

# Please find your topic table

 Shelter

 Protection from harm

 Water

 Health & wellbeing

 Clothing

 Food

# Seminar 02

## Culture defining brands, brands defining culture

## Today's seminar

- 01 Welcome to survey season;
- 02 Your cultural identity;
- 03 Come as you are workshop;
- BREAK
- 04 What does culture have to do with branding;
- 05 Subcultures group workshop;
- 06 Next steps & pre-session tasks for next week.

## Quick recap from last week

01. Definition of challenges and opportunities.
02. Alignment of UNSDGs with both projects.
03. Brand strategy – what/how/why.
04. Enquiry manual and research journey started.
05. You're up to date with pre-tasks  /  /  / 

**Capture all of this activity for both projects in your sketchbooks and eventually process documents.**



# Culture defining brands, brands defining culture

## How do you signal who you are?

- From clothes you wear, to where you live, places you frequent, where/what you eat, who/if you marry, who/if you vote, etc.
- All these elements signal the **status, attitude and aspiration.**
- As humans, seeing the world a certain way, helps you navigate and make sense of the world.

Photo: [You Must Create](#)



## Cultural identity plays an important role in human behaviours and decisions.

- You behave, talk, dress and consume a set of products that align with your belief system, ideologies and lifestyle.
- The force behind humans' emotional drivers and associations, is **CULTURE** – pop culture, subcultures or counterculture.

**No decision is rational, it's all emotional regardless of how hard you try to rationalise.**

## We all have...



**A Spock**



**rational**

**A Kirk**

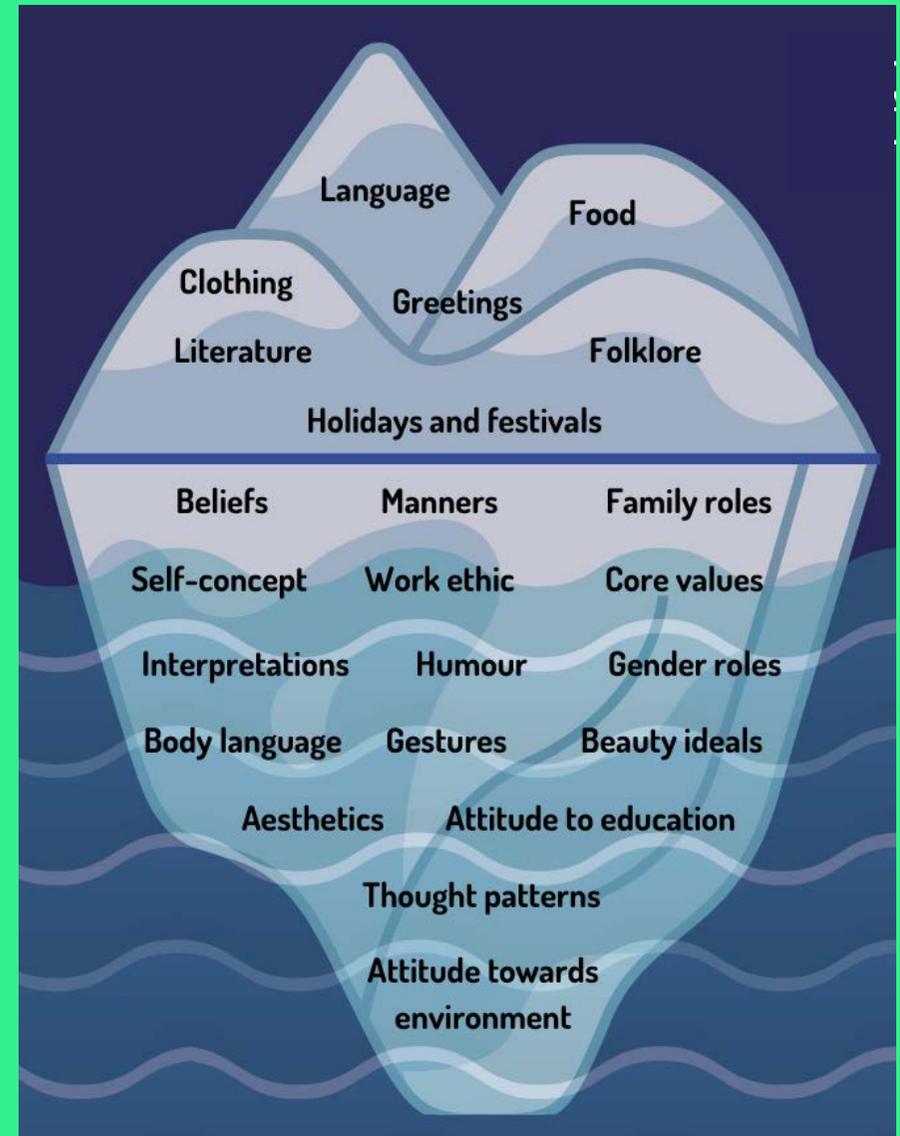


**emotional**

## Culture is very hard to define.

It's the invisible glue that binds "human tribes" together beyond borders and metrics.

Culture is a system of **values, ideologies, norms, language and symbols**, that defines who we are and what's expected from us.



## Dr. Marcus Collins divides culture into two sections

### Ascribed culture

What we're born into (name, family, childhood).



### Subscribed culture

What we chose for ourselves, in adulthood.



Source: [How can brands move beyond targeting generational cohorts and focus instead on sub-cultures?](#)

Photos: [Modern House](#), [Akira Oozawa](#)

## Subscribed culture

As adults we can define and craft our cultural system with carefully **curated values, ideologies, norms, language and symbols.**

These define who we are and what's expected from us. **All these elements signal the status, attitude and aspiration.**



**Ascribed**



**Subscribed  
(aspiration)**

## Culture in a 2.0 world

TikTok and Reddit play a huge role in connecting micro communities and successfully influenced current culture.

Subcultures are no longer a subset of mainstream culture – they increasingly are mainstream culture.

**What defines, unites or divides us isn't our demographics, it's culture.**

The screenshot shows a news article from Metro. The article title is "Pokémon painter who went viral may quit his day job – 'all because of Reddit'". The author is Kenneth Andersen, published on Nov 8, 2023, at 12:43pm. The article includes social media sharing icons for WhatsApp, X, Email, Facebook, and Reddit, and a Comment button. The main image shows a man in a red shirt and a white and red baseball cap holding a framed painting of a yellow Pokémon (Zygarde) in a Renaissance-style setting. Below the image, there is a caption: "Streamer and painter is living the dream painting Renaissance pokémon (Picture: van der Woude)". At the bottom, a summary states: "A Twitch streamer who paints pokémon as if they're from the Renaissance era tells GameCentral how his hobby could be life-changing."

# Workshop 1: Come as you are

We all surround ourselves with cultural markers. This is how we find alignment with other humans, ideologies and lifestyles.

## Workshop 1: Come as you are

- 01.** In pairs, swap your identity artefacts, **no discussion.**
- 02.** Based on the other person's artefact, use the prompts provided to **make a list of assumptions** educated guesses to best define the subscribed culture of your peer.

**NOTE:** Assumptions you make on somebody's culture could form stereotypes, try to keep an open mind and avoid stereotyping!

Assumptions

## Subscribed culture assumption prompts

- What's their style/vibe? Y2K, Dopamine dressing, City boy.
- What do they drink? Cold brew, kombucha, natural wines.
- What could their niche interests and hobbies be? Pottery, wild swim, breathwork, rug tufting.
- What Instagram/TikTok accounts or hashtags do they follow?
- What music/books/podcasts/etc. do they consume?
- What high brow\* and low brow\*\* culture do they consume?
- What is their guilty pleasure?
- What brands do they wear/buy?
- What brands do they aspire to, wear and buy?

\*High brow: interested in serious subjects of a very intellectual nature.

\*\* Low brow: not complicated or demanding much intelligence to be understood.

## Workshop 1: Come as you are

**03.** Regroup, fact check and course correct your peer's culture, writing these down in the reality column. Share with the rest of the group, debate and add to each worksheet.

Assumptions	Realities

Let's take  
a break.

# What does culture have to do with branding?

Brands are identifiable signifiers that evoke thoughts and feelings in people's minds.

We live in a data-driven analytical world, but culture is **qualitative**, not **quantitative**.

## How can brands move beyond targeting generational cohorts and focus on subcultures?

Age and basic demographics alone does not describe who people are, nor provide a full picture.

Brands need to start thinking about people according to **how they self-identify**, there needs to be a greater **understanding of the communities** they are a part of.

## Culture & branding

-  **HP computers** are more powerful but **MacBook** are more desirable.
-  **Bose** headphones are superior in quality but **Beats by Dre** projects a vibe.
-  **Crocks** are practical and affordable but **Birkenstocks** are more aspirational.

## Picture this

Heidi Hackemer, Executive Creator Director at Oatly, said that when Oatly started, it was a “**Birkenstock brand**”, only found at **Wholefoods**.

Oatly now defines itself as a “**Punk Brand**”. (See advert)

**What do you think that means?**  
**What are the symbols behind these brands?**



## Now picture this

You're sitting in London Fields, you see someone having a picnic, wearing pair of Birkenstock mules, a North Face jacket and some mom jeans.

They're sipping some Chin Chin wine, snacking on Torres crisps and Perello olives, whilst cuddling their anxious whippet dog.

Their mate wears Salomons XT6s, a pair of Dickies carpenter pants, and a fisherman's beanie.



## Culture & branding

**If culture influences behaviours, then you need to harness culture to inspire your audience's and capture their imagination.**

If you experience brands that align with you, they begin to define you, your behaviour, and aspirations – and social pressures! **Brands are signifiers of what you want and aspire to in life.**

## How can you predict culture?

Capturing the Zeitgeist\* is difficult to do, especially when culture evolves so quickly.

- ⇒ The only way to do this is through **discourse** and **ethnographic** means.
- ⇒ Culture requires **radical curiosity and intimacy** to predict where it's going.

\*Zeitgeist: the general intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of an era.

## When aligning your brand with culture, think about...

- How do we intend the brand to be perceived?
- How is the brand perceived, especially with the backdrop of product category?
- How can I gather a cult following without being preachy?

**Don't go wide, go niche! It's not about reach, it's about staying relevant.**

Defining your audience as “foodie” is too unspecific.  
Trying instead:

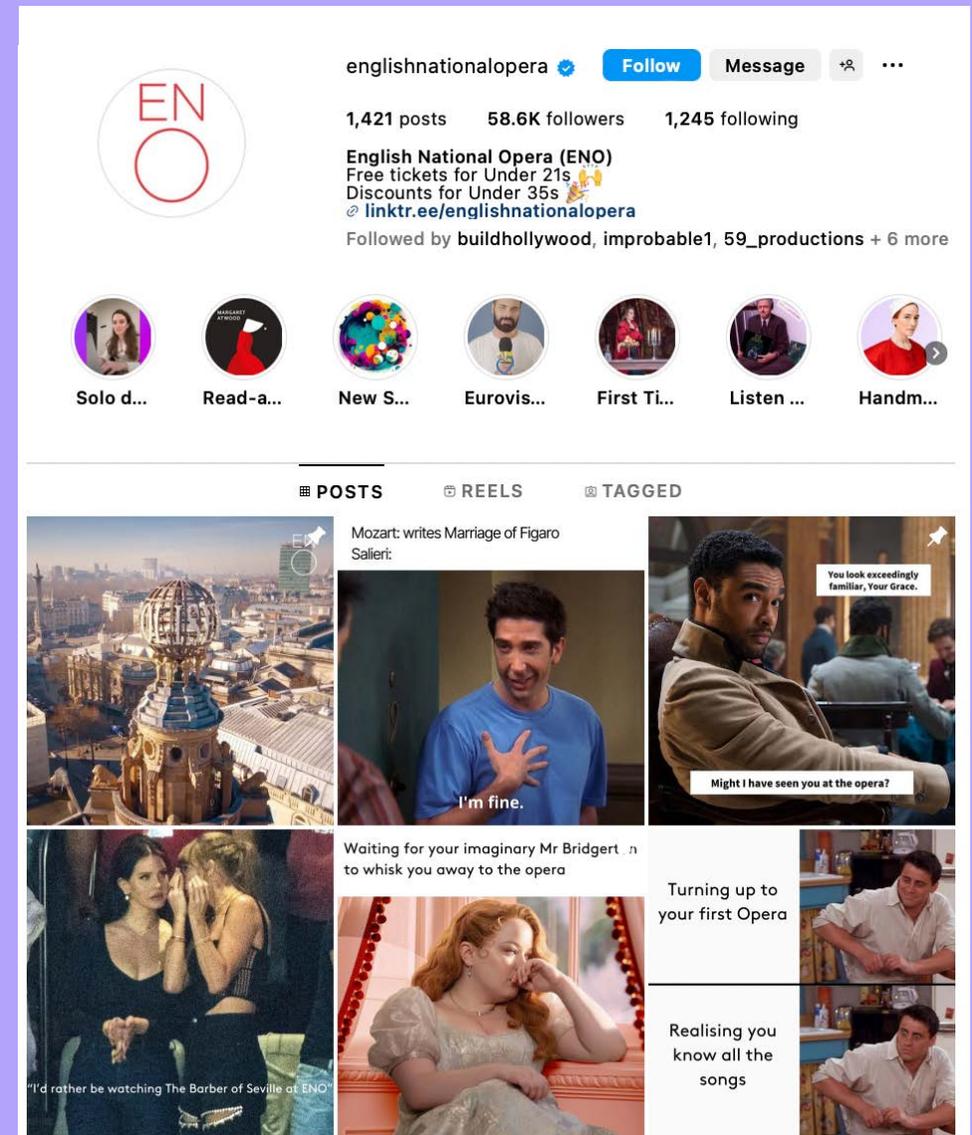
Fermenting (kimchi), gut flora eating, extreme realism bakers, sourdoughers, supper clubbers...

**And always be aware of societal context: Read the news – eg, shortages worldwide due to conflicts and crises.**

# English National Opera (ENO)

If culture influences behaviours, then you need to harness culture to inspire your audience's buying/engaging habits.

Source: @EnglishNationalOpera



## Defining subcultures group workshop

- 01.** We are going to allocate you into two groups within your table topic.
- 02.** You are going to define a subculture for a topic brand – this will be allocated to you.
- 03.** Start by individually researching the potential subculture of your brand, using the following resources: Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, Google news, LS:N Global and WGSN (trend forecasting platforms).
- 04.** Discuss your findings in your group.

## Defining subcultures group workshop

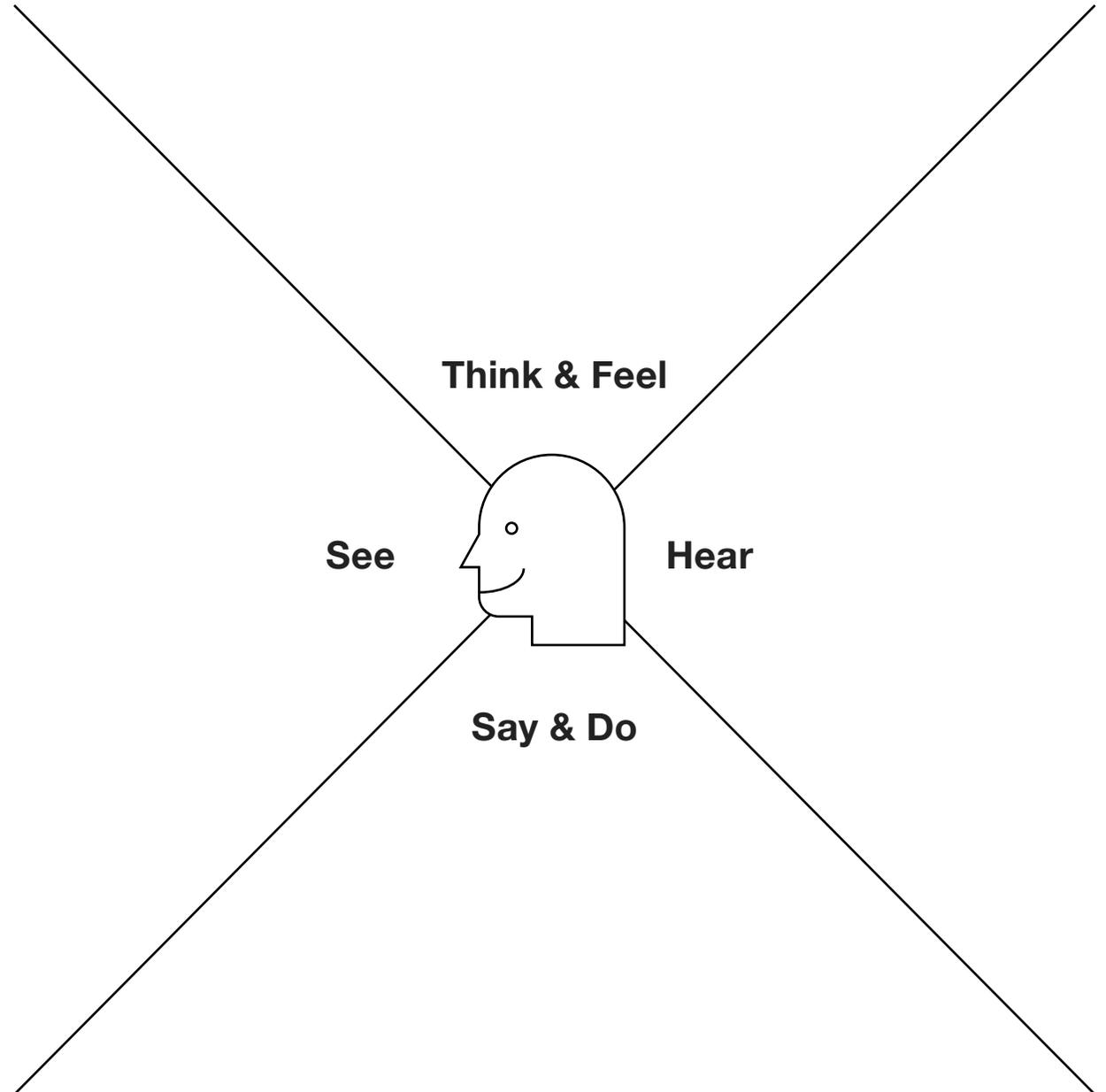
- 06.** Based on the defined subculture you've started developing, now refine this further using the empathy culture map provided.
- 07.** Regroup in your topic team, compare and contrast both empathy culture maps.

**Cultural prompt examples**

- Style/vibe
- Drink, food preferences
- Niche interests and hobbies
- Instagram/TikTok accounts/hashtags
- Music/books/podcasts/etc.
- High brow and low brow
- Guilty pleasure
- Brands they wear/buy
- Aspirational brands

**Weekend plans**

- How do they start the day?
- Are they brunch or night tapas?
- Spotify or vinyls?
- TFL or Tesla?
- Opera, festival, gig?
- Murder mystery or house party?
- Dog walkers or shopping cardio?
- Do they shop at Tesco or Wholefoods?
- Fish and chips or sushi?
- Community allotment or baby yoga?



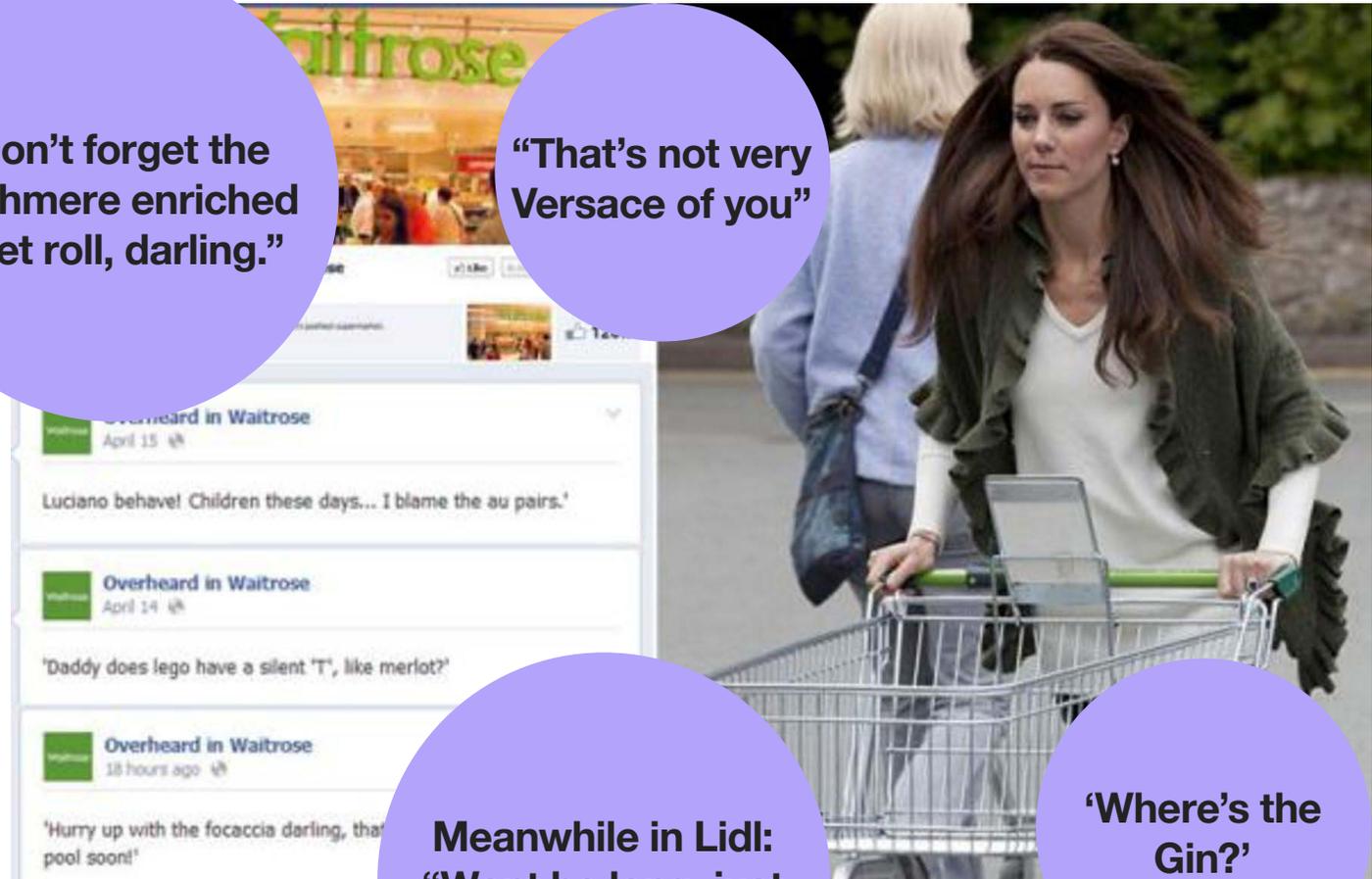
## Overheard in Waitrose

Only In Waitrose is a parody Twitter account where they report on things overheard in Waitrose – a premium British supermarket.

This account is a good example to understand the tone of voice for your empathy map.

“Don’t forget the Cashmere enriched toilet roll, darling.”

“That’s not very Versace of you”



Meanwhile in Lidl:  
“Wont be long, just in Waitrose.”

‘Where’s the Gin?’

## Next steps

- Today's brand culture session, helped you dig deeper beyond basic demographics and tap into the cultural context of your audience.
- Create a cultural empathy map for each of your projects, this will help you engage with your audience more creatively.

## Pre-session tasks for next week

-  Bring two brand competitor artefacts for one of your projects – one mass-market, one cult or disruptor.
-  Watch/listen to No Logo documentary by Naomi Klein
-  Read about No Logo at 20
-  What can we learn from Competition?
-  Stop Trying to Beat the Competition

**Next week's seminar**

# Brand rivals and competitors