CHAPTER 1

An Irrational Animal

1.1 The Sneetches and Other Parables

"*Almost all objects are decorated with emblems indicating the clan or sub-clan of the owner.*"

Levi-Strauss, *Tristes-Tropiques*, p. 225

Human beings are, for the most part, very much unlike trifle.

If the constituent parts of the human being were fruit, custard, sponge cake and jelly then the fate of our species on this planet would have been remarkably different. It is fair to presume that if we had been biologically more similar to a traditional English dessert then our victory over our natural predators would have been all the harder to bring about.

That said, we do share one rather fundamental point of common ground with the humble trifle, and it's not simply the fact that both human being and dessert can be

immeasurably improved by a decent measure of rum. No, rather predictably, it is the fact that both are made up of layers. More specifically, both humans and trifle are comprised of really rather different layers, and only in combination do those layers give a real picture of the beautiful whole. Without the fruit and jelly, trifle would just be some plain sponge covered in custard, an entirely uninspiring dessert. Conversely, strip away the custard and all you have is fruitcake. Actually, not even that. You just have some fruit, in jelly, on some cake.

That is an appalling dessert.

The same, albeit not precisely, is true of human beings.

Beneath our conscious veneer and our rational actions swirl layers of the unconscious, the emotional, the innate and the reflex. Beneath the smooth custard of our recently acquired social behaviour are some pretty basic animal instincts, urges and dilemmas. We will begin this chapter with one of those dilemmas, for it is at the cornerstone of our argument in this book. To belong or not to belong? To join the herd or sit it out?

These are questions that the human animal manages to answer with both a "yes" and a "no". Is our human insane? Not quite (though, of course, possibly). Firstly, on the question of to belong or not to belong, let's deal with the first answer: "yes". We are social animals by nature, a trait we share with all the monkeys and apes to which we are most closely related. We have an instinct, a magnetic urge, to be with others of our kind. It is as much a part of our being as love and hate, or pleasure and pain. So, the human is a social animal. The human needs to belong. The human

needs other humans to belong to. It is a basic need. It is fundamental to what makes humans the way they are.

To belong or not to belong? We'll take "belong" please, fairly obviously.

Aha, but what is that we see one layer down?

Because just one layer of dessert beneath the "yes" layer, we find that the human need to belong also comes wrapped up with its opposite: the need to not-belong. The "no". So we have a "yes" and "no" together. Hmm, this looks like a paradox. The great philosopher W.V.O. Quine once wrote that "[m]ore than once in history the discovery of paradox has been the occasion for major reconstruction at the foundation of thought." You will, most likely, be glad to hear that this is not one of those occasions. This is because our paradox only turns out to be one of those not-really-that-paradoxical-paradoxes-if-you-think-about-it sort of situations. Now, why is that?

Belonging to a group (Tribe A) means not belonging to a certain other group (Tribe B). If you belonged both to Tribe A and Tribe B then perhaps members of Tribe A (those who *only* belong to Tribe A) might question whether you really belonged to Tribe A at all, at least in the sense of belonging that they understand. If Tribe A is the set of Manchester City Supporters or users of Macs and Tribe B the set of Manchester United supporters or users of PCs then the point becomes obvious. One cannot convincingly belong to both. However, what is far from as simple to observe is how important the *other* group is (that is, the one we do not belong to) in defining what we ourselves are. It is others, as much as ourselves, that define us. The differences between our group and the other groups help

to define our identity and sense of self as much as do the similarities we share with members of our own groups. In fact, sometimes it's easier to define our own group by listing what it is not and how it is different to the other groups than to try to define it without reference to the other. This is part of the structuring function of social groupings, and it is therefore necessary that, as Claude Levi-Strauss wrote, "the social group divides and sub-divides into related and opposing sub-groups." It seems that all sorts of segregating features of human society have been fundamental to its survival and growth, even down to our habitat and food. Levi-Strauss goes on to observe that the differences between human groups are "intended to prevent social groups and animal species from *encroaching* on each other, and to guarantee each group its own particular freedom by forcing others to relinquish the enjoyment of some conflicting freedom … Men can coexist on condition that they recognise each other as being *equally*, though *differently,* human."[1]

Liberté and égalité, if not quite fraternité, Monsieur Levi-Strauss.

So, Manchester United supporters don their red shirts so as to preserve their feeding grounds and demarcate their territory and women from blue-shirted City fans, ensuring the possibility of both groups surviving in relatively close proximity. Sounds fairly accurate.

Well, what have these snippets of anthropology got to do with brands and consumer behaviour? Everything, really.

[1] Claude Levi-Strauss (1973) *Tristes-Tropiques*, New York: Atheneum (English translation), p. 149.

One of the principal ways we communicate our belonging is by being the same as, or sharing similarities with, others in the group we belong to. This ranges from the most trivial habits to the most important ways of life. From the food we eat to the clothes we wear. From the beliefs we have about life to the language we speak. Beyond those most basic shared habits, functioning as another way in which we create common ground with others, are the products and brands we choose to use. In our preliminary research we had several discussions with the anthropologist Dr John Curran, of the aptly named John Curran Consultancy (it's not just a coincidence, it's named after him), and Visiting Fellow of Goldsmith's College, University of London. He explained that the products and objects we use

> give meaning and help sustain the idea of group survival and growth. This is because objects play a role in culture that allows societies to ascribe a sense of uniqueness and difference to social groups. The food we consume or the clothes that we wear are not simply mundane habits. They are shaped by our cultural attachments learned over a period of time. The French anthropologist and philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu calls this our *habitus.*

Belonging to groups defines much of our behaviour and thinking. Indeed, the need to differentiate between our tribe and others is often what drives differences in behaviour that would otherwise have no functional reason to exist at all. It's why cultures and languages are different across borders. It's why borders *are* borders. It's why there are different cultures and languages *within* borders. The observation and study of language change in real time (that

is within a conversation, rather than a generation) in the past century, in the work of William Labov among others, demonstrated its social and tribal basis. People either exaggerate or minimize the features of their speech in order to communicate "closeness to" or "distance from" their interlocutors (the people they are talking to). This is a universal aspect of human communication. We all, as speakers of our native tongues, have a repertoire of "registers" or styles. These styles of our speech vary according to a huge range of different criteria, for example how formal, polite, direct or crude they are. Each of us has at their command a vast number of variations of our mother tongue, and an incredible capacity to jump from one to another without even thinking about it. We use these different styles to signal our attitude (positive or negative) to the people we are speaking to. Beyond the registers we can deploy, there are even more subtle differences, like accent, which communicate where a speaker comes from or to which tribe they belong. This is yet another thing we change depending on context, twisting and adjusting the way we pronounce words in order to convey subtle messages of affinity or distance to the person we're speaking to.

There is an area of sociolinguistic and discourse analysis called "Accommodation Theory" which studies the extent to which humans match each other's verbal and communicative gestures during dialogue. What these studies confirm are the kinds of behaviours we intuitively suspect; that we talk like the people we are talking to if we want them to think well of us or the way we often mimic each other's body language and positions during conversation. A simple indicator of people's social pretensions and ambi-

tions can be heard in their voices. The recent, and surely fairly transparent, wave of well-spoken, public school educated music stars and celebrities suddenly doing the "mockney" to seem all ordinary, down-to-earth and cool illustrates the point (and suggests a commercial motivator within it). The converse of this is, of course, that we exaggerate the differences in our speech and body language towards people we do not want to build affinity with. Just think of how we react on the Underground when there's a subterranean sage pontificating into their can of Special Brew, growing increasingly angry about some aspect of the injustice they have faced at the hands, probably, of Thatcher. In response to the agitation and the shouting, we distance ourselves from that behaviour by trying to stay calm and quiet. It is only when these communicative distance-generators are insufficient that we upgrade our efforts to bring about a more physical distance, and we move to another carriage.

These essential dynamics of Accommodation Theory are applicable to all sorts of diverse aspects of our behaviour. Most pertinently for us is how elegantly they provide a lens through which to view the way that brands behave as badges for certain groups. Let's be clear. The phenomenon of accommodation is a general one within social dynamics. People have always clubbed together around polarizing issues to create their own subgroups, clubs, communities, cults or sects. In fact, a great deal of the time, it is not about the behaviour or activity itself, but just what it says about you and which groups you belong to. There is nothing intrinsically more affluent about rugby or anything intrinsically mainstream about football. One is a graceful, sophisti-

cated team sport of strategic balance and skill and the other is a crude encounter of brute force and speed. Conversely, it could be said that one is a powerful coming together of brains and brawn, strategy and execution, while the other is played by a troupe of multi-millionaire playboys, who only care about how much money they make and how their hair looks and would not recognize honour if they hit it in one of their Bentleys. But, irrespective of their logical properties as physical games, in terms of their audience these sports clearly do have socio-economic biases that signal affinity to different ends of the social spectrum.

One of the most famous expositions of how "consumption" participates in this discourse of communicating group membership is Verblen's *Theory of The Leisure Class* (1925). The book coined the now vastly over-used term "conspicuous consumption", defining it as unnecessary waste of money and resources by people to display a higher status than others. One famous example he put forward was the use of silver cutlery at meals, even though utensils made of cheaper material worked just as well or, in some cases, better. It also laid bare how leisure pursuits and other behaviours play a crucial role in aligning us to our various group and class memberships. While neoclassical philosophy, politics and economics regarded humans as essentially rational, utility-seeking things, looking to preserve their safety and (then) enjoy themselves when they could, Veblen saw them differently. He looked at human beings as entirely irrational creatures, mindlessly chasing social status with little connection to their own happiness or physical well-being. We shall return to this irrationality in due course, towards the end of Chapter 1.

In all the vast array of literature, nothing illustrates this point about our behaviour more eloquently than *The Sneetches* by Dr Seuss. Nothing can beat reading it for yourself, except having it read to you. (The animated version is accessible through well known video sharing sites online.) A summary will have to serve for our purposes here. In this masterpiece of modern parable, the creatures known as the Sneetches are divided into two groups.

> *Now, the Star-Belly* ***Sneetches*** *had bellies with stars.*
> *The Plain-Belly* ***Sneetches*** *had none upon thars.*

The Star-Belly Sneetches are superior and snooty towards the Plain-Belly ones. They refuse to engage the Plain-Bellies socially and teach their children to steer clear. The star is a badge of social superiority. So, when the travelling Sylvester McBean turns up with his Star-On machine, naturally the Plain-Belly Sneetches jump at the chance to have one printed on their bellies for a very reasonable $3 each. This puts the original star-bellied Sneetches in a predicament. They are suddenly indistinguishable from the other Sneetches so they feel their superiority is challenged because they can no longer signal their difference with any clarity. The enterprising Sylvester McBean then reveals that he has the technology that can also remove stars. This service costs each of the *original* Star-Belly Sneetches $10 each. They too jump at the chance, and continue to make him a very rich man. Then the cycle continues with the other group removing them again. You can see how it goes. It is not the intrinsic meaning of the stars on bellies that counts but their communicative value – the fact that they

demarcate a difference between groups of Sneetches. The happy and enlightened ending (which we will not spoil here, in the hope of some trendy Seuss-ian revival) is inspiring, and even though it is from a different world, it provides a valuable and simple lesson for our own.

In an allegorical reading of the Sneetches, with an eye on our consumerist culture, the star on the bellies of the Sneetches stands for any one of the millions of brands, products or affiliations that act as badges for the groups we might belong to. We need to identify and belong, and we use products and brands to achieve this. A couple of brief forays into the world of real-life brands should illustrate this point: Burberry and Lonsdale. The Burberry story is very similar to that of the Sneetches. It used to be a badge of belonging to an exclusive set. Then it started to be marketed aggressively, and put its livery on the outside (not the discreet inside) of its products. This attracted a much wider audience, and its tartan signature became visible on umbrellas, handbags and baseball caps across all sorts of social groups. The feelings of the original users, who enjoyed the brand for what it said about their social and economic status changed. They now felt less comfortable using a brand that had so many other users who earned less money than them; it no longer fulfilled what had been a central function for them. "The appeal of such goods is the snob value of their temporary scarcity" as our old economics textbook from the days of proper A-Levels puts it.[2] Using Burberry now grouped people in far too wide (and,

[2]D. Begg, S. Fischer and R. Dornbusch (1984) *Economics*, McGraw-Hill, p. 213.

to the original users, undesirable) a set of humans. As the brand became accessible and of mass membership it no longer held the same "exclusive" communicative power, and thus no longer felt like it belonged to the wealthier users. Like the stars on the bellies, the intrinsic use of the products was irrelevant (i.e. whether a Burberry bag was useful, or their raincoat effective and comfortable); it was the group that used them that counted.

Another interesting tale, on the flip-side of the previous one, is that of the boxing and sportswear brand Lonsdale and its experiences in Germany. The unfortunate coincidental sequence of letters "NSDA" that occurs in the brand name was used by neo-Nazi groups as a coded signal of political affiliation, due to it being the first four letters of the full acronym of the original German Nazi party, NSDAP. Neo-Nazis would wear a Lonsdale T-shirt beneath a jacket and make the jacket hide all but the relevant letters as a clandestine way of signalling to each other. When certain retailers threatened to stop stocking the brand due to these new associations, the brand actively sought to make associations with groups which would make them unpopular with their neo-Nazi users. Lonsdale sponsored gay rights marches and proactively supported immigrant group activity. By aligning explicitly with such activity, Lonsdale managed to make it difficult for neo-Nazis to wear their gear.

There are parallels between the Burberry and Lonsdale cases. A core set of brand users (fashionistas and fascists, respectively) were alienated by the brand activity, but in the former case this was an unwanted side-effect of trying to sell more stuff whereas in the latter it was a deliberate

strategy. Lonsdale was purposely looking to alienate a set of users of the brand in order to drive a wedge between them and what they hoped would be a large majority of ordinary, non-politically motivated consumers. Burberry were undone by their inability to recognize that exclusivity and gross market size are not happy bedfellows. What these examples both show is how humans use all sorts of aspects of brands and products to further their own binding and differentiating strategies, irrespective of what the brand owners' original intentions and strategies are.

People, these examples show us, will find their own uses.

So, to return to our start point: to be the same and to be different. We have to do both. These impulses are contradictory. They pull in opposite directions. The tensions between these battling forces are powerful and run deep in our psyche (at both conscious and unconscious levels). We have a swirling mix of hopes and deep fears and insecurities about them. These basic instincts and our emotions concerning them, therefore, make ideal hooks on which to hang appeals to humans to do one thing over another. Human beings use what means we have at our disposal to communicate which particular mast we are pinning our colours to, because defining our selves and our groups is so important to us. Is it any wonder then, that we are susceptible to all sorts of suggestions of more and more ways to do so? More specifically, our fears about our sense of self and group belonging make ideal bait with which we are lured into the promises of marketing and advertising communications. These fears provide a fertile territory of exhortation and persuasion for human behaviour which is

why the belonging-differentiating impulse is one of the most frequented hunting grounds for the advocate, the rhetorician, the persuader, the propagandist, the advertiser and the salesman.

Consumer behaviour falls directly out of these deeper needs and facets of our human development. Yet, if you have the misfortune of ever having to look up "consumer behaviour" in the appropriate sources, you may be surprised by what you find. For a start you might be met with a double Belch. Belch and Belch, in *Advertising and Promotion: An Integrated Marketing Communications*, define consumer behaviour as "the process and activities people engage in when searching for, selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products and services so as to satisfy their needs and desires". This completely misses the mark for us. As with most of the specialist "literature" on the topic, it defines consumer behaviour as though it were a highly distinctive and specific mode of human activity, a mode of human behaviour that has come into existence in the socio-culturo-economico-political context of recent times. It misses out the bits that connect with everyday human beings; it avoids locating it within the broader context of fundamental behaviours. By our lights, "consumer behaviour" is not a distinctive mode of human behaviour that has only arisen within modern consumer society where there are lots of products and services that satisfy us. As we have already demonstrated, the motivations and underlying thought processes that consumer behaviour involves belong to a broader set of human capacities – the things humans do and choices they make about the things they use and what it says about them. And by

"things they use", we mean everything. And by everything we mean things like (but not limited to) shoes, words, cereals, dances, wallpaper, curses, laptops, soaps, gestures, recipes, songs, football teams, hair-dos, pets, books and votes in the House of Commons.

It is not difficult to observe that "consumer behaviour" is not a specialized modern trait inextricably bound to the age of mechanical reproduction and modern modes of consumer culture. To do so, one need only make reference to how any cultural objects, whether physical artefacts (say, the cross) or rituals of behaviour (say, baptism), create vast intricacies of social groupings and subgroupings. Of course, anthropology and various sociological approaches have been contextualizing consumer behaviour within a wider perspective on human behaviour for ages and ages, as we learned from Levi-Strauss at the beginning of this chapter: "Almost all objects are decorated with emblems indicating the clan or sub-clan of the owner." Marketing Literature, on the other hand, continues to paint this picture of consumer behaviour as some special, distinct mode of action divorced from every other aspect of human life. It is hard to understand why this is the case. Surely the answer cannot be a parochial attempt to preserve consumer behaviour as a special, difficult and technical area of study because certain people's jobs depend on it? No, it can't be that, so in the absence of another guess, we cannot provide an answer to that particular conundrum. In any case, having dispensed with the marketing book definitions, we are sticking to our story which we believe makes much clearer how consumer behaviour emerges from the wider context of our needs to belong and not-belong.

Now it is time to see how on earth this works in everyday life with all the millions of products and brands and people and opinions that are marketed at us. In the next part we will take a few steps towards understanding how we use the rudiment of everyday life to communicate our ideas about our identity and belonging. We then take a short trip to another culture to see that this process is the normal, default way that humans operate rather than some recent marketing invention. It is not driven by brands and advertising, we will notice, because it happens without them anyway. Having ascended these steps we will then be at the threshold of our Chapter 1 finale, which reflects on why these obsessions are uppermost in our minds at the present time. What we'll find, as the first chapter concludes, is that newborn feelings around our increased consumption play a pivotal role in an emerging drama, and it is this drama, this guilt trip, which we will be observing.

1.2 A Rose by Any Other Name

Ταράσσει τους Άνθρώπους ού τα Πράγματα,
αλλά τα πέρι των Πραγμάτων, Δόγματα

("It is not things themselves, but the ideas about things, that disturb mankind")

Epictetus, *Enchiridion*

If we were to conjure the image of "the body as advertising space" or "humans as mobile advertising hoardings", what would come to mind? It might be recollections of

those sad and pathetic (in the traditional meaning of those words) young people in the United States, logos tattooed on their sunburnt heads in exchange for some money from a corporation. It might be Wayne Rooney, arms akimbo, blood-stained with a face like a Tolkien Orc, primal and naked but for the sanguine red on the white of his pasty skin forming a St. George's Cross in Nike's *St Wayne* poster before the 2006 World Cup. That's not quite what we mean. What we'd like you to consider is the much more fundamental role that our bodies and actions play in communicating to the outside world. We want to use those expressions to bring into our argument a universal anthropological observation that runs through all human history, the observation that we all carry externally facing messages all the time. It has been so from time immemorial. Our bodies, our clothes, our actions and the way we speak say an enormous amount about us. Whether we want to or not, we are constantly sending out signals to others, whether we think we are or not. To the extent that we want to try to control the messages that we send out, we are using our bodies, clothes, languages and customs to express something about ourselves. We might be trying to say something about who we think we are or who we want to be. We might be wanting to show an affinity towards something, or a distance from something else. We might be telling the world about our political, sexual or social preferences. In that respect, as well as in the Wayne Rooney reading, our bodies are advertising spaces that carry messages about our selves.

Like many things embedded within social life, there is no way to avoid participating in this aspect of how we

communicate to one another. You might think you don't participate yourself. You do. Whether you think about what you wear or not; whether you buy or choose the clothes you wear or not; whether you wear make-up or not; whether you spend ages thinking about the bag you carry or how your shoes create an ensemble with the rest of your apparel, or whether you think such things are beneath the dignity of enlightened mankind; how we look, our packaging if you will, communicates a great deal about us. People's initial judgements about us are, in the main, based on how we appear. You can try to rise above it all and see the shallowness of the world that judges things by appearances and labels, but that is how humans think and how they process the world. It would be a phenomenal failure not to see it that way. Even those subversive types who take care to appear dishevelled and careless about their appearance or try to never wear branded clothes or products, (or even those quaint types who put patches over all the visible brands on their clothes) are not undermining the system, but reinforcing it, merely using it to say something even more self-consciously about themselves. All they are doing is taking care about the messages they are sending out, which is scarcely different from the Bouji-Botox girls, every designer dress deployed just so, every self-conscious step endlessly rehearsed.

This may seem a very marketing-communications-centric way of putting it; a strangely skewed view of the world, but this is unavoidable when we examine consumerism beside the simple truths of human desire to belong and not-belong. Indeed, it is central to the foundations of our argument here, so the conceit that we are all mobile adver-

tising space helps to illustrate our point. Given the desires of humans to express things about which social groups they belong to (or would like to) through the things they use, it becomes easier to see how this can be used by salesmen and marketing people to get people to wear the clothes and use the products they are flogging. Marketing is in large measure based on this need for people to express things about themselves through what they wear or use or do or say or believe or buy or vote for. So, if someone tells you that using a certain smell-secreting spray on your body will make you more attractive, part of an exclusive and interesting group who use that particular spray, and you believe them, then your desire to be attractive and become part of that group, along with your ability to buy the smelly spray will (ceteris paribus) combine to make you buy and use the smelly spray. Now that, in the simplest terms, is marketing.

In the trade this is called meeting someone's needs. It's what Procter and Gamble claim is vital to their success. "We develop superior understanding of consumers and their needs." For the record and those not in the know, P&G is the colossal business that brings us Pampers, Ariel, Gillette, Pringles, Vicks, Iams and Fairy Liquid among other things. From cat food to crisps, bleach to shampoo to their own fair share of smelly sprays, these and other products in 50 different categories are what enable Procter and Gamble to "help billions of people around the world look and feel better every day" (in the lofty words of their "Our Heritage" document). Some of the time it is not even necessary for people to know they have a need for the things that the marketing people are

kindly providing for us; this is called a "latent" need, or "anticipating consumer needs". Of course, these needs are not limited to the little list of needs we might consider actual needs, like hydration, nutrition, warmth, sleep, shelter and love. They are a special kind of needs. They are sometimes like "wanty", "nice-to-have" types of needs that only the marketing world really understands and does anything about.

We'll get back to these later.

However, how do all these things that answer our "needs" become markers of personal identity and social status? Well, the answer is not simply that branding, marketing and advertising make them so. The fact that artefacts and practices take on the roles of defining and distinguishing one group from another, or one person from another, is something that manifests itself in the natural course of human culture. This is just what happens when we are going about our ordinary everyday lives, in whatever part of the world and at whatever stage of history. Within human culture the things we do and the things we use have always taken on social signifying roles by the association they have with the people who are using or doing them. Think of how the signifying power of the small moustache covering only the area directly beneath the nose was altered by its most famous fan. How marketing, advertising and mass communications get involved in this process, what they contribute over and above the natural role played by our desire to represent ourselves to the outside world, is what we will explore in more detail in what's to come. In the meantime, let's look at how the associations we have with certain things (whether products or people) fit into a

society that does not have a layer of marketing communications spread generously all over it.

Try to imagine a place where there is no marketing. A place where there is no brand communications of any kind. Well, stop right there. You do not need to imagine it, because it already exists. In the outer reaches of the Canadian province of Saskatchewan is Aipotu, both a village and also the name of the people that live there. Among the Aipotu advertising simply does not exist. There is no advertising on TV, no posters on public streets or in outdoor public spaces. There is no advertising in newspapers, magazines or other printed materials. No direct mail is sent out for marketing purposes and there are no promotional incentives or mechanics attached to buying one thing over another. No products are placed in the hands of influential people, nor are people paid to use certain things in order to encourage impressionable others to copy them. All products from the same category come in the same containers, so there is no differentiated packaging, no differences in labelling, colours, shapes of bottles or cartons, or anything of that kind. All cereals, pasta, rice and dried goods come in untreated cardboard boxes; all carbonated drinks come in the same 10 fluid ounce (roughly 300 ml) aluminium can. The standard can has a white label on it which states the ingredients and the product category and a number, i.e. Cola 2 and Cola 3, or Cherryade 1 and Cherryade 2 because there are no brand names. Products are known by what they are, functionally, rather than what someone has decided to call them.

No one in Aipotu talks about the 60-second advert they saw on TV last night or the hilariously lewd viral that's

doing the rounds. No one goes out to buy a pair of boots that they saw in a magazine photo worn by a person they have never met. They choose the products they buy by using them, tasting them, trying them. If they work, if they taste good, if they like them, then they buy them again. If not, they don't. Other than trial, there are, of course, many variables that affect the choices the Aipotu make about what to use. Word of mouth, there as here, is the most influential of all. Personal recommendation, based on actual usage by someone you know or someone you trust is reliable among the Aipotu because they lack the concept of someone trying to sell you something if they don't believe it is the best thing for you.

You may think that the Aipotu sound like an austere bunch. The contrary is the case. They are by no means a wealthy people, in the conventional sense, but their own visual appearance is a lavish and vibrant, colourful display, a sophisticated and rich form of visual symbolism from their clothes and hair and facial ornamentations to their teepees and the contents within them. All these colours and shapes signify things about themselves and their families, denoting kinship ties and obligations. If one knows how to decode the symbolism, quite detailed information can be gleaned from their appearance. These visual signs tell us who they are, their role within the community, their own personal achievements, historical information about the achievements of their family and so forth.

Where certain preferences and habits do form among the Aipotu around using certain products as opposed to certain others, this is based on who else in the community is using them. For example, pairs of families that have

ritualized feuds going on tend to split along product lines also, so that one will use Detergent 1 and the other Detergent 2. The enmity is sometimes so intense that a family might go without certain key staple foods if it is known that the family they have a feud with are particular fans of that food. Such is the strength of the kinship bonds and divisions, even within a group as homogeneous as the Aipotu, that everyday products are believed to be infected with a curse if they are used by your feud-enemy or one of their sponsors. More innovatively still, individual members of the tribe began artificially to equate products that had numerical commonality. Those who bought Cola 1 were more inclined to buy Pasta 1 or Shampoo 1, despite no relationship actually existing between those products at all. Similarly, as one group tended to buy products with the number 1 on the pack, members of rival groups avoided those products, lest they be associated. Gradually, certain members of the tribe gravitated to certain products, and certain members avoided them entirely.

Aipotu, of course, doesn't exist.

However implausible the backwards utopia we just invented might be, the behaviour we describe is exactly what modern anthropological and sociological study would suggest as most likely. Michael Doyle, in *Empires*, credits such innate behaviours with much larger geopolitical group activity. Dr John Curran pointed us to the classic texts of anthropology that support all this, particularly Bronislaw Malinowski's study of the Trobriand Islanders in 1922, which he says "illustrates the point that creating a sense of belonging is based on exchange and reciprocity where goods, both subsistence and luxury, were used to create

bonds between groups and maintain an economic ecology. Belonging is about survival, but survival becomes a complex system of exchange and reciprocity." People find a way to group themselves with whatever means are at their disposal, and identify themselves accordingly. From the behaviour of the Aipotu, there are three lessons to be drawn that illustrate facts about real human societies and their consumption of goods. The story of Aipotu helps to draw these lessons out more clearly than real life case studies would and, what is more, it is substantially more diverting imagining the Aipotu than spending more time with Londsdale Nazis or Burberry Thugs. So, what are those three lessons?

Firstly, wherever there is choice, people's habits, customs (and the things they use) are selected for symbolic social value as well as for functional value. Secondly, using purely objective, functional and rational criteria for selecting products and goods is about as realistic as trying to pick your favourite colour or song on the grounds of quality or logic. Thirdly, trying to put limits on branding and advertising does not prevent our finding products or physical artefacts to signal status, affinity or enmity. There have been from time to time, political and cultural regimes with similar features to the Aipotu. These tend not to be a good idea in most respects, and for the most part have come about under the direct control of lunatics. These regimes, however, have been very appealing to certain kinds of misanthropic intellectual, the kind who hated mass communications and advertising as much as they loathed ordinary people. As John Carey observed, talking of Wyndham Lewis, "One advantage of Fascism, to Lewis's way of

thinking, was that it would put an end to 'the sickly rage of advertisement'. In a totalitarian economy there would be only one state brand of soap, so giant hoardings telling the public how to keep their schoolgirl complexions would be unnecessary."[3] Lewis was wrong about this, of course, since the rage of advertisement under fascism (or communism and other totalitarian "isms" for that matter) is even more sickly; the difference being that the effluent that runs through the mass-media channels happens to be propaganda about a single ideology rather than competing messages about different products. Lest there be any doubt, our stance on this follows exactly the lead of Ferris Bueller in terms of totalitarian politics: "isms are not good."

Back, then, to the main thrust. If goods are used to communicate social affiliations even without the devilish hand of branding and advertising, how does traditional marketing play a part in this game? If all of this is subdivision and grouping is underway in any case, and the wheels seem fairly set in motion, how does marketing latch onto the train and make those wheels spin all the faster? At this point we need to draw two important distinctions. Distinction one is between what is called rational versus emotional messaging about products and brands. Distinction two is between what brands intend their messaging to be about versus what associations people actually have in their heads about the brand. Following a radical strategy, let's look at distinction one first, and then ignore distinction two, but keep it in the back of our minds for later.

[3]J. Carey (1992) *Intellectuals and the Masses*, Faber & Faber, p. 190.

We'll get back to it, we promise.

So, distinction one, the emotional versus the rational. While we no doubt do buy things according to what they do, this only accounts for part of the consumption balance sheet. So much of what we buy reflects what we think our purchase will say about who we are and what group we belong to. We may wish this weren't the case, claiming products to be bought on purely functional grounds, but anyone who picks up caviar because they love the taste and crave the nutrients would be hard pressed to claim that the check-out girl will not make certain assumptions. Whether we like it or not, we know it to be the case. People judge whether we embrace that judgement to carefully curate a character, or not. This has always been part of the marketer's arsenal of assumptions about how to persuade us to do things. This split between what a product or service actually does and what it says about us (and how it makes us feel) is normally referred to as the rational and emotional sides of a marketing proposition.

One might find it hard, for example, to tell the difference between Kellogg's Cornflakes and a few of the supermarket versions of flaked corn breakfast cereals. There is little rational reason to make a choice between the two. This is of course, not limited to cereals, the same goes for a thousand other branded and supermarket own label products. It is this lack of difference which goes some way to explaining why the cheaper supermarket own labels have enjoyed such success in recent years. Consumers are not entirely stupid. So then why do things like Kellogg's Cornflakes still exist? Well, because consumers are not entirely rational, either. If the own-brand cereal tastes the same (within a margin of

error), is made of the same stuff and costs less, why would you not choose it over the more expensive version? There seems to be no rational answer. Now, no doubt the research and development eggheads at Kellogg's have lots of research to "prove" that there is a difference in taste between their own cereal and that of the supermarket's own labels. So, for the avoidance of fruitless legal disputes let us concede that there is a difference, and that it is worth paying extra of your hard earned cash for them. The question remains, when you sit down, bleary-eyed at 7.13 a.m., to put the milk-soaked flakes into your barely conscious mouth, would you be able to tell the difference? Would you be able to tell the difference if both versions came in exactly the same boxes or packets? The fact is, there *is* a difference, and for the most part that difference has very little to do with what's on your spoon. It is all of the stuff that exists *beyond* the flakes. It is the advertising budget and the reassuring logo and the history-steeped name. It is, very simply, the stuff the milk doesn't touch.

We know people make wildly different judgements according to whether they see the packaging or name of the product or not. There are many attested and apocryphal examples, a famous well-attested one being that of Diet Coke vs. Diet Pepsi. When consumers were not told the name of each drink, 51% preferred Pepsi. When they were told before drinking, which was Pepsi and which was Coke, only 23% preferred Pepsi.[4] This well-attested phenomenon is the exact opposite of the proverbial wisdom

[4]S. Knox and L. de Chernatony (1990) "How an appreciation of consumer behaviour can help product testing", *International Journal of Market Research*, 32(3).

contained in "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Unfortunately for this much cited rag of Shakespeare, the truth is, it is simply not true. Our perceptions and expectations of (and even our report of and belief in) the sweetness of the rose are crucially framed and altered by the word "rose" and our associations with that word from throughout our collective cultural memory. These are also determined, as much as anything else, by our associations around the Interflora or Morrisons' packaging it comes in.

Whatever the Bard may say, if it were called a Sewage-Nettle, wrapped in a damp bin-liner and presented by a fat man in a romper suit then, very probably, it wouldn't "smell as sweet".

There are many ways to show just how strong people's emotional associations are around various brands. For instance, let's consider a rather expensive speaker cable. Now, very few people indeed can actually perceive the acoustic differences between a 200-dollar and a 3000-dollar speaker cable, but those who have spent their thousands of dollars on, say, a Pear speaker cable would swear that they hear a sweeter, fuller note.

In part, the difference in cost is justified by what those products are (rather than do). The more expensive speaker cable is made in a certain expensive way out of certain expensive materials by fairies or elves or Beethoven himself, presumably. However, above and beyond these rational drivers, it remains our associations with the words, colours, shapes, packets, boxes and importantly users of goods that drive us, to a very significant extent, to decide for one largely equivalent product over another. These associations are the ones that we register in the background of our

minds and absorb from all the many marketing communication messages we are kindly surrounded with by contemporary culture.

So, it is not the functional, rational messages about any given product washing whiter or lasting longer that have us queuing around the block waiting for the sales to start. No, it is the ongoing associations we build up around a brand over many years (or many instances) of seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling all sorts of things to do with it and the people we associate with its use. That gradual, incremental, cerebral process has been clear to many practitioners but had never been so adequately supported or explained as it was by Robert Heath in *The Hidden Power of Advertising*. In it, he explained how we process marketing communications at very low levels of involvement. This processing, Heath argued, goes on in the background while we consciously think of other things, which is no surprise given how many more important things there are in real life. Many people in the broad communications industry (particularly on the client side and the research industry) found his findings hard to stomach. It opened the eyes of many to the reality that it was not necessarily the single-minded messages that were being sent out by advertising that people were associating with the brand, but a range of vaguer, softer, more emotional things like mood, the tone and how various aspects of the communication made them feel. As the official blurb put it, Heath was able to explain through the lens of low-involvement processing, how "advertising creates meaningful and enduring brand associations in our minds, even when we pay virtually no attention to it."

The reason why so many people were upset by Heath's claim was that it showed why the thinking they had been using and were still using to create and research brand communications was moribund. Millward Brown, the big research factory, was particularly upset because their own model for testing communications is based on a very outdated and irrelevant 1950s behaviourist view of functional messaging and advertising awareness.

Have you seen this ad for cat food? Yes. Tick. Did it make you feel like you should buy this kind of cat food for your cat? Yes. Tick.

It's fairly enthralling stuff.

How interesting it is aside, Millward Brown happens to provide a large number of the world's biggest companies with an outmoded and practically useless way of researching their communications based on functional messaging and its conscious recall. Robert Heath's supposition that we simply don't absorb marketing messages in that way is entirely ignored, and sits uncomfortably with such a methodology. As he said in a recorded interview on www.accountplanning.net, "many tracking studies are more intelligent than that." However, by the time research managers (or insight people as they have ironically come to be known) within client organizations come round to "getting it", thousands, if not millions, of dollars will have been spent trying to make people remember whether they believed a certain advert made them think that the product under scrutiny would wash their clothes whiter or make them faster at running.

It has been mildly entertaining, in the meanwhile, to read the more positive and open-minded reviews of Heath's

book by the marketing community, which got tremendously excited by the idea of low-involvement, nonconscious processing. It appeared to many who had previously relied on outdated methodologies that Heath's observation was a revolutionary new discovery of modern neuroscience. A fantastic new way of understanding how a person processes information and learns. It seems that many of this over-excited group had never really reflected on how they had learned to speak and acquire language. They might have considered the fact that we all acquire, on average, about 10 new words a day between the ages of 18 months and four years, realizing as they did so that they did not learn all those words by being consciously aware and concentrating. They might have realized that they have no recall of the moments or stimulus that put those words in the language processing parts of our heads.

Nobody remembers, for instance, precisely how or when they learned the word "telephone", they just know what it means. Whether they remember how they came to that knowledge is irrelevant. Just because you don't recall a specific piece of communications telling you what "telephone" means (which is what Millward Brown would measure), doesn't mean that "telephone" hasn't done a fairly good job at lodging its meaning in your mind. To convert this to brand understanding, we might well not know why we think something about a brand, or indeed when it was that we started to think it, or what message it was that made us think it. That, of course, doesn't mean we don't have an opinion.

So, we looked in the previous section at how human beings instinctively subdivide themselves into groups. In

this chapter, we observed how brands play a role in allowing themselves to engage in that activity, and how marketing communications only has so much control over what that role might be. Having now ascended these little steps, we arrive at our Chapter 1 finale, which, as already mentioned, takes a broader reflective glance at why these obsessions are preoccupying us at present.

Or, to put it more simply, why are we telling you all this now?

1.3 'Tis the Season for Extraordinary Mass Acquisition

"The evolution of humankind from hunter-gatherers to shopper-disposers was complete."

Pratnakis and Aronson, *Age of Propaganda*, 1991

Certain epochs are known by heroic or creative figures who dominate our image of that period. The Age of Shakespeare, The Age of Napoleon, The Age of Newton, The Age of Geldof. Spot the odd one out? Yes, our age (however vaguely we define it) seems, for now at least, to be resistant to any such one-person-zeitgeist encapsulations. Maybe it is just that we can't see the wood for the trees this close up. Or perhaps, more likely, we just can't think of who that figure would be for our period in history. But while we're speculating, presuming, as we do, that the honour will eventually be bestowed upon someone, we might just as well confess to something. Despite our

currently enjoying the very pinnacle of earthly civilization, there is simply no one person who corresponds to that central role for our age.

Perhaps there is a reason for our lack of an age-defining individual. As a genus, we haven't stopped producing ideas of profound and universal importance, it is simply that the ideas that dominate the discourse of today no longer seem to emerge from individual figures. We seem to be much more accurately encapsulated by our trends or technologies. We suffer the indignity of the technological tools we produce and the behaviours they generate being more dominant in our world view than inspirational people and their ideas or ideals. This sounds like a trendy new thing, but really is nothing other than what Galin Tihanov, in *The Master and The Slave* called "the fundamental conflict of modernity – that between the maturing powers of men and women to master nature and the outer world and their growing enslavement at the hands of their own creations". The Age of the Mobile, the Age of the Microchip, the Age of the Web. These latter sound far more likely to be used than, say, the Age of Berners-Lee, the Age of Gates or Jobs or the Age of whoever invented the mobile phone. The myth of our age might be man's attempt to impose order on life through technology, but in the end becoming more and more controlled by the technology he produces.

But it seems to us that what defines us beyond the technology myth and unites us across the various cultural differences that survive is the role that "consumption" of manufactured goods and brands plays in our lives. Though cultural differences do evidently survive, globalization means we can happily go in to a McDonald's in Beijing or

Bangor or Buenos Aires, order a Pepsi-Cola and expect a more or less identikit experience. This has been proclaimed an evil, publicly and vehemently by some: "Culture now imposes the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part. Even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system … Under monopoly all mass culture is identical, and the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through."[5] While the vitriolic tirade may be so powerful we almost feel the flecks of spittle hurtling from Horkheimer's and Adorno's mouths, we can still see their point, can't we? The cultural homogeneity of modern globalized consumer culture, supported by a more or less uniform mass-media and communication infrastructure, must represent a great loss of man's natural and valuable ability to create a myriad of diverse cultures that once thronged the earth. But maybe such homogeneity is the admittedly hefty price of relative world peace (for some) and global economic growth (for a few less). There is little doubt that mass consumer civilization entails the reduction of privacy and individuality. It becomes ever harder to be different and find, develop and share new forms of living, when all the ways of being and experiencing life and even of expressing individuality seem to be mediated by shopping and the acquisition of mass produced goods that are the same everywhere. Most people might agree that it is a

[5]T.W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer (1976) "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Continuum International Publishing Group, English translation by John Cumming, pp. 120–1.

pretty reasonable price for (relative) global peace and prosperity, but there cannot be many who do not lament it from time to time. Though living in an age without the threat of smallpox or Vikings or Crusaders has quite evident advantages, the resulting homogeneity of human experience is one of the least appealing features of modern life.

But it might be even more serious than that. As someone writing 150 years ago took great efforts to argue, heterogeneity of ways of life and differences of experience might be basic to our needs to be fulfilled happy humans. In *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill passionately cherished the need for differences in how we live, as one of the conditions of true freedom and happiness because, simply, we are all individuals and all different. Individuals possess different "characters" and different ideas of what constitutes "well-being". Well-being is achieved through a process of individual self-discovery and personal development. We cannot, therefore, understand our dispositions (or what gives us happiness) unless we are allowed the freedom to examine different ways of living.

> He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. (p. 65)

It's fair to presume that Mill would be on the verge of tears wandering through a mall in Richmond, Virginia and knowing that the vast majority of what is being offered is largely what is being sold to those back in Richmond-upon-Thames. If he was right, and our functioning as real

humans relies upon us exerting our individuality, then we have not done much good for ourselves of late, have we? It would mean that although we might have all the right Sony hi-fi equipment and use the best, most planet-saving Ecover products, we might not yet achieve human happiness. Because we have been behaving like monkeys, not humans.

As we were saying (before the short lament for the death of heterogeneity of human experience), perhaps more than anything else we are defined by the "Age of Consumption" or the "Age of Consumerism". We have become nothing more than consumers. Everybody is a consumer. You can't avoid it. Everyone needs to buy stuff. When you do your choice defines you as something as opposed to something else. Most of the time marketers and advertisers use the terms "consumers" and "people" interchangeably with no discernible difference in meaning. Dubbing this modern time of ours the "Age of Consumption", however, does not feel quite right on two counts; one factual and one aesthetic.

Firstly, the activity we want to encompass in our descriptor of the age is often not "consuming". More often than not it is just buying a product whether or not we need or use it. Consuming implies an involved activity of use and processing; this may be true of some of our consumption, but barely true about much of the rest of it. Much of our "consuming" is actually nothing more than buying things for others that we barely imagine will be consumed. An example is, of course, that enormous spike in spending and consuming that occurs during the huge festival of retail activity in the West that is known as "Xmas". "Xmas" is

an acronym with an uncertain etymology. Some marketing and consumer groups would suggest that the word means eXtraordinary Mass Acquisition Season. Judging by the behaviour that occurs during this winter festival, a Bacchanalian and gluttonous orgy of product purchases that are explicitly not needed or consumed, then this seems a fairly credible reading of the word. So, factually, "consumption" does not quite fit the bill.

Somewhere, surely, there is a landfill overflowing with reindeer jumpers and chunky-knit socks and compilation music CDs ("because I know you girls *love* music!") and cheap perfume, a veritable topographical feature entirely created by our seasonal inability to resist buying vast quantities of stuff, safe in the knowledge that very little of it will ever be put to any use at all.

Secondly, and probably more significantly, the "Age of Consumption" or the "Age of Consumerism" sound too grand and impressive for the magpie-like activity of acquiring shiny things that we are told will make us happier, better and safer. It sounds too dignified for the defining cultural behaviour we have been reduced to. We now need something a bit more bathetic.

We like "The Age of Shopping".

It's very clear and simple. And true. Andrew Marr's recent history of modern Britain, coming from a different angle, ends up in a very similar place, in summing up the spirit of our age. As the marketing line for his book put it: "*A History of Modern Britain* confronts head-on the victory of shopping over politics."

One of us used to have a black T-shirt that was very prettily designed with a big stylized white barcode and the

words "Don't Think, Consume" in white printed boldly on the front. It was quite a statement and people used to respect him much more for wearing it. He was clever and powerful because he wore it to marketing strategy meetings. (In the technical jargon of the advertising world, this was known alternately as "cynical" or "ironic".) One day it was mistakenly hidden within a pile of clothes that were destined for the charity shop, and taken away to be resold. He never saw it again, and lost all his power to the new owner of the T-shirt. Although he had loved the T-shirt's gutsy, ballsy pith, and the power he derived from it, he actually felt it misrepresented things in some pretty fundamental ways. What was there to misrepresent, you may ask? It was only a T-shirt. The T-shirt was powerful because it participated in the intellectual history of early twentieth century social theory about our Age of Shopping. Its message emerged from the classic Adorno-Horkheimer Frankfurt School reading of our age – the modern dystopian fable of the zombified masses, alienated from things that really matter, living only for the next personal hygiene product that promised to transform their lives for the better. As Adorno and Horkheimer put it themselves, "the most intimate reactions of human beings have been so thoroughly reified that the idea of anything specific to themselves now persists only as an utterly abstract notion: personality scarcely signifies anything more than shining white teeth and freedom from body odour and emotions."

Though the notion encapsulated by the "Don't think, Consume" T-shirt was a pretty accurate reading of our obsessive, semi-conscious need to buy stuff, what was not

so credible was the idea that people had stopped thinking. People do think, only they spend all those vital kilojoules and ounces of brainjuice on evaluating whether Vosene (at its reasonable price) *did* remove dandruff to a satisfactory extent or whether it was worth the seriously extra pricey option of getting Neutrogena T-Gel. Lots of thinking goes on in the Age of Shopping but there are so many different things to think about that if you thought your way through it, you would go mad.

The thing that is cabin-fever-inducing about "The Age of Shopping" is that you cannot escape it. One, more or less, *must* buy a shampoo. When you go to buy a shampoo you are confronted not with two or three choices but with 30. How can a rational decision be made? A rational decision might proceed as follows. You could read all the labels on all the products. You could try evaluating all the products' performances against your key shampoo needs. You should really do both to be sure. Say this process, just for shampoo, took a few years. You wouldn't be able to evaluate for yourself which products to use (sticking just to the bathroom) before you were dead. Such choice paralyses action. The idea that the consumer demands the choice that is available in any market is one of the ugliest of ugly sisters in the fairytale of the Age of Shopping. The consumer doesn't want this selectional aporia. What people want are things that work. What people want are good things, beautiful things, reliable and durable things that last. What people want is not to be ripped off. What people want is a reasonable amount of variety. The actual choice there is makes rational evaluation practically impossible.

Robin Wight, ad-agency WCRS founder, Engine President, natty dresser and amateur neuroscientist, told us much the same: "We're not rational decision makers. We haven't got the time to be. We make decisions within five seconds, and we do so on entirely emotional grounds." Or, as the great trendsetter of his day, La Rochefoucauld put it, "We never desire passionately what we desire through reason alone."

So, rational choice? No. It doesn't work that way. We never make entirely rational choices about what products we use. That is to say, the decision-making process partakes of the irrational. In marketing speak, as Engine President Robin Wight alludes to above, it is called "emotional". Oooh, doesn't that feel better? Yes, we're feeling goosebumps already. We have arrived at the emotional basis for brand choice (we promised we would). The emotional basis of our brand choices has many handmaidens, but they all dance to the tune of one powerful piper: fear. As we will discover, fear underpins our decision-making from an evolutionary, social, physical and even aesthetic perspective. We will, as this book goes on, look into how these fears are cultivated, curated and capitalized upon by brands, marketers and politicians to serve their own ends.

To return, briefly, to the context of that fear. The Age of Shopping has now infected so many different aspects of public life that it is the lens through which almost everything is viewed. Most pernicious and detrimental to life are its encroachment and pollution of public service and politics in particular. One has only to utter the two-word curse "Alistair Campbell" to bring to mind the sad fact that modern politics is rarely more than a communication

campaign. More hidden and under the radar, but equally detrimental, are the ways in which local government in the UK has been reframed as "service provider" to its shopping residents, under the evaluation system known as "Best Value". It is a legacy of the early years of Blair's New Labour, and it has fundamentally eroded any sense of public service beyond a commercial consumer transactional exchange. It's clear to see how voters have been reframed as consumers and the government just another service provider when we read what the government have put on their own Communities website: "Robust performance management is at the heart of any drive to secure continuous improvement and delivery of high quality services. Best Value provides the statutory basis upon which councils plan, review and manage their performance in order to deliver continuous improvement in all services and to meet the needs and expectations of service users."

Service users? There was a time when citizenship was a thing more precious than a simple consumption of services and products provided under a particular flag. Indeed, as of Spring 2009, the UK government became (astonishingly) the biggest advertiser in the country, outspending even the traditional brand powerhouses of Unilever, Procter & Gamble and all those sofa or kitchen companies that are perpetually on sale. Citizens, some might argue, have been recast as nothing more than consumers, and the government has positioned itself as the biggest and most important brand in their lives.

We're now told, on the London Underground, to "let customers off the train first", as opposed to "passengers". Everywhere we go, irrespective of our activity, whatever we

do is being boiled down into commercial consumption activity. Our manifold and varied activities, from the way we move around to the way we vote for our governments, are being condensed into a single, unilateral activity: shopping.

Another sad strand of evidence for this spread of the marketing and advertising view of the world into many aspects of contemporary life is the presence of a disproportionate number of individuals who have an advertising background within both Gordon Brown's and David Cameron's (himself cut of the communications cloth) core teams of advisers. Should we not have the best political, philosophical and sociological experts advising the executive on how to run the country? Even Adam Smith would be turning in his grave. Sadly, of course, in this Age of Shopping, it is these men, not the Isaac Brunels or the Charles Darwins or the John Lockes or the Adam Smiths, who are of most immediate and most demonstrable value.

We have shown (in the opening chapter) how our desire to be the same and to be different is a basic strand of our make-up, and how brands participate in that process of belonging and not-belonging. Mass consumer civilization or capitalist culture did not make us this way. Neither did advertising or marketing. It's just the way we are. There are those from within the advertising and marketing world who would gleefully pontificate about brands and the way people choose them to reflect their identity, as though it was a bold, new and powerful insight. They miss the point entirely. It was ever thus. Humans have always used all aspects of their material and intangible cultural lives to communicate this perpetual process of simultaneous

bonding and separation. Where the interest lies is in the conscious exploitation of this insight by corporations, brands, politicians, advertisers and marketers to encourage people to buy (or buy into) more and more things that they do not need.

More interesting still, and of particular focus to us here, is how brands encouraged us to buy into them on the promise to alleviate our all too human everyday fears about life, our sense of self and belonging. The pertinent question is whether our latest fears and related emotions (particularly guilt) about the state of the world (and what role we played in its demise), be they environmental or social or ethical, can be treated in just the same way.

There is a whole economic and commercial superstructure and system of social organization and interaction that is founded upon the particular aspects of our behaviour that we have discussed in this chapter. Those aspects of how we behave have always been there, but the society that behaviour produced has never been so obsessively reflected upon and worried over as it is today. The lives of everyone on the planet are touched by the economic and political structures that were founded upon those social structures, so current financial, political and cultural discord can all be traced back to these base structures. The financial crisis, wars, societal unrest, the destruction of the planet. These things were not naturally occurring phenomena. No. They happened because of us and those who acted on our behalves. What we intend to argue is that there is an emerging sense of guilt underlying and permeating current discourse; it is mainly unarticulated for now, but gradually it is oozing through the cracks that are appearing at present

in our societal dam. That is the reason we have written this book. It is this phenomenon, this guilt trip, that we want to examine.

However, before we open guilt up on the operating table, we need to explain how we arrived at this point. From the basic human and communication truths we have looked at in this first section, we will walk through the system of mass communications (and media) that we built to support our society. From there, we can begin to understand how those media and the messages that they supported perpetuated our deep-set, evolutionary obsession with fear. What we will discover, though, is that in the land of consumer fears, not all phobias were created equal, and that one fear in particular was set to bring about an explosive change to how we looked at the world, and kick start our guilt trip.