BRANDING THE MAHATMA: The Untimely Provocation of Gandhian Publicity

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One day in the summer of 2006, browsing the Internet, I came across an extraordinary item on the website of the literary magazine *McSweeney's*. Part of a series called "Tim Carvell's History's Notable Persons Reconsidered," this unwittingly sapient piece of silliness concerned Mahatma Gandhi. The author, the titular Tim Carvell, sought to imagine the conditions under which the Mahatma's seemingly shockproof image as "one of the great heroes of the twentieth century" might be called into question.

> Let us now consider what it would take for us to re-examine his legacy. Clearly, murder or arson would put him right over the line. But let's start small: Were we to learn that he was a lousy tipper, he'd probably still be okay. Rude to his staff? Still okay—he was a busy man, had a lot of stress in his life, was hungry. It happens. Cursed like a sailor? Damaging but still not fatal—could be interpreted as colourful. Here, I think, is the dividing line—everything below it, he's still a hero; everything above it, he doesn't make the TIME 100: What if it were discovered that he often, in conversation, would refer to the necessity of "managing" the Gandhi "brand," "leveraging" its "equity" through a series of corporate sponsorships and joint ventures?[1]

To be sure, the very idea that Gandhi's goodness is beyond question is a result of the cultivation of his saintly image on the transnational circuit. But Carvell's choice of ignominious circumstance—Gandhi as carefully managed brand—was in fact less zany than it might appear. Certainly the Mahatma himself was never known

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, Vol. 25, Issue 1, pp. 1–39. ISSN 0886-7356, online ISSN 1548-1360. *© 2010 by the American Anthropological Association. All rights reserved.* *DOI: 10.1111/j.1548-1360.2009.01050.x*

to speak McKinsey. But he was a pathbreaking innovator in techniques of mass publicity. And by the dawn of the 21st century, there were plenty of others who were ready to market the Mahatma.

This is a story in two acts. The first act starts with a scandal triggered by the prospect of branding Gandhi, relates the story behind the event, and explores some of the mess of meanings, aspirations, and phobias to which Gandhi as a public cultural signifier has been yoked in postindependence India. The second act contextualizes this analysis of Gandhi as public cultural signifier in a consumerist age vis-à-vis an interpretation of what I am calling "Gandhian publicity"—that is to say, a specifically Gandhian understanding of mass communication. Ultimately, I argue that it is not Gandhi's otherworldliness that troubles his commodification; indeed, that part of the Gandhi legend is smoothly compatible with the marketing imagination. Rather, it is Gandhi as a this-worldly technician of the body that interrupts a consumerist public culture.

In February 2002, global news networks reported that the name and image of Mohandas K. Gandhi was going to be made available, at a substantial consideration, for use in consumer goods advertising. Responses ranged from righteous outrage to defiant approval. It seemed that one of the Mahatma's great-grandsons, Tushar Gandhi, had sold the rights to his famously frugal ancestor to a U.S.-based corporation, CMG Worldwide, which intended to license the Mahatma's likeness to suitable corporate clients. Oliver Burkeman (2006) reacted in the Manchester *Guardian*:

> He championed non-violence, vegetarianism, democracy and simple living. Now, thanks to a deal struck in the highest echelons of the marketing world, Mahatma Gandhi could soon be championing a wide variety of useful household products. . . . The peace-loving hero of Indian independence now finds himself in the company of Marilyn Monroe, Rock Hudson, Ginger Rogers, Peter Sellers and Garfield the Cat.[2]

But why, actually, did this predicament seem so piquant? Burkeman's response clearly arose out of the field of Gandhi's international intelligibility—that is to say, Gandhi as relatively low-resolution otherworldly herald of peace. For this international Gandhi to appear in advertising was incongruous, even borderline blasphemous, because it seemed to transgress a boundary separating his transcendent saintliness from the instrumentalities of the market. Never mind that Gandhi himself had, throughout his political life, both materially depended on and helped morally to legitimate some of India's leading industrial houses;[3] this "move to

commercialize an icon of austerity" (Bunsha 2002) appeared to many as an almost ontological violation.

At the same time, a certain melancholy resignation modulated the indignation. If the price of Gandhi's continued visibility in the 21st century would be his conformity to a commodity logic, then perhaps this was also proof of the universal capacity of the market to preserve at least the echoes of a more idealistic age (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). This was, in fact, more or less the position from which CMG Worldwide defended itself once the recriminations started. Its representatives argued that it was only through the kind of licensing that they were in a position to provide that Gandhi would command fees befitting his historical status. Kunal Dua, an Indian-born executive at CMG interviewed for Burkeman's article explained: "Now that [Gandhi's heirs have] got American representation, big companies who can afford to pay a lot will pay a lot. We're not doing charity here, of course, but it gives us great satisfaction that it goes to the right people" (Burkeman 2006).

In India, responses tended to be more visceral but also sometimes more irreverent. There was, for example, the 32-year-old man who called Tushar Gandhi from Delhi, "crying over the phone at the thought of Gandhiji being marketed in this fashion" (Kamdar 2002). Who did Tushar Gandhi think he was single handedly to alienate this national treasure to, of all things, a U.S. company? Was not the unauthorized use of Gandhi's image proscribed by Indian law? Dionne Bunsha (2002) quotes an indignant former High Court Judge on the irreducibility of Gandhi to any notion of private ownership: "As a nation, we have a right to protest against the commercialization of the Father of the Nation. You cannot equate Gandhi with personal property. He is not a marketable commodity. He belongs to humanity."

The commodification of Gandhi, then, appeared wrong on two counts. First, Gandhi was not private property and therefore could not be sold. Second, Gandhi's insistence on *brahmacharya* (the renunciation of sensuous gratification) seemed diametrically opposed to the seductive ethos of advertising. At a time when mass consumerism was being presented as the new collective aspiration, Gandhian austerity seemed archaic. Still, Gandhi's stature as both Father of the Indian Nation and Global Herald of Nonviolence also suggested to some that it was high time to take active control of this irreplaceable cultural resource. As a potentially patentable Indian intellectual property, Gandhi enjoyed unique recognition and respect all over the world.[4] So why not capitalize on his symbolic equity before some ignorant foreigner stepped into the breach again?

In July 2002, I found myself engaged in a public discussion in Mumbai with the leading marketing consultant Rama Bijapurkar. The conversation turned to the Gandhi–CMG controversy. In front of a crowd comprising activists, scholars, journalists and executives, she remarked with half a smile: "It seems the furore was about price. 'How *dare* you sell him at a price at which even a B-grade film start in the United States would not be branded? . . . Where is our entitlement? We're big boys and we're players in the world!'" Recognition and reward: several months earlier, as the news of the CMG deal first broke and it was reported that Tushar Gandhi had accepted a measly $60,000 for his famous ancestor's identity, top adman Piyush Pandey spoke to a journalist. His comment nicely captured the paradoxical sense that Gandhi's image was at once beyond commerce and eminently marketable. Exclaimed Pandey: "This is chickenshit for someone who is priceless. Ideally, a great public service charity should have paid through its teeth to get hold of the Mahatma brand" (Mahajan 2002).

So what did Tushar Gandhi think he was doing?

"SURF CANNOT BE A BISCUIT"

At the time of the scandal, Tushar Gandhi was a 42-year-old printer, graphic designer, and aspiring politician.[5] Since the mid-1990s, he had been working with his father, Arun Gandhi, on developing a multimedia resource on the Mahatma. Initially conceived as a CD-ROM, the project attracted the interest of some IT entrepreneurs and soon turned into a comprehensive website and digital archiving initiative called the Mahatma Gandhi Foundation (www.mahatma.org.in).

I spent an afternoon with Tushar Gandhi in Mumbai in July 2002. Our conversation ranged across the history of his organization, the state of Indian politics, the Indian IT boom, and—finally—the CMG deal. I raised the topic gingerly, but my host laughed and proved keen to offer me his version of these infamous events.

He told me that Visa, the credit card company, had been planning to launch a new ad campaign in France. For the television commercials, they had envisioned a "university of the future . . . where holographic images of renowned personalities from all walks of life would be teachers in classrooms."[6] The spot would start with a girl, late for class, rushing down a corridor, catching glimpses as she went.

> In the first classroom she sees Salvador Dalí teaching art to the class. In the second class she sees Bapuji [i.e., Gandhi] teaching world history to the class. And then while she's running from the third classroom a boy walks out and

> there is this vending machine robot walking around. [The boy] goes and he asks for water. His voice is recognized and his data comes up and the credit card transaction happens and the screen comes on—"Visa"—and a bottle of water appears. The boy drinks some, then pours it on his head, cools him off. So the girl looks into the classroom—who's teaching? And Marilyn Monroe is teaching them, I don't know, sex or movies or whatever. That was the campaign.

CMG had contacted Tushar Gandhi to authorize the use of his great-grandfather's image. When he protested that he was not the owner of any copyrights, CMG had reassured him that all they were after was "permission from the estate of Gandhi or from the descendents of Gandhi for the use of his image."[7] Tushar Gandhi countered that he would need more information about the potential uses to which the image would be put. "I never expected there to be any monetary this-thing," he told me, "so I said I'd be happy if you give us credit . . . our website URL and 'Mahatma Gandhi courtesy of the Mahatma Gandhi Foundation.' And that fellow turns around and says 'would a $50,000 credit do?'"

Tushar Gandhi supposed that the money could be put to good use in some of the projects with which his foundation was affiliated—for example, the restoration of the house in Porbandar, Gujarat, where the Mahatma's wife Kasturba had lived.[8] CMG extended the proposed deal to $50,000 a year for three years, with a subsequent annual increase of 15 percent. Still later, when it seemed that clients other than Visa were interested, the figure was raised to $60,000. But before the deal could be finalized, Tushar Gandhi told me, CMG jumped the gun.

> Like a typical American company, in the next month or so they put up an image of Bapuji on their website and said "now CMG is going to protect the Gandhi brand!" And when *that* happened, without understanding it the Indian papers just spread it all over saying that even if you want to put up a photograph of Bapuji in your home, you're going to have to pay dollars to an American company and this and that. And then the whole world was on my back. So then finally I said "it's not worth my while, it's taking too much away from me." There were all sorts of allegations against me. I said "I'm not doing it for my personal benefit in any case. In any case, why waste my energies trying to prove that I'm not wrong? I'm not desperate for that money either." I just washed my hands of the whole thing.

Exhaling as if to expel the frenzy of the weeks during which he had been the target of a national outcry, Tushar Gandhi insisted:

> I still say that I didn't do anything wrong. And there *is* a need. There are people who are going to use his image for commercial purposes. If it's going to happen then why not use that opportunity to fund some of the activities that can further his philosophy? I don't see anything wrong with it, as long as I don't sell his image to [gun makers] Smith & Wesson. Or I don't sell his image to Johnny Walker whisky.

The point, as he saw it, was to acknowledge that Gandhi's image was already in circulation and to attempt to manage that circulation in suitable and relevant ways. Today, anyone who pretended that effective publicity would somehow detract from the dignity of Gandhi's life and legacy was simply out of touch.

> No matter how noble your cause, no matter how appropriate it may be, unless it is properly publicized, . . . [unless you can] manage a sustained campaign, these days these things don't live. Even when they have these massive political rallies, they have to be preceded by a very preplanned, very systematic campaign, to create awareness and inquisitiveness enough for people to come in and listen to these guys. And even then, 75 percent of people are forced to go, or paid to go. But nothing works without publicity or proper PR.

The question then became: what could or should Gandhi stand for? On what terms might his image be circulated at the beginning of the 21st century? I put this question to Piyush Pandey, the advertising executive who had dismissed CMG's proposed payment in the press as "chickenshit." He replied:

> I was asked this question. And my answer was not a very logical one. I just said that "of course you must use the brand." But I would be very uncomfortable if the brand was used for a lot of things. . . . If you branded . . . say, the wheat of India or the salt from Dandi, I would feel quite comfortable. But if you went and sold a beauty oil called Gandhi, then I won't feel very good about it. Why? I can't answer that. I was . . . in Marseilles three years back, and it said Gandhi tandoori chicken on an Indian restaurant. Now Gandhi, in my mind because of my emotions, is a very-very ethereal figure. And when I saw Gandhi tandoori chicken, it felt odd. . . . At an emotional level, that brand carries a lot of core values. The brand Gandhi. . . . Surf cannot be a biscuit. . . . Gandhi can't be a brand of iron.[9]

Tushar Gandhi, for his part, was particularly distressed by the implication that he had somehow set out to patent the Mahatma, as opposed to exercising

stewardship over the significata that his great-grandfather's name and image had already accrued.

> Nobody understood what had actually transpired between me and CMG. They went to town with all sorts of theories that there would be a line of toys and a line of clothing and all sorts of things using the Gandhi brand. Like we have his . . . emblem on the rupee currency notes, there would be stickers saying "Gandhi product." . . . [People thought] that CMG would create, you know, like the Barbie doll? They would have Gandhi doll. The absurdest level! My whole contention was that there was *absolutely no move to create a brand.*

Some of the original generation of "freedom fighters"—that is, individuals who could claim to have been participants in the nationalist struggle prior to 1947—felt that Gandhi's legacy should properly be husbanded by grassroots activists working in villages, rather than by some publicity-minded city slicker like his great-grandson. But Tushar Gandhi saw himself as making a larger intervention. The self-styled Gandhians and the government, he felt, had allowed the Mahatma to lapse into a kind of pious anachronism. Nowhere was this clearer than in the government's principled Luddism when it came to the spinning of *khadi* (the handspun cloth that Gandhi had advocated as a means of universal self-employment in India and as a symbol of the rejection of foreign imports).[10]

As recently as 2000, the Khadi Board had rejected cloth spun on electric machines as inauthentic—and this at a time when most village producers would have had reasonably easy access to such technology. In 2001, the Government of India announced that Arthur Andersen Consulting had recommended revitalizing their moribund Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) by marketing an upscale line of artisanal products under the brand name "khadi" (Martyris 2000; Srivastava 2001). In other words, rural producers should be tied to archaic modes of production to provide "authentically" rustic goods for the urban consuming classes at a price sufficiently inflated to ensure a windfall for the government. Could not the Gandhi name be used instead, Tushar Gandhi asked, to identify a range of products produced not according to some outdated notion of rustic self-sufficiency but, rather, in conformity with contemporary ecological considerations?

> I have sent a letter [to the government] . . . I said "why do you need Arthur Andersen? Here is a brand which you could sanctify, and win the trust by saying this is a brand which stands up to the very, very rigid framework of Gandhi's philosophy. It's passed through that, and now you have the Gandhi stamp of approval on there." And that would revive *khadi* like nothing else would. I

FIGURE 1. Photograph by the author.

know of people from Europe who come over here and they say they want to buy cotton which has been grown without chemical fertilizer and pesticides. Now why don't we offer them a brand where we could authenticate that this was not done, and the Indian farmers used organic farming to cultivate that product. And *give* it the Gandhi brand!' What's he for? I'm sure *he* would have approved it. If he was there he would have said, yes—go ahead and do it.

But when the government got wind of the proposed CMG deal, it threatened Tushar Gandhi with legal action should he fail to explain himself. On what authority was the government acting? Certainly it could in no sense be said to "own" Mahatma Gandhi any more than could Tushar Gandhi or any other surviving relatives. Gandhi had refused any private inheritance by bequeathing his writings and personal possessions to a public foundation, the Navajivan Trust. Today, a bewildering array of institutions and individuals control the Gandhian archive of texts, images, and sound recordings. To the extent that Gandhi had dedicated his life to the nation, many felt that Gandhi's posthumous person was part of the inalienable substance of the national collective. As one corporate executive told me: "He's like the national flag. You can't give it to somebody."

The government was, however, invoking the Emblems and Names (Improper Use) Act of 1950. The Act effectively draws a distinction between public and private benefit and lists organizations and individuals whose names and likenesses may not be used "for the purpose of any trade, business, calling or profession, or in the title of any patent, or in any trade mark or design" without the permission of the central government.[11] The list makes for interesting reading. Along with, precisely, the Indian flag and other emblems and insignia of central and provincial government and the judiciary, it protects the dignity of, inter alia, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the St John Ambulance Brigade of India, the International Civil Aviation Association, the World Meteorological Association, the Tuberculosis Association of India, the International Atomic Agency, the Bharat Scouts and Guides, the International Olympic Committee, and Interpol. Among individuals, the Act singles out Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, the 17th-century Maratha warrior king (and latter-day focus of Maharashtrian regional pride) Shivaji, as well as currently serving Prime Ministers and Presidents.[12] The 1950 Act was modified in 1982 by a set of rules that allowed the circulation of such names and likenesses in the form of state-authorized postal stamps or commemorative souvenirs, or by state-backed institutions dedicated to the "propagation of the ideals for which [the depicted person] stood and lived," or yet in the case of government-authorized circulation for "academic, artistic, biographical, cultural, educational, scientific, or spiritual purposes."[13]

But the scandal around Tushar Gandhi's dealings with CMG came at a time when this kind of separation of markets and the public interest was being challenged by new commercial regimes of intellectual property. The Government of India's Department of Biotechnology was, as Kaushik Sunder Rajan (2006) notes, redefining intellectual property in biological information as being in the "national commercial interest." Could Gandhi's value similarly be recategorized so as to blur the boundary between public and private interests? Shahid Amin (2007) reflects that the burgeoning international market in Gandhi memorabilia has prompted "the Ministry of Culture to rewrite the rules about government making bids at auctions, in the interest of national self-esteem." Still, sometimes the price has simply been too high, prompting patrimonially minded businesspeople to step in. Such was the case in March 2009, when several highly iconic pieces of Gandhiana (including a watch, a pair of sandals, and a pair of spectacles) were auctioned by New York–based Antiquorum on behalf of a private U.S. seller. Tushar Gandhi, as ever a vocal presence in the debate leading up to the auction, afterward expressed his delighted relief that Indian liquor tycoon (!) Vijay Mallya had secured the items

for a total of $1.8 million, although it remained unclear to which institution or body they would ultimately be donated.

The Names and Emblems Act has, to put it mildly, not been consistently applied. As we shall see, various advertisements using Mahatma Gandhi's name and likeness have circulated in India both before and after its enactment. Tushar Gandhi, for his part, escaped potential prosecution by withdrawing from the CMG deal before it had been properly concluded. Nevertheless, the urgency of rethinking the terms by which the Mahatma's image and reputation might be managed was heightened, by his sense that the Mahatma, having been murdered once shortly after India's Independence, was now being slowly killed all over again by a combination of slander and complacency.[14]

DISUSE VALUE

In May 1995, there was an uproar when Indian gay rights pioneer Ashok Row Kavi referred to Gandhi on a cable television chat show as "that bastard *bania*" (Kumar 2006).[15] And Bal Thackeray, the Mumbai strongman founder of the Shiv Sena, routinely thundered against the unmanliness of Gandhian *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and brahmacharya in his incendiary discourses. *Mee Nathuram Godse Boltoi* [This is Nathuram Godse Speaking], a play by Marathi playwright Pradeep Dalvi that examined the motives and actions of Gandhi's assassin, was banned by the Maharashtra State Government in 1989, briefly staged in 1998, and then proscribed again.

In each of these cases, Tushar Gandhi had publicly spoken out in defense of his ancestor's memory and legacy. And every time, he reflected with some bitterness, "the sect of people who are known as the Gandhians" had been worse than useless. Rather than briskly and effectively responding to the defamation constantly hurled at the Mahatma, the representatives of Gandhian organizations "would sit back and say 'no, no we need to turn the other cheek. Bapu said nonviolence means turning the other cheek so we will not counter this. These are lies and they will go away.' . . . They are comatose. They don't do anything. . . . Every time something-something of this sort happens, I have to inform them."[16]

But the challenge was far more complex than policing occasional potshots. In themselves the attacks were not new; Gandhi had during his lifetime been the object of scathing critiques from the Left as well as the Right in India. But in the postliberalization environment of the 1990s and after, the consumerist vindication of sensuous gratification had joined hands with a Hindu nationalist assertion of aggressive virility (Rajagopal 2001). Ostensibly, the Gandhian commandments of

ascetic self-restraint and nonviolence were now entirely outmoded. And indeed the steady stream of feature films celebrating more conventionally militant leaders of the freedom struggle—for example, Subhas Chandra Bose, Vallabhbhai Patel, and especially Bhagat Singh[17]—suggested that the public was ready to recuperate a more macho figuring of national agency.[18] A sense of Gandhi's ineffectual passivity apparently permeated the Indian business classes as well. In 2006, a survey conducted in India's business schools on behalf of the *Economic Times* found that Bill Gates ranked above Mahatma Gandhi as a role model. A commentator in the online magazine *Consumer Voice* remarked:

> An Economic Times survey shows that India's CEOs and management students think that Bill Gates is more of an icon for them than Gandhi, and why not? Bill Gates opens the gates of cash flow for them, tops the Forbes list of the richest men world wide, and Gandhi? Gandhi goes on *padyatras* [pilgrimages on foot] with a *"laathi"* [bamboo staff] in his hand and a ragged *dhoti* [loincloth] on his bare body! He is the quintessential Indian, seeking answers to complicated philosophical and political questions from amongst the poorest of the poor. Bill Gates harvests a rich crop of tech-savvy Indians, with their eyes trained on the West, and little or no concern for the teeming millions of Indians. So what is it that we need to do to make the Gen Y realise that Gandhi is still relevant? [n.d.]

As a signifier Gandhi seemed to have become at once inert and inescapable. As Claude Markovits observes: "The Gandhian reference in India is more and more devoid of specific content. Although Gandhi remains a legitimizing image that no group or individual can dispense with, the more one tends to pay tribute to him the less his message is taken seriously" (2003:62). Bernard Imhasly reports that Gandhi's grandson Gopal Gandhi, himself a civil servant, diplomat, and politician, told him: "For the last fifty years we have either enshrined or vandalized him. In either case we have wanted him immobile" (see Imhasly 2007:186).

At the most general level, Gandhi remains the tediously inevitable and, as it were, highest-order image of national unity—the Father of the Nation. As a corporate executive in Bangalore remarked to me: "Gandhi is very noncontroversial and in that sense getting very blah." For others, Gandhi was an obligatory figure of obeisance, handed down from above. Filmmaker Ramesh Pimple told me: "Gandhi today [has been] made like a single God. And gods basically are not debatable issues. So for the fascist forces also Gandhi is a portrait. Tomorrow also you can build his temple."[19]

FIGURE 2. Photograph courtesy of Jason John (www.flickr.com/photos/mindstock).

The tyranny exerted by the votaries of this godlike Gandhi was acknowledged even by those who lamented the collective forgetting of his message. The Hindi feature film *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara* (Barua 2005) stars Anupam Kher as Uttam Chowdhury, a retired professor of Hindi literature who appears to be sliding into an Alzheimer's-like dementia punctuated by the frantically repeated titular exclamation ("I didn't kill Gandhi!") and violent fits of rage at those who appear to be besmirching Gandhi's dignity. Although Chowdhury was only eight at the time of Gandhi's assassination in January 1948 his neurosis has him convinced that he unintentionally committed the murder, using a toy gun into which real bullets had secretly been placed. Having taken personal responsibility for present-day India's collective failure, Chowdhury's sense of guilt in the end turns out to be grounded in a traumatic childhood episode that coincided with the fateful day of Gandhi's killing. The young Uttam, participating in a children's game, unintentionally desecrates a drawing of the Mahatma. His father, convinced that the two events are inauspiciously connected, refuses, with utter emotional inflexibility,

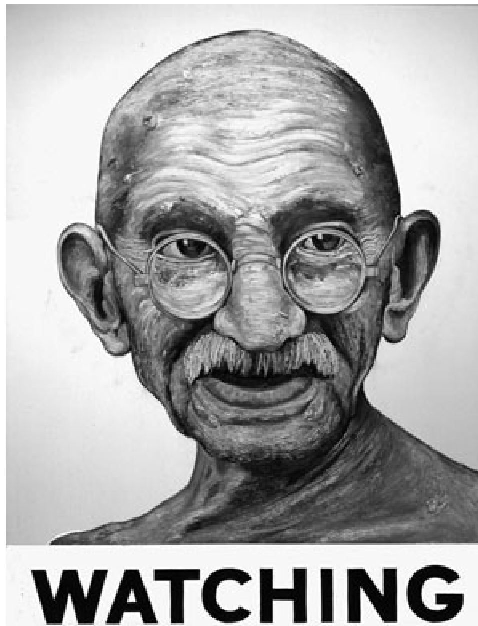

FIGURE 3. Image courtesy of Robbie Conal (www.robbieconal.com).

ever to look at his son again. The story associates the betrayal of Gandhi's memory and the burden of his iconization with a terrifying humorlessness.

The Gandhians were themselves aware of the ossification that was setting in. Nirmala Deshpande, a disciple of the legendary Gandhian reformer Vinoba Bhave, told a journalist: "We in India have made Gandhiji an icon, similar to Lord Rama or Lord Krishna, whereas in the West there is a greater appreciation of the Gandhian philosophy" (Ramakrishnan 2000). The routinization of Gandhian charisma in the form of the Congress Party had, over the decades, diluted the ethical force of Gandhi's political toolkit to the point where plain khadi—once perhaps *the* key symbol of nationalist integrity—was now far more likely to suggest rent-seeking corruption than austere self-reliance.

The widespread sense that public servants were betraying the Gandhian dignity of their vestments was dramatized in *Shobha Yatra,* a Marathi play written by Shafaat Khan for the 50th anniversary of Indian Independence in 1997, and subsequently translated into English by Shanta Gokhale as *It Happens Only in India.* The characters are actors about to take part in a local Independence Day procession in the guise of Gandhi, Bose, and other nationalist leaders. While they are waiting for the procession to begin, a nubile female American photographer strikes their fancy

(shades of Candice Bergen as Margaret Bourke-White flirtatiously photographing the Mahatma in Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*?) but the actors find their lecherous intentions thwarted by the pious gravitas imposed on them by their costumes.[20]

More seriously, at crucial moments Gandhian institutions seemed to be failing the ethical challenge presented by current political crises. Even as the CMG scandal was unfolding in early 2002, Gandhi's home state of Gujarat was being torn apart by some of the most lethal Hindu–Muslim violence in recent memory. With desperate Muslim refugees seeking shelter from the carnage, Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram had, according to some, simply closed its doors.[21] As Tridip Suhrud lamented in *Seminar*: "To a large extent, present day Gandhians prefer not to confront the state. They choose instead to be partners. As a result, they have abnegated [i.e., abdicated] the task of humanizing the state. They choose instead to be its partners" (2002).

Many, then, saw the present-day Gandhian establishment as both complacent and morally bankrupt. Many more were lining up to blame the man himself for the failings of present-day India. A blogger called curiousgawker required only the slightest exaggeration to make his point by means of a satirical news item in the autumn of 2005. The author mock-reported the refunctioning of Gandhi's birthday on October 2 as Blame Gandhi Day by "post-Independence baby boomers . . . to commemorate the evils that have befallen India due to the life and legacy of Mohandas K Gandhi."[22] A man interviewed while "symbolically beating a Gandhi effigy to death with a cricket bat" complained that nonviolent resistance was a hopelessly inadequate strategy, while the economic self-reliance enjoined by *swadeshi* politics was little short of delusional in a world interconnected by free markets. "And why did Gandhi denounce partnering with the Nazis against the British Government? After all, the Nazis were far better than the Brits. They never massacred anyone like the British did in Jallianwalla Bagh."[23] The punch line pumped up the irony to deflate the reality effect of the preceding paragraphs. At the same time it reasserted Gandhi's historical uniqueness: "In other news, the total number of little old men who single handedly brought an entire empire to its knees, who stopped looting and violence in a fledgling nation when nothing else seemed to work by threatening to starve to death still remains at one." The enormity of Gandhi's guilt is here proportionate to the exaggeration of his historical efficacy. Either way, he is abstracted away from the broader political field that gave his practice meaning.

Gandhi the global saint, as portrayed in Richard Attenborough's Oscar-sweeping *Gandhi,* had proved a strikingly successful export. But by the same token many Indians found it intolerable that Western leaders like Bill Clinton

should be permitted to reproach India for failing to live up to Gandhian standards of nonviolence when it carried out nuclear tests in the Rajasthan desert in May 1998. After September 11, 2001, when India's archrival Pakistan became a key ally in the U.S.-led war on terror, it became more pertinent than ever to remember that it was Gandhi who had been "soft on the Muslims." Had he not appeased Pakistan's arrogant demands for a share of the wealth of undivided British India even as it was killing Indian troops in Kashmir? Praveen Togadia, firebrand leader of the Hindu-chauvinist Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), rallied his followers with speeches in celebration of the 2002 slaughter of Muslims in Gujarat. Here, Hindu "resistance" was assimilated to a worldwide struggle against Islamist terrorism. Togadia gloated that on the day of "retaliation"—February 28, 2002—Gandhi, with his "kneeling before Muslims," had been "locked away."[24]

And yet despite all this Gandhi remained the only nationalist leader who could, in the final analysis, still stand for the Indian nation as a whole. A journalist friend in Mumbai told me of an article he had recently written on the government's attempt to select a different famous face for their new Rs1,000 bill. Ostensibly the issue had been the excessive visual simplicity of Gandhi's iconic appearance, which, the government feared, was too easy to counterfeit. Faces with lots of hair or many wrinkles had been suggested and rapidly rejected: Rabindranath Tagore (too regionally Bengali), Mother Teresa (not really Indian and in any case a Christian), Maulana Azad (too Muslim), and so on. In the end, it was back to Gandhi after all.[25]

A couple of weeks later, I had a sobering encounter. Cashing some travelers' checks in Bangalore, I asked the clerk whether the new notes were available. His reply was casually prompt: "Our politicians keep their black money in those, so they're not really in circulation as yet." Later still, in Bernard Imhasly's book *Goodbye to Gandhi?* I came across Gopal Gandhi's related remark: "An *anasakta* [one who is selfless, nonattached] with a revulsion for Mammon—imprinted on currency notes. Gandhi is furthest from the thoughts and deeds of economic offenders—but he lies in stack upon stack of notes undisclosed in the vaults of those offenders!" (Imhasly 2007:187).

By the logic of the Emblems and Names Act, Gandhi's presence on all the bills expressed a paradox of value. As the ultimate inalienable object, Gandhi could not be sold. For this reason, his face appeared to provide an immovable and yet constantly circulating moral bedrock for the money economy and, by extension, for the national community. On the one hand, then, the prospect of commodifying Gandhi evoked the traumatic possibility that the absolute basis of all exchange might

FIGURE 4.

itself enter into circulation and be forced to submit to the same relativizing calculus of valuation as all other things. On the other hand, Tushar Gandhi and others were arguing that Gandhi was, like it or not, already part of the image market. That being the case, the challenge was not one of protecting Gandhi's use value from the profanity of exchange but, rather, of managing his circulation in a judicious way. Only then could he be liberated from the doldrums of disuse value to which Gandhi, qua Father of the Nation, had piously been both elevated and condemned.

One of the retroactive effects of liberalization starting in the 1990s was the widespread (and quite mistaken) identification of Gandhian austerity with the failures of the Nehruvian planned economy. As a joint formation, they came to represent deferral and denial, the big No that stood as a constitutive anteriority to the polymorphous Yes of a consumerist erotics. Joseph Alter (2000) observes that in independent India, Gandhian thought has largely been separated from Gandhian somatics, the bodily practices and experiments that for Gandhi were the experimental terrain and corporeal index of his ideas and beliefs. Gandhian thought has been domesticated and institutionalized in Indian official discourse and

public culture. But Gandhi's body politics, so crucial to his ethical imagination, have been marginalized, as if the concrete corporeality of his practices remains slightly embarrassing.

It is no accident that the liberalizing consumerist project, which depends on highly corporeal forms of publicity, has only accelerated the erasure of Gandhi's body. The activist asceticism of his somatic politics interferes with his iconic serenity (and convenient passivity) as pater patrias in an age of consumerism and identitarian assertion. It is not Gandhi's supposed otherworldliness that renders his activation in commercial publicity problematic. Instead, if we revisit the relation between Gandhi's asceticism and his understanding of mass publicity, we will find something that is all too often forgotten today: namely, that Gandhian body politics were not so much a technology of world-denying renunciation as the worldly condition of his communicative efficacy. Neoliberal branding and chauvinist identitarian politics both involve calculated gambles on the activation of corporeal potentials. Emergent affective resonances are solicited in the hopes that they can be harnessed to given identifications (Mazzarella 2009). In that sense, these apparently "active" modes of public cultural address turn out to require "passive" submission to prefabricated signifiers and narratives. Conversely, the much-maligned "passivity" of Gandhi's body politics turns out, on closer inspection, to require a highly "active" and relentlessly self-critical relation to corporeal potentials.

Perhaps the best way to exemplify these propositions is to start from a slightly different place. For although there were many who were shocked by the idea of marketing Gandhi, there were others who argued that Gandhi had, in a manner of speaking, invented mass marketing in India.

GANDHI: SUPERBRAND?

There was actually nothing new about Gandhi in advertising. Although Gandhi himself often spoke critically of advertising,[26] others were quick to borrow his charisma. Already in 1925, annoyed by the hijacking of his name by a tea manufacturer in Ahmedabad, Gandhi wrote in the pages of *Navajivan* that "the story of the misuse of my name is a long one. Men have been killed and falsehood propagated in my name; my name has been misused at the time of elections; cigarettes, to which I am totally opposed, are sold in my name, as also medicines! When the evil is so widespread, what can one do against it?" (Gandhi 1960–94: vol. 32, item 269).[27]

More recently, blue-chip Indian consumer goods companies like Raymond, Tata, and Amul have featured Gandhi's image in their ads,[28] while Dandi Salt derives its entire brand platform from Gandhi's famous 1930 march against the salt

tax. In less intensively capitalized corners of the market, brands of long grained rice, jute bags, *vanaspati* cooking oil, and safety matches have all been known to carry either Gandhi's name or his image.[29] More predictably, Gandhi's contours have also frequently cropped up in public service ads over the years.[30] In the United States, Apple computers used Gandhi as one of its historical innovators in the "Think Different" billboard campaign of the late 1990s. And in 2005, Telecom Italia would win an ad industry award for a television commercial in which Gandhi's face and voice, remediated by means of digital technology to cell phones and Jumbotrons across the world, brought humanity together across space and time. Less felicitously, in that same year an Australian catering company, Handi Ghandi [*sic*] ("Great Curries, No Worries!"),[31] was discovered to have incorporated into its online advertising a rather undignified cartoon of Gandhi (who was, after all, a vegetarian caste Hindu) as a beef-purveying cook (Nandgaonkar 2005). As Tushar Gandhi drolly noted on that occasion: "He was not a foodie" (Gandelman 2005).[32]

Gandhi's popularity in advertising has partly been a function of his iconic recognizability. Even more important is his reputation for connecting with the people. Although other nationalist leaders had forcefully mobilized popular energies before him, Gandhi's ascent to the center of the anticolonial struggle around 1920 marked the moment at which the Indian National Congress really did come to preside over an all-India social movement. Gandhi was frequently credited with a kind of immediate access to the sentiments of the masses. This made him both invaluable and somewhat unsettling to the nationalist leadership. Subhas Chandra Bose, whose leadership of Congress Gandhi would controversially undermine, remarked: "When the Mahatma speaks, he does so in a language that [the masses] comprehend, not in the language of Herbert Spencer and Edmund Burke . . . but in that of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Ramayana*" (Bose 1998:147).

Whether it was the cultural idiom or the actual language that was vernacular, Gandhi himself was, from the very beginning of his political career in India, fond of pointing out that reaching the people meant speaking their language, an act of communication that would not only transmit information but also "touch" hearts and "move" hands and feet (Gandhi 1956a:129–130). Especially important was Gandhi's remarkable talent as a dramaturge of mass public action, a skill that he honed in South Africa and brought to spectacular fulfillment in India during the 1920s and 1930s. From the Johannesburg certificate bonfire of 1908 to the Dandi Salt March of 1930, Gandhi, the indefatigable publicist, was cannily conscious of the power of actions that could combine an ethical transformation of both participants and publics with the kind of iconic, gestural simplicity that could be effectively

captured and disseminated by the news media (Markovits 2003; Suchitra 1995; Tarlo 1996).[33]

At this level, Gandhi's self-styled "experiments with truth" were also often experiments with mass publicity. In the summer of 2002, I met Harish Bijoor, marketing consultant and author, in Bangalore. I put it to him, half-jokingly, that Mahatma Gandhi had been India's first mass brand. Bijoor did not bat an eyelid before replying:

> I teach him as the only superbrand that India has produced. I equate Harley-Davidson, the Volkswagen Beetle, and Mahatma Gandhi. . . . He was clever in the sense that he was a brand who was related to the pulse of the rural masses of India at that point in time. He was a guy who believed in all the great things that brands believe in. Be different. Swim against the tide. Do things differently. Establish icons. Establish imagery. Strengthen imagery by persistent, focused segmentation of the market. Focus, complete focus. Singular strong imagery. Clear positioning in the mind of the consumer. [interview, Harish Bijoor, Bangalore, August 2002][34]

Warming to his theme, Bijoor delivered a staccato précis of Gandhi's ascent to the heights of marketing savvy:

> He started off like a commodity. . . . As a commodity he was like you and I and all of us. . . . But then one fine day, he decided. And his principle said that he doesn't cheat. So he protested against his teacher. He stood out in a small way. That gave him a lot of impetus. He went further. It was real. He was that kind of a guy. So he went ahead. He went to Durban. He got thrown out of a train. He glamorized that incident. He created enough mileage out of that incident and he really created a branding about himself as a rebel who would protest in a foreign state. . . . He came back to India . . . and he brought in nonviolent protest as a fantastic way. Why? Because, very simply, he knew violent protest would never succeed. So he said, do a completely different thing. . . . Turn your disadvantage into an advantage. He went panning salt. And then visually he created a huge image for himself. When he went to the Roundtable Conference in London, he took his shirt off in the cold of winter! *Wah!* What a beautiful way to stand out! Everybody was in those suits and ties, and here was a guy who was called a "half-naked *fakir*." . . . Imagine the visual appeal and the media attention that he got for that! He became number one. And then he kept consistently hammering in: truth, nonviolence, truth, nonviolence. He built icons around himself. He took the *charkha* . . . he made

> an icon out of that. . . . He said, you know, let me protest and give more than what I should give, when it came to Partition. And then he became a brand. The day he was martyred, he became a superbrand. And he became the entire vision for the entire country.

Bijoor's narrative culminates with Gandhi's death—a moment at which the contingencies of the living man crystallize into a transcendent idiom of identification for the nation as a whole, a brand space that is not only enviably coherent in terms of its content but also derives ethical force and compulsion from Gandhi's martyrdom.

This is a complex story. At one level, Gandhi's expertise as a publicist exemplifies the basic aim of marketing communication: a tightly defined message that resonates affectively. Adi Pocha, the Bombay advertising man who had defined the decidedly un-Gandhian KamaSutra condom brand in 1991 (Mazzarella 2003), reflected:

> I think all successful leaders of any kind or great advertising people—there's no two ways about it. With *full* respect to anybody's religious sentiments, . . . look at Jesus Christ as an example. He had no TV, no press, no nothing. Just word of mouth. But he ran, he communicated something way beyond his time. And that communication endured way beyond his time. On the other side of the good and evil spectrum you can look at Hitler. Who also mobilized vast numbers of people, just through the power of his communication. You look at Gandhi—again back on this side. Same thing, you know? So I think all charismatic leaders owe their base to their ability to a) communicate and b) to have a sharp, well-defined brand persona. If I were to look at it in advertising terms. If you look at Gandhi, I can just draw one line and that will describe him. And you know instantly. So there's brand recognition. Mother Teresa has just the blue border of that sari. And there's brand recognition. So without meaning to trivialize their action, or without meaning to make them seem frivolous, the principles are common. To all forms of communication. Whether it is religious communication or whether it is political communication or whether it is brand communication. Whatever type of communication you want, if you want it to be effective then you want it to be as single-minded and focused as possible [and] you want it to have the ability to create some kind of an emotional resonance, OK? You want to have *one symbol* that will be associated with your message, which helps drag the message out again and again and again, OK? And then you want to keep doing this as many times as you can so that people remember you forever.[35]

If indeed, as Harish Bijoor had implied, Gandhi's martyrdom had ensured his ascent to the status of a superbrand where—in Pocha's words—"people remember you forever," then it is important that the apotheosis of Brand Gandhi happened at same moment that his living body was extinguished in January 1948, mere months after India gained its independence in August 1947.

Now it is easy enough to see that a Gandhian body politics inevitably challenges both any attempt to market Gandhi in a New Age consumerist register and the more macho habitus of contemporary militant Hindu nationalism. But I think it also crucial to recognize the profoundly corporeal basis of Gandhi's understanding of publicity and efficacious mass communication, a point that is generally lost in present-day celebrations of Gandhi qua brand. When it came to Gandhi's body, the medium most certainly was the message. But as Alter suggests, it is as if Gandhi's death killed not only his individual body but also inaugurated the gradual withering of his body practice in favor of a more discursively framed memorialization of his teachings.

First and foremost, Gandhi saw the ascetic self-restraint of brahmacharya as the precondition not only of an ethically righteous life but also as a powerful source of beneficial social influence. A *brahmachari* (one who adopts the discipline of brahmacharya), he wrote, "will instinctively know the fountain of strength in him, and he will ever persevere to keep it undefiled. His humble strength will command respect of the world, and will wield an influence greater than that of the sceptred monarch" (Gandhi 1958b:68). Conversely, an incontinent person can only be a bad influence on others: "A man in the grip of sensual desire is a man without moorings. If such a one were to guide society, to flood it with his writings, and men were to be swayed by them, where would society be?" (Gandhi 1958b:69).

But brahmacharya did not just guide the content of the message; it also quite literally powered its transmission, giving it force. Ascetic renunciation has in Indian traditions long been understood to allow the accumulation of energy or "heat" *(tapasya).* But Gandhi's practice was based on the assumption that this accumulation of ascetic heat could actually be translated into a medium of mass communication. This was not necessarily in itself novel; Susanna Elm proposes that martyrdom and asceticism (understood as a kind of attenuated "daily martyrdom") "is always a mise-en-scene for a large collective. It therefore always has to make use of the best available means of mass communication" (2006:141). But yoked to his exquisite understanding of mass semiosis, Gandhi's renunciatory body energetics became a powerful tool of publicity indeed.

FIGURE 5. Image courtesy of Joseph DeLappe.

Gandhi scrupulously refused to grant any privilege to privacy, and tended to associate concealment and secrecy with sin and violence.[36] Ethical action was for him always predicated on public disclosure. Family members staying at his ashram enjoyed no special privileges and Gandhi would, sometimes to the embarrassment of his associates, use the press to open up the most intimate details of his self-examinations to public scrutiny.[37] At this level, Gandhi believed that the mass media could extend the self-probing of the ethically rigorous individual into a national project of collective accountability and transparency. And yet Gandhian publicity was not reducible to a liberal ethics of open communication. Gandhi's teetotal vegetarianism, his celibacy, his performative poverty, and his fasting were not just the signifying contents of an exemplary message of self-restraint. Rather, as Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph point out, Gandhi quite clearly intended that the potency

he achieved through renunciation should become "contagious and infectious" in a wider public and political space (1983:44).

Bhikhu Parekh suggests that Gandhi was drawing on ancient ayurvedic practices oriented toward the conversion of "base" or "low" energies into a more spiritually refined distillate.[38] Celibacy, when accompanied by appropriate self-discipline in diet, thought, and work, allowed the semen thus conserved to ascend through the spinal cord and, through a series of transformations, eventually to manifest in its purest form as *ojas* (lit. "vigor," understood as the subtle form of life energy). In Parekh's pithy phrase, "*ojas* was the *telos* of *semen*" (1999:178). Alter, conversely, traces Gandhi's search for biomoral efficacy to then-current Euro-American practices of "muscular Christianity." Whatever its genealogies, Gandhian publicity was distinctive in the way that it juxtaposed an ethics of mass-mediated accountability with a concretely corporeal alchemy. The disciplining of publics and the harnessing of crowd energies toward the great project of national liberation was, under the banner of Gandhian *swaraj* (self-rule), aligned with the disciplined body, in which the chaotic energies of base desire were translated into enlightenment. Parekh's commentary captures the continuity of these disciplines well:

> All power was derived from energy, but [energy] did not generate [power] until it was mobilized, organized, focused and directed at a clearly specified goal. The "inert" Indian masses lacked energy and hence power; the terrorists had plenty of energy but, since it lacked focus, organization and direction, [this energy] got diffused and dissipated and failed to generate power. Throughout his political life, Gandhi kept exploring ways of "releasing," "conserving," and "mobilizing" popular energy and "converting" and "transforming" it into power. [1999:172]

Gandhi's thinking about publicity started from the premise that although the ostensible purpose of publicity is the dissemination of information, our relation to signification is also immersive, embodied, and affective. This is the proposition to which his austerities were a response. It is crucial to remember that Gandhian self-denial is about more than merely ascetic refusal. Rather, the constantly vigilant discipline of cultivating and calibrating one's senses makes an individual corporeally receptive, conductive, and transmissive of a substance of collective truth that Gandhi understood to be at once ethical, religious, and political. Gandhi intended his bodily practice not as a recipe for solipsistic self-enclosure but, rather, as a doorway to public communication with a view to social change. As Marcel Mauss once observed

of the accumulated powers of the yogi: he "has placed himself in the position of creating worlds" (2001:144).

Elsewhere, I adapt Annette Weiner's notion of "keeping-while-giving" to explain how consumer goods branding creates value through the mass marketing of products while nevertheless allowing corporations to retain control and ownership over the apparent source of added value, the brand itself (Mazzarella 2003). At first sight, Gandhian publicity would also appear to be a kind of keeping-while-giving: the "keeping" of vital energies through ascetic discipline allows the brahmachari to "give" auspicious influence all the more intensively. But there is a crucial difference between branding and Gandhian publicity.

Commercial publicity claims already to be speaking "our language," to be reflecting our preexisting and deepest desires back to us on a spectacular scale. Despite its mass address, commercial publicity reaches out to us in an apparently intimate register, hailing us with the familiar cadences of an old friend, seeming to demand of us no more than our attention and, perhaps, our identification. When it works, it feels as if the language of advertising is our true language; when a mass-mediated message appears successfully to capture and articulate our sensuous response we experience the "fit" as experiential evidence of the magical ability of the market to "give us ourselves." There is a certain violence (but also a psychological truth) in the preemptiveness of this appeal: Mass publicity appears to know our desire before we do. It knows us better than we know ourselves. Its sensuous provocation solicits our emergent corporeal response that thus, in retrospect, appears as the natural and given grounding for an ideological discourse.

Gandhian publicity, as I read it, aims to do the opposite work. If branding appears to offer us our innermost selves in a preplanned package, then Gandhian publicity demands of every participant in public culture that they not allow themselves to be lulled by seductive identifications but, rather, take responsibility for the ideological complicities of their desires. As Gandhi famously remarked in *Hind Swaraj*: "It is due to Manchester that Indian handicraft has all but disappeared. But I make a mistake. How can Manchester be blamed? We wore Manchester cloth and this is why Manchester wove it" (Gandhi 1997:107).

Corporate commercial publicity "keeps" the brand while it "gives" participation by means of purchase and identification. Commercial keeping-while-giving is quite literally dependent on the possibility of intellectual property. Brand equity is threatened by counterfeits—that is to say the unauthorized circulation or modification of a privately owned semiotic space. But this privately owned semiotic space has value not only because of the intellectual labor that marketing and

advertising professionals have put into managing and articulating it but also, first and foremost, because of the collective imaginative investment it has accrued in the course of its public circulation. For a corporation to claim private ownership over a piece of symbolic real estate like a brand is thus, in a sense, a questionable act of cultural enclosure (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Coombe 1998; Mazzarella 2002).

It is against this kind of enclosure that one might be justified in objecting, as did the former High Court Judge, that Gandhi "belongs to humanity." But the principles of Gandhian publicity are, I think, inimical to any notion of ownership that posits the owned thing—whether it is the signifier *Gandhi* or anything else—as a static, bounded entity that must be policed. Historically, modern brands began as trademarks, as devices that offered consumers a uniform guarantee of quality and allowed producers centralized creative and legal control over the manner in which their goods were packaged and sold (Strasser 1989). The subsequent movement from trademark to brand allowed impersonal and distant corporations to craft pseudointimate prosthetic personae that were meant to compensate for the customer's loss of a more localized engagement with shopkeepers (Marchand 2001). A brand offers standardized security alongside affective provocation; it intimately invokes the assurance of a smooth and homogenous market against the hazards of adulteration and overcharging.

Gandhi, as we have seen, frequently castigated unscrupulous salesmen. But it seems to me that Gandhian publicity in practice also opposes the prefabricated, centralized assurances of a brand logic. If we can imagine such a thing as a "Gandhian consumer" then their first demand may well be to relocalize the place where trust between producer and consumer emerges. Along the same lines, I would also suggest that the top-down, statist prohibition on commercial uses of Gandhi's name and image enshrined in the Emblems and Names Act is fundamentally un-Gandhian. If there is a notion of ownership in Gandhian publicity then it might be something more along the lines of requiring all of us to "take ownership" of our own embodied desires—that is to take conscious responsibility for the emergent potential of our vital and productive energies. This is the aspect of Gandhian practice that is in a sense more radically democratic, because it distributes responsibility universally even as it makes greater demands of every individual. It is the aspect of Gandhian practice that is predicated on a kind of intimately grounded, ongoing corporeal criticism undertaken by every participant in public culture. Not coincidentally, it is also the aspect of Gandhian practice that has been effaced by the dematerialization of his memory.

The Emblems and Names Act is, as I have suggested, symptomatic of a more general anxiety about the besmirching or polluting of Gandhi's name. But protecting Gandhi in this way only becomes necessary once the untimely corporeal provocation of Gandhian publicity has been silenced. The letter of the Emblems and Names Act seems to erect a protective cordon sanitaire between the public interest and exploitative commercial usages. But actually the Act enables a statist enclosure of Gandhi as a public sign that is closer to commercial branding than it is to the spirit of Gandhian publicity.

I do not want to romanticize Gandhian publicity as an inherently democratic alternative to statist or commercial communication. In practice, it tended toward an immanent contradiction between distributed democracy and the possibility of charismatic compulsion. Gandhi insisted, in an almost Kantian fashion, that every one of his followers should reach the objective truth to be had through *satyagraha* by their own rigorous effort. Only thus might the masses transcend the indiscipline that kept them in tutelage to their coarser desires and, for that reason, to demagogues.[39] At this level, the collective body of the nation could be imagined serially: Gandhi's example serving to ignite and inspire sympathetic awakenings all over India until the volatile density of the mob had been transformed into the ordered, yet mutually reinforcing seriality of a nation of satyagrahis. Protesting the draconian censorship regime installed by the 1910 Press Act, Gandhi quite literally turned this vision into an artisanal mode of mass publicity. In 1919, he urged his followers to create newspapers that would be disseminated, one handwritten copy at a time: "it will be the duty of those who receive the first copies to re-copy till at last the process of multiplication is made to cover if necessary, the whole of the masses of India" (see Pinney 2009:46).

And yet at another level, much of Gandhi's charismatic efficacy depended on his apparent ability spontaneously and immediately to actualize the Indian masses as a political force. Indeed, Gandhi sometimes appeared to believe that his own hard-won personal potency had the potential to, as it were, implode and, like a dying star, radiate outward with such irresistible force that it would directly transform the behaviors and understandings of others. Such was the implication when Gandhi, at times of maximal political unrest and violence, placed himself as close as possible to death by fasting until the intensity of his personal sacrifice, magnified and focused by the massive authority of his public iconicity, might compel the masses around him. B. R. Ambedkar, the great leader of the Untouchables and drafter of the Constitution of independent India, was in 1932 pushed by one of Gandhi's fasts unto death to give up the separate electorates that the British had already in principle

granted to his constituency. Whereas the Bengali author, philosopher, and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore had worried about the volatility of a mass social movement based on the "truth of love" at the expense of the "truth of the intellect" (Tagore 1956:224), Ambedkar went so far as to join the British in equating the tyranny of Gandhi's fasts with Nazi mind control (Ambedkar 1946:251).

In a certain sense, the energetics of Gandhian publicity were founded on the idealization of locality. Tightly bounded circulation, whether of the vital energies of the body or of the village economy, explicitly opposed the alienated abstractions of industrial modernity and the centralized state. And yet Gandhi also distrusted immediacy, whether it was a matter of the unrefined impulses of sensuous desire or the ever-present threat that the seething raw energy of crowds would collapse into "mobocracy" (Guha 1997; Mazzarella in press; Pandey 1988). One might perhaps say that Gandhi aspired not only to dissolve the distinction between private and public life but also, at a deeper level, to a world in which the self-management of the individual body could be transposed onto the body politic writ large.

W. S. Wybergh was a member of the Transvaal legislature, a leading advocate of apartheid-style homelands for Indians in South Africa, and an early and loyal critic of Gandhi. Wybergh picked up on the extraordinary—and, to him, illegitimate—power of the signature Gandhian move that made the personal body a medium for public critique and mobilization. From Wybergh's standpoint, Gandhi was allowing the affective, corporeal and, above all, private energies that Wybergh understood as "religious" to invade the public deliberative space of politics proper. As he wrote to Gandhi in 1910, satyagraha was a kind of performative trickery in place of "*intellectual persuasion and argument.*" Gandhi and his disciples had no moral right, Wybergh admonished, to "make political capital out of what seems to you injustice or ill-treatment. . . . If it is really a matter of religion, then I think that the truest heroism is not concerned in this exceedingly active 'passive resistance' but that it consists in suffering as *private individuals* and saying nothing about it" (Wybergh 1997:142).

On one level, Gandhian nonviolence sought to achieve what Richard Gregg in the 1930s called "moral jiu-jitsu": a disorienting interruption of the closed reciprocity of action and reaction (an eye for an eye) that kept the colonized tied to the colonizer's law. But Gandhi also took the moral force of this interruption to be grounded both in the corporeal experience of every individual's personal discipline and in the resultant visceral capacity to resonate with and to receive a "truth" radiating outward from exceptionally disciplined bodies such as his own. Rather than opening the door to an irrationalist or intuitive politics of mass affect—as

some of his critics charged[40] —Gandhian publicity refused the distinction between reason and visceral experience on which both liberal and fascist ideologies have tended to depend. His was a body politics, but it was a critical body politics.

The challenge that Gandhian publicity poses to our present consumerist and populist modes of mass publicity does not so much lie in the historical particularity of Gandhi's personal judgments or prohibitions—even as these are the details that are incessantly recounted. One might reject, for example, Gandhi's idealization of platonic relations between husbands and wives or his disapproval of the cinema. Handwoven cloth is probably not the answer to India's problems today and so on. But the living provocation continues to reside in Gandhi's ethos of corporeal criticism, according to which the emergent potentials and resonances of our vital energies are constantly interrogated as to their complicity with repressive ends.

AN UNTIMELY PROVOCATION

Little more than a year after Gandhi's assassination and cremation in New Delhi, the Home Department of what was then the Bombay State Government received a curious request. In April 1949, Kishori Lal Mashruwalla, one of Gandhi's amanuenses, wrote from Wardha asking for detailed information regarding Gandhi's physical measurements and distinguishing marks. Mashruwalla, who seems to have been writing on behalf of Gandhi's biographer Louis Fischer,[41] evidently assumed that the Home Department would know how to locate such information because it was the ministry that had inherited the policing and incarceration files of the late colonial state.

The Home Department passed Mashruwalla's query on to Bombay's Inspector General of Prisons, who furnished the following summation of the Mahatma's mortal coil: "Height—5′ 5″; Physical marks: 1) Scar 1/4th″ × 1/6th″ Rt thigh lower third and front aspect; 2) Tiny mole, on the outer part of right lower lid; 3) Pea-sized scar, left fore arm, lower third and inner aspect." On consultation, the Superintendent of Yeravada Central Prison in Pune,[42] where Gandhi was jailed several times in the 1920s and 1930s, reported that Gandhi's chest measurement had not been recorded.[43] No doubt it was modest; those who met Gandhi often reported that he was physically unimpressive. Gandhi himself writes: "A powerful soul lives only in a weak body. . . . A perfectly healthy body might yet be quite emaciated" (1958a:62).

In the year after his death, then, a concerted attempt to reassemble an objective impression of the materiality of Gandhi's body yielded only this terse list of vital statistics. These details about moles and scars are dumb, banal—and yet somehow

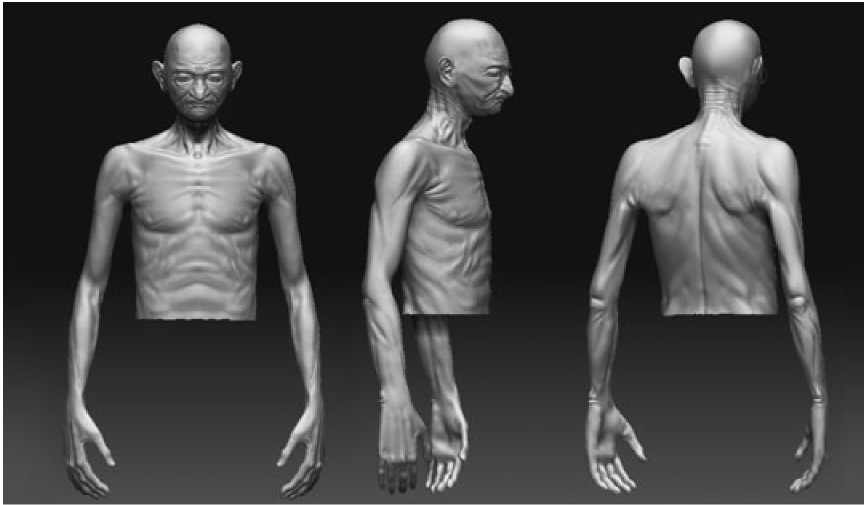

FIGURE 6. Image courtesy of Arnab Roy (www.sagiarts.blogspot.com; www.sagiarts.wetpaint.com; sagiarts@gmail.com).

almost embarrassingly intimate. Their dispassionate precision stands in for what was already disappearing: a sense of the concrete presence of the Gandhian body whose contingency interrupts the overdetermined and simplified visual repertoire of the Gandhi Brand: the loincloth, the walking staff, the little round spectacles. Perusing these brittle old documents on a hot and humid afternoon in the spring of 2004 under the ceiling fans at the Maharashtra State Archive, I had the curious feeling of intruding on the privacy of a man who prided himself on having no secrets.

Perhaps this is one of the fates to which the posthumous Gandhi has been subjected: to have been rendered palatably polite, to have had the corporeality of his experiments with sex and food squeamishly ushered out of the drawing room of official memory. Gandhi's body has, as Alter suggests, been lost. And precisely in its disappearance it has now, paradoxically, also become infinite, omnipresent, and inexhaustible. As late as January 2008, on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of Gandhi's killing, Nilamben Parikh, a great-granddaughter, poured yet another urn of his ashes into the Arabian Sea at Chowpatty Beach in Mumbai.[44] As I write this, rumors continue to circulate that there is still one more at an ashram in California, resistant to the repatriating efforts of his descendants.

This dematerialization and diffusion of the Mahatma has often been carried out in the name of historical relevance: the living Gandhi's preoccupation with bodily energetics can be put down to personal eccentricity arising out of the peculiarities

of his background and biography. When the corporeal grounding of his politics, his ethics, and his communicative ethics is forgotten, Gandhi becomes, as it were, safe for the present: omnipresent yet inert, benevolent rather than demanding. One might admire his "message" and the historical magnitude of his achievement, but his apparent otherworldliness, viewed from our present, looks either quaintly outmoded or, even worse, like an ahistorical image of transcendent ethical purity. Against this background the desire to "bring Gandhi up to date" becomes eminently understandable. What could be wrong with "leveraging" the tremendous brand equity that Gandhi, that master publicist, bequeathed in the emblematic forms of his name and image? Unfortunately, these refurbished, 21st-century Gandhis tend to be just as disembodied as ever. A few years ago, Indian dot-com utopians were asserting that the Internet would finally allow us to reconcile Gandhi's long-deferred dream of the decentralized village community with the latest in high technology. Meanwhile, both swaraj and ahimsa continue to be rhetorically appropriated as inspirations for ecologically sensitive marketing and multicultural politics.

The point is not to moralize. I do not want to add to the mountain of righteous polemics lambasting present generations for having neglected Gandhi's teaching. I am not interested in pointing back, indignantly, to some putative postindependence point at which India is supposed to have veered off the Gandhian track and lost itself in a dark night of communalism and corruption. The history of Gandhi's complex influence on both the nationalist struggle and on postindependence Indian politics has been examined and reexamined by generations of scholars. Rather, I have tried to uncover something in Gandhi's legacy that is "untimely" in the Nietzschean sense of being apparently archaic and yet eminently relevant to the present.

W. S. Wybergh was only the first among a long series of interlocutors and critics who clearly understood the transgressive manner in which Gandhian nonviolence undermined a public sphere in which, as in a market where all concrete use values could be rendered comparable by a single yardstick of exchange value, all claims and interests could ultimately be resolved in the common coin of discursive deliberative rationality. Ironically, the terms in which liberal critics of Gandhian nonviolence tended to couch their attacks was a language developed to deal with violent challengers to civil society. But for Gandhi it was precisely violent action, which, like the market, was based on the ruinous law of equivalent exchange: an eye for an eye paving the way for collective blindness. Gandhian nonviolence reversed the preemptive adequation of violence and the market by deploying what Slavoj Žižek (1993) calls a "premature act": an act that is senseless from the standpoint of the law of equivalent exchange but that, by its very senselessness, interrupts

the circuit of exchange and provokes a transformation of the ethical rules of the game. The premature act of Gandhian nonviolence also manifested the satyagrahi's disregard for his or her own life: "he will not obey a law that is against his conscience, even though he may be blown to pieces at the mouth of a cannon" (Gandhi 1997:93). As a challenge to an unacceptable law, the preference for truth over life has the power to undermine any polity's claim to sovereignty (Chakrabarty 2007).

Gandhi was famously uncomfortable with the translation of *satyagraha* as "passive resistance." The agentive cast that W. S. Wybergh had detected in his neologism (lit. "truth-force" or "firmness in truth") invokes not only the refusal of a false order but also the public deployment of a transformative energy that is rooted in a responsibility for the management of one's own bodily energies. That is perhaps the most profound basis of Gandhi's untimely provocation to present-day publicity: by taking active control of the relation between the potentialities of the body and the communicative content of public action, the satyagrahi can never be reduced to a consumer–citizen. The comedy as well as the outrage that greeted initial reports of Tushar Gandhi's dealings with CMG was a function of the ethereal, all-transcending Gandhi that has been enshrined in public memory rubbing up against the crass instrumentalities of the market. But actually, as I hope to have showed in this essay, it is Gandhi's active bodiliness, his critical understanding of the mass communicative potentials unleashed by the transformation of corporeal energies, which scandalizes the prospect of Brand Gandhi.

ABSTRACT

This essay is an exploration of the relationship between Mahatma Gandhi as a contested figure in present-day Indian public culture and Gandhi as himself an innovative technician of mass publicity. I begin with an analysis of the scandal that erupted in early 2002 when one of the Mahatma's descendants appeared to have signed a deal with a U.S. corporation to license Gandhi's name and image for use in consumer goods advertising. I proceed to situate that controversy within the larger field of recent Gandhian reference in India, focusing on the complex connections between his iconization and his demonization. The second half of the essay turns the analysis around to inquire into what I call "Gandhian publicity." I show that although Gandhi's thinking on communicative efficacy is nowadays often assimilated into a commercial brand logic, Gandhian publicity remains irreducible to such appropriation. Ultimately, I argue that the scandal of "branding Gandhi" has less to do with any violation of his supposed saintly otherwordliness than with the "untimely" provocation posed to consumerist publicity by his understanding of the intimate relationship between the management of corporeal energies and socially transformative mass communication.

Keywords: Gandhi, branding, body, advertising, politics, India

NOTES

Acknowledgments. Heartfelt thanks for support and advice during the writing of this piece to Joe Alter, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Vikram Doctor, Kim and Mike Fortun, Rochona Majumdar, and Joe Masco. The comments of *Cultural Anthropology*'s anonymous readers and those of colleagues at Columbia University and the University of Chicago, where earlier versions of this talk were performed, have also been enormously helpful. The National Science Foundation and the Marion R. and Adolph J. Lichtstern Fund at the University of Chicago generously funded parts of the research on which this article is based.

1. See Timothy McSweeney's Internet Tendency n.d.
2. Burkeman also notes that CMG, traditionally interested in celebrities from the worlds of sports, film, and music, had recently branched out into the realm of "literature, history and politics. . . . Famous names whose heirs have struck deals with CMG include Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, Jack Kerouac, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Malcolm X." For those so moved, CMG Worldwide ("The Leader in Intellectual Property Rights Management") may be further explored at www.cmgww.com.
3. See Lise McKean's discussion of "sumptuary spirituality" (1996) for a theorization of the relationship between sanctity and economic interests in postliberalization India. Gandhi was particularly close to the Birla industrial family, at whose home in New Delhi he was assassinated (Chakrabarti 1955).
4. John and Jean Comaroff (2009:33–38) usefully remind us that the relation between "traditional" modes of cultural production and circulation and "modern" regimes of intellectual property is not always as fundamentally disjunctive as ethnoromantic depictions would have us believe.
5. Initially affiliated with the Samajwadi Party, Tushar Gandhi had by the time of the CMG scandal joined the Congress Party.
6. Interview with Tushar Gandhi, Mumbai, July 2002.
7. Bunsha (2002) cites Tushar Gandhi invoking the precedent of Martin Luther King Jr.'s family, whom the U.S. Supreme Court recognized as having a legal right to prevent objectionable depictions of their late relative.
8. Other projects that could have benefited included work on the house in Rajkot, Gujarat where Gandhi lived as a child, his first Indian ashram in Kochrab, near Ahmedabad, the Aga Khan Palace in Pune, and the memorial to his salt march in Dandi (Hasan 2006).
9. Interview with Piyush Pandey, Mumbai, July 2002.
10. For detailed discussions of the role of khadi in the articulation of Gandhian nationalism, see Tarlo 1996 and Trivedi 2007.
11. See Government of India 1950.
12. The Act specifically exempts calendars that do not explicitly promote a particular commercial product.
13. See Government of India 1982.
14. In 2007, Tushar Gandhi published a book titled *Let's Kill Gandhi! A Chronicle of His Last Days, the Conspiracy, Murder Investigations and Trial*.
15. Bania is a reference to Gandhi's merchant caste background. As Markovits points out (2003:33), while Gandhi did not himself come from a family of merchants (his ancestors had served as secretaries at the court of Porbandar), his community background helped him cultivate good relations with the merchant classes who supported him throughout his political career.
16. The smash-hit Hindi feature *Lage Raho Munnabhai* (Carry On, Munnabhai; Chopra 2006) starred Sanjay Dutt, reprising his role in Munnabhai MBBS as the lovable Mumbai thug Munna who, in this sequel, learns how the ethically transformative force of Gandhianism can overcome the short-cut gratifications of street violence. The movie contains a priceless sequence in which Munna is allowed to enact the fantasy of a nonviolence that would not require any sacrifice

of street machismo. Having allowed himself to be slapped in the face by a security guard he responds by knocking his assailant out cold. He then turns to his trusty sidekick Circuit and explains that Bapu didn't say anything about what to do once after you'd turned the other cheek.

17. Anti-Gandhian analyses of the nationalist struggle routinely emphasize that all three of these leaders were personally thwarted by Gandhi. Bhagat Singh was sent to the gallows after Gandhi failed to intervene on his behalf with the Viceroy Lord Irwin in 1931. Gandhi successfully forced Bose's resignation as President of the Indian National Congress in 1939. And Gandhi put pressure on Patel to make way for Nehru as India's first Prime Minister against the wishes of the majority of the Congress Working Committee in 1946.
18. In the two Bollywood versions of the Bhagat Singh story that I have seen, *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* (Santoshi 2002) and *23rd March 1931: Shaheed* (Dhanoa 2002), Bhagat Singh's militant radicalization comes as a direct result of his disillusionment with the impotence of Gandhian noncooperation.
19. Interview with Ramesh Pimple, Mumbai, March 24, 2004.
20. Thanks to Vikram Kapadia, who directed the English-language version of the play in 2000, for drawing my attention to the piece.
21. Another version of the story is recounted by Bernard Imhasly, who tells of how the ashram valiantly resisted the onslaught of a Hindu "mob" demanding that the great social activist Medha Patkar, who was taking refuge there, be handed over (2007:26).
22. See curiousgawker n.d.
23. The fictional interviewee here is referring to the April 1919 mass killing by British troops of Indian civilians in Amritsar. The incident was widely perceived to have fatally undermined whatever remained of British legitimacy in India. The comparison with the Nazis, although exaggerated for satirical purposes here, is also an allusion to the widely celebrated collaboration between Subhas Chandra Bose's anti-Congress–anti-British Indian National Army and the Axis Powers during World War II.
24. I derive this material from Rakesh Sharma's extraordinary, harrowing documentary film *Final Solution* (2004).
25. As if anxious to offset the traditionalist mood conjured by Gandhi, the back of the new notes highlighted images of an oil rig, a communications satellite and a woman working at a (rather 1980s-looking) desktop computer.
26. Robin Jeffrey writes that "Gandhi's weekly did not accept advertisements, 'ninety-nine per cent' of which he deemed 'totally useless. . . . If there were no system of advertisements, we are surely to save at least half the price [of any article]'" (Jeffrey 2000:54).
27. Thanks to Vikram Doctor for bringing this reference to my attention. Along the same lines, Prem Chowdhry (2000:155) notes that in the 1930s, Indian film producers would often seek to lend nationalist gravitas to their potboilers by publicizing them as "helpers to the cause of Mahatma Gandhi" or as disseminating "the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi."
28. The Raymond's ad, as I recall, took the form of a 1997 billboard advertising their textiles on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Indian independence. On it, Gandhi with his charkha (the hand-operated spinning wheel, institutionalized as an emblem of national pride and self-reliance at the center of the Indian flag) took his place alongside other, markedly more clothed, nationalist leaders. Although Raymond's graciously implied that these were all, as their baseline had it, "complete men" the implication nevertheless remained that it was Gandhi who was busy providing the fabric for his colleagues' public personae.
29. Note also that a brand of rice called Mahatma is nowadays widely available in U.S. supermarkets.
30. I say "contours" deliberately, for it is a tribute to the iconicity of Gandhi that the merest outline has frequently sufficed to conjure his image. Pratik Srivastava, a senior advertising executive in Bangalore, told me in August 2002:

> There was an ad . . . done I think sometime in the '70s by what was then called Lintas. Alyque Padamsee was the person who did that ad. And that is what summed up Gandhi. There was a canvas and there was a brush, and somebody just drew an outline of a space, a very simple outline. It was a film. One brush-stroke of an outline and the specs—he

> used to wear round specs—and [then it] said that the essence of the person was his simplicity. And I think that's what it is.

31. Aside from its misspelling of *Gandhi,* the restaurant's name is also a pun on handi, which is a kind of earthenware pot used in South Asian cooking.
32. Nandgaonkar points out that, in advocating a complaint against Handi Ghandi, Tushar Gandhi himself invoked the fact that Gandhi's name and image was protected under Indian law. Meanwhile, Burkeman notes that, in early 2002, a court in Jaipur censured fashion show organizers for allowing a model to wear an image of Gandhi on her back.
33. Against the prevailing tendency to interpret the popular success of a campaign like the salt march in terms of Gandhi's skill at mobilizing religious–mythological tropes and images Suchitra notes that many of the participants, both educated and not, understood quite clearly that this was an exercise in "publicity." At the same time, we have every reason to believe that these participants were enthusiastically invested in Gandhi's project. Rustom Bharucha points out that our habit of emphasizing how good Gandhi was at the strategic mobilization of religious imagery,

> may be a cogent way of highlighting the "credibility" of Gandhi's messages which extended his "charisma," but it should not be used to instrumentalize the faith underlying Gandhi's politics. As finely tuned as he was to communicative strategies, Gandhi did not reduce his faith to rhetoric; therein lies the power of his intervention. [1998:88]

34. "Superbrand," above, means a brand name that can profitably be extended across a whole series of product categories. Current examples might include Disney or Virgin.
35. Interview with Adi Pocha, Mumbai, November 2003.
36. Thus, Gandhi specifically contrasted the public openness of nonviolence to the secret cells and clandestine politics of violently militant anticolonial action. This was a point over which Gandhi would argue with many of his contemporaries. Subhas Chandra Bose, for one, saw Gandhi's insistence on transparency as both politically foolish (in the context of a repressive colonial public sphere) and artificial insofar as it imposed "a false unity of interests that are inherently opposed" (Bose and Bose 1998:149).
37. Infamous examples include Gandhi's mortified public admission, in his seventies, of a sexual dream and his late-life, resolve-testing practice of sleeping naked with much younger women, some of them his relatives.
38. The practice of autourine therapy, later associated with the austere Prime Minister Morarji Desai, himself an avowed Gandhian, represents the solipsistic culmination of this purifying feedback loop (Alter 2004). My father recalls visiting Bombay circa 1969 and encountering the antiprohibition slogan "Drink whisky, not pissky!"
39. The locus classicus of this line of thought in Gandhi is his dismay at the lapses into violence of participants in his first nationwide civil disobedience campaign against the Rowlatt Act in April 1919. "I had called on the people to launch upon civil disobedience before they had thus qualified themselves for it, and this mistake seemed to me of Himalayan magnitude" (Gandhi 1956b:187). Similarly, Gandhi called a highly controversial end to Non-Cooperation in 1922 after a crowd murdered several policemen at Chauri Chaura in what is now Uttar Pradesh.
40. Shiv Visvanathan quotes what 1951 A. D. Gorwala Report on corruption in Indian public had to say about Gandhi's effect on his followers, soon after his death: "Moved by personality they become fired with emotion and follow his lead. Emotion, however, is transitory and leaves its subject[,] morally, exactly where he was before. It does not impose on him the deep discipline which permeating the mind, burns away the dross" (Visvanathan and Sethi 1998:21–22).
41. Fischer's (1997) book on Gandhi would eventually serve as the basis for Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi* (1982), which has perhaps done more than any other single document to cultivate Gandhi's international image as iconic, Christlike herald of peace (Markovits 2003).
42. In 2002, Yeravada Prison started an optional course in Gandhian principles for inmates. The actor Sanjay Dutt, who absorbs a Gandhian lesson in the smash hit Lage Raho Munnabhai (Chopra 2006), reportedly expressed his intention to sit for the concluding exam (held on

October 2, Gandhi's birthday) in 2007, when he was sentenced to jail on a charge dating back to his involvement in the Mumbai bombings of 1993 (Ashraf 2007).

43. Maharashtra State Archive, Home Department, 6th Series, 2036/6—I.
44. For a poignant account of the January 2008 immersion, see Doctor 2008. Eleven years earlier, on the 49th anniversary of Gandhi's death (and thus in the 50th year of Indian Independence), Tushar Gandhi had immersed a recently found urn of his great-grandfather's ashes at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers.

Editors Note: *Cultural Anthropology* has published a number of other essays on branding, advertising, and commodification; see in particular Neeraj Vedwan's (2007) "Pesticides in Coca-Cola and Pepsi: Consumerism, Brand Image, and Public Interest in a Globalizing India"; Robert J. Foster's (2007) "The Work of the New Economy: Consumers, Brands, and Value Creation"; Martha Kaplan's (2007) "Fijian Water in Fiji and New York: Local Politics and a Global Commodity"; and Pauline Turner Strong's (1996) "Animated Indians: Critique and Contradiction in Commodified Children's Culture."

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