 and the fifth part of the analysis looks at media and public response to his death in 2011.

## Analysis

### **The Stanford commencement address 2005**

Taken from a commencement address (a motivational talk at the start of each academic year) given in June 2005 to an audience of Stanford University students in the US (where Jobs usefully delivered a three-act autobiography), what follows is an analysis of Jobs' own words, against recurrent themes and descriptions of key events from secondary evidence, i.e. biographies. The analysis identifies several emerging ideas in Jobs' address, which are destiny, a divine leader, love, and counterculture. Jobs builds and reiterates these themes in an unsystematic weave throughout the speech; therefore the subsequent discussion will follow his three-act outline. Finally the section about the Stanford address argues that Apple has made use of what is known about Job's life, work, and personality, to provide information for the consumer about the company, and that this is a marketing strategy designed to strengthen committed consumers' relationship with the brand.

### *Part One: 'The first story is about connecting the dots'*

#### **Destiny**

Delivered in the style of a three-act monologue or soliloquy, Jobs addressed his Stanford audience, 'Today I want to tell you three stories about my life' (Jobs 2005). The first section of the speech covers Jobs' adoption and early life. In it he discusses and reflects on personal details regarding the wishes of his biological mother, that his adopted parents be college graduates. However, as he explains, after an initial match was made with a male lawyer and his wife, a different couple, Clara and Paul Jobs, working class, with no college education were subsequently granted adoption on the condition that when he grew up, Jobs went to college (see Young and Simon 2005, p. 8).

Steve Jobs reflected on this period of his life:

I dropped out of Reed College after six months[...]I couldn't see the value in it [...] so I decided to drop out and trusted it would all work out OK [...] The minute I dropped out I could stop taking the required classes that didn't interest me, and begin dropping in on the ones that looked interesting. I decided to learn calligraphy (Jobs 2005).

The subject here is about turning his back on what was expected of him and relying on a sense of faith that it would work out for the best. Once he made that choice he was free to pursue what felt interesting and meaningful. What was expected, what was required did not interest him; instead he takes interest in an artistic activity; it is instinct over obligation played out through freedom and choice. Jobs muses about his dropping out of college and goes on to describe his personal theory of 'joining the dots in life', a personal practice which helps him to look forward. He tells his audience that they must trust their instincts in life and trust 'the dots' to connect them to their future. Jobs also talks about his experiences at Reed College in terms of destiny and karma, attempting to present himself as a spiritual person, who believed in the power of fate. This is a context to describe his relationship with Apple as a type of 'calling', rather than a planned career-path. The details he provides from his background show how he acquired a context, which forms part of the foundations for Apple. He explains this in mystical terms; as the sum of events that formed part of a predetermined, though at the time unknown destiny.

Jobs also described how he values this period in his life for providing a high degree of creativity and personal freedom. The idea of trusting in the unknown to gain a new knowledge is framed as interesting, beautiful, and intangible. Talking about learning calligraphy he said, 'It was beautiful, historically artistically in a way science couldn't capture, and I found it fascinating'. Here, he implies that, although this artistic knowledge might be unquantifiable knowledge, the incentive for believing in it lies in the gaining of a fresh intuitive outlook. Destiny will somehow magically help form the future. He links his experiences here, in part, to the birth of the Macintosh. He

feels he can in part attribute the reason the user interface was developed to incorporate aesthetics as well as functionality to this. He said, ‘ten years later when we were designing the first Macintosh, it all came back to me. It was the first computer with beautiful typography. And since Windows just copied Mac, it’s likely no other personal computer would have had them’ (Jobs 2005).

This free and creative period is then reworked into his later life and constructed as ‘the path’ to his achievements with the Mac. This ‘reworking’ sets up the Macintosh as a reward for trusting his instincts and pursuing the things that he found personally interesting and rewarding. He also sneaks in a swipe at Microsoft setting up a Windows/Mac duality. By aligning the Macintosh with a whimsical description of good looks and imagination he transfers those qualities onto the machine. He also offers the Mac as the original, authentic beauty, rather than Windows as the copy. Jobs continues,

It wasn’t all romantic. I didn’t have a dorm room, so I slept on the floor in friends rooms. I returned coke bottles for 5cent deposits to buy food and I would walk the 7 miles across town every Sunday night to get one good meal at the Hare Krishna Temple (Jobs 2005).

Jobs continued to employ idealistic rhetoric in this part of the speech about living hand to mouth, and even though he stated the experience was not easy he remembers it in a wistful and romantic way. Although he is saying ‘[i]t wasn’t all romantic’ by mentioning the word romance he is actually trying to make it sound romantic. He talked about not having the traditional stabilities of a proper home or fixed employment, and casually drops in his interest in Eastern spirituality when he mentioned the meals at the Hare Krishna centre, implying spiritual nourishment from such encounters. Also, in this part of the speech he continues to place immense value on intuition, and being guided by his inner self. Despite painting a picture of hard times he said, ‘I loved it. And much of what I stumbled into by following my curiosity and intuition turned out to be priceless later on’ (ibid). Here he reinforces the idea that he established earlier, of being rewarded for trusting in destiny. He went

outside of doing what traditional society told him to do - college, a stable home, and constant employment – but, very importantly for him, his going against the grain has paid dividends with the reward of Apple. One could infer that Jobs places great worth on free will. Freedom and the free individual are of course central Apple brand messages as other parts of the brand analysis in this thesis have argued.

### **Counterculture**

These ideas presented in the first part of Jobs’ speech, and what they might mean symbolically can be compared with information circulated about him in other media texts. How might such sources reinforce signified aspects of his persona through reoccurring themes?

After high school, Jobs spent some time in the Berkley area experimenting with spiritual philosophy, but finally enrolled in Reed College in Oregon, Portland, the expensive, liberal arts college he mentions in his Stanford speech (Isaacson 2011, p. 33). In an interview prior to the speech, Job elaborated on his reasons for choosing Reed, he said of the time, ‘I was interested in Eastern mysticism, which had hit the shores about then. At Reed there was a constant flow of people stopping by from Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert to Gary Synder’ (Jobs quoted in Young and Simon 2005, p. 22). As the quotation illustrates, prior to Apple, Jobs was developing an interest in, and was keen to cultivate an association with alternative and cult figures of the time who were connected with environmental activism, psychedelics and even American beat poetry. Thus began his alliance with characters and literature which were to feature in later Apple marketing campaigns, notably the 1990s ‘Think Different’ poem, ‘Here’s to the Crazy Ones’ inspired by Jack Kerouac’s famous 1957 novel ‘On the Road’.

Isaacson (2011) charts a teenage Jobs’ love affair with electronics as a high school student, and his subsequent initiation into the Californian Counter Culture movement at the end of the 1960s. In Young and Simon’s book, Jobs describes his time at Homestead High School: ‘I got stoned for the first time. I discovered Shakespeare,

Dylan Thomas, and all that classic stuff. I read Moby Dick and went back as a junior taking creative writing classes' (Young and Simon 2005, p. 17). This corroborates Jobs' interest in creative pursuits, artistic works, and counterculture. In fact, classmates from the period remember Jobs as what was known as a 'Wire-head', the slang name that Silicon Valley high school kids gave to electronics club members that had a hip connotation. 'Wire-heads' were perceived as 'cool' and 'alternative', rather than geeky. The name combined the drug orientation of the time with the electronics and avoided the bumbling connotations of 'Nerds'. In Silicon Valley it was 'cool' to be into electronics (Young and Simon 2005, p. 18).

It was also during this period that Jobs struck up a friendship with another 'Wire head', Steve Wozniak, through his Saturday job at 'Haltek', an electronics parts warehouse. Wozniak was working on a project building his own kit computer with another friend, Fernandez, and, through hanging out together at the store, Wozniak began to share details of the project with Jobs. They also got involved together in a gang of 'technology savvy hippies [called 'the phreaks' who amongst other high tech heists...] had discovered how to fool AT&T's long distance switching equipment [and generate free overseas phone calls]' (ibid, p. 19).

It is clear these ideas of counterculture and 'cool' feature heavily in the construction of the Steve Jobs brand. 'For white countercultural radicals, cool was a more confrontational posture, a statement that even though they were not excluded from capitalist affluence, they chose to reject it in favour of something more egalitarian and authentic' (Poutain and Robins 2000, p. 74). This is linked to the idea of 'cool' being about feelings of being subordinated by mainstream culture, creating important feelings of 'otherness'. This is also notable, as Apple and Mac users, when describing themselves in relation to PC users and in relation to other technology brands, often echo these feelings of 'otherness'. Jobs articulates his dropping out as 'not romantic' (Jobs 2005). By painting a picture of living a life hand to mouth, Jobs is also marketing a personal freedom, seemingly disconnected from his 'other self' the profit-making businessman. This point in the narrative, and his description, places the onus instead on a sense of freedom, rather than a need to conform to a system. This creatively places Apple in context by an illusion of what it is not, creating important 'alternative' credentials.

## **Part two ‘My second story is about love and loss’**

In the second part of his Stanford speech Jobs moves on to tell the audience about the origins of Apple and his feelings towards his work. The context of this is emotion in that he is keen to stress his deep love for his work at Apple. Part of the way he goes about this is to remind the audience of the company’s humble beginnings as a hobby based in a garage. When he told this part of his story, he established themes of hard work and determination in the narrative.

### **Love**

Such determination obviously resulted in professional and financial triumph for him, but the success of Apple is constructed as partly due to love. He said,

I was lucky - I found what I loved early in life. Woz and I started Apple in my parent’s garage when I was 20. We worked hard and in 10 years Apple had grown from just the two of us in a garage to a \$2billion company with over 4000 employees (Jobs 2005).

Importantly, Steve Jobs ‘loved’ his work at Apple. In this section of the speech he established his work as much more than a job, but more of an ‘*affaire de coeur*’, a relationship that he goes on to articulate in even more romantic terms further into the speech. At this stage he is beginning to construct the idea of being an emotional person and, more to the point, being emotional about Apple. The connoted message is that Apple inspires a depth of feeling. Jobs is using both language and the reflexive arrangement of his life-story to position his audience and provide access to emotional categories and experiences. This is an implicit invitation for his audience to participate with Apple with feeling and positively encourages them to make connections between the emotion of love and Apple.

### **The divine leader**

Aged nineteen, Jobs had a brief stint at Atari as an electronics engineer, and then took a trip to India ‘to see his Guru’ in 1974 (Young and Simon 2005, p. 23). During this time away Jobs lived a stretch in an area called Nainital in the foothills of the Himalayas reading about Yogi practice and going along to Hindu holy gatherings (Isaacson 2011, p. 47). What is relevant from this is that Jobs was the sort of person who was seeking spiritual guidance. In his sanctioned biography which contains interviews about this period with Jobs he talked about feelings of excitement around his meeting other spiritual beings during this time in his life, and his personal interest in *prajanā* which is understanding intuitively experienced through concentration of the mind (Isaacson 2011, p. 48) and that this intuitive thinking had a big impact on his work.

It was on his return to California in 1975 that he and his friend Wozniak began seriously working on their Altair project with the forming of ‘The homebrew computer club’. Altair formed the basis for Apple I, II&III, and the Lisa; the predecessors to the first Macintosh released in 1984. The story of the invention of the Macintosh machine is covered in some detail in Andy Hertzfeld’s (2005) book which, through first-hand accounts from the product development team, described their personal involvement, relationships and memories of working on the Macintosh project. Significantly, in Jobs’ description of this period in the speech, he likens the development of the Macintosh again to a labour of love, and refers to the invention as a ‘creation’, rather than a project, or a product. His choice of words signifies the Macintosh as being brought into existence in an organic way like a birth, rather than through a technical, innovation process. This relates closely to the ‘human like’ exchange value produced by the branding of the Macintosh and other Apple products, such as the ‘1984 big reveal’, of the Mac event. It is also indicative of Jobs introducing himself as ‘creator’, strengthening the ties between the man and the machine – a reoccurring theme in the ‘1984 Macintosh launch’.

Belk and Tumbat place this early period of Jobs’ career against what they call ‘The Creation Myth’ (Belk and Tumbat 2005, p. 208). The story of Jobs and Wozniak



working together in Jobs' parents' garage on the Altair project is very important in the myth-making process. During their study Belk and Tumbat asked participants what they knew about the history of Apple, and many of the participants were able to come up with detailed information about this period in Jobs' life. In their analysis Belk and Tumbat conclude that the cult following of Apple consumers in the earlier years can be correlated to the public image of Jobs as a spiritual leader, with Wozniak as his helper in the manner of 'John the Baptist'. The image of Jobs as a spiritual leader may not be simple conjecture in the minds of Apple consumers 'wanting to believe', but a carefully constructed role on the part of Jobs, who has drawn on further themes of religiosity: 'According to Young (1988), Steve Jobs appeared at the first annual party in 1977 dressed as Jesus Christ' (Belk and Tumbat 2005, p. 211). One can only speculate that if the anecdote is true, perhaps Jobs was being ironic, or possibly cultivating his image. To buttress the idea that Jobs played with the idea of being a divine leader there is another anecdote that Al Alcorn of Atari spoke about to Jobs' biographer Isaacson. The story goes that prior to dressing up as Jesus Jobs had actually dressed-up as a spiritual leader before. Alcorn claims when Jobs first returned from India he turned up to the Atari office, shuffled in barefoot and wearing saffron robes carrying a copy of *Be Here Now*, (Isaacson 2011, p. 51).

In the Stanford speech, referring again to the Macintosh as his creation, Jobs explains, 'we had just released our finest creation – the Macintosh – a year earlier and I had just turned 30. And then I got fired'. In 1983 Jobs, then vice president of Apple and head of the Macintosh division, recruited the CEO of PepsiCo, John Sculley over to the Apple Company.

In 1985, just a short time after the success of the Macintosh, professional disagreements and a clash of personalities led to Jobs being 'ousted' from Apple. Jobs had over-estimated sales of the Macintosh, which had resulted in an over-production for the year of 1985. There were also problems with the Macintosh fledgling software. In his memoirs, Sculley recounts the event, 'his eyes focused on me in a constant burning stare. I nearly felt like he was publicly daring me to go through with it, to announce before his company - his people – that he had been dethroned...' (Sculley

1989, pp. 387-388). Sculley himself even described the removal of Jobs as a ‘dethroning’. This recursively implies an imperial quality to Job’s role, with Apple employees positioned as his subjects and the idea that Jobs was perceived as an all-powerful leader at Apple.

Jobs was essentially in exile from Apple between 1985 and 1997. The media and other commentators at one time constructed the exile of Jobs as an acrimonious divorce. However, it is now presented as a necessary episode in the destiny and personal growth of both Jobs and the company. Therefore, his absence of over a decade from Apple remains significant, because consumers and the contemporary Apple brand have subsequently appropriated it into the narrative and personal journey of ‘the man and the brand’.

What had been the focus of my entire adult life was gone, and it was devastating...I was a very public failure, and I even thought about running away from the Valley. But something slowly dawned on me – I still loved what I did. The turn of events at Apple had not changed that one bit. I had been rejected but I was still in love, so I decided to start over (Jobs 2005).

This particular excerpt from the speech begins by Jobs presenting a period of personal grief. The thing he had centred all his energy and attention on was gone and as he described, the effect on him was devastating. In this section of the speech the words he chooses infer a strong emotional reaction with terms such as ‘failure’, ‘rejected’ and ‘running away’ being used. This is more indicative of the way one might describe a difficult relationship break-up, or the language of a love affair gone wrong. However, he expresses an unwavering affection for his work and on the strength of that passion he turns to the idea of renewal or rebirth. A further point to note is that later on in this section of the speech, when he is discussing what he did next professionally, Jobs also notes his personal relationship with his wife and uses a real-life relationship as a context. He said, ‘during the next five years, I started a company named NeXT, another company named Pixar, and fell in love with an amazing woman who would become my wife’. This is the first time in the speech that he actually mentions his significant other. Meaningfully, the rest of the narrative has

focused on his career, and personal insights about that aspect of his life. However, during this part, he gives equal weight in the sentence to meeting his wife and to the start-up of NeXT and Pixar. Despite falling in love with a person and describing his real human relationship with his wife, it is interesting that he has already portrayed Apple in the same way as one would a significant other, using the same type of language.

Speaking about his return, the decision to ‘comeback’ adds even more force to the notion of Jobs as a great leader, because it is framed as the triumph of both a corporate and, perhaps more importantly, a personal conflict; the idea that lessons may be learned from love and that love is sometimes painful, but true love conquers all. In his description of his feelings about the period away from Apple, he tries to create the notion of confronting pride; of having to face a comeuppance, and once again the end point is his coming to terms with the circumstances of destiny. He described, though, how this part of his personal journey led him to a newfound humility.

There are three significant aspects of his comeback that affect the public perception of this time: first, that Jobs suffered a humbling shock to his ego, as he is at pains to point out in the speech. Second, the end point was his apparent ‘rescuing’ of Apple in 1998, which, third, as stated in his speech, he did out of ‘pure love’: ‘I’m convinced that the only thing that kept me going was that I loved what I did. You’ve got to find what you love. And that is as true for your work as it is for your lovers’, he said. This stresses once again his deep affection for his work through giving it equal significance to his private life, implying the approach for both should be the same. He said,

As with all matters of the heart, you’ll know when you find it. And, like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So keep looking until you find it. Don’t settle (Jobs 2005).

Many others have commented on how Jobs' return to Apple can be understood as an almost Christ-like resurrection. Belk and Tumbat labelled the period where Jobs returned to Apple 'the resurrection', explaining it through the penultimate stage in Joseph Campbell's (1988) myth formula, therefore comparing Apple's history to a classic adventure hero myth. A shorthand version of the resurrection analogy is even made by the very title of Deutschman's (2000) book, *The Second Coming of Steve Jobs*, explicitly drawing a parallel with Jesus Christ. The Deutschman book details the Jobs 'resurrection' period 1985-2000, beginning in 1985 when Jobs bought the graphics group from Lucas Films to begin Pixar and founded a new venture, NeXT Computers, which incorporated networking technology that had been omitted in the Macintosh design. NeXT was a commercial disaster that collapsed in 1993, but the networking technology was instrumental in the progression of domestic access to the World Wide Web and, rather ironically, the basis for the Apple operating platform with Unix (see Deutschman 2000, pp. 9-84). Describing the shutting of NeXT's factory in 1993, Deutschman begins the preface to his book: 'It was all going to hell. His followers were abandoning him. His friends no longer believed in him [...] A fallen hero, the victim of his own hubris' (Deutschman 2000, pp. 1-2). Again Jobs is described in explicit glorified terms and as someone who is dearly loved by his devotees and as someone who was awesome and hero-like, even introducing the Aristotelian term 'hubris', aligning Jobs to the protagonist of an ancient Greek myth.

In 1993 Jobs began to concentrate his efforts on his Pixar Company, and appeared back in the media spotlight in 1995 when the company released the first ever feature-length computer animated film, *Toy Story*. The film was a massive box office hit and generated a large range of merchandise (see Deutschman 2000, pp. 189-228). One could say, as Deutschman does with a biblical reference, this was Jobs' 'second coming'.

Steve Jobs described the experiences in his speech,

I didn't see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life...Pixar went on to create the world's first computer animated feature film, *Toy Story*, and is now the most successful animation studio in the world (Jobs 2005).

Connecting with earlier themes, he draws on a spiritual yet fatalistic description of being fired from Apple, with a literary reference (albeit vague) to *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by the Czech author Milan Kundera (1984) which, through the narrative, discusses how people are not bound to the decisions they make in life; accepting the lightness of being means accepting fate. From Jobs' point of view once more, trusting in his destiny allowed him to be free and creative. Yet again, the account he presents to the Stanford audience shows that this initially painful and difficult period turned out to be a lesson that would ultimately be personally, professionally and financially rewarding and most importantly would lead him back to Apple. As Jobs went on to say in the speech, 'In a remarkable turn of events, Apple bought NeXT, I returned to Apple, and the technology we developed at NeXT is at the heart of Apple's current renaissance'. He described his 'homecoming' to Apple and the work he achieved during his time away as being at the core of Apple's new beginning. This implies Apple would not be as it is today, without Jobs' experiences in exile, a position that reinforces him as the company's self appointed saviour.

### **Part Three: 'My third story is about death'**

During the third section of the speech, Steve Jobs focuses on his experience of being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and discussed his thoughts on his sense of mortality.

Referring to his life-threatening disease - and to synthesise his personal philosophy - he tells his audience,

Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything - all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure - these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart (Jobs 2005).

Revealing his insight, he constructs the ideas that life is temporal and it is best to follow one's heart and trust in fate. He also raised the idea of humility again, reminding his audience at this point in his life that he has been humbled by his experiences. This is important to the notion of being spiritual and the myth of a spiritual leader. More so, however, than his sense of (self-)importance is 'what is truly important', an emotional wisdom. Since the audience at the time knew he was inferring that what remained and what was important was a continued involvement with Apple, a supposition can be made that through listening to him articulate his feelings about this, what he reveals is that he found Apple was what was 'truly important'. It serves as another reminder Jobs loves his work, he loves Apple, and by implication he loves Apple consumers.

Jobs then goes on to reiterate, what by now appears through repetition as a personal mantra, about being free from the constraints of 'systems' of belief. He urges the audience to resist a dogma and the expected ways of being: he says,

This was the closest I've been to facing death, and I hope it's the closest I get for a few more decades [...] No one wants to die [...] Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking (Jobs 2005).

He recommends that the audience goes against other people's thinking concluding, 'Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice'. Using spiritual language, and referring to the idea of an inner voice, once again, through his choice of words, Jobs refers to a mystic self and one who values personal freedom.

When I was young, there was an amazing publication called The Whole Earth Catalog, It was created by a fellow named Stewart Brand not far from here [...] and he brought it to life with his poetic touch. It was one of the bibles of my generation [...] this was in the late 60's, before personal computers [...] it was idealistic, and overflowing with neat tools and great notions. On the back cover of their final issue was a photograph of an early morning country road, the kind you might find yourself hitching on if you were so adventurous. Beneath it were the words 'stay hungry, stay foolish'. It was their farewell message... and I have always wished that for myself. And now as you graduate to begin anew, I wish that for you (ibid).

The Whole Earth catalogue was published by a company that also published another newsletter called the *People's Computer Company* which followed a similar ethos, that technology could be 'friendly'. Stuart Brand the editor has since spoken about how he sees Jobs as the embodiment of the cultural mix they sought to create. (Isaacson 2011, p. 59). By borrowing the signified meaning of The Whole Earth movement, namely care for the environment and care for others, and by quoting the tag line from Whole Earth - 'stay hungry, stay foolish' - Jobs positions himself and the genesis of the Mac alongside the culture and ethos of Whole Earth, and the idea that it is better to work towards an idea for the greater good of society, even if it involves being ambitious. What is implicit in this part of the speech, for those 'in the know' is an ongoing history of association with the Whole Earth movement.

Technophilia and radical politics met in the pages of publications such as The Whole Earth Catalog and Co-Evolution Quarterly. These magazines promoted the appropriate technology movement, which advocates the use and

development of new, democratizing, environmentally friendly tools. The publishers of Whole Earth would go on to found Wired magazine' (Friedman 2005, p. 97).

Friedman talks about Wired editor, Stuart Brand, and a subculture of the Counter Culture moment 'who were fomenting a populist computer revolution' (ibid, p. 98). Their ideas were about creating machines that everyone would be able to use on an individual basis, which would decentralise and make more democratic, 'computer power'; this was combined with the hobbyist vision of computing as 'a way to participate in making the future' (ibid, p. 100). This is the context of Jobs' association with the Phreaks and the Homebrew Computer Club, so in the closing section of his speech he brings the theme back around in a full circle by referring to Whole Earth which, as he says 'was one of the bibles of my generation... it was idealistic'. As mentioned, the successful technology magazine Wired (though now produced by Condé Nast) has its roots in Whole Earth, and a particular branch of left wing politics based in the West Coast of America. Friedman describes the magazine as a business publication, but with a 'cyberpunk edge' (ibid, p. 171). He says the team behind the magazine were ex-bohemians who reworked their '1960's utopian rhetoric' into their business philosophy, and accepted capitalism as a catalyst of positive social change. In his analysis of Wired magazine, Friedman looks at reportage in the early 1990s during the dot.com boom and focuses on coverage of the 'Hacker Ethic'. Friedman claims of the time that 'typical of wired cyberpunk-recuperated-for-capitalism sensibility were stories that portrayed industry figures as counter-cultural rebels with a cause' (ibid, p. 174). Here, a similar rhetoric has been utilised by Jobs in the Stanford speech; there is an equation being worked out, between his countercultural roots, spiritual beliefs, and being a successful, and famous businessman. One could well ask, why Stanford did not invite a non-celebrity religious teacher instead of Steve Jobs the CEO of a transnational company? Because, despite the spiritual style, and rhetoric of freedom, one may infer the purpose is to inspire the Stanford students to strive towards a career, follow a commercial path and to work the ideas of creativity and freedom into a capitalist system.



#### **Part Four: Illness and resignation**

Steve Jobs had a thirty-five year relationship with Apple (1976-2011). He became synonymous with the company he ran. Apple consumers and fans; the global media, technology and business and journalists speak of Steve Jobs *as Apple*. But, in 2004 it was made known that Jobs had been diagnosed with an atypical type of pancreatic cancer. Despite a period of remission, more problems with his health occurred so that he had to undergo a liver transplant in 2008. Then, in January 2009 he announced another period of medical leave from Apple Inc simply stating ‘poor-health’; but with no precise details or announcement of a specific illness given to the press, audiences and Apple consumers could only speculate. However, in a formal Apple press release in 2008 he finally officially announced that he was taking time off from his role at Apple, ‘In order to take myself out of the limelight and focus on my health and to allow everyone at Apple to focus on delivering extraordinary products’. Jobs stated, ‘I have decided to take a medical leave of absence until the end of June’. Finally, in 2011 he announced his resignation on August 24<sup>th</sup>. His short resignation letter, which was circulated to the global media stated

*To the Apple Board of Directors and the Apple Community:*

*I have always said if there ever came a day when I could no longer meet my duties and expectations as Apple's CEO, I would be the first to let you know. Unfortunately, that day has come.*

*I hereby resign as CEO of Apple. I would like to serve, if the Board sees fit, as Chairman of the Board, director and Apple employee.*

*As far as my successor goes, I strongly recommend that we execute our succession plan and name Tim Cook as CEO of Apple.*

*I believe Apple's brightest and most innovative days are ahead of it. And I look forward to watching and contributing to its success in a new role.*

*I have made some of the best friends of my life at Apple, and I thank you all for the many years of being able to work alongside you.*

*Steve*

At the time, the announcement of Jobs' resignation caused a furore among the global press with powerful statements being made by media commentators about Jobs being 'talismanic' or 'having a phenomenal ability to connect with the public', and even 'being the human being who has most influenced global culture' in the last thirty years. Media punditry centred on the personal qualities of Jobs as a leader having amazing passion, nearly extrasensory intuition and on how his philosophy pervades everything Apple does. This was followed by anxiety and general speculation for the future of Apple without him. Meanwhile many of his 'fans' quoted in the media expressed great shock that he had resigned and also their sadness and worry for his health, despite years of reports of his ill health.

A typical example of this is summed up in the comment from an anonymous online reader of the popular Cult of Mac blog, 'I was waiting to hear it finish the sentence with 'died' or 'dead' - thankfully it was 'resigned'. I've never been happier to hear the word 'resigned' in my entire life' [online reader's comment, Cult of Mac<sup>31</sup> talking about hearing on the radio the news that Jobs had resigned]. Mac journalist Kahney said, 'I was standing in line at a store when I heard. Someone shouted out that Steve Jobs had resigned. You could see people were pretty shocked. It felt like a historical moment' (Kahney 2011).

Notably the resignation letter released to the public was brief. The form of the official 'Apple' statement is symbolic, because of the way it contrasts to Jobs' signature communication style. Jobs' audience might normally expect to receive this type of news via an informal interview or even an appearance by Jobs at a Keynote Apple event. Apple consumers have been used to Jobs addressing the public annually at keynote events and these keynote events might be considered something of a 'religious' rally where audiences are invited to hear 'the word of Jobs'. Also, in public he had been known for emotional language and an ebullient personable

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<sup>31</sup> This is from an article on the Cult of Mac website. Kahney is a popular tech-journalist well known to the Apple community for his Apple expertise.

Kahney, L. 24.08.11 It Was Inevitable, But I'm Still Shocked And Saddened By Steve's Resignation Cult of Mac. [Opinion] <http://www.cultofmac.com/110245/it-was-inevitable-but-im-still-shocked-and-saddened-by-steves-resignation-opinion/> [accessed 25.08.11].

manner, which evoked a type of imagined ‘closeness’ with the audiences he addressed. A subjective reading of the official statement may be a sign that the situation with Jobs’ health was serious. The contrast in style to what Jobs’ public had been used to, serves as a signifier and, combined with the knowledge of his ill health, the overall signifieds are that something is different, but not in a positive way. Although Jobs did typically imply notions of the greater good and his concern for the Apple consumer; it is explained that the decision to resign was reached for the benefit of Apple. He makes a point of stating that he will watch over Apple and this serves to reinforce the ideas of love and the divine leader. It can be argued that this particular part of the statement connotes a protective parental role. The resignation letter overall therefore still underpins the existing theme of the emotional bond between Jobs, Apple, and consumers and Apple.

The controlled timing of the statement is significant and should be understood as part of the branding strategy. The resignation, what one may infer would be a significant, personal and even difficult piece of information for some Apple consumers, positions the Apple consumer to remind them that not only is this about one man’s illness and resignation, but ultimately it is about Apple. This strategy in a sense directs and constrains public reaction to be an engagement not only with Jobs as a person, but with the Apple company too. Furthermore, information was offered to the public about Jobs’ leaving Apple in a series of steps. This is indicative of Apple’s overall communication strategy. When a new product is released Apple typically does this in a series of steps with a controlled sequence of announcements, and the news about Jobs was released in a similar way. With new products, a statement is given at a keynote address event telling the audience that the new product is on the way and that it will change everything, and then the press report on this. Next, after a period of expectation, a further announcement of what the product actually is and is capable of is made, thus creating more anticipation and expectations for what will happen. This is followed by a second waiting period before the actual release of the product itself.

After his resignation the press frequently referenced The Stanford address Jobs gave in their reportage, particularly the parts where he discusses his attitude to death. As we have already seen in this chapter, the Stanford speech was presented in three acts and the third act was about death. ‘Death is very likely the single best invention of

Life. It is Life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new'. The media reaction was reflexive in the sense that the Stanford speech and press use of it provided much of the context for the way public reaction was reported. Public reaction incorporated the notion of death, from people saying 'when I first heard his name on the radio I was scared he was dead', to irreverent comments such as 'Steve Jobs is not your friend and he's not dead. Get over it'.

At the time of the resignation letter there was a great deal of speculation among the press and the public on the future success of the Apple Company without Steve Jobs. 'Will Apple die with Steve?' was the question asked. Discussions in the public sphere stressed the importance of Jobs' leadership, but also that his philosophy pervades everything Apple does. However, Apple PR stressed that this will remain and drive Apple forward in a bid to reassure consumers and shareholders. Jobs had been the public face of the company but he was also responsible for bringing together a group of people; design and innovation teams who will for now remain with the company and they will continue 'his legacy' was the official Apple by-line that appeared on the Apple press release. Apple PR copy stressed that 'Apple is a group', rather than an individual, and in fact Jobs' resignation letter stated 'I believe Apple's brightest and most innovative days are ahead of it', attempting to reassure interested and invested parties that Jobs believes Apple will prosper without him. This was Jobs' forecast, the words of Jobs; ergo the words of the divine leader.

In terms of business analysis and market prediction such as from commercial companies like Gartner and Forrester, comparisons were drawn with Walt Disney and the Walt Disney Company, which continue to exist and prosper after the death of Walt Disney the man in 1966. Significantly, the day after Jobs announced his resignation Apple shares dropped by five per cent, and this relates to the idea that Jobs as part of the brand is an object of the economy, demonstrating clearly that Jobs was a source of financial capital for Apple. Brands can work as a form of capital in the sense that capital is an object, which embodies value (Arvidsson 2006). Jobs is, therefore, a source of capital and as such creates financial value for Apple, but he is also a source of immaterial capital (Arvidsson 2006, p. 125). It has been illustrated via the analysis for this thesis that Jobs is an example of this phenomenon, as Jobs as an interface mobilises social or symbolic relations.

## Part five The death of Steve Jobs



*figure 31*

Steve Jobs passed away on October 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Jobs' death was treated as a significant news story by the global media. This media reportage was almost instant, with the story dominating television news, newspaper front pages and radio announcements above political events and large-scale natural disasters. The search term 'Steve Jobs' trended in Google for several days and there were hash-tags on micro-blog twitter such as #iSad so that Apple consumers could communicate their sense of sorrow and share condolences. There was a very large public reaction, which may be compared to the communal response to the death of Princess Diana (although on a smaller scale) with people leaving wreaths, flowers, lit candles, and personal messages outside Apple retail stores all over the world. The state Governor of California declared October the 16<sup>th</sup> 'Steve Jobs Day' with a memorial held at Stanford University where the general public was also invited to observe a one-minute silence in his memory. Consequently, the public reaction also became a news story in itself; a type of echo-chamber of meaning. Public grief became a signified itself working within a sign system of Jobs' death.

The photograph above was taken outside the New York 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue store and featured in several UK broadsheets as part of the reportage over Jobs' passing away. The image is representative of scenes outside many Apple stores around the world after Jobs' death. People took objects to place outside the stores and lit candles, practices which are normally associated with ritual in the wake of a person's death. To light a candle at a shrine may be to grieve, but is also associated with many religious practices involving exaltation and also worship. The particular difference here is that the vast majority of people making 'offerings' had not even met Steve Jobs, instead they had purchased the products of the company he founded and ran.

With images of Steve Jobs, such as the one on the iPod in the photograph often being used in these shrines, his image after death appropriated the iconography of a spiritual or religious leader. It can be argued that Jobs' image moves beyond a public platform for shared grief, transformed into a powerful, religious symbolic and iconic sign, because he is deified. Apple consumers and Steve Jobs' fans draw on social norms and practices around death rituals in contemporary society, but also they draw upon a visual language system associated with religious shrines. These objects and practices transform the store into a place of 'holy' worship and elevate it beyond a place to buy products. The deification of Jobs ensures that even after death he provides a reflexive context for the Apple brand, insofar as the brand refers back upon him as a myth incorporated into the overall brand identity. What is also significant here is that Jobs' passing away became a matter of participation and 'a producerly attitude' (Arvidsson 2006) as consumers were creating content about Steve Jobs as well as consuming it. Consumers performed grief, but aside from any private grief they may or may not really feel, they were performing their participation in and commitment to social activities around the Apple brand via Steve Jobs. Even in Jobs' death a strategy emerges that offers the consumer a means of brand participation, with public grief as a theme and Jobs as a platform or an interface. It is hard to say exactly whether this is a deliberate 'manipulation' on the part of Apple, but I would argue that in this case the company's handling of the events can certainly be construed to be managed.

## Conclusions

It is useful to reflect upon some of the discussion around semiotics set up in chapter four. The idea of Jobs connoting meaning relies on understanding him as a sign and therefore as an object capable of 'meaning'. He can be thought of in terms of being a human logo. Of logos, Lury says,

They are agreed general typifications; the relation of the logo to its object, the brand, is established in relation to an interpretant; and the interpretant represents the logo as argument... as a symbol or mode of Thirdness, the logo as a legi-sign mediates both Secondness and Firstness (Lury 2004, p. 78).

Here Lury is referring to Peirce's (1839-1914), 'trichotomy of the sign', the first of this tricotomy being the sign's simple existence creating a direct meaning, as with iconic signs. The second is its relationship to its object and/or interpretant producing meaning, i.e. indexical signs, and the third is to do with the sign's ability to mean 'symbolically' (ibid, pp. 76-78). Using this logic and drawing upon the tricotomy, Jobs can be viewed as a human logo because he personifies Apple iconically through his real and obvious relationship to the company and its products - founder, CEO, spokesperson - and also indexically because of his shifting relationship with the company in these roles, and through various events in his life, which have become public knowledge. What both these iconic and indexical meanings stand for symbolically is in fact mediated through a (re)presentation of him, and again through the consumers' perception of this (re)presentation. What Jobs may signify as an individual, or discrete brand then blurs into part of the overall ambience of Apple. As Arvidsson (2006) argues in his discussion of brand management, 'the distinction between material product and promotional message tends to be less clear' (Arvidsson 2006, p. 77), so that the consumer is sometimes unable to or does not bother to distinguish completely whether the personality that is being promoted belongs to the person or the company and/or their product.

During the Stanford address Steve Jobs pieced together an autobiography for his audience that was designed to inspire them. During this speech he used certain key events and specific language to construct the reoccurring themes of destiny, himself as a divine leader, and a personal love affair with technology. He situated himself outside of mainstream values, and consequently as belonging to a counterculture. The notion of Jobs, his work, and his company, adopting aspects and attitudes of countercultures and borrowing meanings from socio-groups on the margins of society is a theme which has always been prominent in Apple's marketing campaigns. This has manifested in the product branding within numerous examples as the previous chapter demonstrated; for instance, the radical idea in the 70's of 'personal computers' taking their place in domestic environments such as kitchen tables, or the launch of the Macintosh in 1984 attempting to humanise the machine. More examples of marketing campaigns include subverting traditional forms of and renegotiations of 'Power' in the 80's, 'Think Different' in the 90's, and the more recent iPod Silhouette advertising campaigns portraying different youth and music subcultures of today. As the previous chapter has shown, these examples also deploy the notion of counterculture and associated themes of freedom to varying degrees. This chapter has shown how the personification of Apple via Jobs fits in with these brand themes. In understanding him and connecting with his story, Jobs is inviting his audience and the Apple consumer 'to be like me'. In branding terms this is about offering the rhetoric of freedom to the consumer which, via the Stanford address in particular, is discursively created and maintained. In this sense, as part of the brand, Jobs is accommodating the needs of his audience/Apple consumers for freedom and thus agency. Moreover he actively encourages it as a source of well-being.

What has been communicated about Jobs' life is very important in reinforcing key marketing messages of alternative sensibilities. Jobs' life, lifestyle and personal philosophy are deployed to communicate something about the company as a whole, but the audience/Apple consumer has to work to read these messages and has to be motivated to do this. It requires consumers to draw upon their cultural capital to understand the cultural connotations and deploy their own competencies. By association, the consumer is also asked to understand that Apple is not just money-hungry corporate, but a company that has taken an alternative path with an egalitarian ethos to become what it is today.



The technique that Jobs' speech employs in addressing a sense of time and of a journey is indicative of the dynamic sense of time which was discussed in chapter two when framing the approach to brands in this thesis. That is, a brand involves a set of relations between products or services and a set of relations between products in time that is not static, but instead moves forward whilst retaining a sense of what has gone before. During the Stanford address, to build a sense of the here and now, Jobs reflects back on earlier periods in his life to show how he has evolved as a person. To allow his audience to gain a sense of who he is, he constructs his identity using the reflexive '*connecting the dots*' technique. In other words, what he called 'connecting the dots' is almost a classic example of what Giddens would describe as a 'lifestyle project', as Jobs uses his own life and past experiences as a context for his 'here and now'. Indeed, it is a very carefully put together, public presentation of a lifestyle and a particular branded version of his identity. A worldview is communicated via Jobs' life story as a means of exploiting a specific philosophy and of negotiating a tension between the company's countercultural roots and its evolution into a trans-national corporation. Reflexivity, as manifested in Jobs' narrative, is vital to managing this contradiction.

Jobs communicates his attitudes and beliefs on destiny, spirituality, love and counterculture which, one could argue, contradict the values of a corporation such as Apple within a capitalist system. However, since he was able to resolve the conflict between competing philosophies on a level of personal experience, these tensions are resolved, both for Jobs and, through him, for the brand as a whole. This creates and maintains what Giddens (1991) refers to as 'ontological security'. A resolution between contra-worldviews is reached on a personal level and the consumer can appreciate a sense of coherence and consistency, and also maintain a positive view of Apple.

In considering the above, Giddens' theories, which were discussed in chapter two, can be discussed in relation to marketing techniques that draw upon the relationship between morality and lifestyle and use being 'a good person' as a selling strategy.

‘[M]odern people confront with anxiety and uncertainty the predicament of having ‘no choice but to choose’ in a market place of consumer options increasingly devoid of substantial moral guidelines’ (Binkley 2003, p. 234). Relating consumption to the ‘practice of lifestyle’ Binkley postulates that in the ‘period of late modernity’, individuals as ‘consumers’ place faith in the things they consume in order to define their lifestyle, and therefore themselves, as authentic – but that this is complicated by what Giddens calls ‘the remoteness’ of the apparatus of mass-marketing systems. The personification of Apple via Steve Jobs helps to overcome the moral distance between brand and consumer. For the Apple consumer, identifying with Steve Jobs, the man, and not an overt marketing system, this feeling of ‘remoteness’ may be reduced as it is arguably a much more authentic experience to connect with a physical human being or personality than with more traditional forms of branding such as product brochures or product placements. Through this connection to a person, brand messages become, literally more personal and may appear more sincere and open than if they were embedded in inanimate objects such as TVs advert or other forms of script.

Jobs’ public identity was, and even after death, arguably still is, ‘a new media object’ because it continues to work as a dynamic interface between consumers and producers embodying at different times various aspects of Apple. This is something that moves within the abstract levels of ‘emotion’, ‘experience’ or ‘metaphysics’, too abstract sometimes to put into words (see Feldwick 1999, in Arvidsson 2006, p. 126). What is significant is how Jobs’ physicality masks the metaphysical nature of the brand, making it easier for consumers to connect to, because as a person he was tangible and even in death there are material markers with which to anchor ‘memories of Steve’. Consumers are able to access Jobs’ narrative, significant real-life events, and his so-called or perceived real thoughts to form an affiliation with him if they choose. A personality is mediated by Jobs, one that is transformed into an immaterial object and becomes part of the overall mood and core brand message of Apple. The consumers can then make personal meanings through their understanding of Jobs and conceive an imagined relationship with him. Subsequently, Apple is able to harness this relationship and exploit its value in the more traditional financial sense because, after all, one of the reasons people buy products is because they believe and identify with shared meanings.

In chapter two I discussed Arvidsson's argument that brands produce informational capital and that the communicative exchanges around a brand are, in the end, a source of economic value for the brand producer. As part of this, brands are 'propertied'. The analysis in this chapter has shown that meaning around Jobs has a 'controlled, pre-structured and monitored' quality, and so it can also be argued that the personification of Apple is propertied (see Arvidsson 2006, p. 82). To explain, the communication of Jobs as part of a brand strategy sees his persona unfold over time and, at certain points, made available for publics and Apple consumers to engage with. Thinking about these claims in terms of brand lock-in, it can be argued that as part of the Apple brand, Jobs as an object and in his objective-ness presents a manageable flexibility. To explicate this manageable flexibility, his personification represents certain information made available to the Apple consumer to which their feelings and action is directed. Apple consumers may have autonomy to do what they wish with this information and of course 'manage' their own feelings around Jobs; and yet frequently the consumer activity fits in with these previously offered themes, which are already consistent in Apple. Capital is then derived through the fact that all this feeling and activity (in part pre-structured by Apple) creates, to use Arvidsson's term, 'an ethical surplus'; that is, a thing like a past in common, a shared sense of lifestyle, or a practice such as communal grief, which in the end becomes a source of surplus value, which adds to the financial value of the Apple brand.

## Chapter seven

### *Double distinction*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on Apple consumers who participated in the study and analyses how they actively reflect on their consumption habits and their relationship with the brand. Drawing on what has already been argued about brands as new media objects and about brand logic, the thematic analysis in these chapter analyses the ways in which consumers articulate aspects of the brand logic identified in chapters five and six. Chapter two highlighted the idea of the brand as a coordinating entity and discussed how Arvidsson's (2006) work moved focus from a brand being a frame of action that defines agents and separates actors out in a network to instead focus on how brands permit a degree of experience and immaterial forms of use value such as identity and community. On first inspection of the analysis in this chapter, it might appear that Apple consumers are following the logic of the brand. In their rearticulating of Apple, one might even say that they operate as unofficial sales people for Apple and, as Arvidsson has described, generate an ethical surplus which Apple can draw upon in the production of financial capital indicative of informational capitalism. However, one of the questions chapter two raised was 'have the limitations placed on the consumer been overstated in current branding theory?' Chapter two also discussed how the 'duality of structure' (Giddens 1991) provides a way to observe the reflexive nature of brands and how human activity and consumer practice contributes to brand structure. Giddens has said that structures are dual and that 'structure and agency presuppose each other' (Sewell Jr 1992, p. 4). This chapter explores these issues through an examination of consumption practices as recounted by Apple consumers in interview.

As the title of the chapter suggests, Bourdieu's work is critical here. In particular, concepts from *Distinction* outlined in chapter two are operationalised to show how individual identity and social identity are defined and asserted through difference, which as Apple consumers, is a legitimising practice of the participants. The analysis in this chapter will show how habitus as an expression of lifestyle is embodied in or

objectified via the Apple brand, so that Apple becomes an expression of that taste as cultural capital.

In discussing their relationship with Apple, participants spoke both directly and indirectly about other aspects of their lives and lifestyles in the sense of ‘routinised practices, the routines incorporated into habits of dress, eating, modes of acting and favoured milieu of encountering others’ (Giddens 1991, p. 81). In response to the questions about Apple, the participants considered and discussed many ‘routinised practices’ relating to their consumption- childhood experiences, school, employment, social lives, hobbies, fashion and music tastes- to produce narratives about themselves. Within all this, the most striking characteristic was that all the participants used their consumption of, and relationship with Apple as a means of distinction. They did this in two ways: *one*, ‘we Apple consumers are different from non-Apple consumers’ and *two*, ‘I am different from other Apple consumers’. In the analysis that follows, I argue that such distinctions involve participants in a manoeuvre between individual-identity and group identity and I develop this argument through the concept of ‘double distinction’, which, I argue, is an action through which consumers can be understood as *un-locking* the brand.

## **Significant and reoccurring themes**

The extracts from interviews used in this chapter have been selected because they are the most indicative of what participants had to say, and they tell us something about each person<sup>32</sup>. With Apple as a reference point, participants talked about their consumption and creatively worked the brand into a broad interpretative self-history. Many participants spoke about the look and feel of their products, their consumption practices and feelings about the Apple company.

### **Apple versus Microsoft**

One of the most common ways that participants distinguish Apple consumption as an act of difference is by setting Apple up in opposition to Microsoft. I will begin with Sara's comments as they capture many of the ideas which were raised in other interviews. She is a postgraduate student, who also works in IT. When I asked her how she saw Apple Sara's response was

'It [...] seems like the underdog'.

The word underdog establishes a sense of contest and at first seemed to imply feelings of being in the less significant social group, a minority. However, when I asked her if she could explain further, she went on to create a direct opposition to Microsoft, with Apple as an outsider. Her phrasing suggested she feels quite passionately about the duality and she awards Apple a moral high ground because they are not 'evil' like Microsoft. She explained one of the origins of this outsider status stems from the fact that she feels Apple consumers possess a special type of capital through their technical knowledge and skills, which PC people just do not have. She said,

Apple, despite being a massive corporation, still has the image of the underdog fighting against the evil Microsoft types. It also has a rep for being more elite, like you have to be techie to use Mac whereas any old person can use Microsoft and windows [...] you need skills and knowhow to use a Mac to its full potential but at the same time they are extremely simple for ordinary people to

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<sup>32</sup> In the appendices there is a short biography for each participant, which provides a little more biographical information about each person.

do day to day stuff like word or internet. That's the weird thingie – but the people who really get into them, seem to know what they are doing. They are more knowledgeable about IT, technologies and stuff. Also let's face it Macs are much more stylish, the elite thing is about being cooler. (Sara)

She also frames Microsoft and Windows in terms of 'any old person' and 'ordinary', implying by what she does *not* say, that Apple for her is not average or mundane; unlike PCs, Apple machines are special. She talks about people who 'really' get into Macs as having an exceptional level of expertise and places great value on having knowledge about technologies. Ultimately, she situates the consumption of Apple in the context of style and, for her, a sense of superiority comes from how she feels that they are trendier. In doing so she gains an elevated status from her Mac consumption: PCs may be in the majority but it is better to be in the 'cooler' minority.

The specific words that Sara uses are also worthy of note, because the adnoun 'underdog' was something that recurred in other interviews, such as Alberta's. He viewed marginality as a source of camaraderie in the community, and also correlated it with an opposition to Microsoft. He said, 'I think all Apple users feel a certain affection and loyalty towards its products. Apple's the underdog and is seen to be challenging Microsoft's dominance and winning in some areas such as music, creativity, user experience, security' (Alberta). Like Sara, Alberta constructs a sense of contest between Apple and Microsoft, and draws on the language of a power struggle, i.e. 'challenge, dominance, winning'. Despite Microsoft's larger share of the market, Apple is still triumphant in certain areas which are important to him- 'music, creativity, user experience, security'- activities that focus on the feelings and instinct of the user, and pursuits that allow them to be productive and creative.

Jimmy, a policeman who specialises in high-tech crime investigation also talked about the notion of 'underdog', Jimmy explained this as being 'different' and went into detail about how he perceives that difference.

Someone who likes to be that little bit different – like the ads say, someone who is probably well educated and someone who understands OS [operating system] they come in more than one form, probably a student type who's grown up with

his /her Mac. [...] It's a fair assumption that there is no mould. I've seen all types from roadies to students to teachers who all use Macs. [...] mates - they are usually young and have a different approach to computers other than windows users. They tend to be the creative types, most [Macs] are used for applications, like music and graphics. (Jimmy)

He drew explicitly on the language of the Apple 'Think Different' advertising campaign and spoke about education and 'students' as if, for him, Apple consumers have a certain level of education. For Jimmy, it is common sense that Apple consumers have a specialised knowledge which allows them a level of technical expertise, and an ability to understand technical terms such as 'OS' (operating system). In chapter five I showed how the design of the iMac as part of the brand situated Apple's digital products and internet-ready technology as embodying 'high-tech' lifestyle. Although Jimmy associates education as something Mac users have and therefore reveals the value he places on education, he does also go on to say that there is 'no mould' , other than having 'a different approach and being creative'. Similar to Sara, this seems to be about being unusual, and for him, having an unorthodox attitude. Like Alberta, Jimmy also focuses on creativity and originality.

### **Design**

As has been said when considering the work of Bourdieu, consumers use their understanding and reading of aesthetic of as a way of simulating a level of aptitude and competence revealing of their cultural capital. Sara's comments already touch on the worth placed on aesthetics. Generally participants perceive the design of Apple computers as very tasteful, which distinguishes 'their taste' as superior. Habitus then has a capacity to direct one towards a system of classification schemes. Habitus explains how participants are able to give the impression they are belonging to the community and have something in common in a social group, and this was often expressed via talking about a level of discernment for design.

Time and time again, the overall design of Apple products came across as very important to participants as another way of distinguishing Apple from non-Apple PCs. The participants often referred to PCs as a 'boring beige box'. The choice of



words is verbatim in the 'Intel will be set free' advert, in which the voiceover also refers to PCs as 'boring little boxes'. In fact, about ten of the participants talked about PCs as 'beige boxes', which one can surmise has been picked up and entered into the Mac user culture directly from advertising. For example Alexander, a media studies student, told me about his hopes to set up his own business after university, saying 'I'd be much happier with a client seeing an iMac or Mac-pro rather than a random beige box' (Alexander). Another participant, Michael, who works as an IT consultant specialising in the creative industries, talked at some length about when he worked at a branding innovation agency and also how he understands that companies using Macs in public spaces is a means of communicating something meaningful about what goes on in those spaces. Talking about the 1990s he said,

Look at the iMac. It became the computer that galleries, studios and small companies used in their public areas because they looked nice. *?What If!* [the company] classic case in point. There was actually no technical need, for *?What If!* to have them, but [they] got some office interior designer in ...I think the design element has done a lot to debunk the myth that Apple is mysterious or difficult,... they are more common and you get all types of people using them. (Michael)

It is interesting that again in this statement, the participant who is knowledgeable about IT states that there was not an actual technical need, and the company chose the machines just because of the way they looked. Again consumption becomes a matter of taste and signifying to others the idea of good taste via style. When Michael explains how the company went to the trouble of employing an interior designer and investing money, time and care over considering the way that the office environment would look, he is implying that what this would communicate is a sense of style and that visitors would recognise the environment as a creative place because of the Macs. Personally, though, Michael actually perceives the ubiquity of Apple in these 'creative' environments computers as working towards popularising the brand rather than working within the exclusivity theme. Rather than excluding certain people from using them, such as non-creative professionals, Michael suggests they are too prevalent to be exclusive. However, as an add-on, he does mention that Apple can be seen as somehow mysterious or difficult, but cites that the design draws users to Macs

and that by interacting with the design, people might realise that Apple products are, in fact, not difficult to use. The point here is that he is clearly communicating that the design is consequential in constructing people's attitudes towards Apple the brand, but this also frames people's interaction with the technology. The design contributes to the overall relationship that people build with both, so that in a way the design has a democratic effect. He added -

I do remember how nice the Macs looked at the time compared to what had gone before and you have to remember when we kitted the place out back in 2000 or whenever it was – they were designer objects and still quite aspirational. (Michael)

When Michael talks about the design and aesthetic he uses terms such as 'designer' and 'aspirational', creating a relationship between the Apple machines and fashion, which other participants frequently did too. At the turn of the millennium, Michael perceived Apple products to be highly desirable objects. Although the idea of the Mac being a designer good is contradictory to what he was saying just moments before, about the design demystifying Macs, what he is constructing is the idea that 'at the time' the office was furnished, the brightly coloured iMacs were at the leading edge of design and that, as this is how a creative agency would want to look, iMacs were a natural choice. Talking about the same 1998 iMac models, Calvin similarly observed

For years the computer experience was beige boxes, boring square monitors, beige clacky [sic] keyboards, the iMac brought funky colours in its design, like they'd go with your bedroom or décor. People matching them to their bedspread and stuff. (Calvin)

Calvin's statement shows how the iMac designs are often talked about in terms of revolutionising the way computers look. He uses the description 'funky', connoting style with innovation, and also picks up on the idea of matching the machine to fit in with a home environment and personal taste. Computer consumption via the iMac could be about personal taste rather than having the one 'beige box' style enforced on the individual. In a similar way to the other participants quoted here, Calvin is making a connection between style, taste and lifestyle practice, and is also 'othering' PCs in a

derogatory description of them as boring. What is important here is that the consumer desires an individual object, or at least an object they perceive to be individual, because they want other people to think that they are different.

### **Creativity**

As already stated, many of the participants work in the creative and media industries. Several people talked about the ‘natural fit’ they perceive between the Apple brand and the industries in which they work. Nina is a media professional working in film and, although she does not have her own Apple computer (she has a PC at home), she uses a Mac at work and has her own iPod. She also comes into contact with Macs and Mac users through her work in the film industry when dealing with her clients. She had a very strong opinion and definite idea of what having Apples on display in the office is all about. She reveals this when she started to talk about the post-production houses that she visits in Soho in London having Macs in their receptions.

I do see them in a lot of offices through work and they are very popular in receptions throughout Soho. [Laughs] [...] Er I imagine that it’s because they look good and the companies have to have that sort of cool techno look in the reception. You know the massive flat screen monitors with the ergonomic neck and the white keyboards. [...] I must admit they do look nice. They are bling and if you want a top dollar computer I suppose for the look if you know what I mean, I suppose. But that’s the look these places have to have. (Nina)

She describes the Apple machines in the same way many other participants did as ‘cool’ and ‘cool techno’ and links this to the idea that the machines, by being on display, are able to communicate something about the image of the company to outsiders and clients, i.e. that they themselves are *cool*. The companies, in her opinion, are borrowing connotations from the Macs of being trendy and up-to-the-minute both fashion-wise and technically. She cites the white colour of the hardware, and also the design of the monitors, which several other participants did; many drawing on the aesthetics of minimalism. Again this relates to the idea of taste, and being tasteful, borrowing cultural signifiers from a high-brow art movement. When Nina said ‘that’s the look these places [new media offices] have to have’, she is implying that the reception areas act as a semiotic cue to visitors, that the companies

are both classy and technologically innovative, which ‘seemingly’ in her opinion is an important reputation to have in the industry. The companies are trying to communicate an air of professional creativity by drawing on the cultural signifiers of the Apple brand.

Vivienne is also a media professional working in television advertising. She runs an advertising facilities house and explained how her company had been kitted out with machines as they used the Apple software, ‘final cut pro’. She did say they had some other brand PCs as backup and they did not necessarily require Mac machines to function. I asked her – ‘the people who have Macs - is there a technical reason for that [...]?’ Her response was very clearly about the ‘Apple aesthetic’, a phrase she used herself, but she was also quite savvy and critical in her response, which indicated to me that she was well aware that the company was using the Apple look to communicate something about its status to others. She said, ‘No, it’s an aesthetic preference. Very 1990s but that’s what us creatives in silly Soho do, it’s a self-fulfilling expectation of the way a facility house should look when you walk into the suite’ (Vivienne). By using the phrase ‘us creatives in silly Soho’, Vivienne is including herself and making reference to the industry in which she works, but also being self-deprecating. She is making a type of judgement, and at the same time, uses self-referential industry speak - ‘us creatives’ and ‘silly Soho’. Through this discursive practice, she creates a sense of belonging in an industry that adopts such consumption practices, whilst at the same time showing that she is both aware and critical of such consumption practices, seeing them as largely a matter of image. Bourdieu talks about how aptitude for consuming legitimate works garners the admiration of those who have learned to recognise the signs of the admirable and that there is a rarer practice outside of but linked to art where people who are really practiced and accomplished constitute aesthetically objects that are ordinary (Bourdieu 1984, p. 32). This is what Vivienne is doing with the reception space, and we can see how she is drawing upon her aptitude to read what is essentially a waiting area, desk and computer in a Soho facilities house as visually pleasing based on the Apple products as objects d’art almost. In her description even the monitors constitute aesthetics.

## Work

Participants nearly always reverted to the idea of Apple consumers being independent and somehow 'different', but many made this difference personal by relating to an individual aspect of their lifestyle and often the boundaries between work and other aspects of their lifestyle were blurred when they talked about why they had chosen Apple. As an example of this, Jimmy described his professional identity and justified his Mac consumption, as allowing him to complete his work as a policeman, which, in his view, benefits society. Quite a few participants, like Jimmy, explicitly referenced Apple advertising. When asked him about why he chose Apple, Jimmy described himself using the tag line from Apple's most high-profile 'Think Different' campaign. He described how he works in a very technical environment, yet is keen to portray himself as having this 'other' side to his identity, and it is that other aspect of his identity which he feels really fits with being an Apple consumer, and makes him a unique individual. He said, '...mainly because my job is quite different and I have a creative side perhaps'. Using the notion of difference and the idea that he has 'a creative side' was a reflexive move on Jimmy's part, but to get more detail I asked Jimmy, 'what, if anything do you think using an Apple product says about you?' He replied

In my office they say I've more money than sense and they think of me as different, me personally. I suppose that is because I work in quite a traditional, environment even though I say so myself. Although I work with great people and feel very fulfilled through what I do, I mean as if I am doing a good thing with my life and sounds cliché but using computers for the greater good. The others at work are not Apple users, whereas I have this other side. I think it says I'm tech competent and look for something different other than a grey box.  
(Jimmy)

Jimmy draws upon the brand and what he says reveals a stabilizing effect whilst he articulates a sense of identity. The statement above shows how he uses the brand as a tool to move between a professional identity and a creative identity. Essentially he claims that Apple allows him to do his work, and also maintain a sense of individuality. In actual fact, Jimmy's response draws on many brand themes, such as 'othering' PCs and having a specialised knowledge, which distinguish him as an

Apple person. Several times he reiterated the idea of distinction and, by repeating himself and by his use of the word ‘different’, this becomes almost a personal mantra for him. The overall tone is heartfelt and he is eager to push his ‘being different’ credential to establish that he will not just follow the crowd, and that he is a little bit unorthodox. He sets himself up as ‘being different’ by showing that he understands and has some critical distance from being ‘a type’ with more money than sense; his justification is that he has important work to do – for all humankind. He’s ‘using computers for the greater good’ and ‘doing a good thing with [his] life’. He is presenting the belief that, yes, an Apple computer is expensive and that he feels he is being judged by his colleagues as spending money in an irrational way. He shows he understands this, but can rationalise it, because *they* (non-Apple consumers in his place of work) are more traditional. ‘He’ on the other hand, as an individual, can go against the conventional. *They* may think he is irrational, but his unorthodoxy allows him to be himself and part of this is having a strong sense of benevolence and compassion through the work he does.

### **Hobbies and leisure**

As well as work, participants also factored in other lifestyle choices such as hobbies and music tastes when they discussed their routinised practices. Several of the participants talked about their love of music and particular genres of alternative music. This was another way that participants were able to display their personal taste, as informed and ‘knowing’. The artists that Apple has featured in their iPod adverts draw on connotations of rebel status and an intellectual and creative underground, such as Bob Dylan (Someday Baby used in 2006) and French electro Daft Punk (Technologic used in 2005). Anna, an amateur DJ, talked consistently throughout her interview about dance music and how vital her Mac is in realising her hobby. She relates Apple to her hobby as a justification. She told me, ‘I know you can use iTunes on a PC but I have a massive music collection and I use the iBook as a harddrive cos [sic] it’s for my music collection right.’ It turned out that she had a PC at home, which she used for other tasks, and a PC in her place of work, but her Mac is assigned to the pursuit of her hobby. So I asked her, ‘Do you actually need a Mac for all this, could you do the same with a PC?’ She replied, ‘No not really, well yes actually you can, you totally can, but they’re better I suppose and more muso and I

like white things as well. I have a lot of white in my house and [laughs] it goes better' (Anna).

Here, Anna initially talks about Macs being 'better' for the task, but when she said more 'muso' it was as though she were implying that the look of an iBook gives the owner some credibility on the dance music scene as someone who is both really knowledgeable about their craft and who cares deeply about the music itself. However, she shifted the topic of conversation quite quickly back to her personal taste- how she likes to have white things in her home and how she feels that the Mac fits in with this expression of taste. Similar to a few others in the study, she focused on the fact that her computer is the colour white; and this seems to be very popular amongst consumers, because the connotation is simplicity and draws on a relationship with minimalism, and inferring high-brow, high-end taste.

Steering the conversation back to talk about her Mac use in the context of her hobby and music tastes, I asked 'Why are Macs more muso?' Markedly, she went back to talking about the appearance of Apple laptops (iBooks).

'Er I don't know. Umm, I suppose they are really, just well, more DJ's have them and they look the part, it's a lot cooler and more acceptable to be seen running stuff off an iBook, maybe because it looks techno, and definitely cooler. I can't imagine going into a club and seeing a DJ running a set off some shitty old PC'. (Anna)

She is describing a social identity of dance music DJs on the one hand, and implying that it is important amongst peers to at least be seen to be 'cool'. She explains how she thinks Macs make you look 'a lot cooler' and that personally she derives this coolness from the machines looking 'techno'. Here she seems to be making an association between electronic dance music as a genre and the iBook mediating a look of technological innovation. When she said she cannot imagine seeing someone running a set off a PC she is implying that they are not cool, and that this would not do image-wise on the dance music scene. She is doing several things with implicature, associating the iBook with her hobby/lifestyle, with what she thinks is cool, and also the idea that she thinks it is important to be seen to be cool.

### **Critical consumption**

Several participants talked about their overall lifestyle strategy being a 'green' one. For instance, Tom made it known that he is a Green party candidate, Diane said she is a recycler, and Karl lives in eco-commune style housing. These types of lifestyle can be understood as expressive of contemporary Western concerns and anxiety about climate change, and global warming (see Littler 2009). On first inspection, consuming Apple as a high-end, luxury brand does not translate as a very green form of consumption. Indeed, in 2006 Apple suffered from some difficult press at the hands of environmental action group Greenpeace, because of toxic plastic Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) used in Apple product casing (see [greenpeace.org](http://greenpeace.org) 2009). However, although it is not analysed in this thesis, in 2009 Apple launched a campaign in which it is advertising the Mac Mini and MacBook (laptop) as 'the greenest yet', adopting an eco-friendly discourse of recycling and energy efficiency.

In spite of Apple's less than 'green' track record, participants in the study who described green and/or ethical lifestyles somehow managed to maintain a sense of ontological security (Giddens 1991, p. 83) by critiquing the notion of conspicuous consumption and consumer society more generally, and in doing so, affording themselves a moral distance from such practices. As Littler points out, 'most consumer downsizers fit into patterns of having their psychological and safety needs for food, water and shelter met and practise consuming less as part of a move towards social respect and self actualisation' (Littler 2009, p. 108). Here, Littler refers to Maslow's (1943) '*hierarchy of needs*', and it is interesting that the phase of self-actualisation is where a person is able to be creative and realise their full potential. This aspect of Karl, therefore, is not in conflict with his consumption of Apple, because he tallies Apple in with what he perceives as an alternative.

It is well known that Apple products are more expensive than other technology brands.<sup>33</sup> Earlier, Nina made a reference to the computers being expensive in that 'they are bling' and 'top dollar'. Bling was also a term that Diane used: 'I enjoy the functionality of Macs themselves, but I'm not too interested in owning any other

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<sup>33</sup> At the time of writing (Feb 2013) Dell laptops retail in the UK from about £320 whereas a Mac book laptop starts at around £700.



Apple bling (iPods, iPhones) at the moment'. (Diane). Whereas in the context of her overall interview Nina was impressed by 'blingness', Diane's comment is a negative reference to Apple as a branded form of conspicuous consumption, and one in which she clearly states she does not want to take part. Similarly Alberta wanted to set himself apart from other people when he discussed the idea of ostentation. Alberta said

Like if you look at someone driving a TVR or Ferrari, you invariably think that the person driving it is rich and ostentatious. A friend in Sheffield had to get rid of his TVR because whenever he drove it he could see people mouthing the word wanker at him. (Alberta)

He talks about ostentation and high-end luxury goods, revealing something about where he personally positions the consumption of Apple. He situates the brand in context with expensive sports cars, but he is also disclosing an ideological bias about overt consumption and high-end goods. Generally, conspicuous consumption and display are perceived as distasteful, and a signifier of lack of cultural capital. In Alberta's opinion, Apple consumers are victims of envy and inverted snobbery referencing the PC/Mac duality. He went on to say, 'I think a lot of PC users don't understand Macs and see them as a sort of elite club... they don't realise the value and longevity of a Mac, so it's actually an investment... I like the fact that Apple has a clear direction, which luckily appeals to me' (Alberta). So here Alberta reveals that, in his opinion, outsiders misinterpret consumption of Macs as ostentatious and only the remit of a privileged minority with more money than sense (something Jimmy earlier described being accused of). Alberta believes there is wisdom in buying something that will last a long time and this wisdom speaks to him. He is justifying his consumption as sensible above showy. His consumption is therefore thought about. In considering his purchase, he remains tasteful rather than tasteless.

### **Love**

Many participants spoke avidly about their computers and how they 'felt' and 'care' about them and told me they 'love Apple'. They described in detail how they have incorporated the technology into their lives, and how they take a great deal of care and trouble in maintaining and looking after Apple products, and in ways that seem

distinct from other domestic technologies. This was noticeable in its difference from how one might expect a person to 'feel' about a computer as an inanimate object. Some participants described a very emotional bond with their Macs and expressed this relationship in ways one might expect someone to describe a loved one, or articulate their relationship with a pet. As the previous chapter demonstrated, Steve Jobs as the embodiment of the brand is an important factor in facilitating the idea of emotion in relation to the brand.

Some participants humanised the technology when they spoke about Apple. This was done by expressing their particular relationship with both technology and brand as completely bound up. The relationship between the individual and Apple was also described as unique. For instance, Anna told me, 'I like the little sleeper light, it reminds me of a heart beat'. It seemed to be something she found charming, as if the machine was alive. She also said,

Yes, it's really sweet [smiles] I know it isn't [alive] but there is something very real about them... I do take a lot more care with my Mac though than my PC. It gets put away in a sleeve very carefully and I keep it clean and everything. (Anna)

It may seem surprising at first or even amusing that participants talked about technology using such strong and sometime saccharine language, but what I think it reveals is that some have developed a very close bond with Apple-as- object.

Sara said,

It's definitely a love affair. It's just gorgeous, gorgeous stuff. I don't normally go on about stuff, but I must say I do love having Apple things. It's just a nice feeling like when you get a pressie or Xmas [Christmas] and you have something you have always wanted, but the tingly thing doesn't go away with the iPod. (Sara)

Being able to use the product to connote being fashionable and stylish again produces feelings of great pleasure for her. The technique she uses to show how personal and

important this is to her is to use the language of desire, using sensuous words. She expresses how her consumption actually has a physical effect on her. By describing the non-physical (the hardware) in really physical terms it also emphasises that her relationship with Apple is 'love'. Reflecting back on the analysis of Steve Jobs we can see how this 'love affair' is being rearticulated, because she constructs a sense of intimacy with her products.

### **Apple Stereotypes**

The idea that people who use Macs must be trendy media professionals working in a metropolis was often framed in a positive way. For instance, one of Sara's comments typifies a correlation between Apple being trendy and aspiration as a natural fit; 'You know Apple are funky, hip, what all the hip people want' (Sara). However, during some interviews a conflicting discourse emerged, whereby many described the archetypal Mac user in quite a critical way. On one hand, they wanted to show that they were aware that a stereotype of Apple consumers existed but that, on the other hand, they themselves are separate from it. One example is Diane, a young mum, who said she thinks the archetypal Apple person is, 'Vegetarian, slim, glasses, arrogant, recycler. In that group I'm only a recycler' (Diane). There is an implication in this statement that conceit is potentially derived from being alternative in a knowing or superior way perhaps, but she is clear she only takes part in one aspect, i.e. recycling, and this allows her to distance herself.

Marc, a freelance web designer, also made some quite critical remarks.

We're talking classic stereo type here, Evisu jeans, Hoxton fins, before I went self- employed I used to work for a design agency, the two directors came from a video editing/ CD-ROM background. In fact they used to write articles for Mac user or the like and refused to believe any other product could even come close to anything produced by Apple. I think blind allegiance I think you might call it! (Marc)

Marc was negative in describing a 'classic stereotype'. Comparable to others, in his description, he indicated designer labels and fashion trends such as the Hoxton Fin, which is a style of men's hair cut which came out of a very trendy area in East

London known for being the home and work place of many fashion designers and avant-garde artists at the end of the 1990s. By situating his explanation of archetypal Mac users within artistic fashion, he is drawing on a cultural code of art, as well as high-end and experimental fashion. Also the fashion and art community in the area of East London where Hoxton is, is often derided in popular media as being superficially trendy, showing that Marc is perhaps slightly amused by such cultural stereotyping.

In his comments, Marc is demonstrating that a stereotype exists but that he is not it. In describing the idea that these sorts of people exist and have what he refers to as a 'blind allegiance', he is passing another judgment suggesting that there is an element of simply following a trend for the sake of it, and consuming without really questioning. Earlier in his interview he said that he had chosen his Apple products because they look nice. The paradox is that he identifies a preoccupation with appearance as part of the stereotype, but does not view himself as this sort of person. He identifies a relationship between fashion and lifestyle consumption, and then situates it in an overall scene which he judges as being inauthentic.

### **The iPod**

Apple consumers seem to take pleasure in the exclusivity of the products, so the fact that there have been so many iPods sold presented problems for them during the interviews. There were some, like Sara, who thinks that iPods are 'cool' which, as argued in chapter five, was a theme in the iPod brand, but the majority seemed to feel that the ubiquity of iPods undermined the exclusivity associated with the brand. This idea was raised in chapter three in the discussion of iPods as a 'universalized experience' (Rhen 2008, p. 10). In their interview, several participants framed the iPod and its ubiquity in a negative manner - using 'common' as a derogatory term to describe the iPod. For some participants the popularity of the iPod 'cheapens the brand', and this was particularly the case amongst some of the early adopters of Apple in the study and the more 'ardent' Apple fans who feel iPod-only consumers are not fully fledged members of their elite community. It was notable that during the interviews participants did not really focus their answers on the design or functions of the iPod, and did not initially want to discuss themes (which existing studies of the iPod have highlighted) such as mobility, aesthetics and functionality (Bull 2007). Their focus instead was on how the iPod works in relation to other aspects of the

brand and the overall Apple brand, and they used the iPod as a factor in structuring their taste.

Michael talks about this in terms of the brand being cheapened. He describes the value that one gets from consuming Apple as coming from belonging to something underground, and compares this to his musical taste. He feels as if the iPod is the popular face of Apple. Although he does not include himself and really rather surprisingly does not think of himself as an Apple fan, he talks about the community feeling a sense of the iPod moving away from the core brand, and the people Michael perceives as 'proper' Apple 'fans' feeling that Apple has been disloyal to them. 'Disloyal' is an important choice of word, powerful in tone and revealing something about feelings of betrayal. Michael was emotive in tone, and indicated a real sense of disaffection:

In some eyes it has been cheapened, in the same way as a good band that has sold out and begun producing a more popular sound, as opposed to their original gritty music perhaps[...] I'm not an Apple fan as such so I don't feel Apple have been disloyal to me. I can see how some may feel that way though.  
(Michael)

Here Michael describes something quite close to Simmel's (1957 [1904]) observations on fashion that helps to understand issues to do with conformity and individualism which the iPod presents. '[F]ashion on the one hand signifies union with those in the same class, the uniformity of a circle characterised by it, and *uno actu*, the exclusion of all other groups' (Simmel 1957 [1904]), p. 544). The problem is, as soon as a particular style or product is universally adopted, we no longer speak of it as fashion and this is what is happening with the iPod. The iPod is an object which once represented a technological innovation and was objectified as a luxury item in the mp3 market. It was initially marketed to appeal to consumers with a high degree of musical, technological and aesthetic competence. However, it has arguably undergone a cultural transformation and become a mainstream good. Michael seems to recognise this when he is talking about a 'sell out' and about how the iPods ubiquity represents a devaluing of the Apple brand. Michael goes on to disassociate himself from what he perceives as an inferior form of consumption and, in his final

point, disconnects himself from the brand and from the iPod. He wants to show that he does not participate in a form of consumption which can carry mainstream value; he only participates with the aspect of Apple that signifies exclusivity and has an exclusionary effect.

Diane sees the two ends of the Apple product line as intertwined, but does use the term 'common' to describe the iPod. She explained that, in her view, 'Macs and iPods are intertwined, since you can sync iPods with iTunes. But Macs and iPods have quite different customers. I've never seen a Chav with an iPod –but they are common things now' (Diane). Although she said she had never seen a Chav with an iPod, it is interesting that she introduces the term into the conversation in the first place. In using the term Chav, which is derogatory and employed in popular culture to refer to someone who is perceived to be cultureless, Diane is revealing her thoughts on where the iPod sits in the hierarchy of the Apple brand and making a significant point about how consumer practices contribute to the way the brand is perceived. In general the way participants spoke about iPods demonstrates that they view people for whom iPods is their only Apple product as not full members of the Apple community. This highlights that, even within the Apple community, there is a system of categorisation and that participants want to push their credentials as being more discerning and belonging than others.

### **What is the double distinction?**

Distinction emerges in multifaceted and even contradictory ways through the expression of lifestyle and taste. As this chapter has demonstrated, a one-off distinction is not sufficient for many participants to validate their consumption of Apple and sense of identity. There was something very notable about the way that participants moved between talking about individual identity and group identity. It became apparent that there were two identifiable distinctions occurring: *one*, 'we Apple consumers are different from non-Apple consumers' and *two*, 'I am different from other Apple consumers'. To make this plain and to understand how it works let us look at two examples in more detail: Karl and Marni.

Karl is a 48-year-old white male. He is a former computer programmer of 23 years standing, but having retired he now lives in a self-sufficient, ‘eco’, co-operative household. He is an exclusive domestic user of Apple products, and an early adopter. As well as an extensive knowledge of Apple hardware and Apple history, to establish his credentials as an Apple person Karl told me,

...yep [I am] one of the first people when the "Test drive a Macintosh" campaign first started in the early mid 80's [in the UK]. I'd just started working as a programmer jobbing in Brighton and the owner of the company was into computers and showed me a copy of BYTE with a review of the LISA. I thought it must be science fiction or something as it was so advanced compared to what I'd ever seen. (Karl)

The table below contains excerpts from Karl's interview, when he responds to being asked about his perceptions of the Apple community:

<b>Karl</b>	
<b>Distinction 1</b> We Apple consumers are different from non-Apple consumers	<i>a</i> Yes there is a definite perception [of Apple people] and that's something they certainly cultivate. An aura of style. And personally I think they have that in reality.
<b>Distinction 1</b> We Apple consumers are different from non-Apple consumers	<i>b</i> You'd have to have a strange idea of design if you felt a rectangular metal standard box PC looked better than say, the iMac I'm typing this on. I reckon anyway [...] I think that anyone with a sense of design aesthetic would appreciate the simplicity and elegance of Apple's designs.
<b>Distinction 2</b> I am different from other Apple consumers	<i>C</i> I'm a bit different to most people I think [...] That's not me trying to be cocky or build myself up, but I don't have a TV, freezer or car. I no longer fly. I'm in the Green Party. I'm fairly media savvy and am critical of almost all of our mad consumer culture.
<b>Distinction 2</b> I am different from other Apple consumers	<i>D</i> I get the feeling that there are people who buy stuff, all sorts of stuff, because it's 'cool' and for that reason alone. That's not where I've come from. I have to feel it's technically excellent and as a Taurean (!) design has always mattered to me. Innovation and cleverness. When I had cars they were Citroen - a maverick car company if ever there was.

When articulating distinction one, Karl refers to the Apple aesthetic. In quote *a* he talks about Apple consumers being perceived as stylish and how in his opinion it is true. He does not state overtly that non-Apple consumers are less stylish; the distinction is not that crude. Instead he uses the technique of ‘othering’; what he says about Apple people implies what he thinks about non-Apple people. It is an insinuation: if we are *x*, then they are *y*. In quote *b* Karl extends his argument in a much more explicit way, explaining that his observation is that people who appreciate design also appreciate Apple and that you would have to have a strange view of ‘design aesthetic’ if you think PCs are appealing to look at; ergo, PC consumers are not as discerning as Apple consumers. Overall quotes *a* and *b* are expressions of superior taste.

When Karl makes distinction 2, he does something significant with the way he moves his ideas *forward*. By referring *back* to the narrative he set up at the beginning of his interview when he started to talk about his life and lifestyle, he states, ‘I’m a bit different to most people I think’. Part of his ‘story’ is to establish a self-identity in that he leads what he describes as a sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle, and his consumption strategy as an expression of that lifestyle now fits with his values and beliefs on living in an environmentally responsible way. He asserts how he is both aware and critical of the media, implying a position on media-effects. In this quote *c* he stresses that the media does not persuade him. He goes on to wrap the statement up by articulating a judgement of all other people in that he suggests consuming is somehow irrational (‘mad’). This is reinforced in statement *d* where he goes on to imply that other people are duped by consumer culture and buy things as symbolic resources simply to demonstrate to other people their superior taste. He reflects back on another aspect of his narrative as a context: his technical knowledge having set up his credentials as an IT professional earlier. He uses this to explain that, although he can appreciate form, technology/function is more important. To be clear, here he deploys techno-capital as part of his lifestyle and related to a consumption strategy. He is morally distancing himself from unnecessary consumption and from superficial connotations of favouring appearance. ‘That’s not where I come from’.

There are two pertinent points about the actual manoeuvre or process here. First, Karl is reflexive- he looks backwards and draws on material which has already been set up in his narrative, to move forward. Second, through this reflexivity, he refers to aspects



of his lifestyle to justify and to rationalise his consumption of Apple as distinctive in the sense of being different from other Apple consumers. Overall he is expressing what could be classically described as a lifestyle strategy, but what is noteworthy is that it provides Karl with the means to express uniqueness and, most importantly, this uniqueness is articulated through his engagement with the Apple brand.

This double-back manoeuvre can be seen in other participants' interviews. The table below shows how Marni carries out this manoeuvre in a very similar way, and articulates her own double distinction. Marni is a 44 year old, white female, who works as primary school teacher. She owns many of her own Apple products, but in the past had to use a Sony PC for work. She describes herself as evangelising for Apple, and is in particular an advocate for educational use. To establish her credentials as an Apple consumer she stated:,

I first came across Macs when I first started teaching (1989). I shared a house in London with a lecturer in computer science (or similar title). She used a Mac. She showed me the sort of things her students were creating and I wanted a Mac from then on [...]the other deciding factor was a conference I went on, run by West Sussex LEA - it was about promoting creativity through ICT [information communication technology]. Most of the presenters were using Macs, and showing iLife [...] literally the next day. I bought the iBook. I have never looked back. (Marni)

The table below contains excerpts from Marni's interview when she responded to a question about her perceptions of the Apple community:

<b>Marni</b>	
<b>Distinction 1</b> We Apple consumers are different from non-Apple consumers	e Perhaps the thing that unites us is creativity or rather the potential to be creative, which is in everyone somewhere. Mac's make it easy for anyone.
<b>Distinction 1</b> We Apple consumers are different from non-Apple consumers	f Apple have a distinctive look, that is ultra-stylish. I have a Sony PC, which I quite liked, because the Sony programs are quite creative - I just don't like PCs, though. I don't feel anything about them. They do what they do, and that's about it. Apple products on the other hand look and feel simply fantastic.

<b>Distinction 2</b> I am different from other Apple consumers	g I now choose Apple first because it has all worked so well for the work I do, but looks are secondary for me. I don't subscribe to style over substance. I'm not one of those.
<b>Distinction 2</b> I am different from other Apple consumers	h I used to think they were all quite trendy people, although I'm not so that disproves that theory- I just like gadgets [...] I teach children with complex needs and physical disabilities, who don't produce written work, so we use photos and movies for evidence. I feel I really need an Apple machine for this.

In statement *e*, the pronoun ‘us’ is used to separate Apple consumers from non-Apple consumers, implying not ‘them’. Marni is explicit in the idea of creativity as somehow a unifying force for Apple consumers, implying *we* have it, *they* do not. In statement *f* the ‘othering’ technique is really unambiguous as she plainly refers to non-Apple brands and hardware (Sony) as not having the same aesthetic appeal. Like Karl’s comments, this is an expression of superior taste and notably it is achieved via talking about the Apple brand in direct opposition to another brand. Also, in statement *f* she talks about how, in her opinion, the aesthetic can affect an emotional response, a theme noted several times as being prescribed into the brand. For her Macs are ‘fantastic’, and her tone enthusiastic, whereas in the earlier part of the statement she talks about how, for her, PCs do not inspire any sense of feeling. Both Karl’s and Marni’s comments in distinction one are illustrative of points discussed in chapter three- that strong brand communities have special attributes, which are consciousness of kind, a type of intrinsic connection that members feel and a collective sense of difference from other people who are not in the community (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001, p. 412). Marni, in particular, is very straightforward in saying Mac users are united by creativity and in positioning Macs against PCs and Sony, and this can also be understood through the idea of a shared social capital.

In articulating her distinction two, we can see that Marni’s profession as a specialised educational professional provided much of the context for her being an Apple consumer. In statement *g*, she returns to this, and stresses how the function of an Apple product is the most important thing for her; this aspect is the ‘substance’, it is what matters. In doing so, she distances herself from other people who might favour style and form. ‘I’m not one of those’. It could be read that Marni is implying that

they, in a sense, are lesser than her. This is even though she talks earlier about Apple being stylish and personally enjoying that aspect of the brand. As her telling of her profession unfolds, in statement *h*, she distances herself once again from a sense of collective identity. She tells how she does not perceive herself as a fashionable person and she chooses Apple for the function. Talking about gadgets reinforces that she is trying to emphasise function over design. She also uses her teaching again, reflecting back on this aspect of her lifestyle to justify further why it is that she, in particular, requires an Apple product. Notably, again, she lists the functions as paramount, and the fact that, in performing her role for students who have learning disabilities, having an Apple product can be understood as something she needs rather than simply wants. She uses her professional identity to detach herself from the idea of any gratuitous form of consuming. In both statements *g* and *h* there is an implication that Marni's investment in Apple really allows her to help her students, whereas other people might use Apple products for something a little more superficial.

Other scholars (Elliot and Wattanasuwan 1998) have argued that identity is key to understanding consumers' relationships with brands. The present study takes this idea further and demonstrates, empirically, that there are tensions in this construction of identity- particularly between being part of a group and being an individual- something Simmel discussed in relation to fashion (Simmel 1957 [1904], pp. 541-542). The analysis in this chapter has shown how Apple consumers experience this tension and how they seek to resolve it through a process of 'double distinction'. Although there is no explicit talk of 'class' in the participant interviews, the analysis demonstrate how the Apple brand is being deployed to articulate forms of social distinction. The analysis shows how consumption of the Apple brand is set up as a means of social categorisation and how participants reflect back on aspects of their lifestyle as a context for their Apple consumption, and then use this as a means of rationalising their choice and ultimately their individuality. What the data in this thesis also clearly show in detail is the actual movement between identities through lifestyle and brand.

Over time, Apple has presented branded forms of specialised knowledge about the world. It has done this by drawing on the company's countercultural roots to communicate notions of freedom, highbrow interpretations of revolution, and

individuality (e.g. Think Different), as consistent core brand values. Apple has characterised its products by presenting and representing versions of knowledge work as discussed in the previous chapter (e.g. Get a Mac), the creative industries (e.g. The Macintosh 1984 launch), fashion and cool (e.g. Think Different, and the iPod Silhouettes) and the domestication of technology reworked to represent a trendy and creative lifestyle (e.g. The Apple II), but one that is not readily available to the masses) - it is for a knowing, select group of consumers in society. Being different is a goal and, as Heath and Potter argue, 'In a society that prizes individualism and despises conformity, being a 'rebel' becomes a new aspirational category'. 'Dare to be different' (Heath and Potter 2005, p. 130). By rearticulating these brand values, Apple consumers are reflexively constructing themselves as being different from the masses and aligning themselves alongside other apple consumers. Their consumption takes on symbolic meaning and they are participating in a superior and exclusive counterculture that has style and taste, to form a stylish rebellion. For this first distinction, participants are drawing upon a formal refinement of their tastes to create a distance between themselves and non-Apple consumers. This can be understood using Bourdieu's idea of 'aesthetic distance' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 32). Obviously the Mac is not a 'work of art' in the common sense meaning of the phrase like a sculpture, painting or gallery exhibit, and yet it is regularly described as one or situated as such; it is 'constituted aesthetically'. In the context of his work *Distinction*, Bourdieu was talking about how people can use their aptitude to make readings about objects that are socially designated as meaningless or even ugly, and read them and rationalise them as beautiful. In context of the Apple brand this idea of aesthetic distance in the first distinction explains how it is that participants present readings and rationalisations of the Apple brand as beautiful, and present their reading as an aptitude for perceiving and deciphering the brand which is inseparable from cultural competence. This is a 'practical mastery', which enables the participant to situate themselves as part of a knowing and elite group. That is not to say other people and non-Apple consumers cannot make these readings, but they are not members of the group, because they do not have Apple products.

Participants demonstrate their aesthetic judgment to define themselves as superior. This is a cultural disposition of being different and they are separating themselves out, via their consumption and relationship with Apple. 'Bourdieu [...] argues that theory

is performative, that is, theory brings into effect that which it names' (Skeggs 2004, p. 17). Participants are expressing their branded selves through the discourse of being different, the effect of which is that they perceive themselves this way as a distinct and superior group. Reading of the Apple brand by participants involves having a cultural competence to make sense of and identify with it. Through rationalising their consumption choices and articulating taste and lifestyles, a superior status is produced. By employing different forms of capital, participants legitimise themselves. Consuming Apple is a satisfying experience and this satisfaction seems to stem from being able to draw on their cultural knowledge to make preferred readings of the brand, and aligning themselves with what they understand to be the core brand values- aesthetic, style, taste, fashion, cool, creativity, elitism. The way in which many of the participants spoke emotionally about their relationship with the products, in terms of bonding with and humanising the technology, illustrates how strong the wish is among consumers to convey a deep-seated affinity with the brand values. Through their ability to draw on and understand the world and values of the brand, participants can fit this into their own experiences and translate it into symbolic capital.

Being an Apple consumer is about being part of a group or community, which defines itself as different. Different from what exactly is a vague notion that only has the broad philosophy of 'a mainstream' as a reference point to react against. Sometimes the construct of difference and other(s) implies PC users, or non-creative individuals but this varies somewhat from individual to individual and can be a personal view of what difference means depending on personal lived experience; for instance, the man who is different from his work colleagues because he is the only one with a Mac, or the advertising executive who maintains a critical distance from brands because her professional life causes her to analyse her consumption. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that being different - however vague - is the most prominent feature of the group. It is their special shared feeling. This is understood as a neo-tribal grouping that is 'informal, dynamic and frequently temporal alliance centred around their members' shared lifestyles and tastes' (Shields 1996, p. x in Sweetman 2004, p. 86); on feelings rather than a commitment to particular ideologies or beliefs. Whilst it is hard to agree entirely when it comes to the suggestion of a lack of commitment or commitment to a particular ideology, the ideas of informality, dynamism and temporality help to

understand how people move between membership of the Apple group and then seek to distinguish themselves within or from the group.

Let us return to the term *puissance* from Maffesoli which describes an energy of the people or an 'affective warmth' (Maffesoli 1996, p. 43) to understand what binds Apple consumers. For Apple consumers it is all about the sense of being a special community and experiencing a feeling of autonomy; of 'we the free', that creates their *puissance*. Bourdieu talked about the paradoxical product of negative economic conditioning (Bourdieu 1984, p. 48) and that the notion of freedom engendering a distance. That is, a sense of freedom from necessity at a given moment is an expression of a privileged position, free of the constraints of operating within an economic system. Disposition is defined in relation to others' dispositions and it is at this point that participants really exert their first form of distinction. With this distinction it can be argued that 'objective distance from necessity and from those trapped within it combines a conscious distances which doubles freedom by exhibiting it' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 48). Just as it was argued in chapters five and six that the Apple brand offered the consumer emancipation from a dystopian Orwellian regime and a 'setting them free', participants rearticulate this both explicitly and implicitly. In not so many words they describe autonomy as a privilege position that is theirs, distinct from non-Apple consumers.

Being in a group or community that is different from others (distinction one) has value, but performing a double distinction, that enables consumers to be individuals, has even greater value. This analysis has shown how participants try to claim their own authentic relationship with Apple on the basis of a greater depth of their involvement, and a knowing mode of appreciation, whether real or imagined. By regularly factoring their consumption of Apple into an overall lifestyle strategy to justify their choice and elevate that choice, they are creating a sense of ontological security because it stops them feeling uncomfortable about their choice, and does not bring their own lifestyle into question. It is, though, not particularly new to say that consumption is symbolic, or that constructing a discourse of being different constitutes any type of real life or actual rebellion. What is interesting here is the finer detail of this difference – the method of double distinction. They are creating a group identity - a subculture around the Apple brand; except within that there is an

additional separating-out of identity as a distinct individual: one who understands the unspoken rules of what it is to be different from the mainstream, and one who is also able to rationalise or justify consumption as part of a wider lifestyle strategy, and frequently as a form of critical consumption.

It is my argument that Apple offers its consumer the opportunity to express a branded identity, where the construction of identity as different, and also being perceived as autonomous, is a prime ambition. This is emblematic of contemporary Western consumerism' a *'compulsory individualism'* (see Cronin 2000). 'Being different' here can also be understood in the context of positioning identity within a social hierarchy. The idea of a classed identity is often implied in many of the interviews; that participants perceive themselves as an elite, and that participants regard the Apple community as members of a technocratic creative class.

Yet, for Apple consumers, quite who or what they are different from is not ever clearly articulated. There is regularly an implied rhetorical space of other(s) as being PC users or the mainstream, although a detailed and fixed definition of who the others are is never offered, nor explained. By drawing on and rearticulating various micro-discourses present in the brand, however, I am arguing that participants construct an overall macro-discourse of 'difference'. Furthermore, they are sure that their consumption choice makes them distinct and superior on an individual basis. This vague 'other', the actual specific different from who or what, is a 'discourse blind spot' (Cronin 2008, p. 7). The premise of a discourse of being different is, that there must be 'an other(s)' to be different to, or from, but the other is only perceptible as an implicature. 'It is the blind spot of discourse, that which is not represented but which is implicated in the construction of what is represented' (Cronin 2008, p. 7). Apple consumers perceive themselves as being different, but what they are different from or to is implicated in the construction of difference. It is an inclusion through exclusion.

## **Conclusions**

The analysis of consumer interviews in this chapter demonstrates that Apple's brand messages are successfully appropriated by consumers and used as part of their personal narrative, in a reflexive construction of identity. People do indeed

rearticulate explicit themes such as ‘othering’ PCs and creativity. At times participants even drew upon the exact same language used in branding texts. In doing so they talk a lot about their lifestyles to ‘give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity’ (Giddens 1991, p. 81). The Apple consumers seem to be reproducing, and reinforcing, ideas and beliefs and therefore one may argue power relations, which are already present in the Apple brand. In this sense, one could argue that they are almost perfectly interpellated by Apple to ‘Think Different’. In particular, Apple has been very clever in drawing on a philosophy of counterculture and setting the brand in opposition to notions of a ‘vague’ mainstream. This practice of othering is consistently repeated by participants and to reinforce a sense of group identity between Apple consumers and non-Apple consumers. Through their engagement with the brand, identity is partly a question of accepting this position, or being ‘interpellated’. It marks a point of identification with the existing discourse of the Apple brand and it makes them an ‘Apple person’. This is framed by participants in an affirmative way, though, and produces a positive feeling towards that difference that all the participants seem to gain great pleasure from. They actively celebrate their position as Apple consumers as something that makes them both distinguishable and an elite group. The perception of being different is what unites them; it is that special shared feeling, what Maffesoli has called *puissance*.

Through personal narrative participants often recognise what they perceive as stereotypical characteristics of Apple consumers, yet try to distance themselves from these, and highlight their awareness or disapproval of conspicuous consumption. Participants draw on their own cultural capital in order to make certain readings of the brand and in so doing they recognise a group habitus – as an ‘orientating practice’ (Bourdieu 1986, cited in Clarke, Doel and Housiaux 2003, p. 246). This allows for a collective sense of place of who they are in the world created through their shared taste, and as Bourdieu has famously argued, taste functions as a sort of social orientation.

It implies a practical anticipation of what the social meaning and value of the chosen practice or thing will probably be, given their distribution in social space and the practical knowledge the other agents have of the correspondence between goods and groups (ibid).



Through their narratives and by reflecting on their lifestyle, the participants demonstrate that they feel their consumption positions them. This is the practical anticipation of the social meaning Bourdieu describes, and the value for participants appears to be derived from feelings of being an elite group. However, despite acknowledging a group habitus, most participants then subtly (or not so subtly) choose to renounce it, very often by justifying their own consumption in the context of their individual lifestyle. This tactic is used in distinguishing themselves from the group to project a more individual identity.

Ostensibly, there appears to be an irony here. Being different does not deviate from the central ideas within the Apple brand, 'being different'. Indeed the branding of Apple during the late 1990s was pinned on the TBWA campaign and advertising slogan 'Think Different'. What is the effect of this? The active and freethinking quality of the participant-as-agent facilitated by the double distinction is called into question, because all along, it seems, Apple is hailing its consumers to not-conform. Have consumers as a result simply been subject to interpellation via the ultimate form of brand lock-in? To use Arvidsson's term, are they simply being offered a façade of a 'producerly attitude' here, and governed to think this by brand producer? Is 'the game' in fact fixed?

Apple is apparently offering consumers the tools to articulate ideas and consumers are seemingly articulating those ideas. In discussing critical approaches to branding and brand ontology, the discussion in chapter two engaged with the idea of a limited possibility designed into the brand, or brand-lock in. Based on the analysis and findings in the previous three chapters, so far it would appear that Apple has covered the governance of the consumer from all angles, by inviting their consumer to think differently or feel free. Thus, it may be argued that consumer agency and, in fact any degree of autonomy or perception of that autonomy is created in the first instance by Apple. One could even argue that this is why Apple are so successful as a brand, precisely because they allow the consumer a sense of limitless possibility and emancipation from a system and cycle of consuming.

Before accepting such a conclusion, which renders the consumer quite passive, let us return to the double distinction as an individual reflexive strategy, which sees the individual exert a sense of freedom and difference from what Bourdieu described as ‘the game’. The double distinction has the quality of double-ness in the sense that participants use identity as a context, as they ‘double back’<sup>34</sup> on aspects of their life in a highly reflexive way. This is both a freedom and a difference, as aside to that offered by Apple. This is because, when consumers perform their double distinction, they are often demonstrating that they are highly aware of why and how they choose Apple and conscious of the repertoires provided by the brand that they employ. Overall we could say they are knowing. This can be related to agents putting into practice their structured knowledge and hence, ‘structures must not be conceptualized as simply placing restraints on human agency but as enabling’ (Giddens 1976, cited in Sewell Jr 1992, p. 4) and this chapter has shown how Apple consumers are competent enough to put ‘their structurally formed capabilities to work in creative and innovative ways’. Equally, brands have to presuppose their markets. Brand producers must take their inspiration from empirically observable and intertwining social practices in order to appeal; from this point of view one could say that the brand is recursively reproducing and enacting what people do and say in the real world and reproducing these as structuring principles.

The chapter has shown how participants offer personal rationalisations in distinction two, and that these are often critical of the process of consumer society and of media society to use these terms broadly. Consequently, via the double distinction, participants express a form of knowingness and this knowledge must mean they have some control.

In Bourdieu’s *Distinction*, he uses the analogy of the ‘rules of the game’ to discuss a field and its practices. One can think of brand and participation in this way. Essentially Bourdieu used this analogy to argue that the strategies that an individual may use ‘to act and to be’ in the world come from a person’s aptitude for understanding and playing ‘the game’. Apple participants in this study have shown a clear aptitude for and strong understanding of ‘the rules’, and their conduct and

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<sup>34</sup> To double-back meant here in the sense of ‘go or come back to place, condition, or activity where one has been before’.

explanations are strategically deployed to try to dominate the field. As a consumer they cannot be locked-in if they adopt an objective stance towards their practice and distinguish themselves as not being locked-in. They accept the repertoires the brand offers them, but instead of being locked-in they perform a distancing technique because they know how to play the game 'as a game'.

## *Chapter eight*

### *Conclusions*

#### **Introduction**

This thesis has added to and extended existing studies of Apple and has contributed to the wider debate about how brands work in contemporary consumer society. The comprehensive approach of using critical theory, semiotic analysis of branding material and thematic analysis of interviews with Apple consumers has allowed for an exploration of the ontology of contemporary brands and branding through the Apple case study, and particularly the relationship between brand producer and consumer. In doing so, it has considered what might constitute participation from the consumer's perspective which, in turn, has led to a number of questions about how and why consumers engage with particular brands today, including; 'to what extent is consumer participation constrained by the logic of the brand?' and 'where does value reside and what form does value take for the consumer?' These different issues - the nature of participation, the constraints on participation, and the question of value are all brought together and explored through the notion of 'double distinction' that is developed in this thesis.

The broad aim of this research was to understand the relationship between the Apple brand and Apple consumers. In trying to achieve this, I undertook an historical analysis of the Apple brand and interviews with Apple consumers, focusing on their relationship with the brand over time. This enabled me to explore the idea that a brand is both consistent and evolving and has a dynamic relationship with time (Lury 2004). It also enabled me to explore the relationship between brand producer and consumer, as both were considered vital to brand and branding processes. Undertaking a historical analysis of the brand and a set of interviews with consumers facilitated a critical examination of the practices of both the producer and the consumer and the ways in which the relationship between them was sustained.

It was of course necessary to review literature on relevant and related topics - branding ontology, consumer participation, lifestyle and identity - and to consider

what had already been written about the Apple brand, as well as the work of authors who have already argued that brands are cultural resources for identity work. I also chose more than one method of analysing data: a semiotic analysis of the brand and a thematic analysis of interviews given by Apple consumers. This mixed method approach was identified as the best way to meet the aims of the project, as it allowed for an understanding of how brand meaning is constructed by both producers and consumers. It allowed for an in-depth analysis of the Apple brand and consumer activity in relation to brands to explore how brands mediate specific kinds of personal and lifestyle meanings, which are part of an overall lifestyle strategy for consumers. Therefore the methods help to examine both sides of the brand 'coin', exploring how the brand acts as an interface (Lury 2004) and works as a conceptual space, both connecting and embodying the complex relationship between the two parties. The inclusion of the consumer interviews and subsequent analysis of these was very important in meeting the research aim, because it allowed for the study of the consumers' views in order to develop the key argument of the thesis: although the Apple brand acts as a symbolic resource that has some authoritarian effect anticipating and governing consumer activity, this effect is not total and the Apple consumer is not fully or finally subjugated to the brand. In the rest of this conclusion, I summarise the main arguments of the thesis before going on to address questions of reflexivity, audiences for this research and possible areas for future research.

### **Brand consumer and producer: 'prosumption' or consumer participation?**

This thesis has argued that the brand is constituted by both producer and consumer and it has, through empirical enquiry, highlighted the activities of the consumer in producing and maintaining the brand. In this way, the research provides an advance on previous research on branding which has either been purely theoretical or, when case study-based, has neglected to offer specific and detailed analysis of the role of the consumer in producing and maintaining brands. By offering an empirical study of brands where 'the words of the consumer' are central, this thesis has enabled a better understanding of what consumers think brands 'do', and what consumers think they 'do' when they 'consume' brands. This has enabled an engagement with the literature on 'prosumption'.

Prosumption, an activity that involves both production and consumption (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010, p. 14) is a concept generally attributed to Alvin Toffler and was first articulated in his book *The Third Wave* (Toffler 1980). In more recent literature (Beer and Burrows 2010, Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004, Zwick et al. 2010), prosumption is used to describe scenarios where consumers are put to work by corporations or where they voluntarily enter into productive relationships that involve some element of co-creation.

Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) argued that critical analysis has been somewhat guilty of separating out producer and consumer giving the examples of both Marx who, despite understanding that production always involves some form of consumption, clearly believed that production was pre-eminent in the capitalism of his day (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010, p. 14), and Baudrillard (1998 [1970]) who wrote of ‘the cathedrals of consumption’ and argued that, in the late twentieth century, consumption lay hold to the whole of life.

In chapter two, I argued that a focus on ‘consumer participation’, rather than ‘prosumption’ offered a better framework for exploring consumers’ relationship with the brand as it enabled a wider lens on consumer practices that went beyond the simple notion of consumers being ‘put to work’ and having their free labour ‘subsumed’ by the brand. Another chief reason for not adopting prosumption as a useful concept for this thesis is that it is so often now presented as an ahistorical idea and/or applied uncritically to explain consumer activity – particularly in online and Web 2.0 environments. For example, Ritzer and Jurgenson’s (2010) examples of prosumption, although critically considered, include Wikipedia, social networking sites Facebook and Twitter, blogging, or ecommerce sites such as EBay and Amazon, where consumers along with the retailer create the market and do much of the work ordering products and then writing online reviews for products and services (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010, p. 19). Zwick et al. (2010), although giving considerable attention to the discussion of wider marketing practice, also emphasise digital marketing and online environments, overlooking offline and face-to-face activity and experiential marketing, and significantly omitting the role of social capital from their discussion, which has subsequently been highlighted in this thesis.

In addition to the points above, Toffler's (1980) original explanation of prosumption also omits the notion of social-capital and, beyond his economic-centric discussion, he does not explore at all the reasons *why* consumers might participate in certain practices of 'prosumption'. An area where this study has therefore contributed to discussions around consumer activity is to address *why* consumers participate with brands, concluding that brands are used to express identity and as a means of social distinction. This thesis contributes to discussions of prosumption and understanding contemporary forms of consumption in its focus on both consumption and production of brands as related activities, and the insights it offers into how consumers are active in the production of brands. However, it takes issue with the idea that this production activity by consumers is best characterised by the concept 'prosumption' and prefers, instead, to locate this activity with the context of consumer *participation*, which offers a more critical approach which not simply describes the activity, nor focuses exclusively on online environments, but instead asks the 'why' questions.

Whereas Zwick et al.'s work and that of Ritzer and Jurgenson deals with important, but broad, issues of the evolving and operational characteristics of capitalism, this thesis has drilled down into the Apple case and reflected upon the details of specific consumer activity, and thus the nuanced aspects of consumer's practice(s) to answer some of the 'why?' questions. Ritzer and Jurgenson argue that prosumers 'go to work' because 'they like it', suggesting that the potential exploitation of consumer activity that arises from, for example, sharing and creating and maintaining online content, is not a problem for consumers. However, these authors have not considered what consumers have to say about these forms of engagement with the brand or *why* 'they like it'. This is where the research presented here differs from previous studies. This thesis contributes directly to the 'why' question showing how consumers gain direct value from participating in the brand. As the 'double distinction' concept was developed to illustrate, not only do consumers gain value through participation by gaining a sense of being right in who one is meant to be but they also refer to their lifestyles to produce a second distinction where they perceive and articulate themselves as individuals, as unique and special, thereby gaining further value from brand participation. Thus, the arguments presented in this thesis engage with the notion of prosumption in a critical way, by moving beyond description of *how*

consumers help produce and maintain the brand to *why* they do so, directly linking ideas about social capital and brands.

As a final point in relation to the existing prosumption literature and the authors' work addressed in chapter two such as that of Ritzer and Jurgenson, one can argue that they are essentially exploring whether there is an observable shift in the economic landscape to tentatively claim 'what may be' a new form of capitalism. The Apple case study offers riposte to this. Ritzer and Jurgenson argue that capitalism today has more difficulty controlling prosumers and as a result the exploitation of prosumers is less clear-cut than traditional capitalism. In relation to branding, the Apple case study has demonstrated an example of a brand that offers repertoires of freedom and actively encourages the consumer to 'go create'. The thesis has argued that such discourses are both implicit and explicit within the brand architecture and this is neither ahistoric nor peculiar to Web 2.0.

Extending the point above, this thesis has argued, instead, that constructing a theme of freedom is part of Apple's inner brand logic and may be the answer to what makes Apple such a successful brand. So, in terms of the existing arguments on prosumption and the evolution of capitalism, I have presented a counter-case that shows how one brand has cleverly incorporated shifts in consumer expectation and behaviour into its repertoire and, as a result of this brand strategy, has not lost any 'perceived' control over consumer expectation or experienced loss in profits. Contrary to the arguments of Ritzer and Jurgenson, this thesis has argued that the Apple brand has in fact adapted over time to withstand shifts in late capitalism and that means 'prosumption' does not offer any threat to the current system within which Apple operates, precisely because the Apple brand already incorporates late capitalism and its underlying philosophies: then crucially and effectively 'sells' these ideas back to the consumer.

The notion of perception or what I describe above as perceived control is key here: this is because it may at first 'seem' that this serves as one example of how consumers are locked-in to the Apple brand. This is because Apple constructs the idea that their consumer is an autonomous individual, therefore one might argue that it is actually Apple permitting the consumer to act or think in certain ways: to have a sense of reflexivity and individuality. However, there is in fact something a little more



complex happening that is not summarised by brand lock-in, and it is something more subtle than consumers simply expressing a broad sense of freedom prescribed by the brand. This can be argued because the double distinction is evidence of consumers behaving in ways outside those limits prescribed by the brand. This is because the second manoeuvre is the consumer exerting a sense of *personalised* difference. It is difference beyond the broadest sense implied by the brand; it is difference specific to the individual related to his or her own unique lifestyle. This is explicated in the next section, which sets out the details of the double distinction argument.

### **Double distinction**

Earlier chapters, particularly chapter two, engaged with the idea that the relationship between the consumer and the brand could be set up in a number of ways and in doing so considered the notion of participation. Questions were raised about what it actually means to ‘participate’ and the level of agency that consumers might experience, and what consumers actually ‘do’ with brands. In chapter seven, these questions are answered through my development of the notion of ‘double distinction’. Double distinction explains how participants employ the Apple brand to distinguish themselves both from non-Apple consumers (the first distinction) and then from other Apple consumers, when they assert their individuality and difference from them (the second distinction). The second distinction is performed in a specific manoeuvre that has a ‘double-back’ quality where participants reflect upon the narrative and biographical details they construct in their interviews and then express aspects of what they present as an ‘individual’ lifestyle in order to position themselves as unique, different from the generic ‘Apple consumer’.

The idea of double distinction emerged from the unique combination of analysis of brand materials and consumer interviews that shaped this thesis and by employing the work of Bourdieu in the conceptual framing of this idea. The analysis of brand materials alone would have provided insight into the ‘logic’ of the brand and how Apple positions the consumer, but would not have facilitated greater insight into how consumers engage with this logic and this positioning. Considering the consumer as a central part of the brand and analysing what the participants have to say about Apple and the ways in which they *actively* engage with and use the brand has allowed me to develop this notion of double distinction.

As a means of understanding this process I drew significantly upon the work of Bourdieu (1984) outlined earlier in the thesis, which then informed the claim that Apple consumers assert a sense of unique individualism as social identity. Where I differ from Bourdieu's seminal work is that whereas he was concerned with the ways in which individual consumption could be categorised and related to habitus as the expression of taste and then, importantly for Bourdieu understood through groups or social categorisations, I have concentrated on how value is generated for and by the individual brand consumer. To be clear, Bourdieu correlated his data on individuals to the social categorisation of French middle classes, and he emphasised how consumption was not so much an individual activity but in point of fact directly related to a class, group and rank. Rather than focus on the nuanced ways in which the individual makes the self 'distinct' *within* that class, in his analysis he emphasised the social-cultural systems and structures which shaped and maintained *the group*. I identify and present the second distinction to demonstrate the nuanced ways in which the individual makes the self unique to their group.

The tension between imitation and individuality and their relation to consumption is a long-standing topic of interest for media studies, cultural theorists, social scientists and arts and humanities scholars. This research offers empirical work on Apple that complements pre-existing work. It extends to a new interpretation of the Apple brand using the work of the theorist Bourdieu, and examines existing knowledge from an alternative empirical perspective. This means that the findings and arguments in the thesis can make a claim about one specific way in which brand participants actively 'participate' with Apple, and the particular manoeuvre between group and individual distinction they then exercise to construct a sense of self-identity. Not only is this thesis a synthesis of other scholars' work tested with the application of the critical theory/brand analysis/interview approach, but also the findings offer some new ways to think about how consumers move between imitation and individuality through brands. It also focuses on how the Apple brand is factored into a group habitus, to be expressed as individual 'social' and 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1984). The Apple brand is social capital in the sense that as *an object* it is put to use as a symbolic resource, and participants legitimate their identity to convert it into something of

value to them which ‘is the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability’ (Bourdieu 1984, p. 291).

The discussion of double distinction relates directly to the theoretical idea of ‘brand lock-in’. It may be argued that in performing this double distinction, Apple consumers are simply operating within frames of reference defined by Apple, ‘inter-determinacy within limits’. As I have already stated this argument would make sense given that the notions of freedom and individuality are central to the brand. Any expressions of these characteristics could, therefore, be interpreted as examples of precisely how the process of brand lock-in works, but arguing for brand lock-in is neither my aim nor conclusion, because I do not think such a polarisation is even useful. Instead, the research challenges the idea that consumers can only entirely behave in certain ways and just within the limits of the brand.

Where this thesis is different and where I have been able to contribute to theoretical discussion is to demonstrate theoretical arguments on inter-determinacy within limits through the case study of Apple, alongside the development of the idea of a double distinction argument. Significantly I have demonstrated that it is the consumer who performs a type of double back-manoeuvre where they exert their own unique difference. At times this liberates the consumer from the constraints of brand-logic and lock-in, because the double distinction is unique to each consumer. Yes, the general notion of individuality is cleverly embedded within the Apple brand, but the double distinction stems from the *particularised* consumer’s sense of self. While on first inspection, it may ‘seem’ that structure has a totalising effect and any sense of agency the consumer may have is denied, actually the Apple brand embodies a much more complex relationship between structure and agency. A closer look at consumers’ relationship to the brand suggests that consumers put the rules and resources of the brand into operation in a range of different circumstances that are unique to the individual. This is key. The thesis discussion therefore moves away from the logic of the brand always being the rationale behind consumer participation. Furthermore it argues that participation is sometimes, *but not always*, a consequence of the brand or structure. Rules and resources cannot exist without the agency of people (Giddens 1991), even if people’s agencies recurrently strengthen those rules. Following this, I am not arguing that brands present inter-determinacy which is

*limitless*, or that flexibility is perfect, but I *am* arguing that in recognising the limits prescribed to them, consumers may elect to flout those limits. It could even be posited that the success of the Apple brand is reliant on the consumer's initiative: to self-govern aspects of the community, to help each other, to trade information, to promote and importantly to trade social relations and the generation of relational value and social capital. The analysis offered here has demonstrated that this is one of the forms that participation took for participants in this study. In addition, and significantly, the participants are frequently aware of the branding process and assert a critical awareness of consumption in general, all of which could be said to constitute a form of resistance to the idea of being 'locked-in. Although the brand does provide patterning for activity, Apple consumers exact some self-governing principles and are, in some cases, highly aware of marketing processes and brand logic. This too can be taken as evidence towards a resistance of being locked-in.

A theoretical contribution the thesis has made is that consumers' recognition of marketing tools and tactics, and the articulation of a critical awareness of consumption in general, suggests that brand professionals may well have to think of much more creative ways of managing consumer activity. In light of shifts in marketing practice within digital environments, we might specifically ask, 'must successful brands now offer their consumer an open-door structure?', and 'should the study of brands now turn to the contemporary consumer's awareness of brand logic, since brand producers are often dealing with a knowing consumer who understands "the rules of the game?"' Moving from the general to the specific, the findings show that one of the sources of value for the Apple consumer stems from exacting a type of consumption strategy, a schema of things that is linked to an articulation of identity, which works as an ontological anchor. The value of this for the consumer lies in a form of social capital, which can accrue to the individual or a group in the double distinction and is not necessarily entirely managed by the brand producer.

What might someone interested in brands learn from the Apple case study that has wider significance for the study of brands? 'The other' is an important factor in the formation of a strong brand community (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001); the thesis shows that the exertion of uniqueness is important to the individual within that group, and that consumers equally use the Apple brand to articulate individualism. The

consumption of brands in the contemporary everyday has become a medium to express forms of social distinction where consumers express aspects of their identity as forms of social distinction. The Apple case study suggests that consumer participation involves a particular type of negotiation and manoeuvring between exerting distinction from others who are *non-consumers* of the brand and also exerting a distinction from others who are *consumers* of the *same* brand. To use a phrase from Simmel (1957 [1904]), these two distinctions are not necessarily ‘antagonistic forces’ as he described when talking about fashion, imitation and social equalisation. It is just that the articulation of the brand and of identity has a dual (a double) rather than a *dualistic* purpose. In terms of branding more generally, double distinction can be summed up as a tactical move between the social capital of a group and the articulation of individuality. This could usefully be applied to other brand case studies in order to explore the ubiquity of this process.

### **Limitations of the study**

There are inevitably limitations to any piece of research and important lessons to be learnt from reflecting on these. With respect to this study of the Apple brand and consumers’ relationship to the brand, it might have been valuable to investigate the Apple consumer more extensively by speaking to many more Apple consumers and even comparing participation with the brand globally, in order to be able to make wider and more general claims about Apple. However, the confines of PhD research mean that some boundaries and cut-offs must be set, particularly in light of Apple’s constant product innovation. A study of the Apple brand could almost constitute a lifetime of enquiry. Time and cost have prevented this. Equally, a larger project might have dealt with a larger dataset of branding texts and applied content analysis to the data collected to map an ‘archaeology’ of the Apple brand. Furthermore, it would be really interesting to apply methods of analysis from psychology and neuro-marketing (Plassmann et al. 2007, for instance) in order to explore in much greater scope the construction of identity and the relationship between brands and ontological security. A comparative study could have been another approach. Comparing Apple with another iconic brand, for example, could have enabled me to identify, more confidently, those practices that are peculiar to Apple and those that are more widely

applicable and so assess the extent to which the arguments for ‘double distinction’ are relevant beyond the Apple case.

For those intellectually interested in the Apple brand, the loss of Steve Jobs in 2011 is an extremely significant event. The fortunes of Apple as a company and as a brand ‘without Jobs’, and the theorising of media rhetoric on Jobs is an area of study ripe for academic enquiry to counter and interrogate the claims about the centrality of Jobs to the Apple brand in more popular accounts and media reportage. An area where this thesis contributes is in its detailed examination of the role of Jobs regarding his ill health and death and how it was incorporated into the overall brand strategy, but this work could be developed into a more comprehensive investigation of the strategic role of CEOs in brand architecture. It would be particularly interesting to investigate how cultural and social discourses around individuals as part of a brand are kept in circulation and incorporated after a key individual dies. Cases could include, for example, Coco Chanel and the Chanel brand, and Alexander McQueen and the McQ and McQueen fashion brands - both of these fashion brands have remained successful following the death of their namesakes.

### **Reflexivity in the research process**

In the methodology chapter, I explained that I have been an Apple consumer for over ten years, added to which I also work as a branding practitioner, analysing and developing strategies for global brands. My clients have included supermarket banks, pharmaceutical companies, alcohol brands and international clothing ranges, meaning that I have first-hand commercial experience of how global brands ‘work’ and have been involved in the construction and evolution of brand strategies from an experiential point of view. However, and most significantly, in researching this thesis and analysing my data I also experience the subject position of a postgraduate researcher and a part-time academic engaging with critical theory.

Heidegger (1962) contended that people observe the same phenomenon in different ways and will therefore bring to bear his or her lived experience, specific understandings, and personal background to understanding that phenomenon. This way of *being-in-the-world* means that researchers cannot help but bring their own sense of being-in-the-world into their work and I have had to consider my subjective

motives and the effect of my background as an Apple consumer and brand practitioner on the research.

As a starting point, prior to beginning the research for this thesis, my consumption of Apple and reflection on related practices definitely directed a desire to understand more about the relationship between the Apple brand and the consumer, since in my own experience of consuming Apple, it felt instinctively as if there was something enjoyable and of value over and above the functionality of the devices I was using, which led me to continue my consumption of and interaction with Apple. Later into the research, my identity as an Apple consumer allowed me easy access to the wider Apple community and, because I am both consumer and researcher, I was treated with considerable respect. The communities I approached to volunteer to be interviewed provided me with encouragement, enthusiasm and support, because I was both an 'Apple person' and a researcher.

In terms of working within the marketing industry, specifically on branding, I was aware of a possible conflict or tension in aiming to produce a thesis that was critical - in the true sense of the word - of branding practices rather than simply a piece of market research. Would it be possible to stand back from the practices with which I was so familiar and be critical of what they mean for producer-consumer relations more broadly? This was all the more difficult because the marketing industry has been accused of 'appropriating' critical theory on a superficial level and of producing 'quasi-academic knowledge' (Moor 2007), and I was keen to avoid being seen to be doing this. In reflecting on these concerns, I began to challenge the dichotomy between marketing and academic research that these criticisms imply. Many contemporary branding agencies now employ analysts who are educated to postgraduate and doctoral levels. These analysts have a deep understanding of theory and of research methods and methodology, thus making accusations of 'quasi-academic knowledge' too strong a charge. Simply because knowledge is generated and applied within a commercial environment and to a short deadline does not necessarily mean it is an inferior form of knowledge. What is important is that the roots of knowledge are acknowledged and that we can be reflective about how our experiences shape the way we look at and understand things. My own hybridity - as brand practitioner and academic researcher of brands - generates a specific set of

questions and concerns and a particular methodological approach to address these. As a brand practitioner, I was acutely aware of the importance of consumers to brands but was not always happy with how consumers were understood in the industry. Thus, I was determined to design a research project that enabled me to examine consumers' relationships to the brand from the consumer's as well as the producer's perspectives and to find a research design and method(s) that would enable me to do this. In this way, my particular subjectivity as a hybrid academic-practitioner produced my research design and methods and ultimately the knowledge produced through the research.

Throughout this research, I have been careful to reflect upon how the different aspects of my identity have influenced the design, direction and execution of the work. In the methodology chapter, I have shown how my interests, as well as existing theory and gaps in research, helped shape the design of the research and the methods employed. An example of how this occurred is how I drew on my commercial branding experience to contemplate the relevance of the branding theory. As I started to engage with theory, I constantly reflected upon my own experience of the industry to consider any overlaps between theory and (my experiences of) practice. The intention was not to build alternative theory based solely on my own experience but to use that experience to help interrogate theory and design a piece of empirical research that could test those theories in a more consistent and rigorous way. My experience helped me identify gaps in the literature, particularly regarding how consumer agency was being understood. For instance, when reading and examining the literature on prosumption, I was also working with a digital marketing agency making recommendations on how to develop and encourage consumer-generated content and consumer engagement. This dual perspective encouraged reflection about the value of the concept of prosumption for capturing the everyday experiences of consumers, with which I was familiar. This was not only very interesting personally, but was generative in terms of the thesis because it led me to think about other ways in which consumers' relationships with brands might be captured and explained and to how one might 'get at' consumer experience through empirical research. In this way, I have employed the practice of reflexivity- a 'thoughtful, conscious self-awareness' (Finlay 2002, p. 532) to both situate and justify my research and, through this,



transformed subjectivity in research from a ‘problem’ to an ‘opportunity’ (Finlay 2002, p. 531).

### **Audiences for this research and further research**

This thesis should be of interest to media studies scholars, cultural theorists, sociologists of consumption and marketing/business studies scholars who want to understand more about how brands work and/or who are particularly interested in deploying brands with a better understanding of how consumer agency works in contemporary consumer society.

It will be of particular interest to those who are researching participatory culture and studying digital marketing methods as it draws attention to the more detailed facets of participation such as identity work and the generation of social capital, and how the consumers express this. This thesis has demonstrated the value of empirical research that includes the voice of the consumer and future research can build on this to help move beyond theories of branding that may oversimplify the producer-consumer relationship and/or focus on the corporate subsumption of surplus value at the expense of understanding the value for the brand *for the consumer*.

The thesis will also appeal directly to Apple consumers. This is because it provides a detailed and sustained study of Apple with many examples of the brand, which will appeal to the Apple audience who may wish to inquire about the history of the brand. In addition, we have seen how Apple are a long-standing and iconic brand with a loyal consumer community, and that the members of that community who took part in this study showed themselves to be interested in the actual workings of the brand as well as expressing an interest in brands in the much wider contexts of consumption and consumer society.

Another audience for this research is marketing practitioners who will be interested in the case study because it provides a thoroughly researched study of a ‘super-brand’. Furthermore, market research is increasingly interested in measuring online consumer participation to try to quantify meaning for its clients and at looking at new ways to understand and utilise the ‘semantic web’ to try to quantify sentiment around brands. This research should therefore be of interest to marketers as it offers detail on specific

meanings and insight into the ways that consumers actually make meaning around a brand.

### **Concluding comments**

This particular study of brands set out to incorporate the consumer into the research discourse and, in so doing, the research includes the ideas of identity work and consumer participation. It has sought to explore how consumers engage with brands; what is their role, and why are - and how might brands be - of value and importance to consumers? The thesis also explores the Apple brand within a research setting to gain a fuller understand of the ontology of a brand. In studying Apple and the trajectory of a super-brand, more has been revealed about the active role of the consumer in order to be able to make claims about how the brand evolves as a relationship between the two parties; and the importance of the consumer and consumer agency in this process, which it has argued for, is more than temporary agency for the consumer.

In terms of the possibilities presented for the continued understanding of brands and contemporary consumer practices, the Apple case study has been informative of issues and tensions that exist between the politico-economic structure of brands and the collective social power of the consumer. These issues are much more subtle than either current marketing rhetoric (which extols the 'free-consumer' in a digital age) or the more academic literature (that tends to stress the ways that consumers are restricted by the organisational effects of a brand) would suggest. One key implication of the thesis is that the study of brands could now look to the contemporary consumers' recursive awareness, since brand producers are increasingly dealing with a highly savvy consumer who is, to varying degrees, 'knowing' of how branding works.

The thesis has demonstrated how, when applied to understanding brands, social capital can be exclusionary. One reason why people identify with brands is because of the distinctions that brands confer. However the analysis of the Apple brand presented in this thesis has shown how, when using brands to make social distinctions, Apple consumers make a *double* distinction. That is, we have seen the way in which Apple

consumers talked about how belonging to an Apple community made them feel 'other' and 'different' from non-Apple consumers and how they employed Apple as a means of group identity both 'synchronous and reciprocal' (Simmel 1957 [1904] p. 544). However, and most importantly we have also seen how, in the same act, consumers employ the Apple brand to create a sense of individuality.

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# Appendix i

## Question guide

### Demographics

Sex, Profession, (FT /PT contract /freelance) Age, Ethnicity

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### Product Details

- *Which Apple products do you use?*

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### iPod & iTunes

Just iTunes

Desk top – which one

Lap top –which one

At home, work, both

- *What type of Apple user would you describe yourself as? – e.g exclusive only use Apple or do you use another make of PC, non-Apple music download sites, another brand mp3 player as well as Apple iPod?*
- *How long have you been an Apple consumer*
- *If at work is Apple your choice or your employers?*
- *Exclusively or in combination with other technology brands i.e non (Apple mp3, non Apple PC*

### Activities (iPod /iTunes)

- *Why did you choose an iPod over another brand of mp3?*
- *How long have you had it?*
- *What model / colour is it?*
- *Was this your conscious choice of model? Why?*
- *What are your thoughts about the design/ the way it looks?*
- *Do you take your iPod everywhere you go?*
- *Do you have your iPod on display or do you for instance...tuck it into a pocket*

*/ handbag?*

- *How do you use iTunes, e.g. storing & arranging your music, rating tracks, sharing playlists, podcasting?*
- *What is it about iTunes? Why is it so popular do you think?*

### Activities ( laptop/PC)

- *Why did you choose an Apple computer?*
- *How long have you had it?*
- *Where do you use your computer and what do you use your computer for?*
- *If you use an Apple computer for work is there a specific technical /functional reason for this?*
- *What are your thoughts about way Apple products look?*

### Being an Apple Consumer

- *Do you think there is an archetypal Apple Consumer?*
- *Do you know any other Apple consumers?*
- *Do you communicate /network with other Apple Consumers i.e MUG, user forums etc?*
- *Are you active in your MUG?*
- *Do you feel an affiliation with other Apple Consumers?*
- *What, if anything do you think using an Apple products say about you?*

## Appendix ii

### Sample interview

11/10/2006, 09:52

hi chloe  
xxxx here

Hi Xxxx. Are you good to go?

yup but if i disappear it's because bulldog have called about my broadband  
it's been down for 5 weeks now  
will only be for a few minutes though

Ugh oh. OK no problems - equally if you need to disappear for work or something, I know this is on your work time

09:55  
no problem

1st off - can you tell me which Apple products you own?

right  
1x Quad Core G5 PowerMac  
1x MacBook  
iPod 60GB  
1x 12" PowerBook G4  
1x Airport Express  
that's all the functional stuff  
i have a small mountain of laptops for spares  
Is this all for work?

pretty much  
the macbook i use for all my communications

Are you an exclusive Apple consumer or do you have any other brand PC's / mp3 player etc?

powermac for the work that requires more speed/power  
i have a PC which I built for games and the occasional hard drive which needs a virus scan/spyware removal  
i have 3rd party speakers for my ipod  
and an xbox360 but i don't think i could justify that for work

and how long have you had all these things / how long have you been an Apple consumer?

i've been using apple computers for the past 17 years  
but only really buying my own for the past 10  
10:00

the macbook and powermac were purchased this year

Fabulous...\*just doing the maths in my head\* so since about 89?

yup

moved to brighton aged 7 with my family

Interesting, so were your family existing Apple consumers / mac users? They must have been quite early adopters?

no my dad was given a mac classic by the university  
then the brighton polytechnic

Can you remember when?

..ish

I know for sure, it was august 1989.

Any memories of your early use, as a family? Things you did on it?

He worked at the poly and everyone was given one. It was a big deal when he brought it home. Mainly because it was a computer and not everyone had one at home. It was like we were rich or something. I remember my school mates being dead impressed and coming over to play games after school on it and we'd write these really lame programmes from the book on it using dos or autocad, that we literally just copied from the manual and didn't really understand. I also used to get this one book out of worthing library the whole time, which was about computers and had lots of pictures of flow charts – and that's how it started. I used to like, make it draw a picture of a house using about 5 lines in 2d. We didn't use it for printing and word or anything. I hadn't done it at school yet. I think it was totally for games.

& what made you decide to carry on with Macs?

didn't have a choice, i was 7

mostly it was the poor experience with DOS at the time

i found OS 7 to be much more stable and user friendly

once i'd got up to speed using the mac at home, windows seemed slow and clunky.

We did word perfect at school which is hilarious now & then when I got to collage it was windows everything, but I have always had Macs at home. The finally I could use Macs at uni.

10:05

OK..& can you just explain a little bit about what sort of things you do both personally & for work with your products these days?

Yup i'm self employed & i run MacAmbulance

have been doing that for the past 7 years around brighton and sussex

i provide IT support for approx 320 individuals and businesses

which can range from computer support, networking, installations, cabling, software,

hardware, sometimes mobile phones and home cinema systems  
graphic design, web design  
very rarely multimedia work  
i use both my computers for this  
the macbook does the remote admin side of things  
because i have it with me most of the time  
and can log into servers and PCs over the internet to fix problems  
the powermac does all my design and creative work

would you mind telling me what types of industries / sorts of clients you have?  
Also do you work from home?

i work both from home and on-site  
10:10

my clients range from design studios, development consultants and architects to self employed home workers, graphic designers, illustrators, musicians

Wow you must know a lot of Apple consumers - I might come back to this. In your experience is there an archetypal Apple person?

there are a few  
there's the evangelical type  
who extol the virtues and get caught in mac/pc arguments with PC users  
they're often the ones who know least about apple  
then there's the serious users who realise the advantages of both platforms and choose whichever's suited for their needs  
but i think all apple users feel a certain affection and loyalty towards its products  
apple's the underdog and is seen to be challenging microsoft's dominance  
and winning in some areas such as music, creativity, user experience, security

Interesting. And do you think there is a certain perception of Apple consumers as people - either imagined or real ?

10:15

the perception is most likely that apple users are snobs

Snobs? Can you expand a little?

k

like if you look at someone driving a TVR or ferrari, you invariably think that the person driving it is rich and ostentatious  
a friend in sheffield had to get rid of his TVR because whenever he drove it he could see people mouthing the word wanker at him  
i think a lot of PC users don't understand Macs and see them as a sort of elite club

..."elite club" can you say a little more?

i have a lot of clients who are simple home PC users  
mostly i install more memory and get rid of spyware  
in talking to them about macs and how maybe they should consider getting one  
their responses are invariably "oh i don't understand macs, what kind of computer are they?"

10:20

their user experience with PCs has mentally associated a computer with microsoft windows

that the operating system is actually the computer and not just one way of using the hardware to achieve what you want

i've always thought that windows is patronising, that it explains everything so that the user forgets how to do any kind of self-initiated research. People also think Macs are too expensive and they are just for those xxxxe people who buy Bang & O sound systems and have Jacuzzi baths in their houses, but they don't realize the value and longevity of a Mac, so its actually an investment.

OK. & what is your perception of the Apple brand. What do you like about Apple?

i like the fact that apple has a clear direction which luckily appeals to me

what do you mean by clear direction?

well for example

the recent switch to intel

long awaited

and very difficult

but they prepared for 5 years almost

gave everyone 18 months notice

and brought in new computers that are faster than ever before and able to run windows

bulldog just called, can us hang on 5 mins

10:25

no probs

they're running tests so i'll carry on with you.

the development of the ilife suite is another example

integrated applications that allow the user to generate their own content

and use it in their own way

burn photos as a slideshow in imovie and idvd

and things just work.

OK I see what you mean now

Like, if i buy a digital camera, i plug it in and iphoto recognises it, imports the photos and displays them. Literally do not have to do anything, but plug it in or if i'm designing a page in iweb Pages, i can drag a photo directly out of the library, no html, no webdesign courses, that is pretty awesome if you think about the average person. or if i'm changing my desktop background, i can do the xxxxe no drivers needed, I could go on.

I understand you. Lets talk about Apple advertising.

Which ads over the years are memorable to you?

not many

their advertising presence has always been muted. From what I remember they aren't even on the tv much, but mainly trade magazines and the website now.

10:30

there was the "think different" campaign in the early 90s with Einstein and Neil Armstrong and the really famous 1984 one, but I never saw that 1<sup>st</sup> hand. I wasn't alive!!!!!! I've seen it loads of places though, but it's like 30 years old or something.

Broadband, have to unplug things from the line

OK

10:40

sorry they're making me do all kinds of tests on the line  
might have to get BT out here

but at the time I wasn't sure what the message was, looking back I think it was about individuality and the think different ones the xxxxe thing.

Apple's always followed the direction it's set out rather than adapting to fit the market

Microsoft has always spread itself too thin by focussing on dominating all aspects of the market

OK. We're nearly there. What about the Apple 'aesthetic'?

You know the designs - what are your thoughts on that?

10:45

Apple computers were initially pretty similar to PCs in terms of design  
then with the iMac and iPod, Apple really started to design their objects with care  
increasing their price, but also their desirability

10:50

the iMacs were pretty revolutionary

\*extremely difficult to service\*

and expensive

when compared to PCs

but they were a joy to use

which is the really important part

why revolutionary - the design you mean?

the Performa 5400 was an all-in-one design before the iMac

but the iMac was much more contained, rounded, sculpted even

and was Apple's first attempts at dropping the prices to appeal to more people

for years the computer experience was beige boxes, boring square monitors

beige clacky keyboards

the iMac brought funky colours in its design, like they'd go with your bedroom or

décor. People matching them to their bedspread and stuff

but also a feeling that it wasn't a boring work tool then there was Jon Ive.

he designed the iMac, the iPod, the iMac G4 and many other products

Apple gave him a million dollars and carte blanche to do whatever he wanted

I heard he was a furniture designer before? I don't know that much about his history

but he certainly helped turn Apple away from their near demise.

I AM SORRY I do need to shoot off now. I have to sort out this bulldog things. We can do this again another time though if you need to ask me anything else.

10:55

No need to apologize. 100% understand. Can I get a few demographics from you though please, or email me them when you have the time  
Age, Sex, & ethnicity?

No that's fine now, i'm 24, male, white, pale even  
probably from too much computer time. Gluck with your project!!!!  
let me know if you need any more information

© CHLOE PEACOCK

**STATEMENT OF PRIVACY & INFORMED CONSENT:**

The interviewee must give their informed consent to participate in the interview.

Please state your consent by responding with your name that I agree to participate in the interview, understanding that –

The interview given is part of a PhD research project at The University of Brighton, UK. All rights reserved by the PhD author & The University of Brighton. The interview may be used as data that may become part of a PhD thesis and used in publication. The interviewee will remain anonymous in name, though details such as age, sex, profession and ethnicity may be used to distinguish the respondent in the final thesis. Contact details of the interviewee will be held by the researcher in line with the data protection act, will remain private, and will not be reproduced in the thesis or future publication.

I, Xxxx Mullen, understand the statement above and agree to participate in the interview

i'm usually hard to track down on account of there not being enough hours in the day  
but if i'll do my best  
i'm not on ichat much but we can sort something out.

OK Thanks Xxxx. Have a good day & good luck with bulldog!

Cheers seeya l8R



## Appendix iii

### Participant biographies

The participants' real names have been replaced with an alias to protect their privacy.

1. Calvin 23 year old, white, male based in Ulster. He is a FT media studies undergrad, who also works PT as a freelance composer & photographer. David's experience with Macs was initially through school and university, and was inspired to go on and purchase his own Apple products. He has been an exclusive Apple consumer for 2 years. Professional & domestic user. Desktop, laptop & 2 iPods & uses iTunes.
2. Sara 27 year old, white female FT research student & PT university lecturer, based in Eastbourne / Brighton. She is married to a Mac user and defers to him as the chooser of their shared Apple products, which she uses in the home. As a couple they have been Apple consumers for 4 years and have several different computers and several different iPod models between them. She also uses a non Apple PC at university. PT domestic user Desktop, laptop & 3 iPods & uses iTunes.
3. Tom 21 year old, white male film studies undergraduate, based in Middlesex. He works PT as a sales assistant and is trying to establish himself as a freelance film-maker. His experience of Apple was initially through school & university, but through this he now owns his own products. He is an exclusive Apple consumer of about a year. Professional & domestic user. Desktop & 2 iPods & uses iTunes.
4. Alberta 24 year old, white male FT freelance IT consultant in the Brighton area. His company is called Mac Ambulance and he specializes in troubleshooting Mac operating problems for business and domestic clients. His family have been Mac users for nearly 2 decades. He is not an exclusive Mac consumer stating that he owns a PC, but one which he built himself. Professional & domestic user. Desktop, 2 laptops & an iPod & uses iTunes (advises he has mountains of old Apple laptops for repair parts, but not personal use).
5. Marni 44 year old, white female, who works PT as primary school teacher in the Brighton Area. Desk top, Lap top & 2 iPods of about 3 years. She got her iPod first which she says persuaded her over and inspired her to purchase her computers, though she mentions she had wanted a Mac for a long time before that, influenced by friends and colleagues experiences. She is a domestic and professional, though not exclusive user. She describes her self as evangelizing and is an advocate for educational use.

6. Jimmy 30 year old white Caucasian male working as a FT high-tech crime investigator for The Sussex Police although he also studies at the moment for a PT OU history degree. He has 2 laptops and two iPods. He has been an Apple consumer for two years, though is not an exclusive user. He bought an iPod for someone else as a gift but decided to keep it. He uses the laptops domestically though investigates Macs in his work and mentions there being a Mac-mini at work. He describes himself as having a high level of technical know-how about the inner workings hardware of Macs.
7. Vivienne A 30 year old white female, advertising executive based in London. She has an iPod and a Mac-mini for domestic use and an iBook for work which belongs to her company. She has been an Apple consumer for 3 years, but is not an exclusive user. She states 80% of her company use Macs. She has a professional knowledge of brands and advertising. She also states that her partner a graphic designer uses a Mac.
8. Karl A 48 year old white male. He is a former computer programmer of 23 years, but describes during the interview how he sold his house, and quit his job 2 years ago to join an alternative commune and actively tries to avoid buying new things. He is an exclusive domestic user of Apple products, and an early adopter (since the mid 1980's). He has extensive knowledge of Apple hardware and Apple history.
9. Marc A 32 year old white male self employed web developer. He previously worked in a graphic design company where they used Macs. He owns a power book, which he has had for 4 years, and a Mac Mini which he has had for 2 years, and an iPod which he has had for 6 years. He also uses PC's for work but says his personal preference is for Macs and he uses a Mac for all his personal and domestic tasks.
10. Michael A 27 year old white freelance web developer / Mac specialist. He now runs his own company in Brighton, but has previously worked as an IT manager for a creative agency in London where the company had over 60 Macs and as an IT manager for a large blue chip company in Sussex. Owns a Mac Mini, Power Mac G3, 2 iPods, a Mac Classic and a rare Apple set box top. He first started using Macs at work 8 years ago, but now uses them for leisure and as the basis for his business. Very knowledgeable on Apple company history.
11. Diane A 30 year old, white female former coder who describes herself as a stay at home Mum. She is an American , married to a British man and living in the UK. She owns a Mac mini, which she has had for 2 years, but remembers that as a child her family in the US had an Apple II in the early 1980s.
12. Nina A 31 year old Asian Female iPod mini user from London. Has had the iPod for 1 year, which was a gift. Does not use Macs or iTunes. Has a PC at work but no home computer – cites economic reasons for this, and the follow-

on reason for not using iTunes software. Gets friends and family members to transfer music to her iPod. Says if she could afford a computer she would not get a Mac, because she is used to PC's. Works in a post-production facility house for the Film Industry.

13. Stella A 67 year old, female, white, retired, university researcher who now is a lay minister. She has been using Macs since the 1980's as her employer a university provided them. She owns an eMac and an old power book, which she inherited when a friend was going to throw it away, and based on using that, bought herself a new eMac. She only uses her Mac at home for correspondence and Excel for finances. She knows several other Mac users.
14. Anna A white 40 year old female PhD student and lecturer and DJ. She has had an iBook for 4 years and an iPod for 2. Also owns a PC. She relies on her Apple products to pursue her hobby as a DJ and for archiving her extensive music collection.
15. Anya is a 30 year old white female. She has owned an iPod mini for 2 years and is an itunes user. She owns a Macbook lap-top for home use, but also uses PCs at her work in a primary school. She mentions she uses her iPod a lot in her work as a children's drama teacher.

## Appendix iv

### **Full transcript of the commencement address Stanford University delivered by Steve Jobs June 12, 2005.**

I am honored to be with you today at your commencement from one of the finest universities in the world. I never graduated from college. Truth be told, this is the closest I've ever gotten to a college graduation. Today I want to tell you three stories from my life. That's it. No big deal. Just three stories.

The first story is about connecting the dots.

I dropped out of Reed College after the first 6 months, but then stayed around as a drop-in for another 18 months or so before I really quit. So why did I drop out?

It started before I was born. My biological mother was a young, unwed college graduate student, and she decided to put me up for adoption. She felt very strongly that I should be adopted by college graduates, so everything was all set for me to be adopted at birth by a lawyer and his wife. Except that when I popped out they decided at the last minute that they really wanted a girl. So my parents, who were on a waiting list, got a call in the middle of the night asking: "We have an unexpected baby boy; do you want him?" They said: "Of course." My biological mother later found out that my mother had never graduated from college and that my father had never graduated from high school. She refused to sign the final adoption papers. She only relented a few months later when my parents promised that I would someday go to college.

And 17 years later I did go to college. But I naively chose a college that was almost as expensive as Stanford, and all of my working-class parents' savings were being spent on my college tuition. After six months, I couldn't see the value in it. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life and no idea how college was going to help me figure it out. And here I was spending all of the money my parents had saved their entire life. So I decided to drop out and trust that it would all work out OK. It was pretty scary at the time, but looking back it was one of the best decisions I ever made. The minute I dropped out I could stop taking the required classes that didn't interest me, and begin dropping in on the ones that looked interesting.

It wasn't all romantic. I didn't have a dorm room, so I slept on the floor in friends' rooms, I returned coke bottles for the 5¢ deposits to buy food with, and I would walk the 7 miles across town every Sunday night to get one good meal a week at the Hare Krishna temple. I loved it. And much of what I stumbled into by following my curiosity and intuition turned out to be priceless later on. Let me give you one example:

Reed College at that time offered perhaps the best calligraphy instruction in the country. Throughout the campus every poster, every label on every drawer, was beautifully hand calligraphed. Because I had dropped out and didn't have to take the normal classes, I decided to take a calligraphy class to learn how to do this. I learned about serif and san serif typefaces, about varying the amount of space between different letter combinations, about what makes great typography great. It was beautiful, historical, artistically subtle in a way that science can't capture, and I found it fascinating.

None of this had even a hope of any practical application in my life. But ten years later, when we were designing the first Macintosh computer, it all came back to me. And we designed it all into the Mac. It was the first computer with beautiful typography. If I had never dropped in on that single course in college, the Mac would have never had multiple typefaces or proportionally spaced fonts. And since Windows just copied the Mac, it's likely that no personal computer would have them. If I had never dropped out, I would have never dropped in on this calligraphy class, and personal computers might not have the wonderful typography that they do. Of course it was impossible to connect the dots looking forward when I was in college. But it was very, very clear looking backwards ten years later.

Again, you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.

My second story is about love and loss.

I was lucky — I found what I loved to do early in life. Woz and I started Apple in my parents garage when I was 20. We worked hard, and in 10 years Apple had grown from just the two of us in a garage into a \$2 billion company with over 4000 employees. We had just released our finest creation — the Macintosh — a year earlier, and I had just turned 30. And then I got fired. How can you get fired from a

company you started? Well, as Apple grew we hired someone who I thought was very talented to run the company with me, and for the first year or so things went well. But then our visions of the future began to diverge and eventually we had a falling out. When we did, our Board of Directors sided with him. So at 30 I was out. And very publicly out. What had been the focus of my entire adult life was gone, and it was devastating.

I really didn't know what to do for a few months. I felt that I had let the previous generation of entrepreneurs down - that I had dropped the baton as it was being passed to me. I met with David Packard and Bob Noyce and tried to apologize for screwing up so badly. I was a very public failure, and I even thought about running away from the valley. But something slowly began to dawn on me — I still loved what I did. The turn of events at Apple had not changed that one bit. I had been rejected, but I was still in love. And so I decided to start over.

I didn't see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life.

During the next five years, I started a company named NeXT, another company named Pixar, and fell in love with an amazing woman who would become my wife. Pixar went on to create the world's first computer animated feature film, *Toy Story*, and is now the most successful animation studio in the world. In a remarkable turn of events, Apple bought NeXT, I returned to Apple, and the technology we developed at NeXT is at the heart of Apple's current renaissance. And Laurene and I have a wonderful family together.

I'm pretty sure none of this would have happened if I hadn't been fired from Apple. It was awful tasting medicine, but I guess the patient needed it. Sometimes life hits you in the head with a brick. Don't lose faith. I'm convinced that the only thing that kept me going was that I loved what I did. You've got to find what you love. And that is as true for your work as it is for your lovers. Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it. And, like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So keep looking until you find it. Don't settle.

My third story is about death.

When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: "If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you'll most certainly be right." It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: "If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?" And whenever the answer has been "No" for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything — all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure - these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.

About a year ago I was diagnosed with cancer. I had a scan at 7:30 in the morning, and it clearly showed a tumor on my pancreas. I didn't even know what a pancreas was. The doctors told me this was almost certainly a type of cancer that is incurable, and that I should expect to live no longer than three to six months. My doctor advised me to go home and get my affairs in order, which is doctor's code for prepare to die. It means to try to tell your kids everything you thought you'd have the next 10 years to tell them in just a few months. It means to make sure everything is buttoned up so that it will be as easy as possible for your family. It means to say your goodbyes.

I lived with that diagnosis all day. Later that evening I had a biopsy, where they stuck an endoscope down my throat, through my stomach and into my intestines, put a needle into my pancreas and got a few cells from the tumor. I was sedated, but my wife, who was there, told me that when they viewed the cells under a microscope the doctors started crying because it turned out to be a very rare form of pancreatic cancer that is curable with surgery. I had the surgery and I'm fine now.

This was the closest I've been to facing death, and I hope it's the closest I get for a few more decades. Having lived through it, I can now say this to you with a bit more certainty than when death was a useful but purely intellectual concept:

No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because Death is very likely the single best invention of Life. It

is Life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new. Right now the new is you, but someday not too long from now, you will gradually become the old and be cleared away. Sorry to be so dramatic, but it is quite true.

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

When I was young, there was an amazing publication called *The Whole Earth Catalog*, which was one of the bibles of my generation. It was created by a fellow named Stewart Brand not far from here in Menlo Park, and he brought it to life with his poetic touch. This was in the late 1960's, before personal computers and desktop publishing, so it was all made with typewriters, scissors, and polaroid cameras. It was sort of like Google in paperback form, 35 years before Google came along: it was idealistic, and overflowing with neat tools and great notions.

Stewart and his team put out several issues of *The Whole Earth Catalog*, and then when it had run its course, they put out a final issue. It was the mid-1970s, and I was your age. On the back cover of their final issue was a photograph of an early morning country road, the kind you might find yourself hitchhiking on if you were so adventurous. Beneath it were the words: "Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish." It was their farewell message as they signed off. Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish. And I have always wished that for myself. And now, as you graduate to begin anew, I wish that for you.

Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.

Thank you all very much.



## Appendix v

### **Here's to the crazy ones - the poem which accompanied the Think Different Campaign**

Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes... the ones who see things differently -- they're not fond of rules... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can't do is ignore them because they change things... they push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do.