Manipulation of Opinion; why it’s not us who really makes up our mind.

The influential information we receive about fashion, beauty and mass culture comes to us through the media, such as magazines, billboards, posters, flyers, TV, radio, and the internet. But who invented these modern methodologies of mass persuasion?

As early as 1928 the powers of media circulation were observed by leading thinkers of the Western world, namely the U.S., the land which invented most known marketing tools. Edward L. Bernays, the father of Public Relations, wrote and published several books on issues of mass culture and how to manipulate it successfully, entitled “Crystallizing Public Opinion”, “An Outline of Careers”, “The Broadway Anthology” and “Propaganda”. In the latter he expresses his views on the need to control the masses:

“...The conscious and intelligent manipulation of organized habits and opinions of the mass is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate [...] constitute an invisible government [...], the true ruling power of our country.”

Photos and words by Olga Mitterfellner Central St Martins

“Consume/d” Is the female consumer happily consuming or is she being happily consumed?
Bernays finds that due to a complex development of society this “invisible government” and new technical tools are necessary (and have been invented) “by which opinion may be regimented”, i.e. newspapers, railroads, telephone, telegraph, radio, airplanes and more.

What Bernays describes so early in the 20th century is the highly important development of the tools, which enable big companies, corporations and conglomerates (the three evil Cs) to effectively and rapidly manipulate the opinion and beliefs of masses. A phenomenon which has been understood 76 years ago and which has been practiced to perfection ever since! But what is the mission behind this manipulation? Are people of democratic societies really aware of what is being done to them, and have they really “agreed, for the sake of simplicity and practicality” that their opinions should be “narrowed down to [a] field of choice”?

And what are the results of the narrowing down of our choices and own good judgement to a regimented selection? Bernays believes that “ideas can be spread rapidly and even instantaneously over the whole of America” and so people can be grouped together into common action, regardless of how far apart they are geographically. This affects areas of social, political, economic, racial, religious and ethical content.

In general, it is good for people who share the same interests, but are located far apart, to be able to communicate and share these opinions due to modern technology. But it is a completely different situation, if it is an “invisible government” that groups them together. What is more shocking is that Bernays wrote this in the 1920s, and gave
way for invisible manipulators to practice their habits for almost eight decades, and created skilful monsters of manipulation. He was also Sigmund Freud’s Nephew, living in New York.

Then there was “The Psychological Corporation”, an organization founded in 1921 and kept fairly quiet, which held members who were either Jewish-European immigrants trained in psychology, or American behaviourists. The corporation, believed that the control of “psycho-technology” should be “in the hands of professional psychologists” and “to insure its staying there”. They also were “experts in marketing psychological expertise” and the use of “psychoanalytical concepts to influence public opinion.”

Other members of the Corporation, like John B. Watson, America’s best-known and perhaps scariest behaviourist, “proclaimed the need for a restructuring of society in which advertising would, in effect, serve as the modern replacement for family, religion, and other socializing agents.”

Shockingly, his vision might have come true as James B. Twichell remarks in 2001: “We understand each other not by sharing religion, politics, or ideas. We share branded things. We speak the Esperanto of advertising, luxe populi.”

Later on in the 20th century Ernest Dichter, president of the American Institute for Motivational Research and author of the book “Motivating Human Behavior” (1971), compared humans to Pavlov’s dogs and said that “one can motivate [people] to change habitual behaviors which are protective devices in the first place” by using techniques of reward and punishment.
Interestingly enough today it is practically impossible to get a hold of the literary works of the members of the Psychological Corporation or titles by such authors as Dichter and Bernays. Most books are out-of-print and there are very few copies available in the world. This seems alarming, considering that these psychologists have tutored big, influential companies how to manipulate us, and several billions of people around the world. These books should be mandatory reading in school. People should be taught from an early age how to be aware of opinion manipulators, but it is made sure no one reaches this degree of awareness. Firstly it would produce the undesirable, “unhealthy” consumers who are “too critical” as a marketing service called them. Secondly the Psychological Corporation was founded and is owned by a company called Harcourt, which publishes and distributes educational books worldwide for students and teachers. “Harcourt companies provide a variety of books, print, and electronic learning materials, assessments, and professional development programs” which “for over three-quarters of a century” has been “confidently used [by] virtually every public, private, and parochial school in the nation.” (Harcourt, www.harcourt.com)

It seems Harcourt and the Psychological Corporation have the means to rule the world and rule our minds, especially because they developed a technique called “Psychogramming.” This process maps out the realms of the human mind, and helps marketers better understand consumers and target them effectively, in the name of profit. Decision making is examined and our personal, individual choices are no longer ours, because marketers know about them, before we even make them. Our choices become the result of a cunning chart devoted to manipulating consumer behaviour, the word that draws its strength from the marriage of marketing and psychology.

There are two main types of mental processing individuals use to decide about a problem at hand. The first type of processing is called “systematic processing”. Systematic processing involves in depth analysis and scrutinization of all stimuli in the environment (including the persuasive arguments of the marketer). The other type of mental processing is called “heuristic processing”, which involves taking mental short-cuts or “rules-of thumb” to come to a decision. A very popular heuristic that many people often take is the “like-agree” heuristic that leads people to make the same decision as people that they like did. One very famous example of marketers trying to get consumers to use this heuristic is putting famous people (i.e. Michael Jordan for Nike) in their advertisements. (Consumer Behavior http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~sstumpf/cbdecisionmaking.html)
Pay here—why luxury brands like to cause over expenditure.

Chasing the beauty cream in the Prada outfit. Asking for Louis Vuitton while looking at the Cartier watch. Eating Sashimi and partying at Annabel’s. Some London women live this life, others envy it, but they all have one thing in common: they want the big names. James B. Twitchell argues that today’s experiences linked with luxury “show the developing of religious nature” and that “consumption mimics epiphany […] and becomes an almost transcendental experience.”

The Times reporter Anne Ashworth reports the events taking place at a Jimmy Choo party in the New Bond Street store in April 2004, held for the city’s affluent women who want to socialize and shop. They were responsible for the sale of 100 pairs of Jimmy Choo shoes in two hours, each costing between £250 and £400. The reporter concludes after her visit to the boutique that it is far too expensive for the regular woman to spend such amounts, since “to lay out £400 on a pair of shoes, you need to earn £666 before tax.” Ashworth leaves the party without having bought any shoes or handbags, despite the temptation. However, not all ladies are as careful and reasonable as Ashworth, who calculates the amount of money she has to earn by adding taxes to the cost of a pair of shoes. They rather tend to overspend while pursuing an agreeable lifestyle. Rebecca Arnold believes that: ‘the moral implications of over-expenditure on fashion were overridden by the desire to fit into a particular group, to achieve a particular sartorial identity enough to be accepted, rather than excluded from the realms of the fashionable.’

This over-expenditure touches peoples lives and makes them reach deep into their wallets as the article entitled “Oops, I’m Bankrupt!” published in The Independent, shows: Half of all cases in London’s Bankruptcy Advisory Centre are personal bankrupts with an average debt of £30,000 to £50,000. (It is discharged after only 3 years due to Britain’s new laws under Margaret Thatcher in 1986, which might encourage overhaul spending as well as the originally desired spontaneous entrepreneurship.) An example of a young bankrupt female is Kate who owes £25,000 on six credit cards and £14,000 on a bank loan from having paid for “clothes – although not an insane amount – eating out, drinks, transport, running my car…”

So what is a sane amount of clothing and how much should it cost? If you open the April issue of British Vogue you will find a 12-page photo shoot which tells you what you should wear at a party: Crystal embroidered Gucci dress, £23,120; Butterfly Chloé necklace, from £141; Tulle cross-front embroidered dress from £5,466 at Louis Vuitton. The list goes on and every other page in the magazine shows adverts by such fashion brands as Gucci, Dior, Louis Vuitton, Salvatore Ferragamo, Calvin Klein, Tod’s, Valentino, Emporio Armani, Fendi, Gianfranco Ferre, Escada and Chanel. All adverts show young women between the ages of 15 to 30, wearing the luxury
Supermodels are getting younger and younger every year. So how can real women of that age live up to the imposed standards and afford to wear such coveted goods when an average salary after university education is between £12,000 and £18,000 per year? Perhaps the featured items in the fashion magazines are modes of escapism, carefully composed so that the average woman can dissolve in dreams. However, the dream-factor will only reach so far, as every dream is based on aspiration, striving to become reality. Women make every effort to enhance their looks, it is a natural phenomenon. Conceivably induced by the "male gaze" by which females are evaluated, or perhaps for their own pleasure. Regardless of the motivation, in this case of overpriced editorials, they hardly offer a chance for the dream to become reality. Vogue reports that in their tradition girls who are used for photo shoots have to be beautiful but also “blue-blooded or come from an interesting family, in the Vogue tradition” and that “the pressure is always on to find that beautiful “real girl”, who is a Kennedy scion or a Getty or an heiress.” For the heiress is it likely possible to be shopping in fancy fashion houses and it is her reality, whereas for the normal woman it is a distorted reality. On occasion the average-income woman will splash out on luxury goods and cause temporary indentations in her bank account, and sometimes more serious problems such as the bankruptcies mentioned earlier on.

Whether rich or poor are spending, the revenues from luxury brand purchases go directly to the three biggest luxury conglomerates, LVMH, PPR and Prada, which contently rule and own most of the prestigious brands. LVMH, the biggest and strongest of the conglomerates, also owns other established non-fashion brands, that literally “bubble over” with luxury. Those are Dom Perignon, Moët & Chandon, Veuve Clicquot, and Pommery champagnes; Hennessy and Hine cognacs, as well as the Sephora cosmetics store.

The Spring Preview 2004 edition of V Magazine presents a story on Louis Vuitton as the company turns 150 years old this year. The magazine interviews several strong faces in the company, including Bernard Arnault, the chairman of LVMH and Yves Carcelle the other chairman and CEO of Louis Vuitton Malletier. Carcelle is asked whether fashion is foremost a creative or commercial endeavour and from which side he approaches it. His reply: “You need a creative approach that turns into a commercial success.”
Fed by media forces, her ammo is sexism, racism, fear & hatred, spitting heavy lead sentences to shoot you down.

GUNHEAD
SHE's GONNa Get YA GOOD

‘media control’ by paul hill
http://pabh.deviantart.com
Is this the answer to the mystery of fashion magazines and luxury labels? Do they exist solely to establish success no matter what methods they use to get money out of consumers pockets? With conjunct sales of EUR 37961 million the three biggest fashion conglomerates must know what they are doing.

James B. Twichell humorously calls Bernard Arnault one of the “nameless, faceless, wizards of Oz” who “understood how to assemble opuluxe into a coherent pattern”. According to Twichell, Arnault’s success story with LVMH lies in the American education which taught him that “value does not reside in objects but in the perception of objects.” Hence the allegory to the Wizard of Oz, who was great only until his fraud was detected, because in reality the powerful ruler of the Kingdom of Oz was a regular man operating a machine which made him look, omnipotent.

Arnault operates a managerial machine to keep the consumer world well subordinated: “increasing the perceived value of his products, decreasing the predatory behaviour of other producers, and expanding worldwide.” By owning most of the top luxury brands that any consumer can remember, hiring designers and controlling the licensed distribution of products, and most importantly investing in aggressive advertising “in glossy magazines”, the world belongs to the “corporate octopus” LVMH.

In the case of the Wizard of Oz, the power of the magical man is shattered when Dorothy’s dog Toto, the main character’s pet, pulls open the curtain behind which the wizard is hiding whilst operating the great machine. The wizard is not all that powerful after all, but he is still a kind man who helps all the needy in the story. Is Bernard Arnault a really nice man, too? There is no equivalent to Toto that can help us reveal the truth behind fashion conglomerates, we have to be the inquisitive dog ourselves and sniff out the truth and try to gain insights into the operational mechanics of the fashion world. The glossy magazines, the advertising and branding are maybe no more than fictional wizardry - and we believe it like children believe in a fairy-tale story.

If this fact does not bring shame to an individual, who realizes that his or her naïveté is taken for granted then humanity is intellectually dead. If, however, one by one we can speak up about the unrealistic and overpriced suggestions of the fashion world, then perhaps they will have to pull back their tentacles and make new rules for a more fair game. I am not saying that anything radical should happen, like the abolishment of fashion magazines and the introduction of hemp dresses for everyone. But a more open relationship with the consumers would perhaps be enough to force greedy conglomerates to be less manipulative. People are not as dumb as they are made out to be, they can think for themselves, provided they are given the chance and enough valid information. The marketing to people should be mutually beneficial and not an uneasy relationship for one half of the party.

olga’s excellent site: www.fuselage.50megs.com