

# EXPLOITED

The idea of freedom is not the same everywhere you go. Perhaps most commonly, the concept of freedom has been about peoples' struggle to live free from oppressive and exploitative powers. The West's dream of freedom is particular because it's about, not peoples, but individuals. It's about individual freedom. We want the freedom to pursue our own success and happiness and pleasure without interference or coercion. The highest value in the West's dream of freedom is the individual himself. Within certain boundaries, our ultimate purpose is to do what we like.

We could think about whether or not a civilisation rooted fundamentally in self interest would be a good thing, but for the time being we'll just ask if we've managed to make it happen at all. The exaltation of the self sounds like good news mostly for the self, but it's been popular with big businesses, retailers, advertisers and media machines too. Why? Because a people who are eager to please themselves make for a healthy market.

We are led to believe that we can cash in our discretionary income for happiness (in the form of clothes, housewares, holidays, expensive nights out, cds, dvds, cars, haircuts, magazines, various notions of security, and so on...). Meanwhile, big businesses are inclined to believe that they can cash in the people's self interest (their individual freedom) as profit. I'd say one of us is right.

So, our individual needs some kind of vision of success and happiness so that he/she can go about pursuing it, and where does that vision come from? Who defines what success looks like, or what happiness is? We are told that the definition comes from our own hearts and our own dreams, but does it? Are we not all saturated with the same handful of ideals? Do we not all follow the same religion and congregate around the same screens? Do we not spend our efforts, energies and money on all the same handful of dreams, sold to us over and over again on billboards, soaps, social network advertising space, popular music, cinema and other such 2-dimensional spectacles? We're not individuals anymore, not even a people, but a mass. A big, manageable and predictable mass. We not only buy what we're told to buy. We also think what we're told to think and believe what we're told to believe. Fear and desire is an economic goldmine and we have passively accepted the media's way of defining us by those fears and desires. You are the sum of what you do and do not want for yourself. Not in terms of your greater sense of purpose or direction (those notions have been all but stamped out), but in terms of momentary wants and worries.

Sexuality has been made the very core of our identity. Not our sublime relational capacity, but just plain old hornyness, momentary desire: our "love" affairs with a poster, a cinema screen, a magazine, or any voice-less body that walks down the street. The whole identity of womanhood has been coerced, warped and exploited by advertisers and generations of women grow up under the tyranny of a pathetically sexualised and objectified image of themselves. Desire is cultivated and insecurity nurtured everywhere we go. It didn't take long for us to begin passively conforming to the ideals presented to us. And for what? For profit. We are not individuals anymore, nor a people, we are a market.



The most sorry kind of slave is the one who thinks he's free, and the most disturbing kind of oppressor is the one that exploits without being noticed. We've been led to believe that our society is built around us, but it is we who have been manipulated and moulded into an ever hungry and dissatisfied market.

Our brave new world of individual freedom is the exploitation of the mass of individuals by big business, media and advertising. These, who exist for profit only, have unparalleled power over the desires, beliefs and ideals which shape us as a people - much greater than any elected rulers or politicians (although we are passively responsible for electing them by our obedient consumer behaviour).

It's not a conspiracy, or anything glamorous like that, it's just fair game. The individual became the centre of the universe. We became a nation of gods! And the greater gods exploit the lesser, and the lesser gods climb the ladder and exploit the lesser still. Every man for himself. Our exploitation is disturbing, but the rule which assumes that we would do the same is even more so. It's an agreement between us all. A social contract. Within the boundaries of the law the exploitation of others in the name of self is just the way things work. It's sort of a catastrophic intellectual joke, that our developed notions of individual freedom should lead us to the point of becoming an enslaved and exploited people in need of liberation.

