Naomi Klein, in her tour de force 2000 work, *No Logo*, self-reflexively places herself in much of the book—either in retrospect as a brand-obsessed teen or more affectingly as direct observer of sweatshops or culture-jamming initiatives. I hope, then, that in this spirit it’s appropriate to begin this contribution to Classics Revisited with my own experience with the book. My work is quoted briefly, and then soundly criticized, in *No Logo*, as an example of overly reductionistic Marxist-doctrinaire antiadvertising perspectives. A friend of mine told me about this just after the book was published. Once I read the book myself, I was of course bummed, since the criticism was in such a clearly admirable work. But over the next year or two, many other friends as well as colleagues and students would e-mail or say to me, “Hey, you’re in *No Logo!*” When I pointed out that it was not a favorable mention, they would say, “But you’re in *No Logo!*” To be dissed in *No Logo* was in fact a career booster! It was an early hint to me of how widely read and admired Naomi Klein’s work was.

By just about any measure, *No Logo* is one of the most influential critical engagements of corporate marketing, globalized production, and capitalist resistance of all time. It is an outstanding piece of both advocacy journalism and public scholarship. As an exposé about large-scale advertising, it takes its place next to such works as Stuart Chase’s *Tragedy of Waste* (1929), Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), and more recently Juliet Schor’s *Born to Buy* (2004). As a spotlight on the cost-cutting production in, and social costs of, large-scale capitalism, it belongs to a class of muckraking eye-openers that includes Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906), Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), Ralph Nader’s *Unsafe at Any
Speed (1965), and—noting many of the same contemporary labor trends as Klein—Barbara Ehrenreich’s Nickel and Dimed (2001). As a best seller, No Logo attracted a wider readership than traditional academic books and helped reinforce a coalition of antibranding, antisweatshop activists. Klein herself has been described by the managing editor of the conservative Canadian newspaper the National Post as “the most successful author since Noam Chomsky popularizing leftist ideas in the post-Marxist age” (quoted in Austen, 2007), a description that the editor no doubt meant to be damning but what to progressives is a coveted badge of honor.

We should also recognize the impact of No Logo in academia. I recall discussing with a communications faculty member in the mid-1980s that there were virtually no undergraduate-friendly books taking a critical look at modern advertising to assign in classes. But No Logo was part of a group of books that helped change that by the end of the 1990s, with No Logo being arguably the most accessible (and certainly the best known). It has been assigned, in whole or in part, as required reading in numerous college classes. Excerpts have been reprinted in undergraduate readers. It was followed by a 2003 companion video—with updated material—produced by Sut Jhally’s Media Education Foundation, similarly shown in numerous undergraduate courses. As of this writing, the various English-language editions of No Logo, as listed on Google Scholar, have been cited by other works more than three thousand times; the Spanish edition is cited more than two hundred times. No Logo has been a central part of, and influential on, an ever growing scholarly literature critically engaging the nature of consumer culture, corporate branding, and ant CORPORATE marketing activism; just a couple of notable examples of this latter activist-oriented work include Inger Stole’s historical work Advertising on Trial: Consumer Activism and Corporate Public Relations in the 1930s (2006) and Christine Harold’s OurSpace: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture (2007), a complement to No Logo.

A work that combines critical ideas about advertising with incisive industry analysis, historical perspective, and first-person investigation, No Logo came at a key time in the history of advertising, globalization, and consumer activism. As Klein argues, the “Nike paradigm” mandated that corporations view themselves in the business of “brand production”—aggressively maximizing the visibility and symbolic meaning of brands—and divest themselves of literal ownership of the “means of production” of physical commodities. This model triggered destructive trends in both
marketing and manufacturing. Since brands were the real commodity, the visibility and symbolic attractiveness of the brand must be promoted at all costs. As a result, public space and social values were aggressively co-opted by the branded companies. On the flip side, with company-based manufacturing being deemphasized, the physical commodity had to be produced dirt cheap, with labor being the easiest cost to cut, especially in a globalized economy susceptible to exploitation.

But the story does not end there. The problem (for corporations) was that the brands were too successful, the production too cheap. No Logo was positioned to examine a crisis in this postindustrial logic of commodity fetishism: the hip image of even the most pervasive branding could not mask the cruel realities of large-scale production, especially in an era of globalized outsourcing in which a chain of subcontractors raced to the bottom of worker compensation to win contracts from the brand producers. In fact, the messages of personal empowerment celebrated by these brands (“Just Do It”) were seen as rubbing salt in the wounds of mistreated global labor. To adapt Marx's famous prediction, then, essentially Klein is arguing that modern branding contains the seeds of its own revolution. As brands took over public space and force-fed inspiring marketing slogans and imagery completely at odds with the globalized production trends, they also sparked protest passions and offered branding tools that may be turned against them (and, Klein argues, were turned against them).

Appearing at the end of the 1990s, Klein's book documents a decade that presented the rise of Channel One, Nike Town, and ubiquitous Starbucks-ness, as well as the activist response of Adbusters, prankster urban-space carnivals, and sweatshop sit-ins (this last still very much alive at my academic home, Penn State). Increased attention to the cooptation of social values in branding, the disconnect between marketing discourse and corporate behavior, the guerrilla tactics of resistance, the bottom-line cruelty of global production are all legacies of No Logo, brought together with an extremely engaging writing style.

Naomi Klein's focus is on the political economic: the shrinking political freedoms of the public sphere under corporate control and the injustices of globalized production. In the latter, gender plays its most prominent role in the book, as Klein explores how young women are especially targeted as vulnerable workers in sweatshops and pregnancy is stigmatized and punished. Klein seems less interested in the particular symbolic dynamics of consumer culture. She implies, for example, that concerns with gen-
der representation in advertising smack of immaturity or self-indulgence. Sweatshops, political censorship in commercial spaces, and public protests are what matter, not gendered body images in magazine ads, she asserts. Of course, dehumanizing labor practices and the corporate suppression of ideas do matter tremendously, but so does the significance of the ideological tendencies in advertising and marketing messages.

No Logo ends optimistically. The last paragraph observes, “Ethical shareholders, culture jammers, street reclaimers, McUnion organizers, human-rights hacktivists, school-logo fighters and Internet corporate watchdogs are at the early stages of demanding a citizen-centered alternative to the international rule of the brands.” But her introduction to the tenth-anniversary edition, published at the end of 2009, takes a more somber tone. Although quantifying such trends is difficult, events during the 2000s seemed to derail the anticorporate movements of the 1990s. Klein argues in this new edition about the United States and other Western countries, “September 11 pretty much blasted the movement out of existence. In the United States, progressive politics rallied around a single cause: ‘taking back’ the White House (as if ‘we’ ever had it in the first place), while outside the United States, the coalitions that had been focused on a global economy model now trained their attention on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, on a resurgent “US empire” and on resisting increasingly aggressive attacks on immigrants” (xxx). This passage hints that her 2007 book, The Shock Doctrine, itself extremely important and insightful, can be viewed as a downbeat sequel to No Logo, as state-sponsored initiatives such as various Bush administration responses to 9/11 solidified the neo-liberal agenda of global capitalism and focused activists’ attention away from the activities of corporations and marketing and more toward the state. (The enduring prankster group the Yes Men is a hilarious and perceptive exception that targeted both throughout the 2000s.) Most of her introduction to the new edition of No Logo focuses not on updating the activities of anticorporate activists, but on how mainstream politics have adopted the Nike paradigm, including a long (and perceptive) discussion of the branding of Obama.

We could discuss the recession of 2008 as having a similar dampening effect on progressive protests against corporate consumerist messages. The recession years forced an immediate concern for employability on campuses and other sectors of society, “Main Street versus Wall Street” anger directed at the financial sector (rather than brand advertisers), and mar-
keters spending less on media advertising and sometimes toning down—temporarily—messages of conspicuous consumption.

But the recession arguably, and ironically, may reinvigorate corporate reach. The search for cheap promotion—combined with the power of digital media—encourages more direct marketing, using social media to bypass the decreasingly effective (for marketing purposes) traditional media. As a form of promotion cheaper than paid advertising, public relations is expected to grow in 2010 in terms of both hiring and spending (“Annual 2010,” 2009). The increased role of PR in corporate marketing encourages the aggressive use of YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter to reach people directly as well as the placement of corporate-friendly ideas in traditional media system weakened by layoffs of professional media creators (most prominently journalists; see McChesney and Nichols, 2010). When corporate marketers are willing to spend on advertising, they find a traditional and digital media environment so desperate for ad dollars that they are willing to grant more influence to the spenders. And as an example of how the Bush administration just keeps on giving, in this case with his two conservative justice appointees, we can combine the above trends with the disastrous US Supreme Court decision in 2010 that eased limits on corporate spending in political elections. In all, we see a corporate sector primed to increase its control of the public sphere.

None of this negates the still-relevant effectiveness of No Logo’s analysis of the modern branded corporation, the documentation of branding strategies and grassroots resistance. What we have to hope is that it is not so much that history is cyclical (with the 1990s being a decade of anti-corporate activism, and the 2000s arguably less so). Rather, we can be optimistic that the foundation of resistance developed in the 1990s—that Klein so eloquently documents—offers an activist infrastructure that continues to build, even if unevenly, during subsequent epochs with their own variations of global abuses of power. Will we see new activist vigor sparked by the outrageous corporate hubris and PR duplicity of the 2010 Gulf Coast oil “hemorrhage,” to use the metaphor Klein herself applies in her own investigation (Klein, 2010)?” After all, anticorporate activists and culture jammers can use Facebook and Twitter, too.

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