Call for Papers for an *ephemera* Special Issue on:

The ethics of the brand

Issue Editors: Sara Louise Muhr, Anna Pfeiffer and Sofia Ulver-Sneistrup

In post-industrial societies, brands have become morally contested as a powerful immaterial organizing principle of the political economy (Klein, 2000). As a part of this contestation, contemporary critiques of branding have been prominently directed towards the argument that brands infuse all aspects of life 'as an interface' (Kornberger, 2010: 13) between the rational producer and emotional consumer dichotomy. Further, a critical body of literature deals with questions of the ethical economy of customer co-production (Arvidsson, 2008), brand valuation (Lury and Moor, 2010), spaces of consumption (Styhre and Engberg, 2003), images of crisis (De Cock, Fitchett and Volkmann, 2009) and how a historical morality of consumption is echoed in contemporary consumer brand discourse (Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard and Brogard-Kristensen, 2011). However, many of the most popular critiques of brands as lubricants of neo-liberal markets are not confined to academia, but manifested in global social movements, where Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (2000) has become a cornerstone of this anti-brand movement.

What most of the popular critiques have in common, however, is that they raise ethical questions about the intentions of the branding industry and how consumers interpret these intentions. Brands are embedded in a moral discourse of social responsibility – a 'moralized brandscape' (Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård, 2007). At the same time they are consumed and considered a crucial competitive advantage, an important asset for management, and a critical part of corporate reputation-management practices. In this context, ethical/alternative brands (e.g. *Fairtrade*) have proliferated, with the somewhat paradoxical consequence of these turning into (contested) super-brands. As an answer to such a moralized brandscape, 'ethical branding' as a business strategy similar to CSR is increasingly discussed and/or promoted by academics and corporations alike. But does *ethical branding* imply that branding/brands become more ethical? Can (or should) brands be ethical at all? And if so: What are the possibilities of *branding ethically* beyond *branding ethics* as a one-directional business strategy?

Then, how, to whom, in what contexts and under which circumstances can brands claim to be ethical, and what kind of legitimacy would/could this result in? Is a brand more acceptable if it claims to not exist at all (e.g. the 'anti-brand' *Adbusters'* non-brand shoes)? How and why can a brand be perceived as more ethical if it springs from a charity vision and a low/non-profit economic model (e.g. *Grameen Bank* or *Fair Trade*)? What are the possibilities for anti-brands to be conceptualized as brands? And how can brands claim ethical legitimacy when social concerns are used as PR and marketing add-ons for a business purpose?

Thus, in addition to raising the need of defining what a 'brand' is in terms of its commercial relations, the above questions call for discussions on what 'ethics of the brand' is. In practice as well as theory, questions of ethics in/of branding are already central. However, most of the managerial branding literature engages with ethics mostly at a superficial level, promoting *ethical branding* to enhance competitive advantage. The sociocultural branding literature tends to take its departure from an almost stereotypical consumer morality (Miller, 2001) forgetting the complex interplay between various actors (Holt, 2002). We want to encourage a more nuanced debate of these matters and therefore welcome submissions that deal with questions of the dynamic interplay between business and consumer culture when co-creating the ethical meanings of a brand and the ethics or legitimacy of these. Possible questions and themes include, but are not limited to, the following:

- What is a 'brand' from the perspective of commercial relations? And what then is an 'ethical brand' according to such a conception?
- Does a brand have to be positioned 'outside' the market to be ethically legitimized? And how is that possible?
- What are the interrelations between branding and political ideals (as for example freedom, democracy) and how does this influence the ethics of the brand?
- What are the consequences of seeing the brand as an all-embracing organizing principle?
- What are the interrelations between branding and business ethics/CSR?
- How can life(-styles) be branded – or brands? And what ethical implications could this have?
- How are occupations branded ethically? And with what consequences?
- What are the intersection of anti-brands and super-brands?
- How and in what situations is the image of organizations attempted re-branded (i.e. if they have been publicly judged as not 'ethical enough')?
- How can brands liberate or emancipate?
- What are the possibilities of de-fetishizing the brand?
- What are the possibilities of a co-produced ethics of branding where power is shifting from capital to consumers, workers, stakeholders (i.e. Fair Trade, Sustainability movement)? Examples? Stories? Pitfalls? Opportunities?

Deadline for submissions: 31st of March 2012

All contributions should be submitted to one of the issue editors: Sara Louise Muhr (saralouisemuhr@gmail.com), Anna Pfeifer (anna.pfeiffer@fek.lu.se), or Sofia Ulver Sneistrup (sofia.ulver_sneistrup@fek.lu.se). Please note that three categories of contributions are invited for the special issue: articles, notes, and reviews. Information about these different types of contributions can be found at: www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/call.htm. Contributions will undergo a double blind review process. All submissions should follow *ephemera*'s submissions guidelines, available at: www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/submit.htm. For further information, please contact one of the special issue editors.

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