

The king of the superbrands



The Manhattan Nike Town on East Fifty-seventh Street is more than a fancy store, it is a temple, where the swoosh¹ is worshipped² as both art and heroic symbol. The swoosh is equated with sports at every turn: in reverent glass display cases depicting “The definition of an athlete”; in the inspirational quotes about “Courage”, “Honor”, “Victory” and “Teamwork” inlaid³ in the floorboards; and in the building’s dedication⁴ “to all athletes and their dreams”.

I asked a salesperson if there was anything in the middle of the thousands of T-shirts, bathing suits, sports bras or socks that did not have a Nike logo on the outside of the garment. He racked his brain⁵. T-shirts, no. Shoes, no. Track suits? No. “Why?” he finally asked, sounding a bit hurt. “Is somebody allergic to the swoosh?”

Nike, king of the superbrands, is like an inflated Pac-Man. It is ravenous⁶ by nature. It seems fitting that Nike’s branding strategy involves an icon that looks like a check mark. Nike is checking off the spaces as it swallows⁷ them: superstores? Check. Hockey? Baseball? Soccer? Check. Check. Check. T-shirts? Check. Hats? Check. Underwear? Check. Schools? Bathrooms? Shaved into brush cuts? Check. Check. Check. Since Nike has been the leader in branding clothing, it’s not surprising that it has also led the way to the brand’s final frontier: the branding of flesh. Not only do dozens of Nike employees have a swoosh tattooed on their calves⁸, but tattoo parlors all over North America report that the swoosh has become their most popular item. Human branding? Check.

NAOMI KLEIN, *No Logo* (2000)

1. **swoosh**: name given to the Nike /'naɪki/ logo
2. **worship** /'wɜːʃɪp/ (v.): show respect, admiration and love
3. **inlaid** /ɪn'leɪd/: *incrusté*
4. **dedication** (n.): *dédicace, consécration*

5. **rack (your) brain** (v.): *se creuser la tête*
6. **ravenous** /'rævənəs/ (adj): very hungry
7. **swallow** (v.): *avaler*
8. **calf** /kɑːf/ (pl. calves /kɑːvz/) (n.): *mollet*