

X was awash in praise for Anthropic's New York City pop-up last weekend. Celebrating Claude, the discerning gentleman's chatbot or as the marketing materials put it, "The AI for problem solvers", the Air Mail's West Village newsstand offered free coffees, a copy of "**Machines of Loving Grace**", Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei's manifesto of AI optimism, and thinking caps (dad hats embroidered with the word 'thinking' in Claude's serif font).

While some enthused that Anthropic could be the Apple of AI, others pointed out the obvious: 'thinking' is clearly derivative of 'Think different', the slogan of Apple's iconic Y2K era campaign. It's important to note though, 'Think different' itself was a derivation, tweaking IBM's slogan 'think.'

Simultaneously, another campaign was being torn to shreds—quite literally. The launch of Friend, the AI amulet, was not well received on the New York City Subway.



Honestly, I think the graffiti scrawl improves the ad.

Why the sudden interest in tech branding? Two reasons:

1. **For the first time in a long time, Silicon Valley is offering us new products, not new platforms.** Platform brands aren't really brands at all. (Does anyone really think Facebook has a 'good brand'?) This goes beyond the addictive nature of the platforms themselves. Social media platforms derive their brand value by aggregating the personal brands of their most prolific users. Think Kim Kardashian for Instagram or Addison Rae for TikTok. Commerce platforms are pass through entities for other brands. You use Amazon to buy Nike or DoorDash to buy McDonalds. And streaming platforms live and die by the IP they host. *Stranger Things* matters to Netflix. *Euphoria* matters to HBOMax. AI brands are different. They sell products. Just as hardware brands like Apple do.
2. **Slop is already defiling the AI brand writ large.** Social media had a honeymoon phase. Facebook did have a 'good

brand' in 2008. Only with the post-Trump techlash circa 2017 did the public sour on the utopian promise of social media. Remember? It was going to democratize the world! Artificial intelligence hasn't really had that. Some of this has to do with the fact that artificial intelligence as a concept isn't exactly new, and that the narratives around it have been negative for a century. (Most point to Fritz Lang's 1927 film, *Metropolis* as the first depiction of AI.) The task has always been to *rebrand* AI more than brand it. OpenAI, the biggest player in the field, is failing at this task. Its logo looks like a sphincter. ChatGPT is barely a name, more a general descriptor. The logo for its Sora product is a clear ripoff of Snapchat. And trickiest of all, the slop being produced by its products unsettle as often as they inspire. Today a television show was launched called *The Will Stancil Show*. Satirizing the much-trolled progressive X personality Will Stancil, the episode has already racked up millions of views. Sora is fast becoming a tool of memetic harassment. The friction between bone-dry brand and brain-rotting content recalls Facebook's issues in the 2010s. And just as Facebook's content moderation woes cast a dark cloud over social media as a whole, OpenAI's issues are turning public opinion against all artificial intelligence brands.

I don't think Anthropic is the new Apple. But I hope some tech brand becomes the new Apple. I would even be happy if Apple itself became the new Apple. After a weekend in San Francisco, it was obvious that tech has lost its way on the brandfront. It's a company town and the ads are for venture capitalists not consumers. (I saw a troubling amount of copy that described things as being in various 'spaces': the wellness space, the healthcare space, the sustainability space, and so on and so forth.) But ultimately good brands are for consumers not

investors. Consumers buy products. Venture capitalists invest in spaces. These things are not the same.

Both Anthropic and Friend launching their campaigns in New York signals that this is being acknowledged. New York is not a company town, it's a clearing house for cultural narratives. If you're hunting for capital, go to the Bay. If you're targeting consumers head to the City.

Funnily enough, Anthropic has another event tomorrow, this time in partnership with the arts nonprofit Rhizome. It's called Vibe Shift.