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How do we use an assemblage of objects to convey a constructed sense of self?

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This essay is my own unaided work and its length is 5953 words.

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Abstract

This essay focuses on how individuals curate a sense of self with objects through theoretical exploration into the self applied to a case study. Beginning by applying a historical and contextual understanding of mass production and consumerism, we examine the role of consumer psychology within societies purchasing choices post-Industrial revolution. Drawing upon theories such as conspicuous consumption, it addresses manipulation of individuals to purchase products as identity markers and validation for taste insecurity. This concludes that societies infatuation with material possessions is fundamentally a social orchestration, in which capitalist consumer culture requires identity anxiety in order to form desire-led purchasing.

In order to specifically focus on the construction of the self, we examine the need to maintain a sense of individuality and therefore use anthropologists and psychological analysis to understand how material possessions reflect our identity. Drawing upon theories for individual's need to portray an idealised self, the focus is on how the interpretation of semiotics and symbols reflect an individual's perception of themselves which therefore informs the viewer's interpretation.

By applying these theories to the conscious curation of semiotics that artist Grayson Perry uses to portray a constructed self, the final chapter is able to question subconscious against unconscious identity construction through the narrative that individuals wish to illustrate. We understand Perry's own emotional attachments to objects and his self-aware assemblage of symbols to inform how the public perceive his identity. Examining both his art and personal life, we are able to explore the narrative he deliberately displays through these choices.

We conclude by saying that individuals project a shared narrative onto their most personal possessions which therefore forms an emotional relationship with inanimate objects, and in this sense they become the most true reflection of their identity.

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**First Again
with Tobacco Men!**

**More independent experts smoke Lucky Strike regularly
than the next 2 leading brands combined!**

An impartial poll covering all the Southern tobacco markets reveals the smoking preference of the men who really know tobacco—auctioneers, buyers and wholesalers. More of these independent experts smoke Lucky Strike regularly than the next two leading brands combined.

*So for your own real deep down
smoking enjoyment remember—* **L.S./M.F.T.**

LUCKY STRIKE MEANS FINE TOBACCO
So round, so firm, so fully packed — so free and easy on the draw

Figure 1. AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY. 1948. Lucky Strike Cigarettes - First Again with Tobacco Men [advertising campaign]. Available at: <http://www.bambootrading.com/proddetail.asp?prod=4645>. [Accessed 11/11/17]



Figure 2. EVANS, Laurie. Date unknown. Grayson Perry : Turner Frock 2. Available at: <http://laurieevans.co.uk/index.php?/portfolio/details/people/turner-frock-2>. [Accessed 05/11/17]



Figure 3. ANGERSON, John. 2016. Artist, Grayson Perry with his childhood bear - Alan Measles. The Times Magazine. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/people-are-nostalgic-for-old-school-masculinity-but-its-redundant-2jrnlg32w>. [Accessed 05/11/17]



Figure 4. PERRY, Grayson. 2000. Claire's Coming Out Dress. Nottingham City Museum and Gallery collection. Image by Hardman-Jones, Jerry. Available at: <http://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/bmag/whats-on/coming-out-sexuality-gender-and-identity> [Accessed 05/11/17]



Figure 5. Anon. Date Unknown. Alan Measles. Available at: <https://daily-norm.com/tag/alan-measles/>. [Accessed 05/11/17]

Introduction

“It is also relatively easy to admit that things people use, own and surround themselves with might quite accurately reflect aspects of the owner’s personality. Not surprisingly, the clothes one wears, the car one drives and the furnishing of one’s home, all are expressions of one’s self, even when they act as disguises rather than as reflections.”

(Csikszentmihayli & Rochberg-Halton 1981 : 14)

Modern society is reliant on material goods, the way we interact with them and what meanings are implied through an individual’s curation of inanimate objects, often mass produced. This essay explores how we assemble objects to portray a construction of individuality. By questioning how our belongings reflect our own sense of self, and how identity is constant phenomenon for the individual, there will be a continual exploration into how we form a visual accumulation of our own narrative. Within my own studio practice, identity construction is a reoccurring theme throughout my work’s conceptual focus which led me to choose this subject. Alongside this, there is a personal fascination with self-analysis and understanding of my own portrayal of individuality, applying a background of sociological and psychological perspectives to comment broadly on society and the self.

The first chapter will focus on how objects have become an intrinsic part of our lives by exploring the history of consumerism and corporation’s manipulation of human psychology. Beginning by looking at post industrial-revolution where production developed to a mass produced industry, there will be an explanation into how society began to reject purchasing just for need which therefore led to the formation of the consumer. By exploring how industry began to apply the psychoanalytic theories of Edward Bernays (2000), this will

develop into understanding how corporations and the market manipulated the psyche to form the idea that objects were needed for a sense of self. The chapter will then expand into the history of the consumer, and how theories such as Thorstein Veblen's conspicuous consumption (2007) can be applied into the taste hierarchy of modernity. This will then question these ideas in relation into Stuart Walker's (2017) concept of emotional design by forming an intrinsic relationship with objects and how the focus is continually on the self rather than function.

By looking at the individual's need to form a sense of self and how this becomes reflected visually through a focus on anthropology theories and psychological analysis, the second chapter will begin to explore how we form a visual self. By exploring the individual in reference to the psyche, it will begin to address the idea of the self using objects in the formation of a tangible persona. Focusing on ideas of bestowing a meaning on objects away from function, the chapter will draw upon Roland Barthes (Richins, 1994) to explore theories in relation to semiotics and visual markers. Questioning whether identity is simply a collection of implied symbols, this will focus on the interpretation of a public portrayal, alongside theories of 'bricolage' by Claude Lévi-Strauss (McCracken, 1998) and Jonathan Chapman (2005).

Expanding this further, the chapter will relate 'bricolage' into the private and public meanings of objects and how we portray ourselves through objects in comparison to the possessions that we are most emotionally connected to. This will draw on theories by Jonathon Chapman (2005) of 'patina' and the 'teddy bear theory' which suggest a narrative connection between objects and an individual.

The final chapter will apply the theories explored in chapter one and two to a case study of artist Grayson Perry. By exploring his awareness of a 'sense of self' and 'who we are,' which are paramount to his work, the discussion will be able to reference how he has formed a semiotic alter-ego, Claire, through self-analysis. We explore how he uses his narrative to inform autobiographical artwork and his continual questioning of his identity through both his creation and definition of self, as well as his own psychoanalytic interpretation of others in his work. By referencing both his own personal connections to objects, such as his childhood bear, Alan Measles, this chapter will focus on his consumer and identity construction theories, alongside the interaction of aesthetics in relation to sentimental objects through his self-aware perspective.

Chapter One :

How does consumerism affect our relationship to material goods?

Consumerism is the concept of the ever-expanding consumption of goods, formed through modern advancements in relation to the economy and mass production of products. By exploring the history of material goods and the consumer themselves, this chapter will provide an understanding for the relationship between society and the object.

The way we purchase and produce objects historically focused on “local response to local demand” (Dugan 2000 : 42) and reliant on the hand labour of craftsman and individual skills of a community. However, from the late-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, there was a transition to new manufacturing processes, developed through industrial inventions, innovation within machinery and the enhancement of natural resources, such as coal and steam power. This ability to transform production from small-scale skill to a mass-produced industry formed, in essence, the consumer market, opening trade, such as the textile industry, into a global mass market.

“... Industrial revolution completely transformed ways of living and society as a whole. The transistor from dispersed, rural craft style production to factory production saw the rise of industrial capitalism along with massive urbanisation. Modernity led to a notion of individualism ...”

(Walker 2017: 20)

Following the Industrial revolution, the mass production of material possessions was still being primarily stimulated by the continual ‘need’ for products instead of ‘desire,’ which

threatened the continuation of manufacturing at a fast-paced production level. Despite the revolutionised approach to the production line, American corporations questioned whether the need for goods away from durable and necessary purchases would be lost due to a culture focused on practicality and function within their purchases. The industry decided to change the approaches towards marketing in an plea to “shift America from a needs to desire culture” by questioning the irrational emotions within society (Curtis 2002).

To do this, corporations implemented the expertise of Edward Bernays, nephew of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, to transform the relationship between products and the way in which society consumed and connected with the goods. As Mark Miller suggests in the introduction to Bernay’s book ‘Propaganda,’ “his aim was not to urge the buyer to demand the product now, but to transform the buyer’s very world, so that the product must appear to be desirable as if without the prod of the salesmanship” (Bernays 2005 : 19). He implied and implemented the idea that “we are governed, our minds are moulded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of” and therefore used his theories to form a process of organising society. By introducing the industry to public relations, Bernay’s used ‘propaganda,’ which he saw as a consistent, organised effort to influence the relations of the public to an “enterprise, idea or group” or to spread a “particular belief,” to alter the masses (Bernays 2005 : 37 - 52) which therefore informed the market of consumerism.

Taking on his uncle’s theories into exploring the unconscious and understanding that information drives behaviour, Bernays began to look at how he could manipulate societal masses to “make people behave irrationally and link products to their emotional desires and feelings” (Curtis 2002). By questioning the argument of the all-consuming

self, he sought ways of promoting products through wielding the way companies used psychology to subconsciously attach value and emotion to objects. He began to develop and apply psychoanalytical theories, such as that “a thing may be desired not for its intrinsic worth or usefulness, but because he has unconsciously come to see in it a symbol for something else,” and subsequently implemented marketing to this ‘reaction psychology.’ Therefore, objects became compensatory substitutes for individual’s subconscious ambitions in relation to Freud’s theories on suppressed desires (Bernays 2005 : 75).

A defining example of Bernays enforcing this approach, was to conduct a marketing strategy to encourage females to purchase cigarettes. By using advertising, the emerging celebrity culture and subliminal messaging, Bernays suggests that cigarettes were an integral symbol of female empowerment of the time, such as shown in Figure 1. By labelling them as “torches of freedom” and employing iconic figures to begin smoking at liberation marches, the leisure good became crucial to a movement of consumer focused production and advertising. As one of his employees, Peter Strauss, suggests, “they weren’t purchasing something but engaging themselves, emotionally and personally, in a product” (Curtis 2002). By changing an item which is purely for leisure and inherently seen as a masculine market, cigarettes became a liberating identity marker and a key image to distinguish an aspect of the individual’s values and beliefs. This allowed a new emergence of consumer focused manipulation to question purchasing not just for need but to express an inner sense of yourself, which Chapter Two develops upon.

The idea of seeing a reflection of the self and status through consumerism wasn’t a new concept to the way we used and purchased items, as American economist and

sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1857 - 1929) stated in 'The Theory of Leisure Class.' He explored how material possessions were used as an application of publicly manifesting wealth and social prestige, with "conspicuous consumption of valuable goods [as] a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure." The theory of conspicuous consumption addresses the idea of using possessions to denote an individual's wealth and opulence. Through the notion of the leisure class, the higher income bourgeoisie, portraying their hierarchy and reputability through material goods, working classes begin to replicate these objectified items or interests to emulate perceived status, forming secondary "vicarious consumption." (Veblen 2007: 63.) This relationship between consumerism and hierarchy, leads to unnecessary expenditure and the formation of 'conspicuous waste,' the excess of unneeded purchases, leading to a culture dependent on possession choices rather than requirement.

Through modernity and the growth of civilisation, the distinction and status between social classes has become more transient, as Bernays' noted upon, suggesting that "the minority has discovered a powerful help in influencing majorities" as a reaction against the economic power of the bourgeoisie (Bernays 2000 : 37). This led to divisive "competitive individualism" promoted "through production of status orientated 'positional goods'" (Walker 2017: 24) becoming less of a focus in the way society purchases, with the consumer market becoming part of a continual fast paced cycle. In replacement of the division of wealth as an influence for materialism, a focus has been given to the political and capitalist system of contemporary, secular democracy and the "ideology of individualism." Walker suggests that the focus on the ownership and division of communal goods through competitive consumption led to the constant phenomenon of self-portrayal through material goods that surrounds the political policies of conservative government. The Reagan and Thatcher's 1980's policies, such as implementing tax and

the free market, turned focus on to the role of the consumer, away from governmental control. Thus, this allowed individual consumption to be the prioritisation of the market, rejecting a notion of communal goods. This suggests that society's fascination with material possessions is a result of a capitalist social orchestration to continue a relationship between consumerism and desire.

These after-effects of modernity have led to a "focus on materialisation, secularisation, liberalisation, rampant consumption and a preoccupation with possessions" (Walker 2017: 6) as society continues to use belongings as a dominating focus on the way we address our wealth, and comprise a form of our identity. The continual focus on an expression of self and an acquired pre-assumption of how society will judge the purchases made by an individual has directed the need for taste and representation of the self through visual aesthetics. Through this, the emergence of design of products is the forefront of all industries, with brand identity and attachment highlighting the status rather than the pre-informed quality and function. Wayne Hemmingway's 'Revolt in Homes' suggests this by questioning the insecurity of style in the way we consume material goods and how there's a continual implementation of perceived 'taste.' Stylish aesthetics and trends are formed through prescribed meanings and prestige, influencing the way we consume fast-paced fashion or belongings surrounding the home.

Hemmingway rejects the idea that these possessions define individualistic choices, instead suggesting they form a "visual mono-culture" by portraying the "visual elite with shared vocabulary of design objects" which maintains an aesthetic hierarchy instead of an expression of the self (Hemmingway 2002).

As society possesses a continual desire to consume and define ourselves by material possessions, design is forming a segregation between these continued ideas of

consumption and rapid materialisation and the opposing approach of what Walker terms 'emotional design.' Following into a more holistic connection between the process and the designer, he suggests that the way an individual creator sees and forms his work informs a connection between the consumer, the object and the designer. By maintaining a continual focus on self-expression within design there is rejection of Modernism, "a period characterised by cultural and artistic responses to modernity and the industrialisation of society," therefore objects are seen as an expression of certain values through the accountability of the designer (Walker, 2017). This addresses the idea that there is still a discontentment within the way material possessions denotes our society and the way we as individuals behave and define ourselves, which I will continue to explore into why we uphold a need to use objects to connect to a level of individualism.

Chapter Two :

The sense of self and our need to curate a visual image

By looking at the individual's need to form a sense of self and how this becomes reflected visually through a focus on anthropological theories and psychological analysis, this chapter will explore the construction of self and how we interpret individuality into a visual representation. As discussed in Chapter one, society has a need to experience and reflect our independent reality, and by doing so "cultivate a public persona" (Finkelstein 2007 : 2) to portray a construction of the individual, which is formed through self-invention and a reflection of the consciousness. By using objects and visual aesthetics to inform our portrayal and connect to our underlying need to present our sense of self, we allow ourselves to display our own identity.

According to Joanne Finkelstein, the self is seen as an "inherent and essential quality of human nature" (Finkelstein 2007) which is a cultivation of the psyche and the subject. By seeing identity as a measurable psychological state, she suggests that there is pleasure within forming a fabricated life and continual self-invention through experiences, relationships and the formation of a tangible persona. Rochberg-Halton expands on 17th century French philosopher René Descartes' idea that "the self is the subject of thought or self-awareness" which becomes an object of reflection through development and self-control, by suggesting this cultivation allows the formation of a mask of the "real me" (Csikszentmihayli and Rochberg-Halton 1981 : 3 - 4). Finkelstein's 'The Art of Self-Invention' begins to question that the self is not only an entity within one's own perception, however has the need to be materialised in visual expression as she suggests:

“Such as our infatuation with the importance of self that it means we accept the need to groom and style it. We use physical appearance and material possessions to express identity; we accept a complementary connection between inner character and our material circumstances, yet, at the same time, we like to think there are more permanent qualities that define us.”

(Finkelstein 2007 : 26 - 7)

Rosellina Ferraro continues to claim that in order for an individual to form an exterior persona, the use of material objects becomes necessary in forming a tangible construction of our own perceived sense of identity. Objects provide many functions in relation to an individual, such as utilitarian value in the purpose that they offer, enjoyment, representation of interpersonal relationships by symbolising a connection with others as well as a form of self-expression and identity construction by portraying narrative, achievements and visual cues (Ferraro 2010 : 507).

Through the curation of visual self, Alison Lurie, a novelist and fashion psychologist, suggests in 1992 that we imagine “our own existence is inserted into the mind’s eye of the other,” and therefore predicts society’s current pre-occupation with self-portrayal (Finkelstein 2007 : 197). Although most objects are seen as primarily retaining practical benefits, we impose meaning onto inanimate objects through semiotic conduct. Roland Barthes, a French, 20th-century semiotician, suggests that by using of what symbols represent and the connotative meanings that visible possessions withhold, observers are able to interpret the signs into subjective values and therefore are used as a communicative tool for information. This transformation of objects into a metaphorical symbol of meaning denotes the way society see possessions in relation to the owner, but also dependent to the interpreter’s own cultural values (Richins, 1994 : 505).

French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss' (1908 - 2009) suggests a theory of 'bricolage,' which is the skill of using whatever is at hand and forming something new. McCracken applies this by suggesting that we are able to use objects we own to portray and curate multiple senses of selves subjective to situations (McCracken 1998 : 68). This concept suggests that all individuals are 'bricoleurs' and use objects to "redefine the means that [they] already [have]" (Louridas 1999 : 2). Panagiotis Louridas relates this to design and suggests that the outcomes are dependent on whether the bricolage is unconscious and self conscious. He proposes that unconsciously designed bricolage is a subjective response to external surroundings and therefore is individualistic in it's curation, whereas the self-conscious design has an awareness over the selection of bricolage resources. He defines this by saying:

"Bricolage is therefore at the mercy of contingencies, either external, in the form of influences, constraints, and adversities of the external world, or internal, in the form of the creator's idiosyncrasy ... it creates structures, in the form of its artefacts, by means of contingent events. To arrive at a definition, bricolage is the creation of structure out of events"

(Louridas 1999 : 5 - 7)

This relates to Rochberg-Halton's theory that when inanimate objects are used as identity markers, they become a symbolic reflection of not only the self, but also the purpose of the maker, as therefore he suggests that all objects are "shaped by human intentionality" when created and therefore even at functional level intend to be seen through interpretation (Pg 14. Csikszentmihayli and Rochberg-Halton, 1981.) This

implies that when an individual creates their own constructed bricolage of identity, there is always an intentionality of external and internal analysis when curating the objects.

By legitimising our sense of self through material goods, anthropologist Grant McCracken suggests we have the ability to curate an idealised lifestyle and sees the goods as a way of obtaining hopes and ideals. He questions consumerism by suggesting that we will never reach a “sufficiency” of goods and therefore it becomes an escapist act of collection. Therefore he sees consumer goods as promising the “realisation of personal and collective ideals” and therefore when they maintain an ‘objective correlation,’ possessions can be used as bricolage to form a coherent visual accumulation of an individual’s ideal self (McCracken 1988 : 99 - 110).

These theories address objects used in terms of an interpreted state of observers, however Marsha Richins discusses objects in relation to public and private meanings. This is through use of the symbolic interactionism, a sociological perspective in which meaning is dependent upon the process of social interaction subjective to the situation, and the information communicated through shared understanding of the semiotics. Public meaning therefore delivers an outward understanding of the object and can be used to form and influence relationships, however through private meanings this idea is contrasted through personal attachment to a material possession (Richins 1994).

Private meanings are subjective to the owner, cultivated through time and the experiences invested into the object. Maintaining idiosyncratic connotations which connect to the individual narrative of the owner, this questions the idea that the only objects that show our true identity are the ones which are seen as ‘private.’ The imitate possessions can represent personal relationships, memories and experiences, which

detract away from the aesthetics and semiotics of the object and are circumstantial to the meaning attached (Richins 1994). This idea reflects the theory addressed by Louridas' application of Lévi-Strauss on the 'unconscious' and 'self-conscious' bricolage referenced earlier in the chapter.

Design professor Jonathon Chapman continues to explore these ideas by proposing that the engagement between experiences and possessions form the emotional attachment to inanimate objects, with the suggestion that objects need to have an emotional and aesthetic resonance with the owner in order to become a portrayal of the individual. He discusses this by saying that "emotional responses provide the foundations of individuality: they are what distinguish us from others" and therefore sees products as a gateway to this emotional response through providing triggers for this "vital sociological process to occur." (Chapman 2005 : 108). He discusses this in relation to the 'teddy bear factor' which is seen as a narrative phenomena in which an individual unconsciously forms an emphatic relationship with their possession through an irreplaceable shared narrative history. As a relationship is accumulated through time and combined experience, emotional attachment is informed on the bear through a deep nurturing where the object truly is seen as representational of their own individual experiences, but only through their own subjective understanding. (Chapman 2005 : 117).

This idea is a continuation of Chapman's suggestion that we can maintain "subject-object relationships" as there is a co-dependency between objects and humans because both rely on the other. Through the interactivity between objects and physical experiences, there becomes a cohesive bond, whether purely functional, aesthetic or emotional, in the way that is dependent on user experience (Chapman 2005). These

narrative relationships are shown through the concept of “patina” which suggests the physicality of material culture through signs of age and use. This aesthetic expression of use connects to the private meanings of a shared experience and a formation of a relationship, however McCracken uses Thorstein Veblen to relate this idea back to public meanings of status legitimacy. He suggests that patina itself can be used as a semiotic conduct for verifying status claims with the visual evidence of heirlooms. This is particularly related back to the understanding of conspicuous consumption discussed in Chapter one, where the wealthier classes were able to ‘prove’ their legitimacy at the top hierarchy through their ancestral legacy (McCracken 1988 : 32). However, it could be argued that it is dependent on subjective values and whether or not patina could be seen as a negative or a positive for the consumer.

In conclusion, material possessions are fundamental to forming a sense of individualism by offering a reflection of consciousness through an exterior, tangible assemblage of how we see ourselves. However, this is often an idealised view and a cultivated public persona which bestows semiotic symbols to be observed and interpreted by others in order to understand an individual’s visual sense of self. This offers a public meaning of material possessions, whereas this is opposed with a private, emotional relationship between the subject and an object which combines a sense of narrative and subjected meaning. Therefore, it is understood that there is a continual curation of a visual image and sense of identity through our possession choices, but also emotional attachments formed with inanimate objects which reflect our most individual self.

Chapter Three :

Grayson Perry - an interpretation of objects and aesthetics within his art and personal life

The self-proclaimed 'transvestite potter' and Turner Prize winner, Grayson Perry, explores reoccurring themes of society and the self through a psychoanalytic, contemporary art perspective. By exploring the influential symbols of his own work, with a continual insight into his personal relationship to the objects and visual identity he portrays, this chapter will focus on his consumer and identity construction theories alongside his own self-aware interaction of aesthetics in relation to sentimental objects.

Grayson's work primarily takes form within illustrative ceramics, engaging an "epitome of the middle-class drawing room aesthetic" in which doing so, he questions the idea of the visual and aesthetic hierarchy against the meaning and statement within art and objects. Through the exploration into class, identity and sexuality, his work is a continual reflection of fantastical, highly personal experiences in which he combines aesthetic sensibilities in relation to himself (Klein 2009 : 225).

A primary focus of Perry's work is his constructed persona of 'Claire,' as shown in Fig. 2, which is a manifestation of his own transvestism and exploration into his experiences relating to sexuality and gender. Seen by many art critics as a performance piece itself, Claire is a constructed, semiotic alter-ego and a division of parts of his personality into an exhibitionist sense of self. Using visuals associated with a young girl, such as frills, bows and ponytails to form an exaggerated, frilly femininity, Perry composes an outward expression of his own thoughts but also forms a separate construction of identity away from his regular aesthetic in style and clothing (see Fig. 3). This represents his continual understanding of how he is portrayed, as he sees "dressing up as the heraldry of my

subconscious” and as “a physical manifestation, an outwardly worn symbol, of what is happening within” (Jones 2007 : 49 - 50).

This public approach to the semiotics and objects he surrounds himself with readdresses Barthes’ theory of public and private meanings through his use of symbolic interactionism and construction of self, composed through connotations directed outwardly for social interpretation (Richins 1994 : 506). Through ‘Claire,’ and the way Perry presents an assemblage of femininity to the world, there is a continual awareness of his shared narrative, such as though the assembly of ‘Claire’s coming out dress, 2000’ (see Fig. 4), in which he uses symbols to denote a deliberate message. Using visual representations of his journey and relationship with sexual exhibitionism, such as using “a struggling butterfly, symbolic of the transvestite coming out of the cocoon of puberty,” Perry maintains a continual interpretation of socially understood semiotics and the reinvention of self (Klein 2009 : 13).

In contrast to this constructed use of imagery to form a public portrayal of defining aspects of his personality, a key object which addresses private significance is his childhood teddy bear, Alan Measles.

“The focal point of my imaginary realm was my teddy bear. Alan Measles was bought for me for my first Christmas when I was nine months old. He was a yellow teddy bear, about ten inches tall, with little black eyes; a cheap one, not a posh nor particularly flash one, just a workaday lump of foam, but he did the job. One day he got too close to the fire and his ear burned off so the neighbour knitted a new ear. He wore an orange boiler suit that my Aunty Mary knitted for

him. He is thin now because he was loved to bits. He's the only artefact I have left from my childhood.”

(Perry in Klein 2007 : 14)

As a poignant figure of his personal narrative, Perry's object reflects an intimate attachment, maintaining a shared narrative with the stuffed toy, as shown in Fig. 3 and 5, which references to the 'teddy bear theory' discussed by Jonathon Chapman in Chapter Two (Chapman 2005 : 117). This relates to the theories in which personal connotations and relationships are formed with material possessions in order to objectify the unconscious, through Perry's need to separate and manifest his masculine traits as a child onto his belonging. As a rejection of gender roles around him, the bear became figure of fatherhood as an accumulation of his repressed feelings from his father's disconnection and abandonment as a young child. Used as a coping mechanism throughout a violent relationship with his step-father, and his need to become 'submissive,' Grayson took refuge in forming Alan Measles as a reoccurring character within an imaginary world, seeing the teddy bear as “a symbol, that was [used to] hold onto a lot of myself, I'd given him, in play, a large portion of who I was” (Perry in Springford 2010).

Within his own work, Perry uses Measles to explore the way we form an emotional connection with an inanimate object and how this relationship between possessions and the psyche is continually present. The emotional bond and shared narrative is shown through the patina noted upon within Perry's description of the bear, such as with the burnt ear (Perry in Klein 2007 : 14). Seen as a 'totemic male god' throughout his more intimate pieces, Perry also expands this by objectively looking at objects as a physical

representation of childhood trauma and emotions in avenues of his work. In 'Refugees from Childhood, 2001' he questions the "the idea that your stuffed toys are somehow with you, that they've escaped alongside you," therefore implying they become the antithesis of the sentimental through their bestowed emotional connection and depth (Klein 2007 :78).

Material possessions and identity construction is a dominant focus within Perry's art and research, and reflects his ideas on consumer culture and class. 'All in the Best Possible Taste' is a series of tapestries, alongside a docu-series that explores class structure and his personal interpretation into the taste of 21st century culture. The series questions how we can understand our consumption of objects and what our material choices reflect about our own identity. Relating back to Thorstein Veblen's theory discussed in Chapter One and Two, the series addresses a continuation of conspicuous consumption and the adopted snobbery within the class system of aesthetics.

The artist approaches the idea of 'aspirational purchasers' in relation to seeing material possessions as a symbol of social mobility and the tangible expression of cultural capital sold as a emblem of individualism. By suggesting objects are class markers, Perry notes that lower class collate objects to maintain an aspirational visage, whereas middle class expand the theory of the leisure class, by needing a validation of taste through their continual anxiety and self consciousness formed by questioning how their objects reflect an identity and lifestyle. This continues into upper classes' dictated taste, through the pressure of maintaining heritage and tradition by preserving the legacy of ancestral possessions, shown through patina within collated objects. His ideas are reflected visually through class and consumer related semiotics of social mobility

and how the objects surrounding an individual denote a perceived identity, suggesting “all our taste choices [are] about judging the exact degree of artifice that [is] appropriate to our particular group” (Perry and Crombie 2012).

Perry continues to reference the construction of individuality and the self within his docu-series ‘Who we are?,’ in which he explores identity alongside a series of portraiture interpreting individuals, groups and families. He regards the self as a constructed mask, and suggests that “our most complex artwork we can make is our identity” which relates back to the references to a portrayed ideal referenced in Chapter Two. He suggests that the relationship between consumerism and our construction of self relates to a Western capitalist model of “buy your identity” to distract from universal individuality insecurity. Developing this idea, he references the idea that in a fast paced consumer society, we constantly are changing and manifesting new forms of the ‘self’ and therefore never see ourselves as a stable, constant reflection of our true identity. He references that “in our childhood, ... we have an ability to seek out the symbols that nurture our self image” which allow the individual to exhibit traits that cannot be articulated and therefore references back to the private connotations given to objects (Perry and Crombie 2014).

By looking at Grayson Perry’s constructed portrayal of self, alongside his personal connections to material objects and the examples of meaning he projects onto them, this chapter has questioned the idea of individuality and applied the explored theories onto areas of his work and own personal style. In the way Perry curates objects that he interprets as semiotically representing a symbol relating to his own identity construction, he uses possessions to become a conscious bricoleur.

Conclusion

Within Chapter One, I explored the contextual history of consumerism to understand how objects have always been required to denote an individual's purpose, through practicality and possession as "his self to a large extent is a reflection of things with which he interacts" (Csikszentmihayli & Rochberg-Halton 1981 : 1). However, following the Industrial revolution, the mass market corporations used public reaction theorists' such as Edward Bernays to manipulate consumer psychology to transform material goods to a 'desire' culture. This led to the understanding behind how consumer culture began to use objects to inform a portrayal of identity, and consequently how a capitalist society denoted meanings to objects through theories such as conspicuous consumption. By exploring the context of society's formation of taste choices and possession hierarchy, I was able to understand how objects become a validation of individuality and taste, subjective to their class status and the people around them.

These ideas were then continued by applying theory to understand the construction of self and how individuals can curate objects to portray a reflection of consciousness. Individuals use material possessions to form a public curation of self to express symbols relating to their own perception of taste and semiotics, and therefore they become rhetorical ornaments. This subsequently becomes observed and interpreted by society, but this is all subjective on the viewers' own understanding of the meaning implied within the portrayal. However, we can cultivate a true reflection of our narrative identity through the application of meaning to private objects, which have been formed through an emotional relationship between the object and the subject, reflecting our most individual self.

By applying these theories to a public figure, such as Grayson Perry, the third chapter was able to use primary research to understand how Perry consciously forms an assemblage of self. By seeing Perry as a bricoleur, publicly forming a construction of a feminine self, this allowed me to apply the understanding of semiotics which were previously explored in the second chapter. Because of his discernment of his construction, Perry is atypical from societies norm in the way they form a sense of self. This suggests that individuals portray a less coherent assemblage, unaware of their subconscious need to validate their individuality which therefore leads to choices becoming manipulated by corporations and society, such as explored within Chapter One and Two.

If continuing the research of this subject further, I would explore the public's own possessions and how we can apply these theories further without the conscious understanding that Perry uses through his curation of objects. By dissecting individual's self-portrayal, I would be able to explore the narrative relationship shared with emotionally-connected objects and the private meanings behind material possessions in comparison with the the idealised lifestyle that they want to convey.

This therefore concludes that individuals form a bricolage of symbols, in order to collate an assemblage of objects to portray an interpretable curation of their own identity. However, this is a subconscious accumulation of implied choices which become circumstantial to the viewer's own understanding. Material possessions subsequently become a tangible aesthetic validation of individuality but society is often unaware of the social orchestration behind consumer purchases. Hence, the only physical reflection of

individuality is shown through an emotional relationship to an object by applying a shared narrative, which is only understood by the individual themselves. By accepting that objects use implied semiotics to portray an idealised construction of self, I can question the notion of individuality by suggesting our choices are dependent on circumstance. Therefore, without the self-aware curation of material possessions, visual identity is only the subjective application of perceived idiosyncrasies to inanimate objects.

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