

Jacques Ellul (1912-1994)



Background:

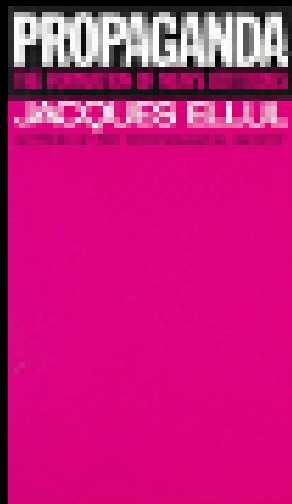
Bordeaux France (Serbian born)

Advanced Degrees in:

1. Law,
2. Philosophy and
3. Theology

Became part of the French underground Resistance Movement during WWII

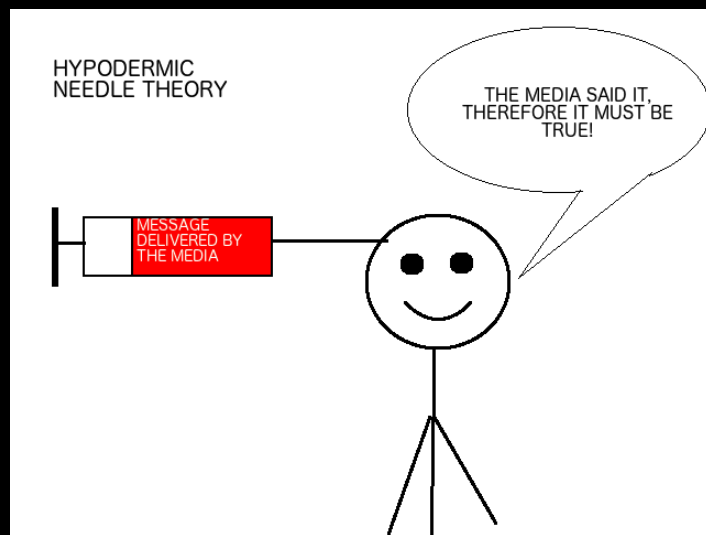
Books: (wrote 43 books during his lifetime)



Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes
The Technological Society (1954)
Political Illusion

Propaganda! Ellul's Reactions to or AGAINST:

- **NAZI WAR PROPAGANDA:** In Germany AND in France. Extremely effective
- **OVERLY Simplistic** Definitions of Propaganda (WWI and WWII) U.S., BRITAIN, FRANCE...
 - The notion that propaganda was always evil and only used by authoritarian leaders of other nations/cultures.
 - (MAGIC BULLET and HYPODERMIC NEEDLE Theories of media)



Ellul's Initial FOCUS, Distinctions, and Definitions of Propaganda:

- **Ellul's Focus:**
 - An **in-depth** examination of **HOW** and **WHY** propaganda works (Sociologically) across **ALL** cultures and periods in history.
 - 20th Century Media has Transformed Propaganda (Quantity, Orchestration, and Impact)
- **Persuasion vs. Propaganda Distinction**
 - **Persuasion** = Small size, Interpersonal, Relatively Benign
 - **Propaganda** = Large scale, Uses Mass Media, Transforms how people think and act, Sender controlled, Collective mass thinking
- DEFINITION: "Propaganda is a **set of orchestrated methods** employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the **active** or **passive participation** a **mass of individuals** who are **psychologically unified** ."

Propaganda and the Sociology of Mass Society

- Propaganda = A sociological phenomenon devised to **motivate, MOVE, AND CONTROL** mass populations.
- Propaganda is directly related to TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM. It makes people **CONFORM** to the dictates of technology and technocratic life.
 - Technological Determinism =
 - The notion that ALL HUMAN progress is determined by technological development.
 - More simply, that you are so reliant upon technology that you can't (or won't) escape it's dictates, rules, obligations.

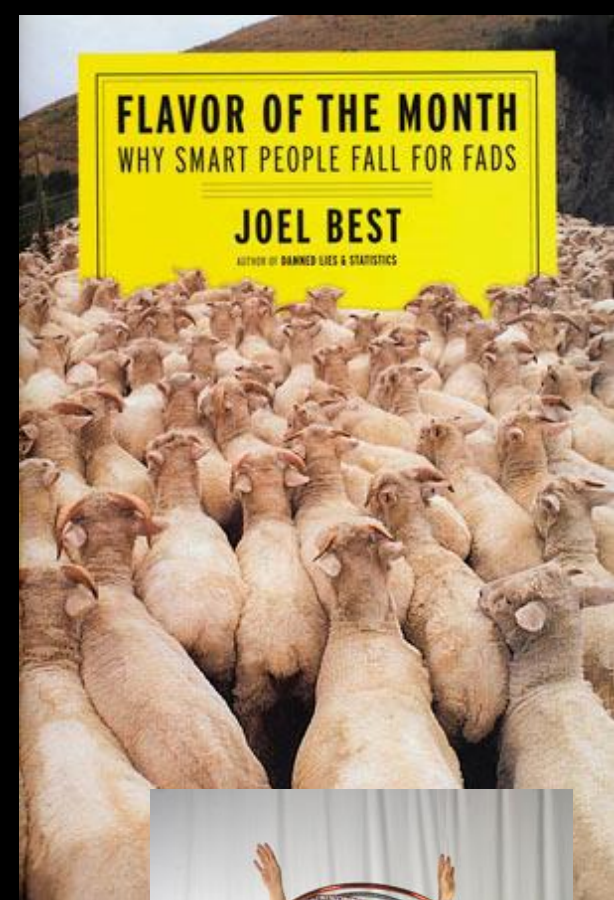
The orchestration of press, radio and television to create a continuous, lasting and total environment renders the influence of propaganda virtually unnoticed precisely because it creates a constant environment.

Modern technology has become a total phenomenon for civilization, the defining force of a new social order in which efficiency is no longer an option but a necessity imposed on all human activity.

Joel Best

Flavor of the Month: Why Smart People Fall for Fads

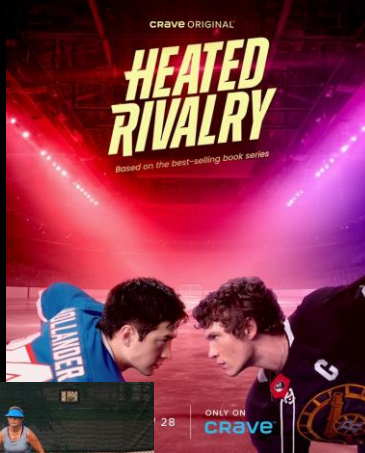
- Baseline Questions:
 - FADS-FASHIONS-TRENDS-CULT FOLLOWINGS: **WHAT ARE THEY REALLY?**
 - How are they **formed** and/or **initiated** and then **sustained** (if they are)?
 - How do things become **COOL/Popular/CULT LEVEL STATUS?**
 - How **DO THEY FUNCTION** (both PREDICTABLY and systematically)?
 - **Who is in "CONTROL"?** Corporations? Media? You?
 - What are the actual roles of **CONSUMERS/AUDIENCES?**
 - Role of the People's own **desires vs.** Media, technology, corporate cycles of GLOBAL MASS production?
 - Connection to childhood, identity, and family life?
 - Connection to History? NOSTALGIA?
 - **Connections to global FLOWS?**
 - **ARE WE BOUND** by a **Conditioned** Cultural Consumer Life?

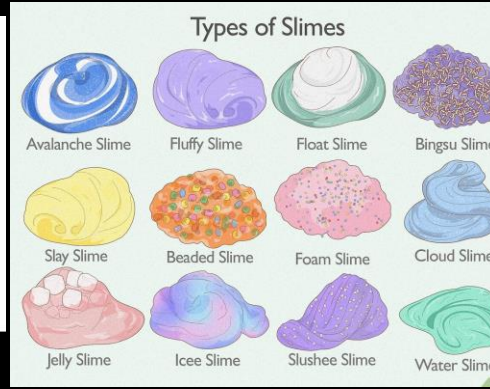
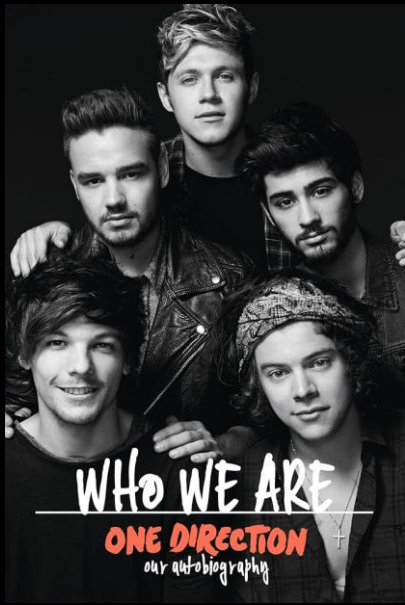


Misconceptions about Fads

- ✓ Too easily dismissed as “trivial” or “non-essential” OR just passing...
- ✓ Fads have a strong association with **entertainment**/fashion cultures, BUT THERE'S MORE!
- ✓ “INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES”
- ✓ Fads have a strong association with **TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS**, BUT THERE'S MORE!
- ✓ Strong associations with **Education** and **Schooling**
- ✓ Strong association with youth and “**youth cultures**” or a specifically susceptible age/stage/demographic
- ✓ Newness → Novelty → *vive la différence*
 - ✓ Rapid rise in popularity (**VIRAL NATURE**)
 - ✓ Equally rapid fall in popularity







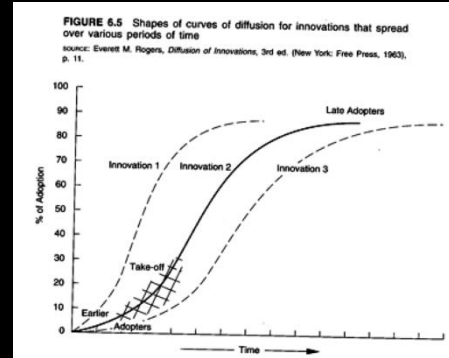
Fads/ Fashion vs. Innovation?

Fashions

- POPULAR in the SHORT TERM
- Unpredictable but cyclical
- Often recycled/Rebranded
- Trickle Up/Down/Sideways
- Not as much “lasting” status
- “Regularized Transience”
- “High Society” or High Culture

• Innovations

- Tend to be enduring
- Become a more permanent “fixture” in a culture
- New invention or service
- S-curve diffusion
- Built upon/improved



THE COCOON OF ENCULTURATION

PHASES: From Age 0-21ish: The “Real” BRAINWASHING

AGE(s) 0-5 Nuclear/Immediate Family

1. Toys
2. “Learning games”
3. Repeat TV, films, and Internet screenings
4. Family Media Rituals – holidays + Daily rituals/story time
5. Social media influences on parents and parenting

AGE(s) 5-11

1. SCHOOL, community, organizational “obligations”
2. Friends
3. LITERACY! Books, libraries, ...language
4. Video Games and gaming “networks”
5. PHONES? (“Yes, for your safety ...dear.”)
6. ORGANIZED SPORTS and ACTIVITIES (summer camps+)
7. Intensified REPETITIVE TV, films, and Internet screenings
8. MEDIA + SOCIAL MEDIA youth/TWEEN focused

AGE(s) 12-22

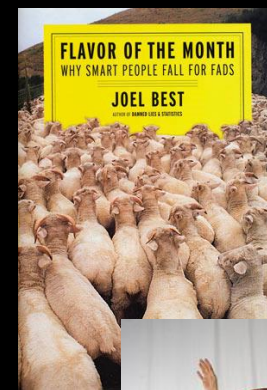
TEEN/ADOLESCENCE → DRAMA

1. PHONES UBERALLES!
2. FRIENDS (in-person)
3. ONLINE/DIGITAL “FRIENDS”
4. Whatever achieves STATUS, COOLness, FASHIONABLE
5. MARKETERS/Advertisers + GLOBAL ALGORITHMS
6. BRANDS + CELEBRITY
7. TRENDING MEDIA-Music, Gaming, “dating”
8. Young “adult” focused MEDIA + SOCIAL MEDIA
9. TABOO or “forbidden”
10. ORGANIZED SPORTS and ACTIVITIES – HANGOUTS
11. JOBS?
12. INTOXICANTS

JOEL BEST'S "TAKE HOME" ARGS

Flavor of the Month: Why Smart People Fall for Fads

- Fads, Fashions are a central part of our social, cultural and consumption lives as humans.
 - Yes, they are **Episodic** – RECYCLED FASCINATIONS and short-lived-seasonal fandoms.
 - Fads and Fashions are a **CENTRAL** form of **CULTURAL CONDITIONING!**
- In terms of **MEDIA** and **Global CORP CONSUMPTION**, **FADS** are extremely **SYSTEMATIC** and **HIGHLY** calculated in their occurrence **AND** central to our Culture Industries.
 - **In 2025 worldwide toy market sales topped \$117 billion (U.S.)**
 - **\$500-1,000 avg amount spent on toys per child per year.**
- They **DEFINE YOUTH/CHILDHOOD, IDENTITY, EDUCATIONS** and **FAMILY!**
 - **NARRATIVE FRAMING** (our memories and our) imagination
- **THEY** help **FORM** our **CULTURAL LIVES** with or without our **active participation**. Our lives are consciously and unconsciously conditioned by these fads



IMPLICATIONS for GLOBAL Media?

- 1. Fads – Fashions – Innovations – Technology Diffusion are all at the heart of SCREEN and visual media production**
 - 1. Visual media are needed to “sell” any new fad, fashion, innovation**
 - 2. Visual media are also themselves fads, fashions**
- 2. Popular Culture (i.e., all media) CONSUMES the “new,” the “fringe,” and the “counter-culture.” THEN, the media repackages the ideas/sentiments from those areas and sends them back to us for our mass consumption.**
- 3. Human Costs**
 - 1. Independence?**
 - 2. Individuality?**
 - 3. An “image” life**
- 4. Ethical/Moral/Intellectual Considerations:**
 - 1. Authenticity**
 - 2. Truth**
 - 3. Proof**



