The Art of Suggestion
Leading Audiences into Determined Trains of Thought

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Suggestion

- "**Suggestion** is the psychological process by which one person guides the thoughts, feelings, or behavior of another person."

  - Studies show a strong relationship between **suggestion, cognition,** and subsequent **behavior**

    - You see what you expect to see…
      or what you are expected to see..?!

  - Tightly coupled to known expectations (or even prejudice) of the audience

Suggestion

- Investigated a lot by **psychology**, often in connection to hypnosis

  - *"What distinguishes a suggestion from other kinds of psychical influence, such as a command or the giving of a piece of information or instruction, is that in the case of a suggestion an idea is aroused in another person's brain which is not examined in regard to its origin but is accepted just as though it had arisen spontaneously in that brain."*
(Sigmund Freud)
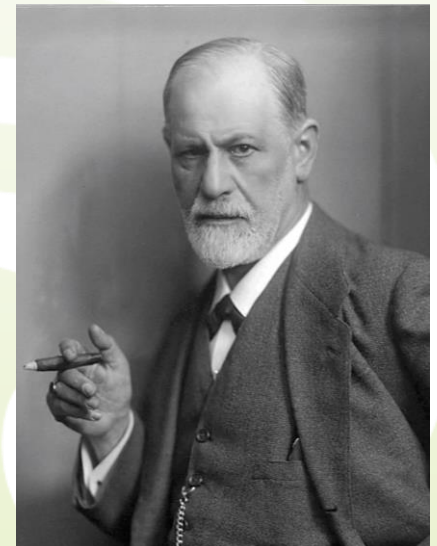
Example: The Placebo Effect

- Administering substances or medical treatments with **no therapeutic value** can actually help
  - Studies show that **placebos** can affect how patients perceive their condition and encourage the body's chemical processes for relieving symptoms
  - The patients' **belief** accounts for positive (or negative) responses…

Example: Self-fulfilling Prophecies

- A person predicting or expecting something, often **makes this prediction come true**
  - Simply because the person believes it will and the person's resulting behavior is actively or even unconsciously aligned to fulfill this belief (**positive feedback loops**)
  - *If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.* (William Thomas & Dorothy Swaine Thomas, 1928)

Example: Advertising I

- Advertising takes great care to **set the stage** for selling products or servies
  - See how happy people are using this product and how much fun it is…
  - See images of unspoiled nature to stress the desirability of some product…

  - **Use positive connotations!**

Example: Advertising II

- Also possible: advertising with high **irritation factors** or shock-advertising
  - The United Colors of Benetton campaigns
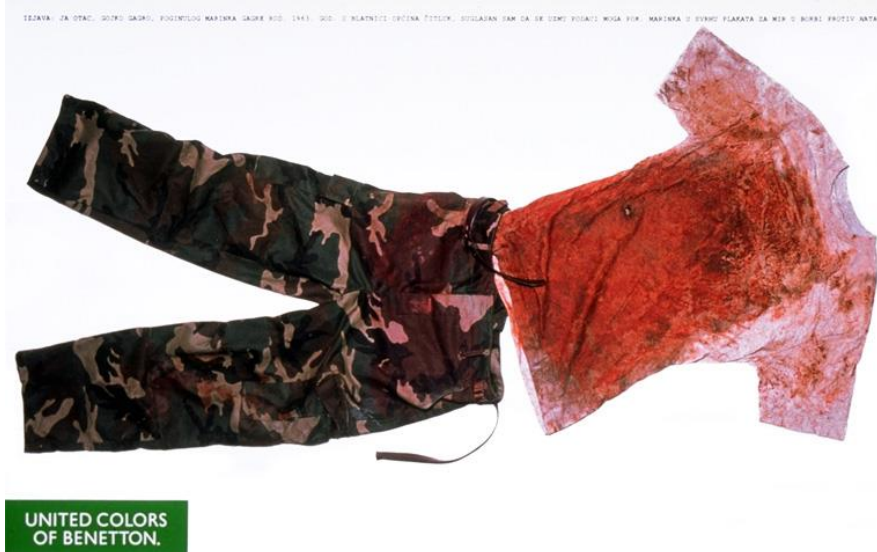
Reducing Complexity

- Suggestion can also be used to **reduce complexity** for complex topics
  - Create a basic atmosphere of **credibility** and **trust** by well-designed metaphors and interactions with the audience
  - Make arguments more **plausible** by suggestive examples
  - **Work with** or **fight against** expectations of the audience

Interaction: Questions

- Basic classification: **open vs. closed** questions
  - **Open questions** usually start with an interrogative, such as who, what, where, why, how,… and need a detailed answer
  - **Closed questions** usually start with a verb and can usually be answered with a simple yes or no
  - In any case, make it **clear that it is a question!**

Interaction: Open Questions

- **Open questions** are generally perceived as positive, because you care for the opinion of your audience

  – Establish a **partnership** (trust) with the audience

  – See what you have to **expect** from your audience during the talk

  – Excellent **opener**, but you need to maintain control (time, topic drift,…)

Interaction: Closed Questions

- **Closed Questions** can be used to structure and lead a discussion
  - **Quickly** get facts and opinions from the audience
  - Establish **positive feelings** because the discourse is structured and thus easier to follow
  - Yet at the same time there may be **negative feelings** because the discourse is actively limited
    - Negative feelings can to some degree be avoided by explicitly including the audience (Do we agree, that…?)

Interaction: Closed Questions

- In particular,…
  - **Alternative questions** offer the choice between several alternatives, but strongly restrict the discourse
    - Especially if only negative alternatives are offered…
  - **Suggestive questions** already contain their answer or contain a direct hint at common norms or values
    - Used to direct the audience into the obvious direction…
  - **Rhetoric questions** do not even expect an answer
    - **Harmonizing**, if everybody agrees that the answer is obvious
    - **Provoking**, if the audience cannot give a correct answer…

And what now..?!

- A little practical exercise:
  - How can we make other people feel?

  - Try with the seminar participants!
  - You have 10 Minutes to plan a little speech, we will keep track of the time…

Thanks!

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