

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BRANDING OF LEARNING

Ads in Schools and Universities

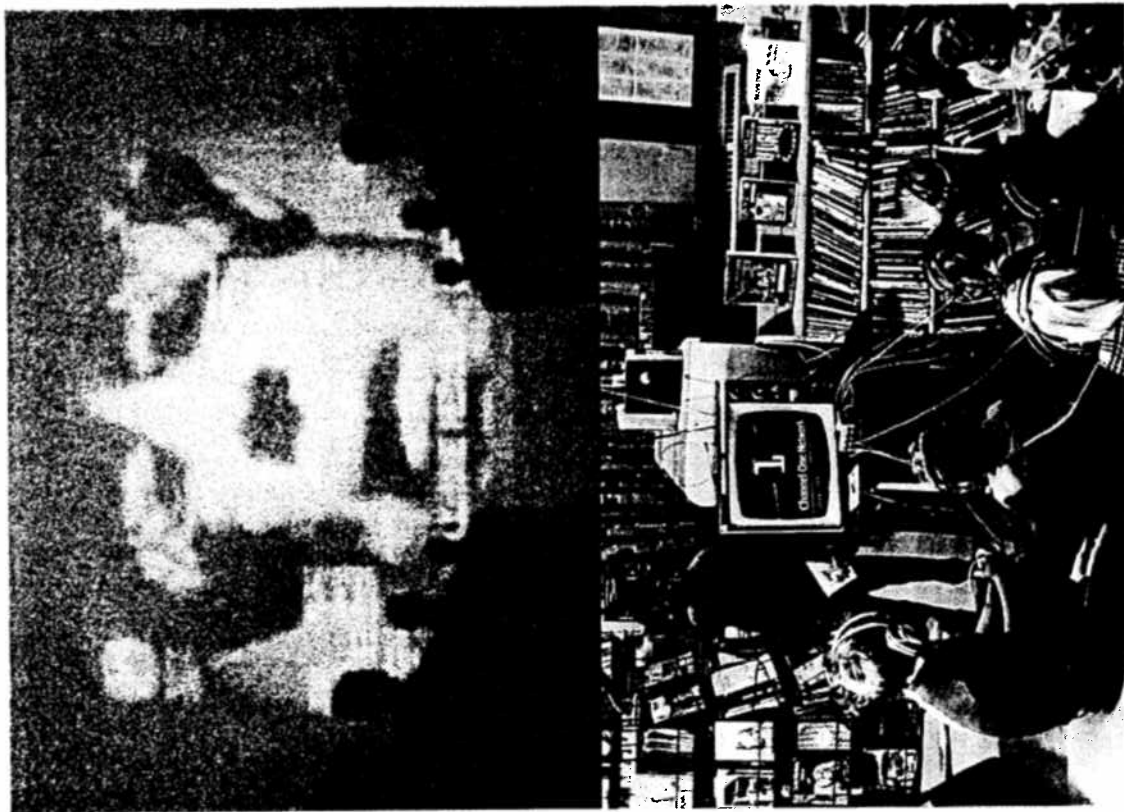
A democratic system of education . . . is one of the surest ways of creating and greatly extending markets for goods of all kinds and especially those goods in which fashion may play a part.

— Ex-adman James Rorty, *Our Master's Voice*, 1934

Although the brands seem to be everywhere — at kids' concerts, next to them on the couch, on stage with their heroes, in their on-line chat groups, and on their playing fields and basketball courts — for a long time one major unbranded youth frontier remained: a place where young people gathered, talked, sneaked smokes, made out, formed opinions and, most maddeningly of all, stood around looking cool for hours on end. That place is called school. And clearly, the brands had to get into the schools.

"You'll agree that the youth market is an untapped wellspring of new revenue. You'll also agree that the youth market spends the majority of each day inside the schoolhouse. Now the problem is, how do you reach that market?" asks a typically tantalizing brochure from the Fourth Annual Kid Power Marketing Conference.

As we have just seen, marketers and cool hunters have spent the better part of the decade hustling the brands back to high school and pouring them into the template of the teenage outlaw. Several of the most successful brands had even cast their corporate headquarters as private schools, referring to them as "campuses" and, at the Nike World Campus, nicknaming one edifice "the student union building." Even the cool hunters are going highbrow; by the late nineties, the rage in the industry was to recast



Top: Image from 1984 Apple television campaign; Apple has been a major promoter of technology in classrooms. Bottom: Channel One is broadcast in 12,000 U.S. schools.

oneself less as a trendy club-hopper than as a bookish grad student. In fact, some insist they aren't cool hunters at all but rather "urban anthropologists."

And yet despite their up-to-the-minute outfits and intellectual pretensions, the brands and their keepers still found themselves on the wrong side of the school gate, a truly intolerable state of affairs and one that would not last long. American marketing consultant Jack Myers described the insufferable slight like this: "The choice we have in this country [the U.S.] is for our educational system to join the electronic age and communicate to students in ways they can understand and to which they can relate. Or our schools can continue to use outmoded forms of communications and become the daytime prisons for millions of young people, as they have become in our inner cities."¹ This reasoning, which baldly equates corporate access to the schools with access to modern technology, and by extension to the future itself, is at the core of how the brands have managed, over the course of only one decade, to all but eliminate the barrier between ads and education. It was technology that lent a new urgency to nineties chronic underfunding: at the same time as schools were facing ever-deeper budget cuts, the costs of delivering a modern education were rising steeply, forcing many educators to look to alternative funding sources for help. Swept up by info-tech hype, schools that couldn't afford up-to-date textbooks were suddenly expected to provide students with audiovisual equipment, video cameras, classroom computers, desktop publishing capacity, the latest educational software programs, Internet access — even, at some schools, video-conferencing.

As many education experts have pointed out, the pedagogical benefits technology brings to the classroom are dubious at best, but the fact remains that employers are clamoring for tech-trained graduates and chances are the private school down the street or across town is equipped with all the latest gadgets and toys. In this context, corporate partnerships and sponsorship arrangements have seemed to many public schools, particularly those in poorer areas, to be the only possible way out of the high-tech bind. If the price of staying modern is opening the schools to ads, the thinking goes, then parents and teachers will have to grin and bear it.

The fact that more schools are turning to the private sector to finance technology purchases does not mean that governments are relinquishing any

role in supplying public schools with computers. Quite the opposite. A growing number of politicians are making a computer on every desk a key plank in their election platforms, albeit in partnership with local businesses. But in the process school boards are draining money out of programs like music and physical education to finance this high-tech dream — and here too they are opening the door to corporate sponsorships and to direct forms of brand promotion in cash-strapped cafeterias and sports programs.

As fast-food, athletic gear and computer companies step in to fill the gap, they carry with them an educational agenda of their own. As with all branding projects, it is never enough to tag the schools with a few logos. Having gained a foothold, the brand managers are now doing what they have done in music, sports and journalism outside the schools: trying to overwhelm their host, to grab the spotlight. They are fighting for their brands to become not the add-on but the subject of education, not an elective but the core curriculum.

Of course the companies crashing the school gate have nothing against education. Students should by all means learn, they say, but why don't they read about our company, write about our brand, research their own brand preferences or come up with a drawing for our next ad campaign? Teaching students and building brand awareness, these corporations seem to believe, can be two aspects of the same project. Which is where Channel One, owned by K-III Communications, and its Canadian counterpart, the Youth News Network, come in, perhaps the best-known example of in-school branding.

At the beginning of the decade, these self-styled in-school broadcasters approached North American school boards with a proposition. They asked them to open their classrooms to two minutes of television advertising a day, sandwiched between twelve minutes of teenybopper current affairs programming. Many schools consented, and the broadcasts soon aired. Turning off the cheerful ad patter is not an option. Not only is the programming mandatory viewing for students, but teachers are unable to adjust the volume of the broadcast, especially during commercials. In exchange, the schools do not receive direct revenue from the stations but they can use the much-coveted audiovisual equipment for other lessons and, in some cases, receive "free" computers.

Channel One, meanwhile, charges advertisers top dollar for accessing its pipeline to classrooms — twice as much as regular TV stations because, with mandatory attendance and no channel-changing or volume control, it can boast something no other broadcaster can: “No audience erosion.” The station now boasts a presence in 12,000 schools, reaching an estimated eight million students (see image on page 86).

When those students aren't watching Channel One or surfing with ZapMe!, an in-school Internet browser first offered free to American schools in 1998, they may turn their attention to their textbooks — and those too may be sending out more messages to “Just Do It” or “CK Be.” The Cover Concepts company sells slick ads that wrap around books to 30,000 U.S. schools, where teachers use them instead of plastic or tinfoil as protective jackets. And when lunchtime arrives, more ads are literally on the menu at many schools. In 1997, Twentieth Century-Fox managed to get cafeteria menu items named after characters from its film *Avatarasia* in forty U.S. elementary schools. Students could dine on “Rasputin Rib-B-Cue on Bartok Bun” and “Dimitri's Peanut Butter Fudge.” Disney and Kellogg's have engaged in similar lunch-menu promotions through School Marketing, a company that describes itself as a “school-lunch ad agency.”²

Competing with the menu sponsors are the fast-food chains themselves, chains that go head-to-head with cafeterias in 13 percent of U.S. schools. In an arrangement that was unheard of in the eighties, companies like McDonald's and Burger King now set up kiosks in lunchrooms, which they advertise around the school. Subway supplies 767 schools with sandwiches; Pizza Hut corners the market in approximately 4,000 schools; and a staggering 20,000 schools participate in Taco Bell's “frozen burrito product line.” A Subway sandwich guide about how to access the in-school market advises franchisees to pitch their brand-name food to school boards as a way to keep students from sneaking out at lunch hour and getting into trouble. “Look for situations where the local school board has a closed campus policy for lunch. If they do, a strong case can be made for branded product to keep the students on campus.”³ The argument works for administrators such as Bob Honson, the director of nutritional services for the Portland, Oregon, school district. “Kids come to us with brand preferences,” he explains.⁴

Not all students' brand preferences, however, are accommodated with equal enthusiasm. Since the fast-food outlets don't accept vouchers from kids on the federal lunch program and their food is usually twice as expensive as cafeteria fare, kids from poor families are stuck with mystery meat while their wealthier classmates lunch on Pizza Hut pizza and Big Macs. And they can't even look forward to days when the cafeteria serves pizza or cheeseburgers, since many schools have signed agreements with the chains that prohibit them from serving “generic versions” of fast-food items: no-name burgers, it seems, constitute “unfair competition.”

Students may also find that brand wars are being waged over the pop machine outside the gym. In Canada and the U.S., many school boards have given exclusive vending rights to the Pepsi-Cola Company in exchange for generally undisclosed lump sums. What Pepsi negotiates in return varies from district to district. In Toronto, it gets to fill the 560 public schools with its vending machines, to block the sales of Coke and other competitors, and to distribute “Pepsi Achievement Awards” and other goodies emblazoned with its logo. In communities like Cayuga, a rural Ontario tobacco-farming town, Pepsi buys the right to brand entire schools. “Pepsi — Official Soft Drink of Cayuga Secondary School” reads the giant sign beside the road. At South Fork High School in Florida, there is a blunt, hard-sell arrangement: the school has a clause in its Pepsi contract committing the school to “make its best effort to maximize all sales opportunities for Pepsi-Cola products.”⁵

Similarly bizarre and haphazard corporate promotions arrangements are thrown together on college and university campuses around the world. At almost every university in North America, advertising billboards appear on campus bicycle racks, on benches, in hallways linking lecture halls, in libraries and even in bathroom stalls. Credit-card companies and long-distance phone carriers solicit students from the moment they receive their orientation-week information kit to the instant after they receive their degree; at some schools, diplomas come with an envelope stuffed with coupons, credit offers and advertising flyers. In the U.S. Barnes & Noble is rapidly replacing campus-owned bookstores, and Chapters has similar plans in Canada. Taco Bells, KFCs, Starbucks and Pizza Huts are already fixtures on university campuses, where they are often clumped together in food courts inside on-campus malls.

Not surprisingly, in the U.S. and Canada the fiercest scholastic marketing battles are fought over high-school gym class and university athletics. The top high-school basketball teams have sponsorship deals with Nike and Adidas, which deck out teenagers in swoosh- and stripe-festooned shoes, warm-ups and gym bags. At the university level, Nike has sponsorship deals with more than two hundred campus athletics departments in the U.S. and twelve in Canada. As anyone familiar with college ball well knows, the standard arrangement gives the company the right to stamp the swoosh on uniforms, sports gear, official university merchandise and apparel, on stadium seats and, most important, on ad banners in full view of the cameras that televise high-profile games. Since student players can't get paid in amateur athletics, it is the coaches who receive the corporate money to dress their teams in the right logos, and the amounts at stake are huge. Nike pays individual coaches as much as \$1.5 million in sponsorship fees at top sports universities like Duke and North Carolina, sums that make the coaches' salaries look like tokens of appreciation.

As educational institutions surrender to the manic march of branding, a new language is emerging. Nike high schools and universities square off against their Adidas rivals: the teams may well have their own "official drink," either Coke or Pepsi. In its daily broadcasts, Channel One makes frequent references to the goings-on at "Channel One schools." William Hoynes, a sociologist at Vassar College who conducted a study on the broadcaster, says the practice is "part of a broader marketing approach to develop a 'brand name' consciousness of the network, including the promotion of the 'Channel One school' identity."⁶

As several critics have pointed out, Channel One isn't just hawking its advertisers' sneakers and candy to school kids, it is also selling the idea that its own programming is an invaluable educational aid, one that modernizes such arid, outmoded educational resources as books and teachers. In the model advanced by these broadcasters, the process of learning is little more than the transferring of "stuff" to a student's brain. Whether that stuff happens to be about a new blockbuster from Disney or the Pythagorean theorem, the net effect, according to this theory, is the same: more stuff stuffed. So Fox's attempts to flog *Anastasia* in schools didn't stop with lunch-menu

ads; it also provided teachers with an "*Anastasia* study guide." Jeffrey Godstick, Fox senior vice president of publicity and promotion, explained that Fox was providing a service to the schools, not the other way around. "Public school teachers are desperate for materials that will excite the kids," he said.⁷

It's impossible to know which teachers use these branded materials in class and which ones toss them away, but a report published by the U.S. Consumers Union in 1995 "found that thousands of corporations were targeting school children or their teachers with marketing activities ranging from teaching videos, to guidebooks, and posters to contests, product giveaways, and coupons."⁸

It will come as no surprise that it is the folks at the Nike World Campus who have devised the most advanced hybrid of in-class advertisement, public relations exercise and faux teaching aid: the "Air-to-Earth" lesson kit. During the 1997-98 academic year, elementary school students in more than eight hundred classrooms across the U.S. sat down at their desks to find that today's lesson was building a Nike sneaker, complete with a swoosh and an endorsement from an NBA star. Called a "despicable use of classroom time" by the National Education Association and "the warping of education" by the Consumers Union, the make-your-own-Nike exercise purports to raise awareness about the company's environmentally sensitive production process. Nike's claim to greenness relies heavily on the fact that the company recycles old sneakers to re-cover community center basketball courts, which, in a postmodern marketing spiral, it then brands with the Nike swoosh.⁹

Hey, Kids! Be a Self-Promoter!

In a corporate climate obsessed with finding the secret recipe for cool, there are still more in-school resources to tap. After all, if there is one thing the cool hunters have taught us, it's that groups of kids aren't just lowly consumers: they are also card-carrying representatives of their age demographic. In the eyes of the brand managers, every lunchroom and classroom is a focus group waiting to be focused. So getting access to schools means more than just hawking product—it's a bona fide, bargain-basement cool-hunting opportunity.

For this reason, the in-school computer network ZapMe! doesn't merely sell ad space to its sponsors; it also monitors students' paths as they surf the Net and provides this valuable market research, broken down by the students' sex, age and zip code, to its advertisers. Then, when students log on to ZapMe!, they are treated to ads that have been specially "micro-targeted" for them.¹⁰ This kind of detailed market research is exploding in North American schools: weekly focus groups, taste tests, brand-preference questionnaires, opinion polls, panel discussions on the Internet, all are currently being used inside classrooms. And in a feat of peer-on-peer cool hunting, some market researchers have been experimenting with sending kids home from school with disposable cameras to take pictures of their friends and family — returning with documented evidence, in one assignment conducted for Nike, "of their favorite place to hang out." Exercises like these are "educational" and "empowering" the market researchers argue, and some educators agree. In explaining the merits of a cereal taste test, the principal of Our Lady of Assumption elementary school in Lynnfield, Massachusetts, said: "It's a learning experience. They had to read, they had to look, they had to compare."¹¹

Channel One is pushing the market-research model even further, frequently enlisting "partner" teachers to develop class lessons in which students are asked to create a new ad campaign for Snapple or to redesign Pepsi's vending machines. In New York and Los Angeles high-school students have created thirty-second animated spots for Starburst fruit candies, and students in Colorado Springs designed Burger King ads to hang in their school buses.¹² Finished assignments are passed on to the companies and the best entries win prizes and may even be adopted by the companies — all subsidized by the taxpayer-funded school system. At Vancouver's Laurier Annex school, students in Grades 3 and 4 designed two new product lines for the British Columbia restaurant chain White Spot. For several months in 1997, the children worked on developing the concept and packaging for "Zippy" pizza burgers, a product that is now on the kids' menu at White Spot. The following year, they designed an entire concept for birthday parties to be held at the chain. The students' corporate presentation included "sample commercials, menu items, party games invented by the students and cake

ideas," taking into account such issues as safety, possible food allergies, low costs "and allowing for flexibility."¹³ According to nine-year-old Jeffrey Ye, "It was a lot of work."¹⁴

Perhaps the most infamous of these experiments occurred in 1998, when Coca-Cola ran a competition asking several schools to come up with a strategy for distributing Coke coupons to students. The school that devised the best promotional strategy would win \$500. Greenbriar High School in Evans, Georgia, took the contest extremely seriously, calling an official Coke Day in late March during which all students came to school in Coca-Cola T-shirts, posed for a photograph in a formation spelling Coke, attended lectures given by Coca-Cola executives and learned about all things black and bubbly in their classes. It was a little piece of branding heaven until it came to the principal's attention that in an act of hideous defiance, one Mike Cameron, a nineteen-year-old senior, had come to school wearing a T-shirt with a Pepsi logo. He was promptly suspended for the offense. "I know it sounds bad — 'Child suspended for wearing Pepsi shirt on Coke Day,'" said principal Gloria Hamilton. "It really would have been acceptable... if it had just been in-house, but we had the regional president here and people flew in from Atlanta to do us the honor of being resource speakers. These students knew we had guests."¹⁵

Though all public institutions are starved for new sources of income, most schools and universities do try to set limits. When York University's Atkinson College sent out a call to donors in 1997 stating that "for a gift of \$10,000... you or your corporation can become the official sponsor for the development and design of one of our new multi-media, high-tech courses," the college insisted that only the courses' names were for sale — not their content. Roger Trull, who brokers deals with corporations at Ontario's McMaster University, explains where he draws the line: "They have to be things that don't impact on academics," meaning only extracurricular sponsorship. Besides, many point out that before lunchrooms and letter-man sweaters went brand-name, schools weren't exactly corporate-free turf. Advertising historian Stuart Ewen writes that as early as the 1920s, teaching kids to consume was seen as just another way of promoting patriotism and economic well-being.

Back then, toothbrush companies visited American schools to conduct "tooth-paste drills" and cocoa producers made cameos in science class to demonstrate "the various stages in the production of cocoa."¹⁶

And in more recent history, commercialism had already become a major part of campus life before the brands even arrived. For instance, U.S. college sports is a big business in its own right with sales of merchandise generating \$2.75 billion in 1997, a higher figure than the merchandising sales of the National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball and the National Hockey League. And well before the fast-food invasion, many cafeterias had already been contracted out to companies like Marriott and Cara, which also specialize in providing airlines and hospitals with institutional glop.

For these catering giants, however, faceless and generic was their calling card — the very antithesis of branding. When the prima-donna brands arrived on campus, they brought their preening and posturing values with them, introducing to schools new concepts like corporate image control, logo visibility, brand-extension opportunities and the fierce protection of trade secrets. And this collision of the dictates of academia with the dictates of branding often proves uncomfortable. At the University of British Columbia, for instance, students have been unable to find out what is in the text of an agreement between their school and the Coca-Cola Company. Despite the fact that UBC is a publicly funded institution, the soft-drink company demanded that the amount it paid for the vending rights be kept secret for reasons of corporate competitiveness. (Coca-Cola also refused to cooperate with requests for information for this book, claiming that all of its campus activities — including the precise number of campuses with which it has agreements — are confidential "for competitive purposes.")

In May 1996, students and faculty at the University of Wisconsin at Madison did find out what was in the text of a sponsorship deal their administration was about to sign with Reebok — and they didn't like what they discovered. The deal contained a "non-disparagement" clause that prohibited members of the university community from criticizing the athletic gear company. The clause stated: "During and for a reasonable time after the term, the University will not issue any official statement that disparages Reebok. Additionally, the University will promptly take all reasonable steps necessary

to address any remark by any University employee, agent or representative, including a Coach, that disparages Reebok, Reebok's products or the advertising agency or others connected with Reebok."¹⁷ Reebok agreed to nix the demand after students and faculty members launched an educational campaign about the company's patchy record on labor rights in Southeast Asia. What was exceptional about the Wisconsin clause is that the university community found out about it before the deal was signed. This has not been the case at other universities where athletic departments have quietly entered into multimillion-dollar deals that contained similar gag orders. The University of Kentucky's deal with Nike, for instance, has a clause that states that the company has the right to terminate the five-year \$25 million contract if the "University disparages the Nike brand ... or takes any other action inconsistent with the endorsement of Nike products."¹⁸ Nike denies that its motivation is to stifle campus critics.¹⁹

Regardless of the intentions when the deals are inked, the fact is that campus expression is often stifled when it conflicts with the interests of a corporate sponsor. For example, at Kent State University — one of the U.S. campuses at which Coca-Cola has exclusive vending rights — members of the Amnesty International chapter advocated a boycott of the soft drink because Coca-Cola did business with the since-ousted Nigerian dictatorship. In April 1998, the activists made a routine application to their student council for funding to bring in a human-rights speaker from the Free Nigeria Movement. "Is he going to speak negatively about Coca-Cola?" a council member asked. "Because Coca-Cola does a lot of positive things on our campus like helping organizations and sports." The representatives from Amnesty replied that the speaker would indeed have some negative comments to make about the company's involvement in Nigeria and funding for the event was denied.²⁰

On some university campuses, protests critical of a corporate sponsor have been effectively blocked. In August 1996, Tennis Canada hosted the DuMaurier Tennis Open Tournament, sponsored by Imperial Tobacco, at York University. Concerned that neither a university nor a sporting event should be seen to be endorsing tobacco products, an anti-smoking group, the Grim Reaper Society, asked York for permission to pass out pamphlets to students and tournament goers near the university stadium. Susan Mann, the president

of York University, refused the request, saying the school did not "normally" allow "interest groups" on campus "unless for University purposes." Activists handed out cards and leaflets to motorists at a traffic light just outside the entrance to York and, on the last day of the tournament, they staged a clever culture-jam: the leaflets they handed out were shaped like fans. Clearly amused, many of the tournament goers brought their fans inside the tennis stadium, cooling themselves off with anti-tobacco slogans. After a few hours, police officers hired by the tournament approached the peaceful, off-site protest and, citing traffic problems, ticketed two of the activists and seized all the remaining fans.

These are extreme examples of how corporate sponsorship deals re-engineer some of the fundamental values of public universities, including financial transparency and the right to open debate and peaceful protest on campus. But the subtle effects are equally disturbing. Many professors speak of the slow encroachment of the mall mentality, arguing that the more campuses act and look like malls, the more students behave like consumers. They tell stories of students filling out their course-evaluation forms with all the smug self-righteousness of a tourist responding to a customer-satisfaction form at a large hotel chain. "Most of all I dislike the attitude of calm consumer expertise that pervades the responses. I'm disturbed by the serene belief that my function — and more important, Freud's, or Shakespeare's, or Blake's — is to divert, entertain, and interest," writes University of Virginia professor Mark Edmundson in *Harper's* magazine.²¹ A professor at Toronto's York University, where there is a full-fledged mall on campus, tells me that his students slip into class slurping grande lattes, chat in the back and slip out. They're cruising, shopping, disengaged.

Branding U

While brands slowly transform the experience of campus life for undergraduates, another kind of takeover is under way at the institutional research level. All over the world, university campuses are offering their research facilities, and priceless academic credibility, for the brands to use as they please. And in North America today, corporate research partnerships at universities

are used for everything: designing new Nike skates, developing more efficient oil extraction techniques for Shell, assessing the Asian market's stability for Disney, testing the consumer demand for higher bandwidth for Bell or measuring the relative merits of a brand-name drug compared with a generic one, to name just a few examples.

Dr. Betty Dong, a medical researcher at the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF), had the misfortune of taking on that last assignment — testing a brand-name drug with brand-name money. Dong was the director of a study sponsored by the British pharmaceutical company Boots (now called Knoll) and UCSF. The fate of that partnership does much to illuminate precisely how the mandate of universities as sites for public-interest research is often squarely at odds with the interests of branded fact-finding missions.

Dr. Dong's study compared the effectiveness of Boots' thyroid drug, Synthroid, with a generic competitor. The company hoped that the research would prove that its much higher priced drug was better or at least substantially different from the generic one — a claim that, if legitimized by a study from a respected university, would increase Synthroid sales. Instead, Dr. Dong found that the opposite was true. The two drugs were bio-equivalent, a fact that represented a potential saving of \$365 million a year for the eight million Americans who were taking the name-brand drug, and a potential loss to Boots of \$600 million (the revenue from Synthroid). After the results were reviewed by her peers, Dr. Dong's findings were slated to be published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on January 25, 1995. At the last minute, however, Boots successfully halted publication of the article, pointing to a clause in the partnership contract that gave the company veto rights over the publication of findings. The university, fearing a costly lawsuit, sided with the drug company and the article was yanked. After the whole ordeal was exposed in *The Wall Street Journal*, Boots backed off and the paper was finally published in April 1997, two years behind schedule.²² "The victim is obvious: the university," wrote Dorothy S. Zinberg, a faculty member at Harvard's Center for Science and International Affairs. "Each infringement on its unwritten contract with society to avoid secrecy whenever possible and maintain its independence from government or corporate pressure weakens its integrity."²³

In 1998, a similar case ripped through the University of Toronto and the affiliated Hospital for Sick Children — only this time, the researcher found that the drug being tested might actually be harmful to patients. Dr. Nancy Olivieri, a world-renowned scientist and expert on the blood disorder thalassemia, entered into a research contract with the drug-company giant Apotex. The company wanted Olivieri to test the effectiveness of the drug deferiprone on her young patients suffering from thalassemia major. When Olivieri found evidence that, in some cases, the drug might have life-threatening side effects, she wanted to warn the patients participating in the trial and to alert other doctors in her field. Apotex pulled the plug on the study and threatened to sue Olivieri if she went public, pointing to an overlooked clause in the research contract that gave it the right to suppress findings for one year after the trials ended. Olivieri went ahead and published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* and, once again, the administration of both her university and her hospital failed to defend the sanctity of academic research conducted in the public interest. Adding further insult, in January 1999, they demoted Olivieri from her top-level research position at the hospital.²⁴ (After a long and public battle, the doctor eventually got her job back.)

Perhaps the most chilling of these cases involves an associate professor at Brown University in Rhode Island, who worked as an occupational health physician at the university-affiliated Memorial Hospital of Rhode Island in Pawtucket. Dr. David Kern was commissioned by a local textile factory to investigate two cases of lung disease that he had treated at the hospital. He found six more cases of the disease in the 150-person plant, a startling occurrence since its incidence in the general population is one in 40,000. Like Dr. Dong and Dr. Olivieri, Dr. Kern was set to present a paper on his findings when the textile company threatened to sue, citing a clause in the agreement that prevented the publication of "trade secrets." Once again, the university and the hospital administration sided squarely with the company, forbidding Dr. Kern to publish his findings and shutting down the one-person clinic where he conducted his research.²⁵

The only element out of the ordinary in these three cases of stifled research is that they involved academics with the personal integrity and the

dogged tenacity to publicly challenge their corporate "partners" and their own employers — factors that eventually led to the truth coming out through the press. But relying on crusading individuals to protect the integrity of academic research does not provide a foolproof safeguard in every case. According to a 1994 study conducted on industry research partnerships at U.S. universities, most corporate interference occurs quietly and with no protest. The study found that companies maintained the right to block the publication of findings in 35 percent of cases, while 53 percent of the academics surveyed agreed that "publication can be delayed."²⁶

There is also a more insidious level of interference that takes place at universities every day, interference that occurs before research even begins, prior, even, to proposals being committed to paper. As John V. Lombardi, president of the University of Florida at Gainesville, says: "We have taken the

Kmart's attitude always has been: What did we get from you this year?... Many people at Kmart thought I was employed by Kmart.

— J. Patrick Kelly, Kmart Chair of Marketing at Wayne State University, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 1998

great leap forward and said: 'Let's pretend we're a corporation.'"²⁷ What such a leap means back on the ground is that studies are designed to fit the mandate of corporate-endowed research chairs with such grand names as the Taco Bell Distinguished Professor of Hotel and Restaurant Administration at Washington State University, the Yahoo! Chair of Information-Systems Technology at Stanford University and the Lego Professorship of Learning Research at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. J. Patrick Kelly, the professor who holds the Kmart Chair of Marketing at Wayne State, estimates that his research has saved Kmart "many more times" the amount of the \$2 million donation that created his position.²⁸ The professor who holds the Kmart-endowed chair at West Virginia University, meanwhile, has such a hands-on relationship with the retailer that he or she is required by contract to spend a minimum of thirty days a year training assistant managers.

Where Was the Opposition?

Many people, upon learning of the advanced stage of branded education, want to know where the university faculty, teachers, school boards and parents were while this transformation was taking place. At the elementary and high-school level, this is a difficult question to answer—particularly since one is hard-pressed to find anyone but the advertisers who is actively *in favor* of allowing ads into schools. Over the course of the decade, all the large teachers' unions in North America have been quite vocal about the threat to independent instruction posed by commercialization, and many concerned parents have formed groups like Ralph Nader's Commercial Alert to make their opposition heard. Despite this, however, there was never one big issue on which parents and educators could band together to fight—and possibly win—a major policy battle on classroom commercialization.

Unlike the very public standoffs over prayer in schools or over explicit sex education, the move to allow advertisements did not take the form of one sweeping decision but, rather, of thousands of little ones. Usually these were made on an ad hoc, school-by-school basis, frequently with no debate, no notice, no public scrutiny at all, because advertising agencies were careful to fashion school promotions that could slip between the cracks of standard school-board regulations.

However, when Channel One and the Youth News Network wanted to bring ads directly into classrooms, there *was* some debate: genuine, heated discussions took place at the school-board level, and most boards across Canada decided to block YNN. Channel One, though far more successful, particularly in poorer districts, has also had to swallow its share of board refusals.

There is, however, another, more ingrained cultural factor that has helped the brands get inside the schools, and it has to do with the effectiveness of branding itself. Many parents and educators could not see anything to be gained by resistance; kids today are so bombarded by brand names that it seemed as if protecting educational spaces from commercialization was less important than the immediate benefits of finding new funding sources. And the hawkers of in-school advertising have not been at all shy about playing upon this sense of futility among parents and educators. As Frank Vigil, president of ZapMe! computer systems, says: "America's youth is

exposed to advertising in many aspects of their lives. We believe students are savvy enough to discern between educational content and marketing materials."²⁹ Thus it became possible for many parents and teachers to rationalize their failure to protect yet another previously public space by telling themselves that what ads students don't see in class or on campus, they will certainly catch on the subway, on the Net or on TV when they get home. What's one more ad in the life of these marked-up and marked-down kids? And then again ... what's another?

But while this may explain the brands' inroads in high schools, it still doesn't explain how this process has been able to take such a firm hold on the university campuses. Why have university professors remained silent, passively allowing their corporate "partners" to trample the principles of freedom of inquiry and discourse that have been the avowed centerpieces of academic life? More to the point, aren't our campuses supposed to be overflowing with troublemaking tenured radicals? Isn't the institution of tenure, with its lifelong promise of job security, designed to make it safe for academics to take controversial positions without fear of repercussion? Aren't these people, to borrow a term more readily understood in the halls of academe, *counter-hegemonic*?

As Janice Newson, a York University sociology professor who has published widely on this issue, has noted: "On the surface, it is easier to account for the increasing realization of the corporate-linked university than it is to account for the lack of resistance to it." Newson, who has been sounding the alarm on the corporate threat to academic freedom for more than a decade, writes that she had (wrongly) assumed that

members of the academic community would become actively concerned about, if not resistant to, this shift in direction. After all, a significant if not transformative pattern of institutional change has occurred over a relatively short period of time. And in many ways, these changes sharply contrast to both the idea and the practices of the university that preceded them, the university in which most current members of the academy began their careers.³⁰

Newson's critique could well be expanded to include student activists, who until the mid-nineties were also mysteriously absent from the corporatization non-debate. Sadly, part of the explanation for the lack of campus mobilization is simple self-interest. Until the mid-nineties, the growing corporate influence in education and research seemed to be taking place almost exclusively in the engineering departments, management schools and science labs. Campus radicals had always been prone to dismiss these faculties as hopelessly compromised right-wing bastions: who cared what was happening on that side of campus, so long as the more traditionally progressive fields (literature, cultural studies, political science, history and fine arts) were left alone? And as long as professors and students in the arts and humanities remained indifferent to this radical shift in campus culture and priorities, they were free to pursue other interests — and there were many on offer. For instance, more than a few of those tenured radicals who were supposed to be corrupting young minds with socialist ideas were preoccupied with their own postmodernist realization that truth itself is a construct. This realization made it intellectually untenable for many academics to even participate in a political argument that would have "privileged" any one model of learning (public) over another (corporate). And since truth is relative, who is to say that Plato's dialogues are any more of an "authority" than Fox's *Anastasia*?

This academic trend only accounts for a few of the missing-in-actions, however. Many other campus radicals were still up for a good old political fight, but during the key years of the corporate campus invasion they were tied up in a different battle: the all-consuming gender and race debates of the so-called political correctness wars. As we will see in the next chapter, if the students allowed themselves to be turned into test markets, it was partly because they had other things on their minds. They were busy taking on their professors on the merits of the canon and the need for more stringent campus sexual-harassment policies. And if their professors failed to prevent the very principles of unfettered academic discourse from being traded in for a quick buck, this may also have been because they were too preoccupied with defending themselves against their own "McCarthyite" students. So there they all were, fighting about women's studies and the latest backlash book while their campuses were being sold out from under their feet. It

wasn't until the politics of personal representation were themselves co-opted by branding that students and professors alike began to turn away from their comrades with each other, realizing they had a more powerful foe.

But by then, much had already been lost. More fundamentally than some-what antiquated notions of "pure" education and research, what is lost as schools "pretend they are corporations" (to borrow a phrase from the University of Florida) is the very idea of unbranded space. In many ways, schools and universities remain our culture's most tangible embodiment of public space and collective responsibility. University campuses in particular — with their residences, libraries, green spaces and common standards for open and respectful discourse — play a crucial, if now largely symbolic, role: they are the one place left where young people can see a genuine public life being lived. And however imperfectly we may have protected these institutions in the past, at this point in our history the argument against transforming education into a brand-extension exercise is much the same as the one for national parks and nature reserves: these quasi-sacred spaces remind us that unbranded space is still possible.