

PALESTRA

PLAYING WITH FIRE: Public Rhetoric and the Greater Good

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Transcrição da palestra ocorrida no II Encontro ESPM de Comunicação e Marketing - Arenas da Comunicação com o Mercado em 7 de novembro de 2007¹.

Can you hear me? First of all, it's a great pleasure to be here. I've been enjoying my stay in São Paulo. It's my first time in Brazil but not my last time, I can tell you! I plan on coming back soon!

The theme of the event here is marketing and communication which, for the most part, is a euphemism for marketing to consumers, reaching consumers, consumers formerly known as people. And at the heart of this, and after listening to yesterday's presentations it's only clearer to me that at the heart of this issue is the issue of persuasion, of influencing people's perception and influencing their behavior. What I want to do today and to a certain extent in response to a comment that was made by a panelist during the last panel yesterday. One of the panelists said: "We have nothing to learn from history, we need to look forward."

Today's presentation, what I want to try and do with you is to risk that question because I think that we live in a time of social and historical amnesia and that history, even for those of us who are looking towards the future, even for those of us who are trying to reimagine marketing may prove to be a useful tool. Now, in today's world and I would say particularly in the United States but I think it has had a global impact. The events of 9/11 2001 are inseparable from any discussion of persuasion. /that is to say that 9/11 has become something that in many ways accelerated and transformed much communications not only within the US but certainly within the west globally.

Now I'm not talking about 9/11 the lived experience. This here with some video footage taken by a guy who was walking in the street in New York, when the planes hit the World Trade Center. My son Sam was driving down the West Side Highway

¹ Os textos disponibilizados nestes Anais não são transcrições *ipsis verbis*, mas registros elaborados a partir das transcrições do áudio captado durante o evento. Buscou-se, contudo, manter a maior fidelidade possível às falas, assim como preservar suas características de linguagem oral. Além disso, todos os textos foram revisados pelos respectivos palestrantes.

towards a meeting on that morning and saw the second plane fly into the building. I from where I was at the school saw the fires and the smoke rise through the building. This was a living experience not only a visual sort but the stench of the blood and the dirt was also a part of our lives and I'd say of our nightmares for a period after that. I'm not interested in talking about 9/11 the experience but rather 9/11 the image.

In many ways, the legacy of that date has largely been built on a propaganda of images. From the beginning on live television a living experience was being transformed into a heavily loaded and strategically marketed symbol. I don't draw a strong distinction between selling soap and selling politics, if you'll excuse me.

Only 2 days after this event took place, I walked into a newsstand near my home and already there was a souvenir magazine available which was part of the process of transforming this geopolitical event, this lived experience into a powerful and I would say nationalistic symbol. On the left September 11th 2001 the day that changed America. Well, this was two days after. They were right, it would change America, I'm not sure they understood how fully it would change America and in what ways it would change America but they knew that "God bless America" was going to be part of the message and one of the things that happened continually in the visualization of 9/11 in the American media was to show the girders from the structures in the form of the crucifix to associate what had happened as an assault on Christianity and the Christian world. And yet, the cross stands, the faith stands.

Images like these embedded themselves in the minds and eyes of people in the US and I'd say around the world. You've seen these. The image on the left is an extraordinary one. I'm a historian by training, a historian by habit and this image which allows you to see the threshold between before and after between one historical moment and another is extremely rare and this is the power of this image. It's an image where the world is about to change momentarily and of course here the desperation felt by people forced to choose whether they would rather die by fire or by heart attack on the way down. These images beset the minds of millions of people and they stirred up overpowering feelings. At the same time it is necessary to say that while they stirred up overpowering feelings they offered very little in the way of understanding. In fact they defied understanding and I should add that more than the blood and the dust and the dismal agony of the people who were directly affected by this event in New York City where I live, the stark silence of these kinds

of images defied comprehension on the one hand and also became a validated fear and a non-specific thirst for revenge as the psychic core of a new national and international agenda.

Amid the collective anxiety that was created by this moment and by these images, I should say that at least within the United States any attempt to reflect and understand why this had happened, any attempt to use reason to unpack this historical event was viewed as a sign of weakness. It was viewed as a sign of treason. Feeling and anger was the only acceptable response.

Now I should add that 9/11, or more important its immediate description in the media and on the internet and various other places provided communicators with an object lesson in the usefulness of images. The ways in which images could excite public emotions, could excite public feelings and simultaneously bypass the meaning of what those images portray.

Walter Lippmann was an American in the 1920s who wrote a book called "Public Opinion". It's an amazing book because it's an anatomy of this thing called the public in a mass culture and he said that the power of symbols is that they intensify feeling and they degrade significance. They intensify emotional response and they push off to the side the meaning of what is actually happening.

Now I would add for the Bush administration in 2001 which was faltering at that time, 9/11 was sort of like a gift from Allah. From that moment the power of the images as a tool for evoking emotional responses, that was spelled out by the World Trade Center became the pivotal component of the Bush Administration's carefully orchestrated oratory and I would add of a media system which without question began to march in lockstep. That is to say the American media completely abandoned the principle of an informed public and instead became instrumentation for provoking the emotional anger and the emotional anxiety of the public.

To some extent that is still true in the United States, some six years later.

This is what it looked like. What the Bush administration started doing was to very carefully create totally orchestrated environments so every announcement was presented in a visual setting. This is a picture of Bush on the day of August 15th 2003 where he announced that the Americans were going to declare war on terror. You may not know this. This is a famous monument in the United States called Mount Rushmore, where some very insane sculptor went up into the mountains and

carved the heads of early great American Presidents. We have here Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Theodore Roosevelt; over here would be Abraham Lincoln. It took him a long time but he was obsessed.

And Bush has a team of people who travel with him. All of them come out of television. The head of the team is named Scott Sforza who was a producer for Fox television and also on the team are experts in cinematography and lighting. And one of the things they knew was that if they placed a perch for the photographers at a certain distance from the place where Bush was speaking that in order to create a close up picture of Bush they would need to use a long telephoto lens. For those of you familiar with photography a long telephoto lens collapses space and therefore Bush's face becomes part of the faces on Mount Rushmore.

This is not a coincidence. This is a strategized visual experience designed to say that this policy is a policy that is part of the decision making that has been made by great men before me.

He did a lot of this. One of the things that you will notice is that the basic strategy of this kind of imagery is what we call juxtaposition. You take one thing and you put it next to another thing. It's sort of what we were talking about yesterday. You take a very hype videogame and you place Coca-Cola next to it and you hope that people will drink more Coke. In this case you have a President and you place him next to Jesus and you hope that people will make more war! It's similar!

Also, if you are a photographer, one of the things you know is that when the light is low you need to open up your lens and when you open up your lens, the depth of field shrinks. So, in order to get one thing in focus, the background goes into a blur. What you see behind him is the Presidential Seal but this scene was tested beforehand. The lighting was calculated so the Presidential Seal now becomes a halo. This is a picture, I was lecturing in Iowa a while ago and this is a picture that came out of the *Des Moines Register* in Iowa. It was given to me by a person there. I think it's quite astounding.

Of course, images that were not only used in creating this kind of juxtaposed position between Bush and very pregnant kinds of imagery but when Collin Powell addressed the United Nations on February 6th of 2003, in which he was making an announcement in preparation of the United States invasion and occupation of Iraq, he put on a picture show.

Now this picture show was not aimed at the world even though it was done at the United Nations. It was aimed at the American people who had been fed a steady diet of images beforehand and this was more of them. He put on what we call in America a “dog and pony show”. That comes from the old circus days where you would have a dog riding around on a pony. It may not translate well but it’s a phrase worth using. In the world of marketing in the United States “dog and pony show” is a standard term for putting on a show that means nothing but you know, it’s just a routine.

And it began with these very formidable power point slides: Iraq failing to disarm, denial and deception. Of course today we could put the United States at the top and it might also be accurate but at the time it wasn’t about the United States. And then they showed us visual proof. This was a piece of aluminum tubing, which you might see in any junk yard, right? But which, with a tape measure next to it and a hand of a scientist, you know he’s a scientist because he’s holding a pen. This was an aluminum tube for uranium enrichment. Actually it turns out to have been part of beer-making machinery, but for the purpose of this show it was a proof that Iraq was attaining nuclear weapons. This is going on right now with Iran. Be careful! The world is in an uproar! Dangerous times!

Look at this! This is a proof that the Iraqis were producing biological agents. Now this is amazing because this is not a photograph. This is something that somebody did on their computer. I mean, any kid who knows how to use Photoshop or Illustrator could create the same evidence and yet in ways this stuff is a very sort of powerful communicative device as were images like this which was a map with circles on it, which might as well have been MacDonald’s but in fact were places where chemical ammunition was stored.

This stuff was followed once the invasion took place with images like this. This, which by the way, the day I was in Colorado giving a lecture the day after this happened and a historian was quoted on the first page of The New York Times that day announcing that this would become the defining symbol of the Iraq War. Now, first of all any historian who doesn’t wait five minutes to make judgments isn’t doing his or her job.

But what we also know is that all of the people who were there were people who had been flown in on a CIA transport: Ami Chilabe and his group and in order to actually topple the statue, American military people needed to come in and sort of set up the

block and tackle apparatus so that the statue would come down and when Reuters published long shots of this scene, which was designed to show the gratefulness of the Iraqi people for the US invasion. When Reuters published long shots of the scene you saw that almost nobody was there.

This was a thoroughly staged event, as was this when our President spent most of the Vietnam War avoiding any contact with military activity. And this is a guy who during the war was in the reserves and evidently never even went to training. But he flies in. The story goes: he flew in himself, comes off in a flight uniform, you can get, by the way, action dolls of him coming in and then of course the people on the boat spontaneously produced a sign: Mission accomplished. This is when the Iraq War ended. This was I guess in May of 2003.

Now, this cut a premeditative stage of events. First of all it relies on a compliant media. If the media is in fact performing a democratic function which is to ensure an informed public, the media will be asking questions about this. But this here relied on a media that was “inbedded” a media that was in bed with the administration.

It follows a rule of thumb from Walter Lippmann who I quoted before late out in 1922 in public opinion. At that time he said: “Without some form of censorship, propaganda in the strict sense of the word is impossible. In order to conduct propaganda there must be some barrier between the public and the event. Access to the real environment must be limited before anyone can create a pseudo environment that he thinks wise or desirable.”

And so what we’ve seen in a lot of these images is that philosophy translated into practice. That you create a situation where photographers can only shoot a photograph from a certain position. One of the things about this boat was it was a mile off the coast of California but all of the cameras were aimed out at sea to make it look like it was in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Now I would add that any way of seeing is also a way of not seeing and so the images that we are looking at here are images that to a certain extent also close out if they become the universe. They close out other ways of seeing.

And it wasn’t only the political administration that joined into this. We have in the United States a television station which is called the History Channel and this channel is designed to provide people with knowledge of history. When you look at this you can see that it might be called the amnesia channel. This was an ad that

appeared in The New York Times for a documentary that was going to appear again in 2003 on terrorism. “This week we will show you the face of evil like you’ve never seen it before” and then it’s interesting how in the United States a lot of people say Castro. You know, anybody with a beard is suspect. And then up there Kaddafi, no, it doesn’t matter, that’s the point. I think it probably is now; if I remember correctly but it doesn’t matter because what the History Channel is doing here is taking faces from 4 different historical periods, historical contexts and melding them together. Whatever one might say and there were a lot of associations made between Saddam and Hitler is that Hitler had an army that was nearly capable of conquering much of the world. And if one adds to that, Japan in the Far East, you were talking about the formidable military power stronger than any of the other military powers in Europe. And by the way, somebody who kept a nation, a Reich who kept the allies at bay from 1938 until 1945 effectively.

When you’re talking about a Reich and to make that association, it only discourages understanding of what are the circumstances under which Mao comes to power. What are the circumstances under which Saddam comes to power and it should be added, the circumstances that brought both Saddam and Bin Laden to power with the support of the United States?

One of the problems with these juxtapositions (and yesterday one of our speakers talked about spoofing) one of the problems with these visual means of persuasion is that while they are very effective at provoking an instantaneous response, they work spatially. We read them instantaneously but they don’t have a long shelf-life. It’s very different for example from music. When you’re a child you hear your Mother singing a certain song or humming a certain song and then 40 years later you’re walking along and all of a sudden, the music is in your head. Has this happened to anybody? It’s called “earworms”. This research has not been done very effectively yet to have an enduring influence on an unconscious level within the mind. It’s far more powerful than that of the visual.

These things are short-lived and because they are short-lived, the images can very easily be turned upside down, against themselves.

This was an ad for a film called Underdog which came out in August 2007 which was I believe the 4th anniversary of Bush announcing the war in terror in Mount Rushmore and now we have Underdog declaring war on reality. And part of the way this works is we remember the first image and now we see this image.

Now all I'm suggesting is that while it has become common place for people to view visual communication as one of the most powerful ways of sort of rallying emotions, there may be an Achilles heel here and particularly in a digital age where a lot of people may have the tools to take the imagery and remake it and publicize it. And so images like this spread on the web faster than the initial images.

That having been said, that the increasingly common practice of bypassing critical thought in order to create emotion is a threat to the possibility of a meaningful democracy. I'm not talking about the kind of democracy that is being packaged for mass consumption. I'm talking about the idea of democracy which is predicated on an engaged and informed public that rules itself, an egalitarian vision of democracy. Not democracy the movie. This kind of stuff in many ways constitutes a threat to the possibility of democracy, but they are also of moment to any of us who engage in the arts and sciences of persuasion.

I had the opportunity to interview Edward Bernays in 1993. Edward Bernays was the founder of psychological approaches to public relations in the United States. He was also the double nephew of Sigmund Freud. His Mother was Freud's sister and his Father was Freud's wife's brother. So there was a genealogy at play not just with Freud but he was very interested in social psychology and in mass psychology and applied a lot of those ideas to publicity and public relations strategy and I said to him when I met with him, I said I heard from a rumor that Joseph Gerbles had a copy of your book propaganda on his shelf in his study and Bernays said to me: "Yes we're playing with fire!" Yes, when we start dealing with persuasion and particularly tools of persuasion that are aimed at evoking emotional responses, you are playing a dangerous game. It needs to be in the right hands. And it's one of the reasons why I said in the title of my talk that public rhetoric needs to have some sense of social responsibility because all of us even those of us who are designing games on the internet and who are selling cell phones and who are pushing a new soft drink, we are all playing with fire. And we need to understand that when we're playing with fire we need to act responsibly.

And because of this a conference like this one cannot confine its goals to simply expanding its expertise in strategies of communication and marketing. It needs to explore whether or not it is still possible to serve our own goals in marketing, say and at the same time nurture a democratic public that is at the same time informed,

engaged, active, passionate and which also has an insubordinate tendency towards laughter, towards satire. Can democracy and propaganda coexist? - is the question.

Now, in today's world a lot of people would say "no". Any form of mass persuasion is antagonistic to the idea of democracy and I would say in the United States, despite the fact that it is a highly commercialized society, it's also a society where people harbor a great deal of anxiety about hidden persuaders around them. There's an awareness of that. There's a folklore of what they call subliminal seduction where people believe that there are hidden messages everywhere and even if they aren't there, which often they aren't, the anxiety that people have is part of the mental baggage that people begin to develop in a society where they are constantly being addressed by people who are interested in influencing their thought.

Now in the age of spin therefore, many people have become estranged from the idea of rhetoric and in English, the term rhetoric has become a synonym for lying. If somebody is saying something that's deceptive you'll say: "Oh, that's just rhetoric!" And I think what's important for us as citizens, as human beings and as people involved in communications and marketing is to remember that the concept of rhetoric which goes back to Aristotelian writing is a unity of eloquence and logic of fact and fluency. That is to say that pools of rhetoric are not simply about beguiling people but also presenting information, knowledge in a way that people will respond to. And I think one of the reasons, and I would add something else that for those of us who are students of history and who are students of the history of democratic movements and I'm talking on a global level, the uses of rhetoric are an essential component of the development of democratic movements. That is to say, the democratic movements were not simply built on an architecture of fact; they were also built on a unity of eloquence and logic.

I think one of the things that have been lost within the contemporary world, and I would say, it's something that is a perception of ordinary people, and I would add also too often it's also a perception of people involved in the compliance professions - the persuasion industry - is that eloquence and logic eloquence and logic are diametrically opposed to each other. Even though the rise of democracy can't be understood without that unity of fact and fluency what has happened within the field of marketing is that more and more the idea of leaving your public more informed, of communicating in a way that makes people smarter about their world

has been abandoned for forms of communication that are in what I would call the Pavlovian tradition. Let's see if we can ring the right bells and make the people salivate. And I think a lot of what we were listening to yesterday afternoon, with all due respect to my colleagues, is about ringing bells and making people salivate. And a lot of the discussion, particularly in the panel in the afternoon was: "How can we get the best bells? How can we make people salivate the most?"

Now, the genealogy of this kind of thinking is important for us to understand. That is to say this is not something that came out of nowhere. To some extent, this instinct on the part of people in marketing and communications to make dogs salivate or make humans salivate is something that is rooted in the history of modern persuasion. And that history began with the idea and the need for a systematically manageable public.

Do you know the term the "manufacture of consent"? Is that a phrase that you are familiar with? No? Chomsky wrote a book some years back called "Manufacturing Consent" - the mass production of agreement. That phrase the manufacture of consent comes from Walter Lippmann who says that in order for democracy to function effectively it is necessary that there be certain people who will manage public opinion and thereby manage manufacture consent - mass produce agreement.

The founding Father of this perspective was a French sociologist by the name of Gustave Le Bon. Gustave Le Bon wrote a book in 1895 which was called "The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind". It was the first book that was an attempt to understand what makes in his case the urban masses mind tick. You have to remember 1871 in Paris there was a takeover of the city, the creation of the Commune de Paris (the Paris Commune) and even though the Paris Commune was defeated after 3 months in a very bloody execution of the communards there was still in the mind of many French bourgeois such as Le Bon a fear that the masses might at any moment take over the street, might take over society. This is a period when socialist and anarchist ideas are running through France and through much of the Western world and Le Bon was interested in figuring out how to psychoanalyze - that's not a term he would have used - how to analyze the workings of the mass mind for the purpose of controlling it. He wanted order.

He believed that the church was no longer effective, that the old aristocratic hierarchies, that the monarchy and so forth was no longer effective. People believed

that they actually had rights and therefore, he wrote: “A knowledge of the psychology of crowds is the last resource of the statesman.”

Now Le Bon believed that middle class individuals like himself were capable of reason and reflection but he saw the crowd the urban masses as an atavistic, primitive lower life form – a neural network. The crowd, he wrote, was driven by dark irrational forces, by instinct by its spinal cord. Now what’s interesting about this is that today in marketing there has been a rediscovery of the spinal cord – that is to say the reptilian brain is something that advisors to the market place particularly a man named G. Clotair Rapai who is a major consultant in many large industries who says that people are driven by their reptilian mind. Their basic instinctual mind which has to do with sexuality, which has to do with aggression, which has to do with passion. It’s the kind of stuff that drives reptiles. And people may look like they’re not reptiles but at the heart of things the reptilian mind is what makes things tick and in fact this oven here which is an 8-thousand-dollar Turbo Chef Oven which is being sold now was something that was designed, to a large extent, in response to the advice of Rapai. This oven was designed to provoke the reptilian mind. You can tell me or not whether your reptilian minds are being provoked. Perhaps not, but this was the idea here.

So in certain ways this idea of the spinal cord as driving the masses is something that has not fully left the world of marketing.

Le Bon was the founder of the field of social psychology, a field that only continues to expand. It hasn’t been discussed here but there’s no way of understanding marketing or communication strategies without understanding social psychology. That’s what polling is about, that’s what focus groups are about, and that’s what commercial surveillance is about. It’s an attempt to understand the behavior and the psyche of potential consumers.

Today the fields of neuroscience, genetics and evolutionary psychology and pattern recognition and the sciences are all being used to try and figure out what are the irrational buttons that can be pushed. This here, I love this picture. This is a brain scan of somebody in love. You see, you thought it was all romantic! This is what it really looks like. This has become quite common in the United States. This very reductionist approach to neurological and genetic determinism and the possible uses they may have to the people in the marketing field. There are people who are doing pattern recognition studies in a similar way.

It's all about trying to understand the public, not as a thinking body of people but as hardwired and if they're hardwired therefore programmable.

The underlying approach here and I think it's something that runs through the discussion of marketing, is to do away with, to abolish the unpredictable. To try and figure out ways of creating messages that will predictably have the impact that one wishes to have.

Le Bon was the ancestor of these practices. He wrote: "To know the art of impressing the imagination of crowds is to know at the same time the art of governing them. Crowds have always undergone the influence of illusions. Whoever can supply them with illusions is easily their master." And he also understood something about the power of visual persuasion. 'The Crowd' he wrote, this is 1895, 'The Crowd' is particularly open to the impressions produced by images. A crowd thinks in images and the image itself immediately calls up a series of other images, having no logical connection with the first". The Mount Rushmore scene, the History Channel advertisement putting together images that have no logical connection with each other is a powerful strategy. The ideas he wrote "must assume a very absolute and simple shape. They must present themselves in the guise of images. Crowds being only capable of thinking in images are only to be impressed by images. For this reason, theatrical representations, where the image is shown in its most clearly visible shape, always have an enormous influence on crowds." This brings us back to yesterday's discussion of entertainment as a form of marketing. Turn it into theater.

"It is not the facts" he wrote, "It is not the facts in themselves that strike the popular imagination, but the ways in which they take place and are brought under notice. It is necessary that by their condensation, if I must thus express myself, they should produce a startling image, which fills and besets the mind."

Now, as social psychology matured and as marketing matured Le Bon's idea about the primitive mental life of the crowd (he was mainly concerned about the urban masses and about political control) began to give way to an idea that the entire public's mental life was motivated by the inescapable matrix of unconscious, instinctual baggage. And from the period after the First World War that assumption moved from the political arena increasingly into the commercial arena. That is to say, the lingua franca of early advertising of early public relations assumed that the public to whom he was speaking was a bunch of neurons that were firing off and if

you could get to those neurons, if you could excite those emotions then you could get your message responded to.

It was Freud actually who wrote a response to Le Bon in 1922, a book called 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego' in which he said Le Bon is perfectly right in describing the mental life of the crowd, his problem is what he's describing as the mental life of everyone including individuals. And that kind of thinking began to become very influential in the fields of marketing, in the fields of advertising and in the fields of public relations – propaganda as it was called then.

The first course ever taught on influencing human behavior in the United States was taught, at a place that still exists, called The New School in 1925 and it was taught by a philosopher and psychologist by the name of Harry Overstreet. He gave a series of lectures that summarized an approach that had dominated the idiom of public persuasion before then and that has dominated unfortunately ever since. What he says is that the roll of the persuader is to create the power of suggestion. It's to use the power of suggestion, in other words, he's using the language of hypnotism, of mesmerism not of rhetoric. He says: "the key is selective picturizing". Show a picture that is so selective that it will induce what he calls an imagined experience and will trigger the desired response. "The secret of all true persuasion" he wrote, (this is notes from his lecture) "is to induce the person to persuade himself. The chief task of the persuader therefore is to induce the experience. The rest will take care of itself."

The secret of it all is that the person is led to do what he overwhelmingly feels. Practice in getting people to feel themselves in situations is therefore the surest road to persuasiveness.

Don't hit people over the head by this. Create an imagined experience and the rest will take care of itself. And I would add, there's a lot of talk about branding. Some of the most effective marketing is not branding. The message appears to exist simply as a message. The branding is something that happens purely by association. You don't need to put your logo on everything. If you induce the right imagined experience then certain behaviors will follow. This is his argument. By the way, Edward Bernays made the same kind of argument. You never let people know who you are. Just make it look like reality. The rest will take care of itself and it's one of the reasons why I think this whole concept of branding is a problematic one because

when we talk about branding we're still talking about images when in fact branding may have to do with behavior.

I'll give you an example: Apple is a very powerful brand and one of the most successful examples of a company that has been branded or branded itself in recent years but the reason why Apple is such an effective brand is not because of the shape of the apple, which is very nice, it's not because the equipment is beautiful, which it is (I've been advertising Apple all through my talk!), it's because Apple put the tools of communication into the hands of ordinary people. That's the brand! And so even though Steve Jobs is no democrat, I mean small "d" democrat, he's not a revolutionary in any kind of political sense. He's not particularly generous in fact when it comes to social programs but he has a company which has first of all created an interface that even a chimpanzee can use. I was a chimpanzee when I first started to use a computer and this is what seduced me. It was easy to use. It was a vernacular form. It looked like dropping things in the waste basket. It looked like putting something in a file. It looked like moving something from here to here, stuff I've been doing all my life but it also provides the tools - it can turn anyone into a film maker, anyone into an artist. It does what Walter Benjamin called "it breaks down the division between author and audience" and that is the brand and that is also one of the fundamental goals of democracy - to break down the distance between author and audience where all people may speak and all people may listen.

Unfortunately, that is a rarity. For the most part, strategies such as the one Overstreet suggests - making people feel themselves in situations are used for the most part to degrade democratic possibility, to sell products to consumers, to link public loyalties to big businesses, to manage current events and in recent years to lead populations into war.

So the question then for us is: What are the lessons we have to learn from this genealogy? Are there lessons for us? As ordinary human beings (because that's really who we are) or as professional marketers and communicators which is also who we want to be. Even me! I'm not selling soap but I am in the marketplace of ideas.

Should Overstreet's formula be summarily rejected? Should Le Bon's argument that "It is not the facts in themselves that strike the popular imagination, but the ways in which they take place and are brought under notice" be rejected? - Because of their

demagogic possibilities? Because of their antidemocratic possibilities? I think that the answer is yes and no!

There's something true in what these people are saying. What's missing is a belief that the public is capable of in any way understanding the world in which it exists and therefore, this inducing of imagined experiences takes on the feeling of an experiment with laboratory rats rather than with engaged, thinking human beings.

The day that I left New York, my flight was in the evening so I was wondering about the neighborhood with my camera. I often wonder around with cameras. I like to take pictures. It's my form of memory in a world where my memory is failing. It's the illusion of memory. I was walking past a construction site where there was a big wooden wall in front of the construction site and this is what I saw.

I brought these to you from New York. Have you seen these before? The concept here is that these are posters which are calling for authoritarianism. These are posters: Creativity is prohibited and there's a picture of a policeman with a night stick and this one says: Embrace conformity everybody should be exactly the same and somebody has gone and "graffittied" and spray-painted on these posters and now it's: Creativity will save us, taste freedom, democracy dot com. Embrace the movement social movement, taste freedom, democracy dot com.

So in certain ways, on the very surface of this it's an example of the way in which a street artist might come along and deface what they see as a big brother speaking to them. It's only when you look closer that you realize that these things are not actually pasted on they're part of the poster and you'll also notice that democracy is spelt *dewmocracy* D-E-W. In fact these are advertisements for a soft drink that is sold in the United States called Mountain Dew.

I used to be an organizer in Mississippi in the early 1960s in the rights movement and Mountain Dew was illegal liquor that you would buy from white lightning, moonshine. Mississippi was a dry state, liquor was illegal and so you had these people off in the woods who were making their own whisky and Mountain Dew was one of the terms for it. So it always had the notoriety of being illegal and Mountain Dew according to my son is still associated with people who are involved in kind of extreme sports, skating, young edgy people. So it has a kind of not politically radical but culturally radical association but what's going on here is that an

imagined experience is being induced. But rather than promoting and provoking democracy, in fact it's turning democracy upside down. That in the name of fighting against conformity, in the name of becoming involved in a social movement the punch line of the advertisements is that one should buy this soft drink which is not what democracy as an idea is really about. I'm not saying that they can't coexist; I'm saying that the idea of democracy is not predicated on being able to choose between 5 different kinds of soft drinks. At least that's not where it came from.

So as we think about the issue of Overstreet's message, the point is not to mimic it but to transfigure it. First of all, I think if we're going to get engaged and this is going to become necessary even for people in marketing who are resistant, if we become engaged in looking for forms of communication that have a more integrated understanding of human beings that reject that sort of division between thought and emotion. Something that was very instrumental for Le Bon but which nowadays gets in the way of communicating effectively. I think people are very aware of and resistant to the extent to which persuasion strategies are designed to make them do things and people don't want to be made to do anything. So in certain ways rhetoric needs to develop which gets rid of simplistic formulas of human motivation, rejects what kind of game makes people salivate so they will buy our product and I think we also need to revive our education in rhetoric, not simply gathering truthful and dependable information that will empower people but also understanding how that information will take place. As responsible publicists we need to abandon the separation of reason from emotion that shapes too much thinking about social, political and commercial communication today. We need to rejuvenate a link between publicity, democracy and the greater good - an informed public. Without this commitment, propaganda will continue to be servants of entrenched power and social inequality and I would add through much of South America, that question is on many people's minds.

So if we're engaged in the field of communicating part of what we need to do is to stop thinking of people as consumers. Stop thinking of them as trash baskets which we throw things into and of course it's necessary to throw them into trash baskets because we want them to throw it away and buy something new tomorrow.

We need to start looking at people as engaged citizens. One of the things that is interesting about blogs and about the use of the internet is that like it or not people are carrying on, not always in good ways, democratic discussions. If marketing is

going to be effective, if branding is going to be effective then it's going to require institutions like businesses to reimagine themselves not as providers for users not as sellers to consumers but as citizens engaged in conversations with other citizens. People as people engaged in conversations with other people. It's hard to imagine but it's a dream worth having. Thank-you!

I put some information up there. I have a couple of websites; one of them is called "rejected letters to the editor". It's a publication which only publishes materials that mainstream media have refused to publish.