PANTONE: Identity Formation Through Colours

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Abstract:

This Major Research Paper examines Pantone, the producer of a commercially owned colour standard widely accepted by public and industry. By analyzing the company's history, context, products and marketing strategies, this research explores the manners in which a tool for the occupation of design became a commodity and a signifier of social identity. The 'circuit of culture' by Paul DuGay is utilized to structure the paper's research methodology, approaching the cultural processes of representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation that inscribe meaning into cultural artifacts. The paper investigates how Pantone's brand extension Pantone Universe has aided in the identity formation of its public through the translation of a design working tool into consumer goods, blurring the lines between economic and social identity. In addition, this research analyzes how Pantone has inverted the brand advertising process, relying on its public to promote its products and how current media facilitates these occurences.

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1.   Introduction

        The Pantone Company is universally famous for its standardized colour

palettes.[1] Initially established as a tool for the practice of graphic design, the

Pantone Matching System became popular for its innovative and accurate method

for printing colours at the industrial level, thus facilitating the reproduction of

shades and hues with an unprecedented precision.[2] Since its creation in the 1960s,

the company has grown to become the world's leader in colour technology and

trend forecasting, establishing Pantone as one of the most influential brands in the

field of design.[3] During the past decade Pantone has been continuously expanding

its niche market through the production of a wide array of consumer goods under

the brand extension Pantone Universe. This has led the company to translate its

standardized colour palettes into brand material and merchandise, triggering an

involved response from a public interested in colours and good design.

        As a business Pantone has gone through a series of transitions in order to

adapt to the changes and fluctuations that both the commercial and

communication industries have encountered amid the past fifty years. Pantone's

evolution does not, however, imply total and complete agency, but demonstrates

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[1]"About PANTONE®: Color Management, PMS Color System for Graphics, Plastic, Fashion and Home," *PANTONE®*, accessed April 10, 2014, http://pantone.com/pages/pantone.aspx?pg=19306.
[2] Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *The Color Revolution,* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press in association with the Lemelson Center, Smithsonian Institution, 2012).
[3] Leatrice Eiseman and Keith Recker, *Pantone: The Twentieth Century in Color,* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2011).

the adjustments that many successful businesses have undergone so as to contend with the rapid pace of economic and technological advancements of the contemporary age. Pantone's example is relevant due to the company's ability to renovate brand interest and to engage and involve its public with its products in a changing environment. Pantone profits from the timelessness of the subject of colour in order to perpetuate a fading empire. As four colour printing technology evolves, and the reproduction of spot colours proves to be increasingly accurate, Pantone's business is exposed for its fragility; losing space and purpose in the global market, Pantone must re-invent itself within a distinct realm of production to remain relevant.

Pantone's commercially owned colour system is widely accepted by the specialized public and industry. Rather than being a government established standard, the Pantone Matching System has been legitimated through use. It is a private standard through which a company makes its profits. The dominance of the system has guaranteed it a symbiotic relation with the design and colour industry, where the ubiquity of Pantone colours induces people to utilize them while their wide utilization makes them ubiquitous. As such, through this reciprocal relationship between design professionals and Pantone colours arises a phenomenon where a tool for the occupation of design becomes a commodity and a signifier of social identity.

By utilizing the Pantone colour palettes, purchasing Pantone Universe products, creating web-art that references the Pantone colour chips, staying at the Pantone Hotel in Brussels, or even applying Pantone make-up, individuals are capable of concomitantly fulfilling desires of singularity and belonging. Pantone epitomizes the social identity of design oriented individuals as part of a global class by becoming a social differentiator, a status symbol, and a personal insignia. The Pantone brand has become a signifier for the design profession in a period where being a designer or having design skills or knowledge becomes part of a lifestyle choice. Through the specificity of design, the brand proposes a worldwide lifestyle where individuals are connected by the suggestion of a differentiated taste as an alternative to the traditional social-geographic modes of correlation.

In these regards, this Major Research Paper proposes an investigation of the overarching structures of brand strategies as reinforced by consumers and producers through a global process of validation, "from the symbolic to the real."[4] It poses questions concerning the influence of new technologies and the media on contemporary branding practices. More specifically, it seeks to unveil the eminence of the Internet as a driving force in the global process of identity formation and as the instigator of new customer relations strategies. Furthermore,

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4 Scott Lash and Celia Lury, *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things,* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

this research investigates how political systems and dominant modes of thinking shape industrial patterns of standardization, which are reproduced to the populace promoting hegemonic and nationalistic values and ideologies.

Despite the ample range of elementary books concerning colour theory and history that have referenced the name Pantone,[5] there is a lack of academic research that considers the company's background and production from a theoretical perspective. The research structure for this paper is loosely based on the 'circuit of culture' (figure 1) by Richard Johnson and Paul DuGay, which offers a holistic understanding of a cultural product through the scrutiny of five distinct aspects related to its circulation: *representation, identity, production, consumption* and *regulation.*[6] The 'circuit of culture' is a model of analysis that investigates the five cultural processes at which meaning is inserted into a cultural text or artifact. As DuGay asserts in relation to his own object of analysis, the Sony Walkman, "to study the Walkman culturally one should at least explore how it is represented, what social identities are associated with it, how it is produced and consumed, and what mechanisms regulate its distribution and use."[7] Within the circuit, the individual processes interact with each other to create articulations which, in turn,

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5 Leatrice Eiseman, *Pantone Guide to Communicating with Color* (Sarasota, Fla.: Grafix Press, 2000; Leatrice Eiseman, *Color: Messages and Meanings: A Pantone Color Resource* (Gloucester, Mass.: Hand Books Press, 2006).
Eiseman and Recker, *Pantone.*
6 Paul DuGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: SAGE, in association with The Open University, 2013).
7 DuGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies*, xxx.

contribute to the establishment of cultural meaning.
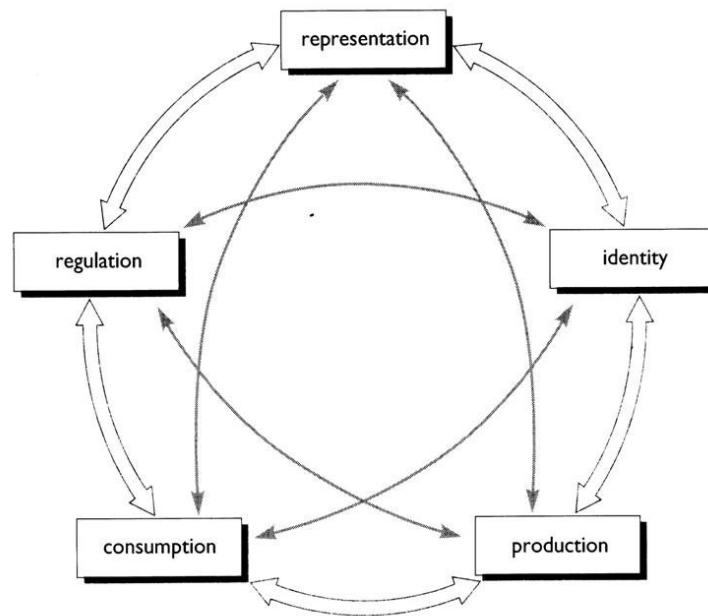
Figure 1 – The Circuit of Culture by Paul DuGay

Representation focuses on how meaning is inscribed through both oral and visual language into a cultural artifact. It considers the way producers attempt to endow concepts into products aiming at a specific target audience. *Identity* is concerned with how a product is used to construct individual and group identity. It looks at how products become associated with certain kinds of people. *Production* comprises the circumstances through which a cultural artifact comes to be. It examines the power structures and socio-cultural practices that surround the production of an artifact. *Consumption* seeks to identify the meanings people give to products once they use them. It attempts to pinpoint how individuals can alter

the meaning-making process through use. Finally, *regulation* investigates how dominant forms of control such as social norms and government laws influence the way products become meaningful within society.

This research, however, is not devoted to singling out each one of the cultural processes in relation to Pantone. While at the conclusion this does happen, throughout the paper the five processes appear as need comes. As Dugay posits it: "Remember that this is a circuit. It does not much matter where on the circuit you start, as you have to go the whole way round before your study is complete. What is more, each part of the circuit is taken up and reappears in the next part.[...] We have separated these parts of the circuit into distinct sections but in the real world they continually overlap and intertwine in complex and contingent ways."[8]

In this particular case study the 'circuit of culture' is applied to a brand, rather than a physical or textual object, so as to investigate the articulations between the public, the company and its products. While the main brand Pantone commercializes colour management systems and solutions for colour communication, i.e. colour palettes and chips, the target public to be considered is composed of design professionals. The design profession is defined by the International Council of Communication Design as follows:

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8 DuGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies*, xxx.

> Design is a constantly evolving and dynamic discipline. The professionally trained designer applies intent to create the visual, material, spatial and digital environment, cognizant of the experiential, employing interdisciplinary and hybrid approaches to the theory and practice of design. They understand the cultural, ethical, social, economic and ecological impact of their endeavors and their ultimate responsibility towards people and the planet across both commercial and non-commercial spheres. A designer respects the ethics of the design profession.[9]

Meanwhile, the brand extension Pantone Universe is the one responsible for the production and commercialization of general consumer goods, thus its target public is broadened towards a design-conscious audience, such as colour enthusiasts and admirers of the modernist aesthetic. This division of Pantone's public does not intend to promote a discrepancy, but wishes to clarify the fact that under the umbrella of the Pantone company there is more than one type of consumer. There are those who utilize Pantone products for professional activities, those who utilize the brand in leisure, and those who do both.

Chapter one presents the 'circuit of culture' in detail and discusses concepts deriving from Cultural Studies, Branding and Globalization Theory with the purpose of decoding the cultural processes through which meaning is made. Chapter two proposes an overview of Pantone's history, context and products. By tracing the origins of standardized systems and colour management methods, this chapter demonstrates how as a business Pantone has been shaped by political, economic and technological circumstances. The manners in which Pantone has

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9 "Icograda: Defining the Profession", *ICOGRADA,* accessed April 23, 2014, http://www.icograda.org/about/about/articles836.htm.

been influenced by its context are made evident by the company's history and marketing choices presented throughout this chapter. In addition, it pinpoints the key moments in the company's history, showcasing its commercial growth and the increasing expansion of its lines of consumer goods. Chapter three analyzes the way Pantone relates to its public and how identity is established through this relationship. It presents the brand extension Pantone Universe, in addition this chapter introduces the concepts of the web 2.0 and postproduction in order to untangle and thus comprehend the interplay that takes place online between Pantone and its public.

2.   The Circuit of Culture and the Digital Sphere

        The discipline of cultural studies began in the city of Birmingham,

England at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies established in the mid-

1960s. There, scholars such as Stuart Hall, Richard Johnson and Celia Lury

strove to further the understanding of human society by means of the investigation

of lowbrow and popular culture. Through the research of culture as an inherent

social determinant, a movement of the social sciences entitled the 'Cultural Turn'

arose during the 1970s and 1980s. In the article *What is Cultural Studies Anyway?*

(1983) Richard Johnson put forward his concerns regarding the inception of the

new discipline. By defining cultural studies as "a process, a kind of alchemy for

producing useful knowledge"[10] Johnson portrays it as a non-discipline, or rather,

as an interdisciplinary practice that involves complex articulations between

different realms of knowledge, understanding that culture is not a precise

category. It implied the notion that everything within the realm of social practice

can and should be analyzed from a cultural viewpoint instead of simply being

interpreted as a reflection of economic and political processes.[11]

        In order to fully address the implications of cultural studies within the

realm of research, a new model of analysis that would conform to the complex

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10 Richard Johnson, *What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?* (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary
Cultural Studies, 1983), 1.
11 Johnson, *What Is Cultural Studies*, 10.

articulations proposed by the discipline had to be implemented; one that would look at culture from different perspectives while coordinating them so as to arrive at a more holistic and inclusive theory. Hence the inception of the 'circuit of culture', a model that integrates the cultural processes attached to a product. In its primary conception by Johnson, the 'circuit of culture' was comprised of the moments of production, circulation and consumption as inspired by the 'circuit of capital' by Karl Marx.[12] In its most recent version, and the one adopted throughout this research, the 'circuit of culture' is re-conceived by Paul DuGay in *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (1997) as an ongoing dialogue between *representation, production, consumption, identity* and *regulation.*[13] DuGay's relational model allows a cultural artifact to convey a story, without focusing on one single aspect of its 'life'. As such, the 'circuit of culture' permits the investigation of the interrelations of production, consumption and identity.

According to DuGay it is necessary that we focus our attention on the structure, strategy and culture of global commercial enterprises in order to understand how culture works in the contemporary age.[14] The articulation of all five processes of the 'circuit of culture' is unquestionably paramount since meaning is not constructed in a vacuum, but as a conjunction of processes and influences. It is important to highlight that a product does not have just one

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12 Johnson, *What Is Cultural Studies.*
13 DuGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies.*
14 DuGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies*, xxix.

meaning, but has a myriad of meanings for different people and different

circumstances. DuGay states that:

> meaning-making is an ongoing process. It does not end at a pre-ordained point. While producers attempt to encode products with particular meanings and associations, this is not the end of the story or 'biography' of a product, because this tells us nothing about what those products may come to mean for those using them. In other words, meanings are not just 'sent' by producers and 'received', passively, by consumers; rather meanings are actively made in consumption, through the use to which people put these products in their everyday lives.[15]

In this regard meaning is constructed, all agents and processes that insert

meaning into a product must be analyzed individually. However, *production* and

consumption are not separated; one determines the other, making it important to

understand the way that they are articulated through advertising, market and

design, and how they work in a visceral way constructing rapport with consumers.

Pantone as well as Pantone Universe are part of this complex network of

meaning-making processes, their products being constantly shaped and reshaped

by the different actors involved with the brand.

For DuGay, meaning is not 'found' in things, but constructed within

culture. Objects have cultural significance because they are associated with a

distinct set of social practices, with certain kinds of people and with certain

places.[16] These associations have symbolic power, working as a metaphor for what

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15 DuGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies,* xxxii.
16 DuGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies,* 4.

the object stands for. For instance, modern designers are associated with the tools

of their profession. As Andrew Blauvelt, Ellen Lupton and Rob Giampietro state:

> Ever since the demise of the medieval craft guild, modern design had sought to separate itself from one-off hand production in favor of mass-produced objects that bore few traces of the hand and more of the machine, the new laborer. Freed from the production, the modern designer had to devise methods so that his intentions could be faithfully realized by others. Drawings, pasted-up layouts, instructional overlays, coordinate colour systems, standardized ink formulation and paper sizes, prototypes, models, and reprographic proofs were just some of the instruments invented to ensure that the faithfulness of a designer's vision was executed according to plan. The separation of conception and planning from making and production were therefore part and parcel of being a modern designer.[17]

During the last decades the process of design has been linked to several

apparatus such as the Machintosh computer, the Moleskine notebook and the

Pantone colour palette, to name a few. While the computer and the notebook can

be both a work tool and a personal object, the Pantone colour palette is mainly a

work tool, whereas Pantone Universe products would be considered personal

objects. As such, for some the sight or mere mention of the Pantone colour palette

would activate a set of meanings that would connect the object to certain social

practices, kinds of people and places. Thus the map meaning process occurs

according to previous associations, in this particular case according to former

interactions with Pantone or with colour palettes. The symbolism of these objects

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17 Andrew Blauvelt, Ellen Lupton and Rob Giampietro, *Graphic Design: Now in Production* (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2011), 24.

are encoded, therefore we are able to decode them.

Several theorists have debated meaning-making practices with most emphasis being given to production and consumption and achieving different conclusions. For instance, according to Jean Baudrillard (1988), production and consumption have identity value, while for Michel de Certeau (1984) consumption is seen as a productive activity, where meaning is always attached to usage.[18] All of those methods are incorporated into the 'circuit of culture' and aid in the daunting task of decoding cultural meaning. The current challenge is to now incorporate the 'circuit of culture' and cultural studies to the investigation of globalized products of the post-internet era. The five stages of circulation – *identity, representation, consumption, production,* and *regulation*—have evolved and continue to evolve constantly in order to adapt to the radical cultural changes of the twentieth-first-century. The initial tools for this decoding process are powerful ones, but they too must evolve with the times for the upkeep of cultural studies.

As DuGay suggested in his *Introduction to the Second Edition* (2013),[19] much has changed since the 1990s, with the ties of *production* and *consumption* becoming even more intertwined, and the modes of *representatio*n having evolved

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18 Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London: Verso, 1996); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
19 DuGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies.*

and mutated in the digital sphere. [20] Admittedly branding has gone through immense changes during the past few decades and the manner in which products are sold has shifted significantly in order to adapt to the globalized world of the post-internet age. This shift has left theorists wondering if the ideas of 'global culture' and 'global marketing' have been completely travestied by the rise of the internet and the automatic transformation of all sorts of representation into something inevitably global.[21] With advertising campaigns available with the click of a mouse, the boundaries of marketing become virtually nonexistent, giving both the consumer and the brand a plethora of trans-national possibilities.

In the digital age it is necessary to take into consideration the myriad of new ways in which interaction happens inside and outside of the internet. Globalization has completely modified the manner in which the culture industry operates, shifting from Adorno and Horkheimer's model where mass produced cultural goods are utilized to manipulate society into a state of apathy and obedience, to a new global post-industrial[22] and digital model.[23] While the traditional culture industry worked with commodities, the global culture industry works through brands. The difference is that commodities work through a logic of identity while brands operate on the basis of a logic of difference. Whereas the

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20 DuGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies.*
21 DuGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies,* xxiv.
22 Post-industrial society refers to an economic period characterized by the rise of the service sector over the manufacturing sector.
23 Lash and Lury, *Global Culture.*

consumer acquires brands for its sign-value so as to differentiate oneself from others, the logic of commodity puts emphasis on use-value for consumers.

Objects are inserted into substantial and expressive contexts and are part of a cobweb of connections and stories within a system of objects. As Jean Baudrillard posits, the study of the system of objects consists on the investigation of the meanings that these objects constitute.[24] The symbolic order of objects educates humans about their own positions as individuals and as part of a community. Nonetheless, in the post-internet age these articulations become increasingly more fluid with objects acquiring a media-like potential developing new narratives. As Celia Lury affirms in an interview with Guy Julier:

> The relation between narrative and representation is changing – that narrative is no longer so consistently organized in relation to texts, or in relation to an author function, regulated by copyright, separated out from everyday life (that is, it is less consistently representational). Rather, we suggest that narratives are circulating in a multiply mediated environment, in which their internal integrity or coherence is much more permeable, in which characters can be detached and move across narratives and media, in which the capacity of narratives to induce self-reflection in the reader declines – in which, in fact, narratives don't have readers (whether of books, films, television programs or brands) but audiences, publics or users.[25]

Concomitantly, material goods have become medialized while medium such as colour palettes have become materialized in merchandise. There is a

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24 Baudrillard, *System of Objects*, 2.
25 Guy Julier, "Value, Relationality and Unfinished Objects: Guy Julier Interview with Scott Lash and Celia Lury," *Design and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2009): 99.

constant commodification of *representation* in the present world where things

become media. This implies that medialized things transition from the symbolic to

the real.[26] Digital brands become objects, movies become merchandise, and

printing systems become hotels. Simultaneously everything becomes virtual.

There is "no distinction between media and society, we live in a media-society,"[27]

governed by objects and cultural products and those in charge of their production.

Nonetheless, in the post-internet age these articulations become increasingly more

fluid with objects acquiring a media-like potential and developing new narratives.

The constant cultural shifts of the Web 2.0 in a post-industrialized world

have narrowed the gap and blurred the lines between producer and consumer,

generating an interesting tendency in which producers systematically move

towards consumers in order to gain product insight. Web 2.0 is a term popularized

by Tim O'Reilly to define the second generation of the World Wide Web as a

platform of collective intelligence focused on user participation and social

networking.[28] The spread of contemporary design trends has been widely

connected to the development of social media and the internet. The equal platform

of learning and sharing has allowed people from different backgrounds to interact

with each other and to develop and expose new ideas. The power given to people

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26 Lash and Lury, *Global Culture.*
27 Lash and Lury, *Global Culture*, 28.
28 Tim O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0? Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software," in *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, ed. Paul DuGay et al., (London: SAGE, in association with The Open University, 2013), 155.

through the internet has completely changed the way companies and entrepreneurs alike now establish and promote their businesses. Inspiration can be found everywhere online: colours, patterns, lines and ideas are available on the web and are there to be taken. Designers and design companies look at the internet as a source of insight and promotion where it is possible to interact with the public getting ideas and receiving feedback. In this way, consumer fidelity is established online and brand association is utilized as another form of identity construction through the web.

The Web 2.0 harvests collective intelligence and catalyses the capacity that companies have to engage with users relying on them to help construct the digital environment.[29] The concept of user-created data and user-created media content is predominant in the Web 2.0. As pinpointed by Mirko Tobias Schafer: "with the advent of Web 2.0, the narrative of participation shifted from emphasizing access to emphasizing collaboration and collective action and easy-to-use interfaces in popular applications have led to an amazing increase of user-generated content."[30] This change in narrative of the global culture industry and empowerment of users through the Web 2.0 represents new ways in which media and mediums can be reshaped, revised and disseminated. As Ross Kaminsky declared about Iran's Twitter revolution of 2009: "While we've talked about 'mass

29 O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0?," 155.
30 Mirko Tobias Schaefer,"Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production," in *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman,* ed. Paul DuGay et al., (London: SAGE, in association with The Open University, 2013), 157.

communication' for decades, we've never truly seen communication for the

masses until these past few days."[31]

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31 Ross Kaminsky, "Iran's Twitter Revolution," in *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman,* ed. Paul DuGay et al., (London: SAGE, in association with The Open University, 2013), 150.

3.   Producing Pantone: The Story Behind the Colour Empire

> We cannot truly understand designed objects or technological systems outside of their historical, industrial, technical, social, and cultural contexts. This is especially true of managed colour, a modern technology that was developed through a drawn-out process and carried out by countless actors and gatekeepers. Colour management, like other technological processes, pivoted on negotiations and transgressions that fuelled creativity and sometimes erupted into turf wars. Business institutions often served as incubators, but colour practices were shaped by the internal and external environments and were grounded in a variety of factors: individual personalities; inventor's dreams smashed to bits in the innovation process; the realities of production and distribution; transnational networks in fashion, design, and art; the audience's expectations and perceptions. [32]

The history of standardization can be traced back to the foundation of new political and economic structures during the eighteenth-century.[33] Both the French and Industrial Revolution played pivotal parts in the establishment of standardized systems of units, weights, measurements, languages and industrial sizes throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Encompassing concepts of interchangeability and uniformity, standardized systems represented ideals of equality and justice that were set in place by government, science and industry.[34] The Pantone Matching System derives from this longstanding tradition of

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32 Blaszczyk, *Color*, 19.
33 Wang Ping, "A Brief History of Standards and Standardization Organizations: A Chinese Perspective,"in *East-West Center Working Papers, Economics Series*117 (2011): 1-25, accessed April 15, 2014, http://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/brief-history-standards-and-standardization-organizations-chinese-perspective.
34 Andrew Russell, "Standardization in History: A Review Essay with an Eye to the Future," in *The Standards Edge: Future Generations,* ed. Sherrie Bolin, (Ann Arbor: Sheridan Books, 2005), 247-260.

industrial standardization. But while most standardized systems were developed and implemented either by the government or by industrial consensus, Pantone's colour system was a personal enterprise that resulted in a commercially owned colour management method. Its history is preceded by developments such as the metric system and standardized spelling, but most importantly, the Pantone Matching System is the by-product of the technological advancements in the production of synthetic pigments and dyes of the nineteenth and twentieth-century and the standardized systems that hailed from it.

The term "colour revolution" is employed by Regina Lee Blaszczyk to define the sudden popularization of synthetic pigments that took place in United States of America in the 1920s. A major turning point for both industry and society, this democratization of colours was set in motion to stimulate consumerism and improve sales in the depression era.[35] While natural pigments have been known to the human kind since prehistoric times, as demonstrated by cave paintings from periods as early as 40,000 BC,[36] until the early eighteenth-century the production of dyes was limited to the availability of natural resources with certain colours being more difficult to produce than others.[37] The chemical advancements of the textile industry that took place during the centuries following

35 Blaszczyk, *Color.*
36 Helen Skelton, "A History of Pigment Use in Western Art,"in *Paint & Coatings Industry* 20, no. 1 (2004): 32, accessed April 23, 2014, *MasterFILE Premier*, EBSCO*host.*
37 Philip Ball, *Bright Earth: Art and the Invention of Color* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).

the Industrial Revolution broadened the production of pigments through the

development of new synthetic dyes, opening the way for the industrial usage of

more durable and less expensive synthetic pigments.[38] Leatrice Eiseman and Keith

Recker assert in *Pantone: The 20th Century in Color* (2011): "The last century

was a remarkably significant time for colour. Revolutionary changes occurred in

every visual discipline, with the rules being broken and new ones set in their place

at every turn. New materials became available as new technologies transformed

(or indeed invented) everything from paints to plastic to powder coatings, and

changed the nature of making with new manufacturing processes."[39]

While the Europeans were the ones responsible for the invention and

development of the wide range of synthetic materials that propelled the chemical

industry and allowed industrialists to produce products in any colour, Americans

were the ones first attributed with utilizing colours for mass-marketing purposes,

applying them as an aesthetic differentiator and a commercial bonus.[40] They were

the ones who adapted the colour charts from the old continent and transformed

them into a highly technological mode of increasing productivity and sales. In this

regard Blaszczyk argues that "they were both Taylorites and taste makers. Their

idea of combining Fordism and fashion was bold at the time, distinctively modern,

and unabashedly American. Judicious colour choices were seen as contributing to

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38 Blaszczyk, *Color.*
39 Eiseman and Recker, *Pantone*, 6.
40 Blaszczyk, *Color.*

the American business system and its commitment to mass production, mass distribution, and mass consumption."[41] Thereby, colour management as we know it today derived from a blend of old world tradition and the vivid spirit of a young country's growing industry: it was a mixture of science, business and aesthetics that was pivotal for propelling American consumerism.

Standardization was seen as a key movement for advancing American industrial progress after World War I and therefore was applied to every aspect of industrial production. National standards were set for every type of product, from pork and screwdrivers to colour. As such, the rationalization of colour started to take place in the early twentieth-century affecting structures of taste, fashion and culture.[42] Based on a modernist world model, colours became categorized, studied and produced with the intensity of a precise science. Specifically in the United States of America, colour was seen as serious business for industrialists and the government due to colours intrinsic capacity to mesmerize and catch the eye of the consumer, hence the birth of colour management.[43] Consequently, the American colour management model influenced the rest of the world and became the international standard. Industrial production became increasingly standardized, being expanded and employed worldwide in order to support the contemporary models of economic relations between countries.[44]

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41 Blaszczyk, *Color*, 290.
42 Blaszczyk, *Color,* 10.
43 Blaszczyk, *Color.*
44 Ping, "Brief History."

This new found chromatic availability of the "colour revolution" had a profound impact on the professions that utilized pigments and dyes, such as design and art. Professionals who worked with colours were suddenly faced with more options than they ever imagined possible and were able to produce colourful goods as never before. Nevertheless, the wealth of colour options available at the industrial level embodied both positive and negative aspects for the creative process. On the bright side, artists and designers had at their disposal a myriad of shades and hues to select when developing a project, allowing them to be true to their original ideas. On the other hand, the practically unlimited selection of colour options made it considerably more difficult to match the desired colour to the colour of the final product. In spite of the several standardized colour systems, the inaccuracy of colour reproduction still represented a challenge to designers, who until the mid-nineteenth century had none, or little, power to solve this issue.[45]

3.1. The History of Pantone

Bearing in mind the difficulties faced by graphic designers, the chemist Lawrence Herbert, who in 1956 joined a printing company named Pantone,[46] decided to develop a system to facilitate the colour reproduction process.[47] In an

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45 Victoria Finley, *Color: A Natural History of the Palette* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002).
46 Alisson Fass, "The Color of Money," *Forbes*, November 24, 2003, accessed April 23, 2014, http://www.forbes.com/global/2003/1124/056.html.
47 Eiseman and Recker, *Pantone*, 117.

interview with Victoria Finlay, Herbert stated: "My dream was that someone should be able to call a supplier in California from their home in Acapulco and say I'd like to buy rose pink paint, or whatever. And that when it arrived it was exactly right."[48] To that end, Herbert developed a colour palette with tested formulas to simplify the printing process for both the client and the printing company. In 1962, Herbert, who was extremely successful with his creation, purchased the business located in Carlstad, New Jersey, and renamed it Pantone Inc. Seeing that the company had a debt of $50,000, Hebert bought the printing division for that exact amount, and in 1963, he launched the eminent Pantone Matching System.[49]

Figure 2 – Pantone Colour Palette

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48 Finlay, *Color,* 393.
49 "Pantone Inc. History," *Funding Universe*, accessed April 23, 2014,
http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/pantone-inc-history/.

The printing system developed by Herbert utilized a small number of standardized pigments in order to obtain an exact tone for printing. The system consisted of a catalogue of stock shades (figure 2), each identified by an allocated number indicating a certain combination of pigments. The original system contained 1,114 spot colours, all of which could be produced with the correct combination of 12 Pantone pigments. [50] The Pantone Matching System was simple and efficient, solving the most common problems faced on other traditional printing methods in which the final products could be printed with a wide variety of shades. Once perfected, the license and royalties of Pantone colours were sold to a wide range of ink manufacturers, thereby initiating the company's empire in the early 1960s. The Pantone Matching System's promise of colour uniformity was groundbreaking, as Eiseman and Recker claim: "Lawrence Herbert changed the printing industry with his Pantone Matching System. When one of Pantone's colours was chosen for a job, the printer used Pantone's inks and formulas to recreate the same colour every time. The clarity and simplicity of the system were a huge success – and Pantone eventually became the language of colour for creative people across many industries."[51]

The development of the system comprehended the cultural processes of *regulation* and *production* within the 'circuit of culture'. Influenced by the western

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50 "The Creative Pro's Guide to the Pantone Plus Series," *Creative Bloq*, accessed March 10, 2014, http://www.computerarts.co.uk/features/creative-pro-s-guide-pantone-plus-series.
51 Eiseman and Recker, *Pantone*, 117.

tradition of standardization, the Pantone Matching System was directly regulated by the established symbolic boundaries of industrial production as well as by the dominant modernist ideologies of its period. The *regulation* of the system would come about through the acts of classifying and standardizing colours, which fit perfectly within the power structures of that period and geographic location, but they would also happen through *production*. *Production*, as understood in the circuit, investigates "how an objects is produced culturally, how it is made meaningful."[52] Herbert developed the Pantone Matching System with the goal of creating one of, if not the most, effective colour printing methods in the world, and that is exactly how Pantone colours became meaningful. Through its *production* the cultural meanings of efficiency and standardization were inserted into the Pantone Matching System.

Pantone was first and foremost based on the principles of simplicity and rationality, aiming for a minimalistic aesthetic of line, colour and shape. The spot colours catalogues were organized according to hue and shade, marked only with the Pantone logo and the colour identification code, all signed in a sans-serif typeface (figure 3). The functional aesthetic was prevalent of a time— 1950s and 1960s — when the International Typographic Style became widespread, accompanied by the rise of the corporate identity.[53] The 1960s was the "golden era

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52 DuGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies*, xxxi.
53 Stephen Eskilson, *Graphic Design: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 286.

of logos" for American corporations. Companies longed for fresh modern logos

that would set them apart from the past in order to put forward the idea of

rationality, function and efficiency. By adopting this "neutral discourse of

commercial communication",[54] Pantone aimed for functionality, and through the

circuit's process of *representation* it expanded the company's mission and purpose

to their visual identity. With the use of a sans-serif typeface flushed to the left,

black type and a white background, Pantone sought a depoliticized aesthetic

established by the Swiss in favour of developing a universally marketable brand

expunged of traces of American nationalism.[55]

Figure 3 – Pantone Logo

Pantone's system and visual identity resonated with the high-modernist

ideology of the cold-war period of the 1950s and 1960s. Interpreted by Peter

Taylor as "a theoretical taming of the perpetually new by application of a

rationality privileging science and technology,"[56] high modernism was a rational

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54 Eskilson, *Graphic Design*, 286.
55 Eskilson, *Graphic Design*, 306.
56 Peter J. Taylor, *Modernities: A Geohistorical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of

mode of thinking that sought efficiency in the planning of human settlement and

production.[57] Originated in Western Europe and North America, the high

modernist movement aspired to remove social uncertainties and to master nature

through the application of science and technical progress.[58] High modernity

proposed a clean slate, a distancing from historical and geographical contexts,

focusing on establishing social and spacial order based on standardized models

and geometrical grids.[59] As a company regulated by the cultural life of the period,

Pantone displayed attributes of a high-modernist ideology in its corporate culture,

such as the utilization of standardized models and the unfaltering belief in the

application of science and technology to sort colour. As such, high modernism

played an important part in the *regulation* process of Pantone as business and as

cultural producer.

By numerically organizing the colour spectrum, subjectivity no longer

played a role in the identification of shades and pigments, thus conforming

printing colours to the American industrialist model. The Pantone Matching

System performed a vital task for designers and printers, facilitating production

and decreasing the amount of time spent by the printing press. Not only designers

benefited from using Pantone colours, consumers too would find it easier to

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Minnesota Press, 1999), 32.

57 James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press, 1998), 4.

58 Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 4.

59 Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 4.

identify products and to shop accordingly. For example, in the early 1960s Pantone solved the packaging problems faced by Kodak; since Kodak utilized the services of different companies to print their orange-yellow carton boxes, their shades would vary, making it so that consumers would prefer to purchase the bright looking ones leaving the dull coloured packages behind.[60] Once Pantone colours were applied to Kodak's packages the problem was effaced and sales were increased. As such, consistency and uniformity in colour became the rule of the market rather than the exception.[61] In this way, Pantone attained a higher degree on agency within the market in which it acted as a regulator.

During the following years Pantone promoted its colour management system by targeting designers and eventually extending its services to a wider range of industries. The *representation* process of the 'circuit of culture' would happen through the placing of ads in specialized magazines, which came to pass since the late 1960s. Ironically, Pantone's early advertisements were black and white, purely textual images that explained the Pantone Matching System (figure 4). As the company grew so did the dimensions of their advertisements, eventually featuring double-spreads in full colour. By observing copies of specialized magazines such as *Print* and *Computer Arts* of the past decades, one can identify the evolution of the *representation* process of the Pantone brand over the years by

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60 Blaszczyk, *Color,* 297.
61 Blaszczyk, *Color,* 19.

observing the lack of colour in its early advertisements to the full fledged

technicolour of the 2010s (figure 5).

Figure 4 – Pantone Advertisement from 1968   Figure 5 – Pantone Advertisement from 2012

In the 1980s and 1990s the rise of the personal computer propelled the

company even further. Pantone colour chips became especially important for

designers working with computers and colour proofs, since uncalibrated colour

printers could produce a range of varying shades for the same job. While clients

might have approved the initial colour print, there was still a chance that they

would not be pleased with the final printed colour. Therefore, designers would

attach Pantone colour chips to jobs and would collect the clients' signatures on

them to assure that clients would be conscious of the final result. The described

activity demonstrates how consumers would inscribe meaning into the product,

characterizing the *consumption* process of the 'circuit of culture'. By slightly altering the way one handles Pantone colour chips, the meaning of the colour chips themselves are altered, assuming new cultural connotations for both designers and clients.

Due to its immense success and popularization Pantone expanded the range of its standardized colours during the years following the 1990s by applying its colour management method not only to paper but to a broad variety of substrates. New Pantone colour systems have been introduced for textiles, paints, powder coating, plastics and so forth.[62] Through their investment in colour reproduction for the digital world and agreements with IBM-PC and Macintosh, Pantone managed to be at the forefront of the colour industry and to profit considerably with new expansions of its colour system. Being the first private company to ever develop a patented colour system, Pantone became a global leader in the colour industry. In October 2007, despite the company's successful record, X-Rite Inc, a supplier of colour measurement instruments and software, purchased Pantone Inc. for $180 million.[63] Currently the company remains under the control of X-Rite and has offices in the United States of America (Carlstadt, New Jersey), Switzerland (Regensdorf) and China (Hong Kong), all of which work year-round to improve colour technology and expand brand awareness.

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62 Eiseman and Recker, *Pantone*, 132.
63 "X-Rite to Acquire Pantone, Inc. Extending Reach in the Color Industry," *PANTONE®*, accessed April 10, 2014, http://www.pantone.com/pages/pantone/pantone.aspx?pg=20479&ca=10.

In recent years the company has implemented new strategies to reinforce its stage of *representation*. The Pantone Colour of the Year, which is part of the results of trend forecast research that the company launches annually, has become a chromatic landmark, with designers and colour enthusiasts eagerly awaiting its prediction each turn of the year. Another important form of *representation* within the circuit would be the Pantone Color Institute, which investigates chromatic trends, colour theory and consumer behaviour. These researches are made available by the PantoneView, an online database that provides colour trend reports to paying users. Their research and colour forecasts are widely respected and influence several industries from fashion to interior design, packaging to tech-devices. These *representation* strategies by Pantone are meaningful practices that are relevant for those involved, and like so, they impact other stages of the 'circuit of culture', promoting both the *production* and *consumption* processes.

3.2. The Branding of Pantone

One of the manners in which Pantone articulates the cultural processes of *identity* and *consumption* is through branding practices that strive to promote an emotional connection amid consumer and brand, such as lifestyle branding. Lifestyle branding is defined by Kacie Lynn Jung and Matthew Merlin as "a product or service that provides consumers with an emotional attachment to an identifiable lifestyle — the rugged outdoorsman, the posh executive or an urban

hipster, for example. The consumer then projects this lifestyle to society by purchasing and using particular brands."[64] Evidently, much of the branding we currently witness could be mistaken for lifestyle branding, as Wally Olins suggests: "branding these days is largely about involvement and association; the outward and visible demonstration of private and personal affiliation. Branding enables us to define ourselves in terms of a shorthand that is immediately comprehensible to the world around us."[65] Nonetheless, in lifestyle branding, products are never seen as strictly functional but as a concept, an image, an experience, a connection, an emotion; in summary, products are seen as a part of lifestyle.

Pantone has adopted a marketing approach in which its products are seen as part of a "design lifestyle". By strengthening the already established associations that permeate its 'circuit of culture' the company can, in turn, reiterate the meanings that have been ingrained throughout its *representation*, *production* and *consumption* processes. It is important to understand the connections and relations between consumer and brand, given that branding is not a one way channel, but a varied collusion of influences in which the consumer is not passive.[66] Pantone's design-conscious public actively works in the construction of

64 Kacie Jung and Matthew Merlin, "Lifestyle Branding: As More Companies Embrace it, Consumer Opposition Grows," in *Journal of Integrated Communication* (2003): 40.
65 Wally Olins, *On Brand* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 14.
66 Jonathan Schroeder, "The Cultural Codes of Branding," in *Marketing Theory* 9, no. 1 (2009): 123-126.

brand meaning, with the usage of colour palettes and Pantone merchandise being key symbolic practices that takes place under the 'circuit of culture'.

Cultural codes mold the way in which brands generate value as brands are "open-ended objects" enlivened by consumers and their actions.[67] Consumption is the most important of immaterial labours that happens outside of salaried organization.[68] According to Adam Arvidsson the customer is always a co-producer: "Brands work as platforms for action that enable the production of particular immaterial use-values: an experience, a shared emotion, a sense of community. This way, brands work as a kind of ubiquitous means of production that are inserted within the socialized production process that consumers engage in."[69] Brands like Pantone offer to consumers a space of engagement and in return they expect these consumers to endorse the brand within the social realm through the means of individual insight and personal account. The consumer is then the one who generates the social relations in which commercial goods can make sense, holding the power to either build or destroy the context of a brand.[70]

Accordingly, several contemporary brands make the decision to actively affiliate themselves with taste makers who have the power to embed the brand

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67 Adam Arvidsson, "Brands: A Critical Perspective," in *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5, no. 2 (2005): 235-258; Nicholas Carah, *Pop Brands: Branding, Popular Music, and Young People* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).
68 Arvidsson, "Brands."
69 Adam Arvidsson, "The Ethical Economy of Customer Coproduction,"in *Journal of Macromarketing* 28, no. 4 (2008): 248.
70 Arvidsson, "Brands."

within social life.[71] Numerous companies have embraced the productive capacity

of young people in lieu of dictating brand values, thus, involving the consumer in

the brand-building process.[72] At first glance it may seem that corporations

continue to exploit consumers, however, in this new form of experiential

branding, consumers, too, benefit from their keen commitment to certain brands.

They do so by gaining exclusive access to goods and information, on top of

strengthening the links between the brand and personal identity. As pinpointed by

Nicholas Carah: "constructing yourself as a value-creating subject by acquiring

the right culture capital and embodying brand values is key to feeling

'empowered' in the flexible capitalist economy."[73] By associating oneself with a

global brand like Pantone, the consumer is capable of building individual identity

in conjunction with a particular set of like-minded people, acquiring certain values

which oneself perceives as desirable at both local and global scales. Process

which can be characterized as identification within the 'circuit of culture'.

The capacity of brands to actively aid in the construction of the self most

often derives from their iconic and mythical aspect. The construction of the brand

as a myth stems from its capacity to communicate. For Roland Barthes myth is a

language. "Since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is

conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by

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71 Carah, *Pop Brands*, xviii.
72 Carah, *Pop Brands.*
73 Carah, *Pop Brands,* 93.

the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no 'substantial' ones."[74] Consequently, the brand is better understood when, as Cayla and Arnould suggest, the idea of the brand myth is extended to one of brands as "global symbol systems". Thus, contemporary brands such as Pantone work as fluid symbols that seamlessly transcend one reality to the next building a world of connections and meanings between dissimilar individuals. They are the perfect portrayal of our current post-modern capitalist world. "The brand is ideally suited to the age of the soundbite and the global village. It says a huge amount to like-minded people, wherever they live, all in one go."[75]

As previously established, the mythical brand is the one capable of incorporating cultural, social, political and/or economic urges into its speech, it is the brand that provokes an emotional reaction in consumers through its intricate storytelling. As in the case of Pantone, a tale of standards and excellence constructs the social and economic myth of colours and taste-makers. In such a way, the Pantone Matching System was able to become a metaphor for American imperialism and modernism. The Pantone system emulated American modes of production and the country's high-modernist ideology, applying their own system and subduing all to it. As Fredric Jameson posits: "The standardization of world culture, with local popular or traditional forms driven out or dumbed down to

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74 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 109.
75 Olins, *On Brand*, 13.

make way for American television, American music, food, clothes and films, has

been seen by many as the very heart of globalization."[76] Following the "American

Way of Life" where everything is copyrighted and commercialized, even colours

are patented as a way to construct a brand myth.

Pantone managed to become successful by utilizing the industrial

standards of its home country and well as its high-modernist aesthetics. Pantone's

pithy argument for the simplification of printing displayed only the positive side

of high modernity by claiming to organize and make the world a better place for

all. By adopting a layout that is commonly associated with the International Style,

the brand does not fully showcase its origins, making it easier for the Pantone to

infiltrate a diverse range of global environments. Pantone attempts to be a neutral

brand, however it is not, as one can never be absolutely neutral. Once a

homogenizing aesthetic is embraced, all other aesthetics are effaced, and it is in

this way that Pantone operates. As claimed by Olins: "the best and most

successful brands can ignore or capitalize on their product origins and their

national characteristics. They can compress and express simple, complex and

subtle emotions. They can make those emotions immediately accessible, in many

cases overriding mountainous barriers like ethnicity, religion and language. They

have an immense emotional content and inspire loyalty beyond reason."[77]

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76 Fredric Jameson, Preface in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao
Miyoshi (Durhan NC: Duke University Press, 1998), xii.
77 Olins, *On Brand*, 19.

Through its "Americanness" Pantone fulfils the requirements to become an iconic

brand.

4. Consuming Pantone: Objects, Hotels, and Art

In the year 2000, the iconic look of the Pantone colour chip (figure 6)—composed of the spot colour, Pantone logo and serial code — inspired the company to expand their lines of products and to launch the brand Pantone Universe. Mimicking the International Typographic Style aesthetic incorporated by Pantone, the Pantone Universe collection features a series of everyday commodities targeted at a public concerned with good design. This brand expansion was launched as a consumer licensing program, in which companies acquire the rights to develop and sell products under the Pantone Universe name. As part of the Pantone family, these companies are obliged to incorporate the standard layout of the Pantone colour chips on their products (figure 7), featuring the Pantone Universe logo and the product's respective colour code.

Figure 6 – Pantone Colour Chips

Figure 7 – Pantone Universe Notebooks

The Pantone Universe product line has provided the company with great business exposure. At first simple memorabilia such as coffee mugs, notebooks (figure 6), cell phone cases, and key chains were the fashionable design objects catching the public's attention. But, as the brand expanded and more partnerships were established, a wider range of Pantone Universe merchandise was introduced into the market. Several product lines have been launched in order to achieve different purposes, with goods ranging from bicycles, credit cards, Rubik's cubes, toothbrushes, chairs, and so forth. These products are part of exclusive and limited lines, fact that justifies them having higher prices than similar products of comparable quality. They are sold at exclusive boutiques and museum shops throughout the globe as well as online, focusing on a specific international clientele of design-concious individuals who would not resent spending more in order to obtain a more unique product.

In the past couple of years the Pantone Universe license has been extended to the fashion world through the Pantone Universe Beachwear, Pantone Universe Colorwear, and Pantone Universe Eyewear. In 2012, a deal was closed with the famous beauty retailer brand Sephora, giving origin to a complete line of makeup products called Sephora + Pantone Universe. Together both companies developed the "Color IQ", a technological device that can determine a subject's skin tone and match it to the right foundation colour. Other partnerships have been

established with Lowes, Ice-Watch and Room Copenhagen.[78] Hitherto several partnerships have been sealed resulting in a vast array of Pantone Universe merchandise.

In 2010 the brand Pantone Universe expanded their range of products even further by inaugurating the Pantone Hotel in Brussels, Belgium (figure 7). [79] This hotel is completely dedicated to the aesthetic of the Pantone brand, and was conceived by the Belgian interior designer Michel Penneman and Belgian architect Olivier Hannaert. The entire hotel — including the 59 bedrooms and suites — is decorated with seven different colour palettes including various utilitarian objects from the Pantone Universe brand. The hotel also includes a gift shop with all sorts of Pantone products.

Figure 7 - Front of the Pantone Hotel in Brussels, Belgium

78"About PANTONE®."
79 Jamie Derringer, "The Pantone Hotel in Belgium," *Design Milk*, May 26, 2010, accessed October 23, 2013, http://design-milk.com/the-pantone-hotel-in-belgium/.

Pantone Universe has received a great amount of attention from the media and from Pantone's design-conscious public. Its products have been featured in several newspaper articles from the New York Times to the Los Angeles Times,[80] and have been presented in important design blogs such as TAXI, ColourLovers and Design Milk.[81] While in 2003 there were around 400 firms selling Pantone Universe products across the United States of America, contributing to 15% of the company's revenue;[82] in 2014 Pantone Universe goods are being commercialized on over a 100 countries,[83] and have helped to increase the profit margin of X-Rite Incorporated, Pantone's parent company, by +146,66% at Nasdaq and by +102.93% at Dow Jones in the period of April 24th 2009 to April 23rd 2014,[84] making it a successful brand extension. As claimed by Wally Olins: "In reality brand extension is a remarkable development, because it implies that the brand has a life and personality of its own and that, if the emotions surrounding it are sufficiently powerful, we will unquestioningly accept

80 Rocky Casale, "Now Booking | Pantone Hotel, Brussels," *New York Times T Magazine*, February 22, 2011, accessed April 23, 2014, http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/02/22/now-booking-pantone-hotel-brussels/; David Keeps,"The Deal: Pantone Folding Chairs," *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 2010, accessed April 23, 2014, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/home_blog/2010/11/pantone-folding-chairs-yooxcom-.html.
81 John Yong, "Pantone Suitcases: Travel Companions for Quintessential Designers," *TAXI*, May 14, 2012, accessed April 23, 2014, http://designtaxi.com/news/352498/PANTONE-Suitcases-Travel-Companions-For-Quintessential-Designers/; "Pantone Color Product Guide," *ColourLovers*, April 15, 2008, accessed April 23, 2014, http://www.colourlovers.com/home/blog/2008/04/15/pantone-color-product-guide; Caroline Williamson, "Pantone Universe Paint Collection by Valspar," *Design Milk*, October 2, 2013, accessed April 23, 2014, http://design-milk.com/pantone-universe-paint-collection-by-valspar/.
82 Alisson Fass, "The Color of Money."
83 "About PANTONE®."
84 "X-Rite, Incorporated: NASDAQ:XRIT quotes and news," *Google Finance*, accessed April 23, 2014, https://www.google.com/finance?cid=623936.

its functional capabilities."[85] Indeed, Pantone Universe has managed to successfully incorporate Pantone's personality as a brand and to be accepted as a natural marketing move. The brand extension has been embraced by the expert community and gradually incorporated into popular culture with Pantone Universe products being commercialized at Sephora's 1,750 stores over 30 countries,[86] Lowe's 1,830 stores in the United States, Canada and Mexico, [87] and with new Pantone Colorwear Pop-Up Shops being set throughout the world during the year of 2014, to name a few.[88]

In regards to the 'circuit of culture', Pantone Universe reshapes the *production* process and manages to articulate *production* and *consumption* through design. Pantone Universe commodities retain attributes of the colour palettes giving functional artifacts a symbolic form.[89] Through design, Pantone Universe seeks to establish *identification* between consumer and product.[90] It operates as a magnifier glass through which all processes of the 'circuit of culture' become evidenced and augmented. Pantone Universe commercializes a visual attribute of the world in the form of commodity. The brand extension serves as a means to expand the Pantone Macthing System to the domain of industrialized

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85 Olins, *On Brand,* 18.
86 "Sephora Store Locator," *Sephora,* accessed April 23, 2014, http://www.sephora.com/store-locations-events.
87 "About Lowe's," *Lowe's*, accessed April 23, 2014, http://media.lowes.com/about-lowes/.
88 Jennifer Paul,"Experimentally Colorful Pop-Up Shops," *TrendHunter*, February 14, 2014, accessed April 23, 3014, http://www.trendhunter.com/trends/pantone-colorwear.
89 DugGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies*, 56.
90 DuGay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies*, 59.

goods, classifying each product according to a standardized colour code. Nonetheless, its repercussion affects both the colour industry and the brand's image, constructing a wider and more self-referential network of connections amongst users and consumers. In this manner Pantone Universe allows Pantone to broaden its consumer public, moving the target from designers to a wider demographic.

As argued by the Argentine anthropologist Néstor Garcia Canclini, in contemporary society the borders that define the social and cultural processes have been blurred by globalization.[91] The coexistence of numerous symbolic codes within the same group and even the same subject influence the *identification* process.[92] In this day and age it is no longer possible to define identity solely based on ethnicity, social class, nationality and/or gender; the contemporary process of identification is not a monologue, but a constant process of reconstruction in which the individual appropriates and expropriates cultural codes as he or she deems fit. Cultural products, such as the ones commercialized by Pantone, connect their owners beyond languages and cultures as they participate in the international circulation of goods and information. They are constituent parts of fragmentary identities that allow people to distinguish themselves as members of a social group. Through the means of Pantone Universe

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91 Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 255.
92 Canclini, *Consumers*, 107.

products, *consumption* becomes a symbolic act of belonging and engaging with an international class of people informed in the ways of colour and design, thus attesting the owners rightful identity as a design professional or dilettante. In this manner, the 'circuit of culture' completes a full circle, going through all fives eventually arriving at the *identity* process.

As pinpointed by Daniel Miller, while in urban settings people live in geography proximity, this does not necessarily mean that they are acquainted with each other, or even that they have anything in common with their next-door neighbours.[93] The contemporary lack of collectivity and the overall feeling of not belonging to any particular group leads people to connect through a material presence.[94] Today's human relationships are no longer bounded by proximity and arbitrary factors like language, race, gender or age; they can now be mediated by objects and through virtual public spaces. Pantone Universe serves to these needs, mediating humans and objects. It strives to delineate a group to which individuals can relate to, even if in a global scale. Individuals build relationships with people and objects, and at times those relationships with objects and brands can be far more poignant than those with people.[95]

With Pantone Universe, the company has reached new heights of interaction: interaction through use, interaction through consumption, and

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93 Daniel Miller, *The Comfort of Things* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).
94 Miller, *Comfort of Things*, 286.
95 Miller, *Comfort of Things*.

interaction through production. The interaction through use happens when designers utilize Pantone colour charts in their professional activities, they use Pantone brand products for designing purposes. Interaction through consumption takes place when designers buy Pantone Universe products such as coffee mugs and bicycles. And finally, interaction through production happens when designers create a cultural product, for example an artwork, that makes direct reference to the Pantone colour chips. All the cultural processes of the 'circuit of culture' are seamlessly articulated and become reinforced with the presence of Pantone Universe and the active presence of Pantone fans on the Internet.

4.1. Pantone in the Culture of Postproduction

All over the globe companies have been harvesting their social influence via social network, activating consumers and instigating them to participate in the extended brand experience that happens online. The Internet allows Pantone users and enthusiasts to connect globally in an unprecedented manner. Pantone has mobilized its online presence in order to promote the brand through the voice of fans and users. Pantone has 243 thousand likes on its official fan page on Facebook, 92 thousand Twitter followers and 103 thousand Instagram followers.[96] As posed by Mirko Tobias Schafer: "The phenomenon of social interaction and its

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96 "Pantone Color," *Facebook*, accessed March 24, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/PantoneColor; "Pantone on Twitter," *Twitter*, accessed March 24, 2014, https://twitter.com/pantone; "Pantone on Instagram," *Instagram*, accessed March 24, 2014, http://instagram.com/pantone.

social-political implications is blurred by the overly positive perception of users interacting online. While enthusiastic promoters celebrate these platforms' potential to empower passive consumers, entrepreneurs have long realized that the 'social media' users are not yet only another audience for advertising, but also a crowd of helping hands in distributing the commercial messages."[97]

Through Twitter's system of hashtags Pantone encourages public participation, as in the case of #MugMonday, in which fans and followers post pictures of their Pantone Universe mugs every Monday while linking them to Pantone's account (figure 8). More devoted Pantone enthusiasts utilize the hashtag system to share their new interactions with the brand or even present their Pantone inspired tattoos to the world (figure 9). Pantone fans go as far as categorizing celebrities hair colours according to the Pantone Matching System, as in the case of the Buzzfeed list "A Pantone Spectrum of Celebrity Hair Color" (figure 10).[98] In this manner, the Pantone's public has been blurring the lines between *production* and *consumption*, generating new forms of *representation* where instead of the traditional model in which meaning is inscribed in the act of *representation* by the producer, it is the consumer who takes upon himself/herself the task of *representation* and inscribes him/her own meanings into virtual forms of product *representation*.

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97 Schafer, "Bastard Culture," 158.
98 Emily Hennen, "A Pantone Spectrum Of Celebrity Hair Color," *Buzzfeed*, accessed March 24, 2014,http://www.buzzfeed.com/emilyhennen/a-pantone-spectrum-of-celebrity-hair-color.

Figure 8 – Pantone's Twitter Campaign

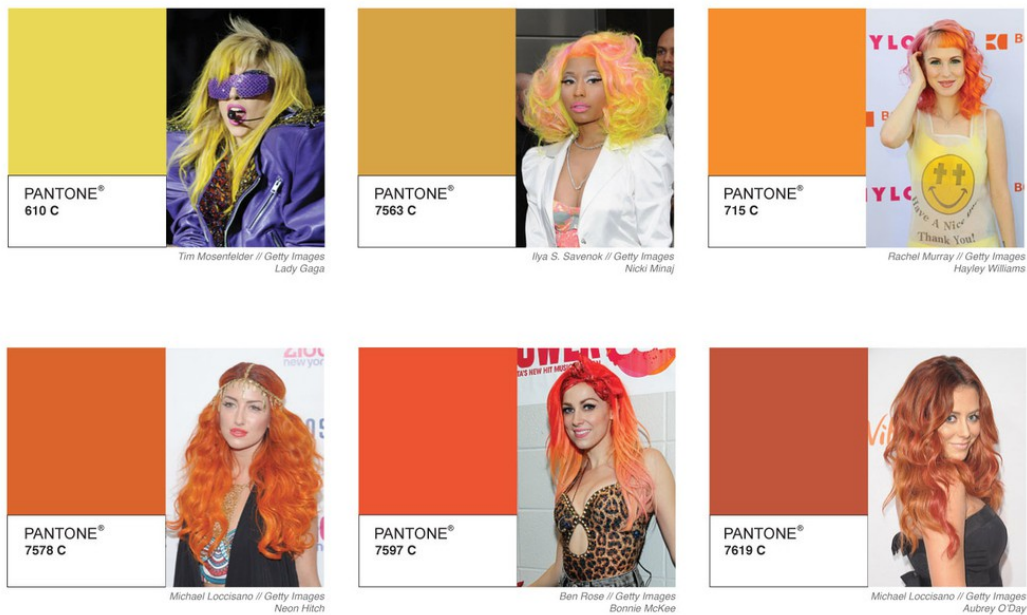Figure 9 – Pantone Inspired Tattoo by Fan

Figure 10 - A Pantone Spectrum of Celebrity Hair Color

Through its online presence, via fans and consumers, Pantone has

claimed its place in the culture of postproduction. A complex concept employed

by Nicolas Bourriaud, postproduction is a technical term originally tied to the

audiovisual processes applied to recorded material, which are linked to the service

industry.[99] In his interpretation of postproduction, Bourriaud establishes a

connection between art practice and the service industry, arguing that:

> Since the early nineties, an ever increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of preexisting works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products. This art of postproduction seems to respond to the proliferating chaos of global culture in the information age, which is characterized by an increase in the supply of works and the art world's annexation of forms ignored or disdained until now. These artists who insert their own work into that of others contribute to the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work. The material they manipulate is no longer *primary.* It is no longer a matter of elaborating a form on the basis of a raw material but working with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, which is to say, objects already *informed* by other objects. Notions of originality (being at the origin of) and even of creation (making something from nothing) are slowly blurred in this new cultural landscape marked by the twin figures of the DJ and the programmer, both of whom have the task of selecting cultural objects and inserting them into new contexts.[100]

In this regard, postproduction is a contemporary phenomenon that has

reached all spheres of cultural production and that is augmented by the web 2.0.

Photos, images, objects, and artworks, all circulate on the web characterized by

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99 Nicolas Bourriaud, Caroline Schneider and Jeanine Herman, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* 2nd ed. (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005), 7.
100 Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, 7.

coauthorship, reference, and collectivity.[101] Pantone colours and products are not simply reproduced through the internet, they are reclaimed and reinterpreted, going against all ideas of traditional *consumption* and *production* within the 'circuit of culture'.

For Pantone engaging is a form of postproduction. As stated by Andrew Blauvelt: "The language of postproduction speaks of sampling rather than appropriation, sharing as opposed to owing, formats instead of forms, curation (i.e., selection) over creation, and context as the prime determinant of form rather than content. It is a culture o re-: remix, reformat, reshuffle, reinterpret, reprogram, reschedule, reboot, repost, recycle."[102] On the web, Pantone has been re-contextualized, it has become a symbol of a sort of "subculture" of design oriented individuals and hip artists. It represents a trivial knowledge that only someone that is on the "in" could ever be acquainted with, excluding others not by colour, gender, sexual option or social class; but for knowledge. Pantone culture operates similarly to an underground culture with the exception that what happens is on the surface, nonetheless it is a group culture that requires knowledge of the signs to be able to recognize it. It is a new way of incorporating *identity* through the digital sphere.

Immersed in this complex context, Pantone is a brand that transgresses

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101 Andrew Blauvelt, "Tool (or, Postproduction for the Graphic Designer)," in *Graphic Design: Now in Production* (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2011), 24.
102 Blauvelt, "Tool," 28.

several of the previously established barriers. Its current success as both a colour

reproduction system as well as a brand of consumer goods relies heavily on the

ambiguous lines that it crosses, such as the close involvement and dependence of

its design-conscious public, the global overcoming the local, internet sales,

internet mouth-to-mouth. Pantone has done more than marketing and branding, it

has delivered itself to its public, it has relied on the power of the global

community of design enthusiasts to make it the huge success it is today. As

cultural intermediaries, term utilized by Pierre Bourdieu to describe a group of

professionals employed in the realm of symbolic goods and services,[103] designers

often time occupy an important place articulating *production* and *consumption*

within the 'circuit of culture'. Theirs is the role of understanding what consumers

want from products, making it even more interesting when the target market is

formed by designers themselves. Due to the cultural intermediaries who make up

the bulk of Pantone's public, interactions with the brand take place not only at the

level of *consumption* but also at the level of *production*. As Pantone proposes

more ways to participate through Pantone Universe and its online presence, its

public engages with the brand in a diligent and thought-provoking manner.

    As Pantone establishes itself as a global leader in both the colour industry

and in the market of consumer goods more and more products are launched. This

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103 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

constant need for innovation, typical of the post-modern world, is a strategy to

keep the company's name in people's minds. However, this plan has turned out to

be so successful that the public has incorporated an active role in the construction

of the identity behind the Pantone brand. During the past couple of years, a great

number of creative individuals have developed forms of self-expression through

Pantone. A successful example would be the work *Pantone Fruit Tarts* (2012) by

the French designer Emilie de Griottes (figure 11), who recreates the Pantone

color chips with fruits and tarts.[104] Similarly referencing the Pantone colour chips,

the *HUMANAE* project (2012) by the Brazilian artist Angelica Dass, whose goal is

to catalogue all skin tones in the world using the format of Pantone chips (figure

12).[105] Another project that has captured the attention of the virtual world is the

Tiny PMS Match (2014), in which designer Inka Matthew collects small objects

and attaches them to Pantone colour chips.[106] In the *Designers Rights Project*

(2012), ten designers united to promote their cause that sought to bring awareness

among clients about the hardships faced by designers.[107] In order to make

reference to their occupation, these designers chose to produce their posters using

the shapes and colours of Pantone chips. It seems like utilizing and consuming

Pantone is no longer enough, the consumer must produce Pantone.

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104 Emilie de Griottes,"Choose your Color," *Griottes Palette Culinaire*, accessed March 15, 2014, http://www.griottes.fr/choose-your-color.
105 Angelica Dass, "Humanae," *Humanae*, accessed March 15, 2014, http://humanae.tumblr.com/.
106 Inka Matthew, "Tiny PMS Match," *Tiny PMS Match*, accessed April 25, 2014, http://tinypmsmatch.tumblr.com/.
107 "Designer's Rights," *NewsiLike*, accessed March 15, 2014, http://www.newsilike.in/infographics/designers-rights/.

Figure 11 – Pantone Fruit Tarts by Emilie de Griottes (2012)

Figure 12 – HUMANAE Project by Angelica Dass (2012)

5.   Conclusion

The meaning-making processes that take place at the current age are at once complex, diverse and concatenated. They allow intricate identities to be formed through the constant association and disassociation of the self with objects, brands and social groups. As such, companies strive to keep pace and at times they must break boundaries in order to provide commodities that bear the distinct signifiers which modern-day consumers seek. Pantone is a prime example of a company that incorporates the contemporary flux and transforms it into a business asset. Ultimately, Patone's *tour de force* remains indisputably the extension brand Pantone Universe. It shattered all preconceived notions regarding the company, transgressing the limits between physicality and abstraction and materializing the concept of colour. By transfiguring the aesthetic of its colour palettes into consumer goods, the company has been able to capitalize on most industrial products that can display colour. In the early twentieth-century colour had already been utilized as a decoy for conspicuous consumption, however Pantone's ruthlessness lies on its ability to sell colour by itself. Colour as a concept, as an industrial serial number transposed into a commercial product.

Throughout this Major Research Paper, the 'circuit of culture' has been employed to investigate how Pantone has transformed a tool for the occupation of design into a commodity and a signifier of social identity. The cultural process of

representation has demonstrated the progression of the company's image, initially represented as mostly concerned with uniformity and good design, and eventually becoming a transnational ambassador of colours and a signifier for identity. The stage of *representation* has aided in the uncovering of Pantone's physical and digital strategies to imbue its products with meaning. Thereafter, the manners in which the industrial patterns of standardization and the high-modernist ideology have shaped and influenced Pantone have been made visible through the cultural process of *regulation*. The stage of *production* provided insight in regards to past and current consumer needs that have motivated Pantone to develop new products, while the process of *consumption* evidenced how Pantone's public contributed to the establishment of the company, and explained how they became involved with the construction of Pantone as a signifier of the design profession. Ultimately, the cultural process of *identity* has proved itself extremely helpful to this research, since it articulated all other stages in order to arrive at an understanding of the fragmentary identities of the present time so as to explain how cultural products connect individual beyond frontiers allowing them to take part in the international circulation of goods and information, thus establishing identity through their symbolic power.

Pantone has continuously adapted to the times by investing in new technologies for colour reproduction as well as being a patron of the digital sphere. The company has worked closely to its public in order to construct its

brand meaning, and at last has relied on them to assist the brand on its marketing efforts. Postproduction rejuvenates and inspires Pantone, it provides free publicity whereas serving as a form of authentication of brand relevance. The convenient space of the web 2.0 enables and amplifies the reverse promotion process of Pantone, where instead of Pantone being a tool for its design public, the design public becomes a tool for Pantone's self-promotion.

In essence, a global issue takes form through this analysis: at the current time people's desire to feel connected goes beyond the limits of the physical realm and reaches the digital sphere. There is a contemporary void within us which makes us seek new ways of establishing identity through objects and through brands. The fluttering stage of the self seeks refuge and takes a hold of anything that might fulfil the void within to attain the feeling of belonging. Our uncertainties are certain and big corporations will stop at nothing until they can use them in their favour.

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