

outers of Nike footwear conceal their own internal engineering marvels. A landscaped parkway—whose concrete abutments invite consumers to sit and rest, observe and ruminate—gives the store an initial curb appeal. The facade is strongly reminiscent of an old gymnasium. Banners hang between the windows in columns on the middle stories. Two entranceways flank a bank of windows at street level. In those windows, consumers see not only product offerings and vestibule merchandising, but also reflections of their own images and the surrounding streetscape. Reflection is an activity greatly encouraged by the NTC servicescape. Above this central glasswork, the corporate name and logo are centered on a filigree grillwork. On the four structural columns bracketing the entranceways, bas-relief sculptures executed in material resembling aluminum are framed above eye level. These sculptures depict the body parts of athletes engaged in sport—a cyclist's torso, a runner's trunk and limbs, basketball players' arms, torso, and head, the profile of a female enacting aerobics. These sculptures appear to be emerging from the building (or merging with it), and the functions they embody make them suitable genius loci for this marketplace. If we allow the temple or shrine conceit to shape our interpretation, the fixity of these cult statues is not simply appropriate, it is also essential to the shaping of experience the consumer will undergo upon crossing the threshold. (Indeed, the *nikai*, or victories [McEwen 1993, 104] themselves, embodied in all the offerings of the corporation, from whence its name was derived, alight in this building.) That threshold crossing marks the entrance of the consumer into an alternative phenomenal realm, an existential condition of being-in-the-marketplace, a participation in a lifeworld just shy of a total institution.

Inside the Building: A Walking Tour

Because space limitations make it impossible to describe all the pavilions in sufficient detail, I limit my discussion to those interior structures that both give the reader an overall sense of the enterprise and reflect the degree of consumer interest that promoted my own initial introspection. That is, I confine my treatment more to the

The Soul of the Company Store

remarkable than the mundane as communicated to me by intuition and the enthusiasm of informants. I employ a bottom-up approach, describing phenomena encountered in ascending the building.

Vestibule

The vestibule has undergone considerable change since I began this investigation. The original window display consisted of a large rimless paddle wheel whose spokes terminate in athletic shoes, giving the impression of perpetual motion sustained by the product. Over this display, a banner proclaims, "There Is No Finish Line," reminding exiting visitors that true athletes remain suspended in an existential present of achieving, and that Nike will support them in their Sisyphean pursuit. Mounted on a side wall are framed covers of *Sports Illustrated*—each bearing the picture of a Nike celebrity endorser—that look like pictures in an exhibition.⁵ An accompanying plaque pays tribute to the performance of "great athletes," the accomplishments of which confraternity the cobranding sponsors enable the customer to experience vicariously.

The performance motif conjoined with the opportunities for touching greatness (O'Guinn 1989) are impressed upon the consumer at the very outset of the visit. Consumers walk across a set of inlaid embossed concentric circles, at the center of which is the globe (North America featured prominently), ringed about with the Nike Town trademark. This same design, adorned with cardinal compass points, is also reproduced on what appear to simulate manhole covers on street-level floors inside the building. Crossing these globes gives us the impression that we are standing at the

⁵ This concept has recently been reinterpreted in an upstairs wall-of-fame gallery that features photographs of area amateur athletes and accounts of their achievements, while the original vestibule exhibit has been retired. Whether the removal of these covers coincides with the end of history, or the corporation's transcendence of the historic into the realm of the fantastic, if not mythic, is interesting to consider. It may enable viewers to enter more easily into a culture-bound delusional system if they are not reminded so graphically of the firm's historical situatedness. Perhaps history has been "captured totally by the spin-doctors of market forces" (Fjelman 1992, 308).