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The Brandworld as Ontological Metaphor

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is twofold: to argue in favour of the thesis of the reality of brands as distinct artefacts and to make the anatomy of this kind of entities as transparent as possible. The steps I take are the following: first, I establish similarities and differences between brands and other categories of artefacts. Secondly, I plead for identifying certain local, specific mechanisms that guide the genesis of social and cultural artefacts: thus, I indicate a way to understand the fundamental differences between the different classes of artefacts beyond their common features. Thirdly, I make an analogy between what Arthur Danto calls *the artworld* and what I call *the brandworld*: just as the artist posits a world of rules and artistic significations through which a common object can be transfigured and regarded as a work of art, so do the branding specialists advance a world of significations and stories through which a common industrial product (be it cultural or political) is transfigured and turned into a brand. Fourthly, I investigate the extent to which the model of possible and fictional worlds can help us better understand the anatomy of brandworlds. Fifthly, drawing on Jean-Blaise Grize's concept of discursive schematization, I analyse the possibility of understanding the mechanism through which brands are generated as discursive micro-worlds. Sixthly, I dismantle and reject the most important counter-arguments levelled at the realism of brands. Finally, I believe that the reality of brands can be supported by emphasizing the multiple causal effects they generate in the economy, in society but also on the level of the life of individuals. If we refuse to accept the full reality of brands, we are left without sufficient grounds to explain certain phenomena that give complexity and additional meaning to the world we live in.

Keywords: ontology of brands, artefacts, brandworld, artworld, possible worlds, fictional worlds, discursive schematization, branded products, Danto, Grize.