
Manufacturing and Selling a Way of Life

A Historical Analysis of Modern Communication and New Forms of Conformism

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Introduction

In the following article I will try to analyse and interpret a not well known and neglected change that occurred in the tradition of American liberalism, which had a profound impact in the formation of the United States as a modern nation in the 20th century. Although liberalism defined the Constitution and political order of the first modern republic, it underwent through a fundamental change in the so-called Progressive Era (1880-1920), when new ideas of scientism started to emerge in times of threatening social turmoil and fragile political institutions. The belief that science, especially as scientific techniques and social engineering could also take control of human affairs, conduct and thought and make them predictable, dominated public debates on crucial political and social issues like labour unrest, poverty and immigration that were shattering *the land of promise*. Moreover, the aforementioned idea became constitutive for the emerging American social sciences and for a number of entirely new disciplines like Scientific management (F.W. Taylor) or Behaviourism (J.B. Watson), which were promoted and accepted as a new technical answer for human affairs and prosperity. Their influence in the political realm of the 20th century was and still is without any doubt significant.

These technocratic ideas were not entirely new considering the vivid tradition of the American technical utopia (E. Bellamy) in 19th century, which echoed, unlike the later dystopian works, a celebration of the coming technical society. »American technical utopia does not speak either against the existing state of affairs nor does it warn against the fu-

ture dangers. On the contrary. This utopia speaks in line with the existing situation and push it to the extreme / ... / into even more technical progress that will bring to salvation the American society« (Turk, 2011: p. 222). Most important, the American technical utopia was widely acclaimed far beyond fictional literature. In the same way as it was written and offered, in the form of a technocratic reformistic program, it was also accepted and popularised. The true novelty of the technocratic movement lies in the fact that in a time of crisis they succeeded to inspire new organisational principles that aimed at organising a nation as a whole in an unprecedented manner and scale. Although explicitly antipolitical, these principles were generally justified and promoted as the salvation of the republic and its founding ideals. Apparently the American creed so eagerly oriented toward the future, toward the promise of prosperity by constantly ameliorating and advancing its own living conditions, was voiced loudly enough to demand a sacrifice even of its own founding ideals. For Croly, as one of the referential representatives of the era, the first task his fellow Americans are facing in front of keeping the Promise of prosperity alive is »to emancipate from their past« (Croly, 1909: p. 5).

The rupture in the tradition of American liberalism will represent our historical frame. In the first part of the following analysis, I will consider especially ideas and concepts that introduced communication as a new potential organizational tool and how their primary assumptions and purpose subverted the elementary understanding and relations of the political realm in order to enhance the actual state of affairs – to make an industrial society function with adequate smoothness. In the central part of this analysis, I will continue with focusing on selected Progressive discussions on efficiency that treated an emerging society of labourers and consumers in terms of unity and sameness as necessary conditions for social progress and how they planned to secure it in a systematical way. In the last part, I will try to show how the specific organisational principles of the social realm along with its antipolitical characteristic paved the way to a new form of perfected conformism and, consequently, how the basic conditions of human existence were altered in an unprecedented manner. The present attempt to analyse how conformism ceased to be something imposed solely from the outside, but rather unfolds as something that is reproduced in a mutual cooperation as a socially constitutive and functional behaviour, perhaps offers a possibility for a different perspective on the issue and helps to understand more thoroughly the most immediate components of the so-called American way or The American dream beyond their mythical character and meaning.

Communication as a Form of Social Ordering

During this period of crisis, another specific debate came in the forefront, which brought together all the prominent Progressive intellectuals of the era, from John Dewey, Charles H. Cooley, Robert Park to Walter Lippmann. The point at issue was unfolding around the question of how to find a new cohesive force that would unite a heterogeneous population of millions of immigrants. Especially considering that the traditional community's way of life and local town-meeting practises in the vanishing nation of villagers and farmers could not be practised nor be cohesive on the scale of the new continental nation, now interconnected and interdependent for the first time with various means of communication like railroads and telegraph. The disintegration of traditional community's way of life and the total absence of any other binding tradition, not to mention the threatening pre-revolutionary conditions, offered an opportunity for Progressive ideas to fulfil the gap and solve a potentially fundamental political question of organising a national state in the only way they could imagine. Namely, as a matter of applying new scientific techniques, as a task of social engineering that would elevate the state of human affairs and cultivate human nature with the same fruitful results as natural sciences achieved before them with dominating nature.

The primary attention in the discourse of social sciences was thus given to the notion of communication attributed with a fundamental socio-formative function, that of creating a substitutive bond, a certain unity of life, behaviour, thought, idea. Not communication as a primarily human capacity of speaking, dialog or exchange of opinions, but as an *instrumentum* of assimilation and psychological standardization, a controllable and manageable process, which »creates and maintains society« (Belman in Rogers, 1997: p. 196). The urge to invent and propagate adequate social forms of life in order to enable an industrial society to function effectively, be able to multiply and accelatere its own processes in order to achieve affluence, was rooted in the traditional creed that praised America as the land of prosperity and comprehended as its continuation by completely new means. Social sciences established communication as their concept mostly by recapitulating the old usage in modern natural sciences where the notion appeared in discussions on magnetism, more accurately, how distant bodies are affected or attracted at distance in a transmission of forces. Understanding and researching communication as a separated and available object with its own inherent laws that, once discovered, would make it disposable for steering social processes, like analogies about communication as a society's nervous system suggest, es-

tablished the conditions for an instrumental development of communication as control, command and planning that was not bound by political or communal human activity of speaking. This specific conceptual construction preceded and influenced the foundation of mass communication theory and research in the 30's, which was understandably preoccupied with measuring effects in order to find out how to ensure that a certain message would cause predicable effects in mass audience, while completely »lacking political self-consciousness« (Peters, 1986: p. 1).

The idea of communication as a disposable instrument for manufacturing social harmony, which was initiated as an engineering approach in the emerging social sciences, most elaborately in the Chicago school of sociology, was condemned to destroy what was determined to accomplish. Although they had in front an ideal of a restored community, they wanted to enlarge it on the national scale, beyond the face-to-face personal interaction or beyond the »primitive direct man-to-man democracy« (Lippmann, 1917: p. 142-143) seen as hostile to large organisations. These intentions found their ground and support also in the political discourse of the time, especially in Wilson's introduction to a series of progressive reforms »The New Freedom« (1913), where personal relations between men are recognized as belonging to the past while in the coming era of the »new social age« relations of men will be »largely with great impersonal concerns, with organisations, not with other individuals« (Wilson in Wallas, 1967: p. 3).

The classic liberal theory was conditioned by the political project of sustaining individuality. The political project of Progressive intellectuals was the reverse: to create community. /.../ The solidarity and intimacy of the small community was their model for the reconstruction of American life. What emerged from this project, was a new kind of liberalism: one that still saw the face-to-face community as the cradle for democracy and yet adapted to the complexity of modern conditions (Peters, 1986: p. 67).

Obviously enough, this project soon collided into an unresolvable contradiction. In the newly emerged perspective of the continental nation as one whole, forms of locally confined communal life, which indeed offered practical possibilities for public appearance and direct participation in political institutions, became something obsolete. Although the reconstruction of community was the »tenet of Progressive thought« (ibid.: p. 64), there was no turning back to tradition, which became mute in front of present problems. This new »Great community«, as Dewey (1927) calls it, had to be knitted together anew in an artificial way. Not

by enabling people's common activity in public affairs, but by creating a binding public experience transmitted via communication. Such a community, which would exist in transmission, had the potential to extend as far as the communications channels would stretch. Although Dewey, unlike Lippmann, was probably one of those most reserved toward the technocratic ideas of regimenting the public from expert minority, this is the main reason for exposing him as an example, he still confidently relied on the new governing potential of social sciences to solve the problems of men. In this approach, he was not far away from social engineering ideas and sociocracy. On the contrary, his ambitions just went in the opposite direction; to enable everybody as a social scientist, which would enable anyone to raise to the level of an »expert and governor of society« (Peters, 1989: p. 252). In fact, his notion of cohesive public experience is nothing else but the experience of social sciences, in his time already established in the public discourse as those professionally devoted to methodical discovery of social laws and capable of describing and predicting social reality. For this reason, they were promoted above all tradition, as a new public philosophy that would function as an organ of enlightenment, which is one of the fundamental turns in the Comtean positivism. Their enlightenment was in fact a paradigmatic closure with political consequences, namely, by turning their theorems and assumptions, for example, that people are by nature *animal laborans* or that productive society is the only possible form of common existence, into constitutive facts, determinative for the whole sphere of human affairs. The second function, which touches directly our topic, is even more explicit in its socio-formative intention, namely, to »invent values, ideas and practices - in short, intelligence - to enliven and unify the Great community« (Dewey, 1927: p. 181).

If Dewey was criticized for being the spokesman »for the crass industrialism in American life« (Peters, 1986: p. 115) it is because his project of bringing public and community back to life is more an apology to the actual state of affairs than a new perspective that would reopen a possibility for the public sphere where people could indeed practice their »capacity of being citizens« (Arendt, 2006: p. 245). Although Dewey was preoccupied, at least nominally, with the problems of democracy and its decaying conditions, his starting ground was not in the tradition of political thought, but in the emerging Progressive social theory and its expectations that communication would fulfil a new function of »providing the means for society to gain consciousness of itself as a totality, to create a grand unity of all its members« (Peters, 1986: p. 54). In one aspect, the idea of human organisation they were striving for was evidently entrenched in what they saw around them, a rising land of steam, steel and

electricity endlessly multiplying its productive force and at the same time already showing its self-destructing ruptures. Graham Wallas (1967) perhaps describes best how Progressive intellectuals saw the emerging new actuality that was offering them the chances to demonstrate the potential of their new methods of perfecting it. Wallas did not coin his term »The Great Society« just as a result of his analytical attempt to describe a technical society after the second industrial revolution, but also as a part of the following programme legitimised and derived from his analysis. His argument is clear, precisely because »The Great Society«¹ was intellectually a creation of engineers, specialists and specialised sciences dealing with forces of nature, therefore it could be brought under complete control, considering its remaining unsolved question of the human nature, only by those means that contributed most to its primary creation. He resorts to social psychology as the most promising scientific technique of organising the Great Society. Its promising applied knowledge could be made useful for steering those who had to be organised anew, »to forecast, and therefore to influence, the conduct of large numbers of human being organised in societies« (Wallas, 1967: p. 20). This typical turn in purpose toward serving the needs of an industrial society can be traced in many founding works of modern psychology of the time, where the founders voluntarily abandoned their purposes and put themselves as employees working under the mandate of society like in case of Watson (1930), Münsterberg (1913), Trotter (1919), Le Bon (1895), etc.

This excursion perhaps helps us to understand more thoroughly the content of criticism pointing at Dewey's reformist position that is in fact valid for all Progressive thinkers. Their primary preoccupation was not to restore community as a potential political entity known in the American revolutionary tradition. »The Great Society«, was the »fact of modern life« (Dewey, 1927: p. 127). Consequently, their primary concern was to meet the needs of a new age and equip an industrial society, in order to enhance its own processes, with a cohesive force that was the exact opposite of a political community, where people can gather as plural and different, expressing their uniqueness and exchange their perspectives on the common world. To be exact, the type of cohesion they had in mind far more resembled the primary group or the family community where relations are based on love, intimacy and cooperation, where acting and thinking as one is undoubtedly one of its basic constitutive characteristics. Perhaps Cooley and his work »The Process of Social Change« (1897) is the finest example how Progressive thinkers imagined human relations or, in other

1 This term with its implications was later reiterated as referential by both Dewey and Lipmann in their central discussions.

words, which form of organised coexistence and consequently way of life they assumed as principal that should embrace all others.

Only as the processes that prevail in the primary group become generalised to the social processes of the national whole could a nation be truly humane and democratic. The notion of communication is one part of the extension of the private realm to the public realm that is a hallmark of modern society and politics, and is a key part of an intellectual program to redesign public life on the model and rules of intimacy (Peters, 1986: p. 87)

His term »cooperative whole« (Cooley, 2004: p. 23) is describing this new form of organised coexistence, basically referring to a multitude of people primarily organised as an (industrial) work force, that can act simultaneously as a coordinated physical strength and »behave as they were one« (Arendt, 1996: p. 124). Arendt's (1996) concept of society² as a specific and historical form of human organisation, helps to explain the complete neglect and incapacity to recognize the private and the public as two opposing spheres of human existence. The historical loss of this distinction lies in the foundation of the social realm in modernity, precisely when the activities, organisational forms and relations typical for the *oikos* began to gain public character and established themselves in the public realm. The fundamental principles of social organisation are thus derived from activities subjected to necessities posed by the biological aspect of life itself, principally that of production and consumption. The despotic reign by which necessity rules in the form of socio-economic interest now levels every member of society without exception in a new egalitarian condition, for »society always demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest. Before the modern disintegration of the family, this common interest and single opinion was represented by the household head who ruled in accordance with it and prevented possible disunity among the family members« (ibid.: p. 42). If we consider once again the Progressive reformist tenet from the point discussed above, strictly speaking, they were not discussing an already existing society, but rather creating one on a numerically large scale using sophisticated technical means of communication intended to enlarge exactly those organisation-

2 Arendt formulated the concept mostly by reviving Aristotle's practical philosophy, which stands out specifically from the rest of the western tradition of political thought exactly because he treats in the most elaborate and explicit manner possible the difference between *polis* and *oikos* and at the same time, criticizing Plato's *Statesman*, warns against the old tendency and temptation, to equate these two strictly different kind of communities.

al principles and relations once typical for the household (*oikos*), like intimacy, harmony and cooperation, that, once transformed and amplified in the public sphere, compose the essence of the social.

Arendt's insightful analysis offers two conclusions. Firstly, the rise of the social and, on the other hand, social sciences coincide both historically and by their mutual interest. More precisely, society can reasonably count and rely on scientific findings and social laws that legitimise its doings and confirm its existence, while social sciences follow their vocation to develop a social engineering technique, which would help to organise and steer social processes in the same way as civil engineers before them succeeded in dominating nature relying on natural sciences. Secondly, since the despotic rule of the social interest manifests itself in imposing countless regulations, norms and rules of socially acceptable behaviour in order to integrate its members merely as functions of its own processes and consequently excluding »spontaneous action and outstanding achievement« (ibid.: p. 43), it appears that the phenomenon of conformism is in fact inherent and constitutive for social types of organised life.

From this point of view, the open distrust and hostility toward the traditional self-sufficient community way of life expressed by Progressive intellectuals every time they were trying to meet the needs of a new age becomes much clearer since they perceive it as an actual obstacle in the establishment of society as one organisational whole. This historical development resulted in the fact that »the realm of the social has finally, after several centuries of development, reach the point where it embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength« (ibid.). Considering Arendt's analysis that the rising of the social is accompanied with intrinsic measures of conformism in thought and behaviour, a different reading and understanding of the Progressive discourse becomes possible, beginning with the insight into the type of cohesive bond that on the one hand, was promising a revival of democracy and community, while on the other, its assumptions reveal the exact opposite.

The element that would be constitutive for Dewey's »Great Community« is not a plurality of thought, but the invented ideas, values and practices, which should be possessed by all, as they were commodities. What they must have in common possession is »like-mindedness as the sociologists say« (Dewey in Peters, 1986: p. 78). Cooley's articulation goes into the same direction as communication is »capable of fusing men together in a fluid whole« (Cooley in Peters, 1986: p. 56), where a propagation of movements, thought and action take place, entire populations can now »be included in one lively mental whole« (Cooley in Peters, 1986:

p. 65). The emerging capacities of fusing people together, although only as mere recipients, were not problematized as such, as long as the »one mental whole« would be organised according to principles of intimacy and compassion. The fact that communication can eliminate all distances and enhance the possibilities that vast populations could be »put in one room« and reached with one single voice, was recognised as an actual threat, especially considering the spread of revolutionary turmoil and subversive ideas, but at the same time offered an opportunity to address and exploit the new conditions in the right way, to ensure a stable and efficient organisational order on a large scale. Considering that the »search for order«³ was the final preoccupation in the Progressive era, it becomes evident why legitimisations⁴ of manipulation techniques, which followed as methods of ensuring social order in the 1920s, could be done publicly in such an explicit way and meet no serious critical resistance. On the contrary, they were greeted with great expectations. These foundations laid by Progressive social theory determined also the eventual meaning of mass communication, the dominant concept in the field of communication research from the 30s and 40s onward, namely, as a »process by which large populations come to think or feel the same thing at the same time. In other words, mass communication is a process by which a common consciousness is secured in a numerically large social order« (Peters, 1986: p. 48).

Unity as a Matter of Efficiency in a Society of Labourers and Consumers

Lippmann (1960) in his apologetic work »Public Opinion«, while legitimizing new instruments of manufacturing consent or one general will, reminds us once again of the decisively important context in which intentions toward perfecting the »socialisation of man« were not just a brief chapter in new engineering ambitions of social sciences, but became a central issue in the so-called building process of a modern nation, which demanded a redefinition in the meaning of politics, citizenship and government. The emerging theorems like that of »manufacturing of consent« or »crystallizing public opinion«, which pursue an organised uniformity of will and behaviour, suggest how consent and opinion became disregarded as something that comes out as a result from people's political activity and instead becomes perceived as something that can be produced and engineered. It is almost impossible to imagine a greater rupture in po-

3 See Wiebe (1967)

4 See Walter Lippmann »Public Opinion« (1922), Harold D. Lasswell »Propaganda Technique in World War I« (1927), Edward L. Bernays »Propaganda« (1928).

litical theory and practice. Moreover, it is quite revealing that all technocratic ideas of this type entering the political realm were self-decorated exploiting the word »democracy«: »The conscious and intelligent manipulation of organized habits and opinion of the masses is an important element in democratic society« (Bernays, 1928: p. 9). When activities and interests, characteristic of the private sphere, were established as a matter of public concern, traditional delimitations between realms of different human activities broke down. Once the specific human activities of work and production ceased to be restrained in the private sphere and started to determine the general relations between people, it became possible that the whole human organisation can be dealt with and subdued to a continuous technical perfecting of its own process's efficiency. On the other, the centre of gravity in interpersonal relations profoundly shifted toward associations where people gathered solely with the purpose to satisfy the necessities of life. Gigantic collectives of labourers and jobholders became the type of association that occupied the public realm and transformed it by unleashing an unprecedented multiplication of productive forces into a boundless realm of sustaining life. »The sameness prevailing in a society resting on labour and consumption and expressed in its conformity is intimately connected with the somatic experience of labouring together, where the biological rhythm of labour unites the group of labourers to the point that each may feel that he is no longer an individual but actually one with all others« (Arendt, 1996: p. 227).

The rationale Lippmann (1960) is following in the background of his legitimisation of psychological techniques for mass manipulation⁵ is in fact the same as that advocated by Progressive social scientists in the case of social integration. For them the ever-increasing complexity in diversity of people automatically demands a greater unity and simplicity of common ideas⁶. The issue was not just how to invent a new cohesive force in conditions where immigrants⁷ started to compose large proportions of the population, but how to make them efficient primarily as a workforce and

5 The founding legitimisations of modern propaganda, public relations and other techniques of control in the 1920s were already leaning on psychological and sociological theories and discussions on how to create a harmonic, integrated and effective society. In fact they consciously shared the exact same purpose.

6 According to Aristotle (2010), demanding or striving for too much unity in the city-state would result that it would resemble more a big household than a state of plural and different citizens.

7 The third immigration wave called also the "New immigration wave" brought to the United States more than 23 million immigrants from 1880 to 1923. In this period immigrants from mostly southern and eastern Europe with religious, cultural and ethnical background different from the Anglo-Saxon protestant majority started to arrive for the first time in large numbers.

later, following this blueprint, in their entire social existence, as consumers, as soldiers, as voters, etc. Unity as a standardization of thought and behaviour was seen as *condition sine qua non* for methodical efficiency as promoted by the widely acclaimed Taylorist system⁸. The dominant perspective that still today declares how immigrants have shaped the greatness of the United States is almost completely neglecting the previous and far more decisive part of this process. Namely, how an industrial⁹ society imposed demands on mostly preindustrial immigrant populations in order to shape them as functional to fulfil the quest for national prosperity, which at that time already lost its liberal individual character and was elevated to a unitary national aspiration and purpose.

Bernays (1928) offers perhaps one of the most explicit insights into what kind of social existence or way of life should constitute the new order. In his introduction to modern propaganda and PR as techniques of intelligent men »by which they can fight for productive ends and help to bring order out of chaos« (Bernays, 1928: p. 159), he reveals a specific consent imposed to all of its members. »We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we never heard of. This is the logical way in which our democratic society is organised. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society« (ibid., 9). To summarize, an accomplished society that can finally explain its existence and purpose in terms of an efficiently running machine, which tends to perfect its functioning as a gigantic household according to organisational principles of love and harmony, must reasonably give up physical coercion. Instead, the modern society demands from every of its belonging »parts« to cooperate actively in their own adjustment, to participate in being molded, seduced, manipulated, etc.¹⁰ Also Lasswell dispels any doubt about this: »If the mass will be free of chains of iron, it must accept its chains of silver« (Lasswell, 1927: p. 222).

8 The ambitions of Taylor's scientific management went far beyond organising the human element in various forms of industrial production processes. Considering his methods, which were intended for every conceivable human activity and social function, he was clearly developing a general social practice based on an applicable science: »methods developed for dealing with natural laws and materials, were also used to deal with everything else, not just with humans, but social relations in general« (Marković, 2006, 44).

9 See King (2000)

10 Straightforwardness and sometimes harsh language common for Progressive thinkers is not a matter of simple impudence, but reveals in its depth the way in which they disclosed the world around them. As engineers of the social realm they do not see individuals that can independently develop their capacities, but raw material, psychological structures that can be molded and formed for the »right cause«.

In a society of dependent jobholders, the promised reward of a new era of national prosperity made this kind of requested cooperation seem acceptable, since it could, along the need to satisfy the necessities of life, easily turn out as one's own interest. Considering that the American dream became popularised as a national motto only in the late 1920's and since its content is comprised mostly of promises of upward mobility and economic advancement, it seems more appropriate to interpret it together with the missing component discussed above. Conditions where a new national prosperity was entrusted to a scientific design, engineer's plan and methodical efficiency, which were not focused on the material side of production, but on adjusting the human element to correspond to its necessities, became determinative also for the belief called the American dream. Since this belief did never belong to those already fulfilled, but to the masses of poor and miserable, it was never just a plain promise and hope, but most of all a demand. If the American dream took the form of an »explicit allegiance« (Cullen, 2003: p. 6), then it was an allegiance to accept an already designed serving way of life.

At this point we have reached a central turn in our analysis. Referring to Arendt's (1996) findings that the modern phenomenon of conformism appears to be inherent to society exactly because its specific organisational principles exclude, by rule, the human possibility of individual spontaneous action and independent judgement and replace them with predictable behaviour usually handled by external causes, we can continue by adding one crucial remark. Since behaviour replaced action, the process of conforming never unfolds only one-way, as if it was solely imposed on those supposed to be conformed. On the contrary, modern conformism apparently unfolds as a cooperation, where those supposed to be conformed participate in it and hand over themselves voluntarily to those who are supposed to conform them. The remaining crucial issue that needs to be clarified in the following paragraphs is how this whole process has become obscured on both sides up to the point where all of its constitutive features like order, obedience, servitude, passiveness have lost their explicit character and have become unrecognizable. This fatal opacity, when coercing and to be coerced are embedded in someone's way of life, enables conformism to reach an unprecedented level of totality and perfection.

While the improvement of living conditions by means of labour and production in the liberal tradition was still confined in the domain of every individual, in the Progressive era it became elevated to a national purpose, as a common endeavour defining the whole nation, which appeared to them as a gigantic collective. Consequently, Taylor's (1947) ground-breaking scientific management, which tries to end once and for

all the antagonism of interests in order to bring a harmonious cooperative collectivism into existence, is not addressing this or that industrial plant, but calling for a national efficiency, which means »the development of each man to his state of maximum efficiency« (Taylor, 1947: p. 9). Although Taylor offered a systemic solution to the question of national prosperity through maximizing the national efficiency in production and by application in all other social activities¹¹ and human relation in general, a paradigm that was fully embraced as a sovereign value soon after the America's entry in World war I, there was still an unsolved void left on the other side of the same process, on the side of consumption. At this point, as Ellul (1973) shows in his analysis, uniformity was recognized as an economic potential: »Mass production requires mass consumption, but there cannot be mass consumption without widespread identical views as to what the necessities of life are« (Ellul, 1973: p. 68). The demand to enhance a national efficiency in consumption coincide with the emerging field of scientific techniques like modern propaganda, advertising, PR etc., which took over this task. However, the need of organising and accelerating consumerism was not confined solely to commodities, but was extended to results of intellectual or educational activity like ideas, practices and finally to ways of life, which compose the true decisive dimension of the consumerist society, since disseminating a functional way of life that would correspond to society's needs became more fundamental than selling any kind of commodity. At the same time, consumption ceased to be a mere necessity of life. Many started to see consumption as a means of richer life in the broadest meaning. Thus the question was not only »how to consume, but how to desire to consume the "right" things, how to make consumption genuinely satisfying. Short-term gratification could be derived from the accumulation of material goods, but long-term happiness required the satisfaction of man's deeper longings – a sense of individual worth and dignity and, perhaps above all, a sense of spiritual harmony« (Qualter, 1973: p. 160).

Conformism Dissolves into Selling and Buying

If even the realm of highest human capacities can become a matter of consumption, as something that might belong to a person by purchasing it, then we are facing a new radical form of passivity. Results of human spiritual or cognitive capacities cease to reside and arise in someone's individual or communal activity. Per example an idea, opinion, practice or worldview can be equally produced and sold by specialists as if they were

11 See Taylor (1947) *The Principles of Scientific Management*: p. 5-8.

commodities and those who purchase them do not act differently than when they are looking around for the most promising and satisfying provider. The radicalness of this new kind of passivity lies in the fact that when the purchaser starts to rely entirely on the supplier, in order to be supplied with something that once resided in his most human capacities, he ceases to be genuinely active in any regard. Instead, his behaviour is a mere reaction to external causes and can easily become conditioned by a variety of stimulus. After some time, his passiveness makes him also incapable of any spontaneous activity and in the end he cannot recognize anymore the need to be. The consumerist society appears to be the latest stage in the development of the social realm, since the public sphere where people could actualise their political mode of being, appear in front of others and distinguish themselves with outstanding achievements, disappeared completely, while the only notion of “public space” that society was able to recognize and preserve was that of an exchange market.

The activities of manufacturing and consuming, selling and buying, traditionally valid for exchanging of goods and commodities, also started to determine the sphere where people could primarily exercise their capacity of speaking and to exchange, judge and form their own opinions in dialog and discussion with others. Bernays (1928) already demonstrates that there is absolutely no difference between a political idea and a commodity, both are products that can be arranged and sold while everything that is left to the *demos* is a customer's choice. But only in a mediated society, once amplified with patterns of mediated experience, when experience of the world became something made by someone else, produced, accustomed and delivered to every household, this kind of bargain and trade with ideas unfolds mostly one-way, impersonal, at distance, on the terrain of a dispersed and atomised mass audience. The mass-man of today is produced differently than in totalitarian strategies of manifest mass movements, he or she is self-produced, while consuming mass products at home, in solitude, as Anders (2014) showed in his insightful analysis. Conformism lost its decisive characteristics precisely because it unfolds as regular consumption, as a provision, as a satisfaction of everyday needs, as a leisure time amusement. And most important, it unfolds in our privacy, where we are most vulnerable.

Product suppliers, especially in the case of phantasm-products promoted by media, do not recognize that through their supply they make us deprived and incapable of experience, depriving us of freedom to formulate judgments, that they shape and dominate us. Rather, they think they're supplying us and that is all. And we consumers too are blind be-

cause we do not recognize that our suppliers make us deprived and incapable of experiencing. Rather, too, we just think that we are only being supplied /.../ each one always belongs at the same time to both groups, since within the conformist society there is nobody who in one way or another is not conformed somehow (Anders, 2012: p. 180, 185).

Let's consider once again what kind of relation is experienced and what happens with the capacity of human thought, judgement and action once it becomes merchandised. Per example what does it mean to sell someone the idea of going into war, and that someone should buy and own it. If we take into account as referential a comparison with business, trade exchange, commodity market etc., then selling and buying usually comprise a certain item that has already been made and finished by someone else and the customer receives and owns it exactly as such, as already finished in purpose and function by someone else. The item is also made in such a way and arranged in its appearance to appear more attractive to the customer, to meet his needs or expectations or at least give such an impression. The customer's main activity is to choose among them. But whatever choice he makes, when it is bought and becomes someone's possession it starts to determine in one way or another the owner's conduct. The product starts to produce the owner himself. If an idea of going into war is sold as something already finished/decided and becomes adopted by those who bought it as their own, it is not because an individual was persuaded by arguments in a discussion, but because he sold his capacities to think and formulate his own judgements, renouncing in advance the steps necessary for partaking or making any kind of decision. When ideas like these are sold, bought and possessed on a massive scale, we face a new phenomenon of a »buying public«, which excludes itself completely with the conditions *to be* participating or *to be* actively present in shaping and judging common affairs.

These expressions resembling a merchandising process are not just a way of figurative speaking. Park's (1922) study of the immigrant press and its control already demonstrates that advertising became one of the most promising methods for the socialisation of men: »National advertising is the great Americanizer. /.../ American ideal, law, order, and prosperity, have not yet been sold to all of our immigrants. American products and standards of living have not yet been bought by the foreign born in America. How can they buy them when they know nothing about them« (Park, 1922: p. 450). Similarly, Creel (1920) summed up the activities of his wartime Committee on Public Information that persuaded the American public to support the decision for war and to actively engage in

the war effort as a »plain publicity, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world's greatest adventure in advertising« (Creel, 1920: p. 4). When Bernays (1952) defines Public Relations as a method of adjusting dependants to the environment on which they depend, and assists his corporate clients in selling their interest as public, he starts with the question: »How can American business successfully sell its definition of the American way of life to the American people« (Bernays, 1952: p. 337). Quite expectedly that this kind of advertising could never be explicit as advertising, but is carried out disguised in many forms and perhaps perfected itself in the cultural industry.

Conclusion

What kind of life should become the American way of life, considering its nature of a collective imagination that can be intentionally produced in massive quantities rather than belong to individual spontaneity? An arranged one that is sold as a perfected worldview in which the path to someone's interests, fulfilment and self-realization are presented (promised) in such a way to coincide with perfect harmony with the commands and demands of a productive and consumerist society. Finally, this overlapping of interests ceases to be only imaginary in the exact moment when the imposed regulations of conduct are bought and turned into someone's way of life, when the social interest, as Arendt (1996) explains it, starts to appear as the only particular and common affair left. Regardless of whether or not the American dream is materialised or remains simply a dream that sustains hope, it unfolds at a certain cost, that of conforming someone's own existence into a household kind of serving life dedicated to boundless accumulation and acquisition. Modern forms of conforming and self-conforming do not take place due to any political ideology, but represent a perfected form of servitude to the impersonal despotical reign of the social interest that unfolds in front of us as if it was unquestionable, as if its processes were unstoppable.

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