

Book Reviews

Richard R. Weiner

Marketing the Moon: The Selling of the Apollo Lunar Mission

By David Meerman Scott and Richard Jurek.
Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 2014, 144 pp.

The sight of the stars makes me dream of the poetry of the heavens," wrote Lord Byron. Men and women from the beginning of human time have gazed at the brightest object in the night sky, the moon — gazing at it until it feels that it gazes upon us, burns within us. The image of the moon persists as our constant companion in our journey around the sun. The stars, the moon, and space have served also as an avenue of escape from earthly care, from our human condition. And for some it serves as a sense of our role in the Interstellar/Intergalactic universe, and perhaps the extension of the bounds of human possibility and desire.

Scott and Jurek's beautifully mounted coffee table book — featuring over three hundred photos and images — is a celebratory work. It celebrates the branding of our lunar gaze in the selling of the NASA's Apollo Lunar Program to land a man on the moon and bring him safely back before the end of the 1960s. This was the *new frontier* that President Kennedy brought us to conceive of and surmount as part of America's exceptional role in the world. Getting Americans to

buy into this dream and endeavor was the result, Scott and Jurek argue, of a pioneering set of public relations techniques. These are techniques of the *Mad Men* — who constitute what Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno labeled the culture industry. The particular techniques chronicled have come to be referred to as "brand journalism" and "content marketing": driving the buzz; connecting with a sense of authenticity and credibility not spin; building target audience participation not through repetition of slogans but through developing a sense of affinity with and participation in the program.

We are told that Dr. Wernher von Braun — the key developer of the Third Reich's V2 rocket and ballistic missile programs and two decades later Director of the Marshall Space Flight Center — had "devoured" the popular science fiction of Jules Verne, Kurd Lasswitz, H.G. Wells, and Hermann Oberth, and recognized such fantasy storytelling could inspire others as it did him.

Already in 1955 and 1956, von Braun appeared on *Tomorrowland* episodes of the new ABC TV show *Disneyland*. Von Braun, reflecting upon Neil Armstrong's walk in July 1969, would say that the public relations job of selling the Apollo Program was crucial in securing political support and funding. Von

Braun said that without the incessant public relations campaign "we would have been unable to do it."

Brand Journalism builds more than awareness. It engages and positions a target audience, which in the case of the Apollo program was the American public. A public relations campaign set out to attach the American public to the Apollo program through the power of a well-told story. NASA's Public Affairs Office (PAO), as developed at the end of the 1950s by Walter Bonney and in the 1960s by Julian Scheer, is presented as "the first brand newsroom." For Scott and Jurek this was a landmark contribution to the history of advertising. PAO's mission was to brand our lunar gaze in terms of NASA's Apollo Program, building on the public's fascination with all things space travel and exploration. PAO hired top journalists who had covered the early civil rights movement and the Mercury space program that preceded Apollo. Their mission was not just to write press releases to pitch to journalists, but to provide newsworthy articles, background materials, television newsreels, radio broadcasts, sound effects, sponsored symposia, and scientific kits for schools. They were to do so by providing a receptive audience with credible communications content: concrete facts and inclusive imagery about space travel and exploration.

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In the idiom of Madison Avenue, PAO was to provide “news feed on behalf of the brand.” They were to create a coherent and consistent brand framework within which brand stories could be created, and within which the brand was “positioned.” They were aggregating more than reporting. They were focused on sustaining the public’s interest in a time-sensitive manner, as well as their trust in the program. The time-sensitive targets were front-page stories in an era when daily newspapers were still dominant, as well as top billing on television news in the days when there were only three TV networks. The ultimate objective was a human walking on the moon as the most tele-visually watched real-time event, with an estimated six hundred million viewers. Prior to Armstrong’s walk on the lunar surface, public information releases on television had been on a time-delayed basis.

Historically for Scott and Jurek, brand management came to be conceived as brand journalism cultivating the information landscape. It was for the co-authors “the largest, and we believe, the most important marketing and public relations case study in history.” Here the campaign involved *nation branding* in which the PR campaign was to make the public feel closer to the nation’s space project. If we go back in the development of modern American advertising, Elmo Calkins had stressed positioning brands as concrete expressions of valued ideals and aspirations.

By the 1950s, David Ogilvy and Leo Burnett refined the guiding principles of selling the brand image, now emphasizing a branded content campaign wherein the target audience’s desires are molded into a sense of a volitional choice and participation in *what*

ought to be in the good life, as well into an acquiescence in and support of the brand’s authority. The goal is to sustain an affective “buy in,” wherein the brand is included in the self and its aspirations. Brand journalism establishes the framework within which non-interrupted content marketing builds brand credibility; and both sustains and grows the brand attachment attitudes and behavior.

The content is the well-told story. With the Apollo program it was a packaged *quest story* as a national mission, the wonder of a sense of adventure and participation in a quest President John F. Kennedy referred to as a “New Frontier.” The key elements of a quest are fulfilled in the telling of the story. The hero here is the Nation. There is the goal: sending a man to the moon and bringing him back safely before the end of the 1960s. There is the recurrent reminder of the hardships along the way: none before “ever so difficult and expensive.”

But the undercurrent to the content story was the goal of convincing America and the World of our national competence. The imagery of spaceflight was to be presented as a powerful and tangible weapon to be wielded in the Cold War. Americans were reminded of the Russians launching an artificial space satellite called Sputnik in October 4, 1957; and orbiting the first man in space, cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, on 12 April 1961. The deeper patriotic message was that Americans did not want to see space dominated by vehicles and astronauts of other nations; did not want to see the nation’s falling behind the Soviet Union in the new space race theatre of the Cold War; did not want to see the Soviet Union get to the moon first. Quoting President Lyndon B. Johnson: “Now would you rather

have us be a second rate nation or should we spend a little money?”

In an interview with lagudre.com (March 27, 2014), Scott expresses regret that the Apollo marketing “was not sustained. That’s why we haven’t landed humans on Mars.” It is here where Scott reveals the limits of his celebratory narrative, and demonstrates a *mentalité* taken aim at in two other books on the Apollo Program published in the past year and a half. First, there is intellectual historian Matthew Tubbe’s *No Requiem for the Space Age: The Apollo Moon Landings and American Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2014). Tubbe recalls President Richard Nixon sighing during the 1973 OPEC oil embargo that he couldn’t get America come together to meet the new challenge “In the Spirit of Apollo?” Tubbe calls attention to the crumbling of the Robert McNamara aura of technocracy incarnate, as conservative congressional contempt for government “expertise” began to surge. Tubbe notes that the American mood for space exploration started to flag and shift after Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon.

Starting again in the later 1970s, new generations of American had their fascination with space, technology and now robotics rekindled by George Lucas’s epoch-shifting film *Star Wars*. “May the force be with you.” In the next decade President Ronald Reagan would turn again to the quest story of American technological prowess and resolve in winning the Cold War. This time Reagan’s *Star Wars* ballistic missile Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was used as a ploy to explicitly neutralize the Soviet Union’s nuclear arsenal, but implicitly to force Russia into a missile defense system race that sped the Soviet Union’s eventual fall into financial collapse. The other extraordinary recent complementary book on the Apollo

program is Nicholas de Monchaux's *Spacesuit: Fashioning Apollo* (M.I.T. Press, 2013). It stresses the intricacies and interconnections of technology and design that went into both the fashioning of the Apollo spacesuit and attending to human physical needs in space travel. De Monchaux very well complements Scott and Jurek's thorough description of the importance of the partnership between government, corporations, labor, and the media to make Apollo a success and on time.

The spacesuit itself derived from an earlier vision of Christian Dior and the close involvement of the Maidenform Bra Company. There was also the heavy involvement of Hasselblad cameras, Zeiss Ikon, Omega watches, North American Rockwell, General Motors, Raythe-

on, TRW, SONY tape recorders, Harris Electric, Grumman Engineering, Del Monte and Stouffers foods. Of course, there was also General Foods touting Tang its powdered orange juice as "aboard" the Apollo flight, even if the astronauts never mixed and drank it. Yes everyone got a publicity piece of the action, but as both de Monchaux as well as Scott and Cooper amply demonstrate this was an awesome and exemplary national collective effort.

In the end, we are left with the gaze of the astronauts not only on the barren surface of the moon with the American flag reflection on their visors, but with their non-branded lunar gaze – now ours – of Earth floating in blackness. The new gaze would become the symbol of the global ecology movement which stirred into prom-

inence near the same time. Beyond the brand journalism and content marketing, Scott and Jurek never neglect to note how as a result of the Apollo Program science has been endowed with so much more knowledge and many more clues, and with the reality of interstellar space transportation.

Author Information

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Sandy Zabell

The Enigma

Alan Turing: The Enigma. By Andrew Hodges. Princeton University Press, 2014 edition.

In 1970, Alan Turing was best known for his work in two areas: mathematical logic and computer science. In the years immediately prior to World War II, Turing had solved Hilbert's *Entscheidung-*

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sproblem, that is, the "decision problem," whether there exists a mechanical procedure for determining if a mathematical statement expressed in a formal language has a proof. In order to do this Turing introduced the concept of what is now termed a "Turing machine," a mathematical abstraction of an algorithm. After World War II, Turing then turned to the foundations

of computer science, including his famous popular paper on whether a machine can think, which introduced the "Turing test," the original imitation game.

But for the period of the war itself, almost nothing was known of Turing's activities. In her 1959 biography of her son, Sarah Turing devoted just a short chapter to the war, noting: