

Subud Trademark Registration - a Response

By Marcus Bolt

In spite of the evidence, there is still a firmly held concept in Subud circles that in order to attract people to Subud, we have to be a 'shining beacon'.

Does anyone know - or is anyone willing to hazard a guess at - exactly what that means, or even what it is that purportedly does the 'shining' and the 'attracting'? Is it one's talent(s)? abilities? capabilities? Is it one's success, or wealth? One's finely tuned, svelte body - one's 'shining manageable hair'? Could it be one's mind? spirit? aura? essence? presence? goodness? saintliness? niceness? Is it all, some, or none of these?

I never really thought about it before in my undeconstructed days. Just took it as a given that there would arise in me, due to years of sincere latihan, a certain *je ne sais quoi* that would have some kind of effect on those around me. After thirty-eight years of diligence, I have to admit to zero, zilch, *nada*, as they say (as far as I know, that is... hope springs ever eternal).

As a corollary, Bapak also intimated that there would one day be musicians in Subud who could cure people with their playing.

Interestingly, this 'shamanistic' belief in the psychic efficacy of cultural pursuits was toyed with (in rivalry) by both Picasso and Matisse. Matisse famously said that his work 'could cure toothache'. Picasso drew a portrait of a mistress he was tiring of (can't remember which one) on a piece of medical graph paper and was so amazed when she got ill the next day that he convinced himself he had shamanistic powers. And of course, his involvement with African art was not only for visual effect; he utilised it to ward off his own demons.

All of which leads me neatly on to what happened yesterday. While clearing up, I came across a cap emblazoned with a Subud symbol that my wife had bought at the ThankYou gathering.

Being a designer involved on a daily basis with branding and the application of logos to all manner of things from racing cars to biro, and knowing, deep down, what a surfacey business it all is, I couldn't help reflecting on the fact that at any Subud Congress nowadays, one will see stalls selling pictures of Bapak, as well as Subud-symbol enhanced badges, car stickers, tea towels, mugs, caps, T-shirts and so on. Are these tawdry objects used by members to ward off the evil eye? To placate demons and ancestors? Or as a tribal emblem of belonging? (I recall that the word 'tawdry' is a corruption of 'St Audrey', and at the annual fair in her name, cheap jewellery and lace were sold. Nowadays, the word is applied to anything gaudy, in bad taste, tatty and of little value.)

And now the WSA have registered the Subud symbol and the Subud name. They've done this, I guess, to not only have control in order to 'protect Subud's good name', but also to stop any unofficial, 'tawdry' use - although how they will police this is unclear. (Can you imagine International Helpers forcibly closing down members' craft stalls?)

The registrations are, by definition, part of a 'unifying branding process' - a

controlling, organising technique. As I wrote for a marketing company's website recently: 'We believe a brand is an attitude. It encompasses your beliefs, your values. It's what makes you one of a kind; it's what you communicate to your customers, to your prospects, to your staff, to your competition.... It is your unique footprint...'

Do I sense we are moving away from 'ourselves as capital' (a concept suggested by Bapak himself); away from the concept of our inner natures projecting Subud's 'unique footprint', and sliding into the surfacey world of commercial branding? (As an old Subud friend of mine, a marriage guidance counselor, once memorably told me, 'When I take on a couple in trouble, my first question is always," Do you want it to look good, or be good?'"

Aldous Huxley (a peripheral Subud member) pointed out in *The Doors of Perception* (I paraphrase here), 'Christianity filled its churches with gold and jewels and pomp and ritual to replace the waning, withdrawing power'. If we become more concerned with a surface 'corporate identity', with 'branding' (shining our light from behind an illuminated Subud symbol? Or as Bob Dylan expressed it: 'Flesh coloured Christs that glow in the dark...') how could we ever begin to attract by that mythical, inner *je ne sais quoi*, anyway? It doesn't add up, somehow. Unless we are unconsciously attempting to replace a waning power like those medieval Christians....

I do have concerns over the whole Subud ® business, despite the fact that Bapak apparently urged that it should be done (although no one has offered a talk reference yet) and its ratification at congress as official WSA policy. Did we approach this in the right way? Did we think it through properly? What kind of image of our organisation does it project? What 'product' is it protecting? Is it really the protection we think it is?

However, it's a *fait accompli* now, a done deal, so let's look at how we are going to minimise its effect.

Speaking purely as a professional, commercial graphic designer of 40 years standing, I have to say that the double, clunky application of the ® symbol on the new Subud.com site looks amateurish and, if I had been consulted, I would have suggested a rather more subtle solution - such as lighter type, smaller point size, paler colour - all would help. And certainly not two together, sprouting one above the other like an outbreak of eczema.

In fact, no commercial company would flaunt their ® mark in such an 'in yer face' way, even if they were at risk from competitors - which Subud is surely not (we have trouble giving it away!).

In fact, I am paid to make such marks (®, ©, TM and even Ltd sometimes) as unobtrusive as possible. As long as the marks are somewhere, and legible, on the literature/exhibition stand/advertising/website, that is enough to satisfy all the legal criteria, according to my clients.

Personally, I do not understand why WSA went the ® route anyway, when I would have thought a © symbol would be protection enough - but I am not a lawyer, so have to bow to those with more knowledge (unless those tricky lawmen saw us coming). All I know is, my hard-line commercial clients go for TM or ®, mainly to protect their branding (name and image) within their marketplace from ruthless

competitors, whereas my service industry clients (occasionally) use © to protect 'intellectual property' (such as photos, words, illustrations, symbols, statements, concepts, ideas etc).

Somehow, I can't help feeling that trademark registering Subud and its logo is going to make us look a little ridiculous, like wearing a jacket many sizes too large.