The Objects of Modernity

An Investigation of Material Culture and Mass Consumption

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of the objects that surrounds us and the practices of consumption in which we engage on the cultural constructions we live and vice versa taking its point of departure in an examination of the objects and consumption practices that have been used in the definition of the construct of modernity in various cultures. Theoretically it develops a framework based on speech act theory and ritual studies, which is then applied to a range of case studies coming from all over the world. It then builds this into an argument for attributing increased importance to the material world and material culture, when doing anthropology.

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Chapter 1. Introduction.

We are surrounded by objects. They pervade every part of our existence from we get out of bed in the morning till we lie down again at night. We may not be aware of our objects all the time, but they are always there. They are a given part of our world just like the natural environment and the social institutions into which we are born. The contexts we live in are to a large extent responsible for making us who we are and objects are a key feature in making the contexts we live in. But material culture is often peculiarly ignored in the works of anthropologists. Consumption as an area of study has only recently become a study deemed worthy of anthropological analysis. Consumer culture was for a long time deemed to be a perversion of 'real' culture inauthentic in the essence of its being. There have been many recent attempts to correct this shortcoming in anthropological theory (see Miller 1995 for a survey), and this thesis aims to add another attempt to these. The main point of this thesis will therefore be to argue the importance of material culture. To argue, in other words, that we must take the object world into account when we analyze the social world rather than simply seeing objects as receptacles of projected social classifications that can be safely ignored. The approach will be to show a concrete way of approaching this topic that might be useful to cultural analysis. As this would be a task with too large a scope without some qualification I have confined myself to dealing with the ways in which physical objects and consumption practices work relate to the construction of modernity in a range of case studies. I, therefore, hope to be able to say something interesting about modernity and consumer culture as well in the process, but give up any hope of having sufficient data to sustain overarching generalizations. Along the way I will be asking such questions as: What do we mean by "consumer culture"? How does this relate to the concept of modernity? What do we even mean by using these words? How can we analyze it? How has it been analyzed in the past? What conclusions can we reach by looking at specific examples of the ways in which material culture and consumption relates to modernity? To put it succinctly *this thesis wants to argue the importance of material culture to culture by showing its importance to the making of a single social construct namely that of modernity*.

This thesis is divided into two main parts. The first part includes chapters 2, 3, and 4 and is concerned mainly with theoretical questions. Chapter 2 begins with trying to define modernity as it will be used in the thesis. It distinguishes three separate senses of the word that will be deployed at various points through the following chapters. The second half of chapter 2 tries to define the concept of "consumer culture" and gives a summary of the history of consumption in the West. Thus, the second chapter sets up some of the key concepts for the following chapters so as to know what we are talking about. Chapter 3 deals with the study of consumption as it has manifested itself in the social sciences in general and anthropology in particular. It summarizes theories by Adorno and Horkheimer (Adorno and Horkheimer 1976), John Fiske (Fiske 2000), Thorstein Veblen (Veblen 1915), Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984), Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai 1986), Roland Barthes (Barthes 2000), Jean Baudrillard (Baudrillard 1988), Marshall Sahlins (Sahlins 1976), Mary Douglas and Chrisopher Isherwood (Douglas and Isherwood 1979), Daniel Miller (Miller 1998), Grant McCracken (McCracken 1988), and others to give a broad survey of the historical development and the current state of theories of consumption. It will give us a sense of where the subject we're studying has been and where it might go. Chapter 4 contains the theoretical crux of the thesis. Proceeding from a critique of the semiotic approach to consumption it argues for a performative approach to the meaning of objects and a deployment of Stanley Tambiah's performative approach to ritual (Tambiah 1979) to the study of consumption practices. The chapter ends by giving an example of this approach. The purpose is to present a different way of looking at objects and consumption that though it may seem a little far-fetched can generate some new ideas about the approach to material culture.

The second part of the thesis consists of chapters 5 and 6 and takes a more practical approach in deploying the model developed in chapter 4 on a range of case studies. Chapter 5 deals with the use of objects in the home to create a relation between the self and its position in the world particularly as it concerns the constructions of modernity. The first case is a study of the making of modern Swedish living as it is expressed in the use of furniture. It shows modernity embedded in the physicality of the living room. The second case deals with the concept of "homeyness" as it was described by informants in a field study conducted in Ontario. It shows the objects of the home as related to the construction

of the bourgeois family in direct opposition to modernity. The last case deals with the negotiation of western and traditional styles of decorating the home in contemporary Japan. It shows a complex interrelation between various social needs being negotiated in object form. The chapter ends on a comparative note by drawing contrasts and parallels between the three cases. The nexus examined in the chapter is that between identity particularly national identity, modernity, and material culture as it is used in the home. This chapter deploys some of the vocabulary developed in chapter 4 and shows how the construct of modernity becomes embedded in the material fabric of the home in a variety of cultures and thereby also demonstrating the main point of the thesis that our physical contexts are active in shaping our social worlds. Chapter 6 contains a further three case studies all dealing in some way with objects used in creating selfhood and alterity, again particularly as this relates to the positioning of subjects and cultures in modernity. The first case study is from the Cuna Indians in Panama and deals with the relationship between mimesis and alterity as it is embodied in object form. The second case comes from Belize and deals with the shift from the use of goods to mark social as well as temporal distinctions to a new vista of imagining modernity through the medium of objects in the postcolonial context. The last case comes from Trinidad and deals with the peculiar use of style as in clothing and other apparel to enforce transient individuality. This chapter too ends comparatively. This chapter goes a bit further in linking together ritual behaviour, consumption, and modernity so as to show the importance of objects in social construction.

There is no overarching theoretical framework that I want to apply in this thesis. I don't come at this problematic from any well defined camp or position that I'm aware of. I do have to plead an affiliation with those that consider anthropology a humanistic, literary and interpretative endeavour, and make no attempts to follow an approach based in "scientific method". If there's one common thread throughout the thesis it is the use of methods such as logical analysis and speech act theory that originated in analytic philosophy of language, but this is merely an artefact of my own training rather than expressive of any belief in the inherent superiority of such methods. I'll admit to have been profoundly influenced by the work of Daniel Miller in my approach to material culture, but I think that is made clear by the pervasive presence of references to his work. The thesis contains no original field research only reinterpretations of the work of others. The methodogical underpinnings of

the models I deploy are explained in the contexts of using them I so I have chosen not to dedicate any special section of the thesis to method. I must also note that I take a firmly pragmatic approach to methodology. I believe that the only way to judge the value of any approach is whether or not it makes you capable of saying something interesting about your subject of study. Furthermore, I should note that this is a work of theory. It doesn't aim to solve any practical research questions, but instead to reconfigure the theoretical perspectives anthropologists take with them to the field in a way that gives greater emphasis to the object world. The amount of material covered is very large and I do aim for breadth rather than depth in the case studies presented. That is to say I sometimes sacrifice detail in order to be able to suggest connections that have not previously been made, and that span a larger territory. The thesis is also intentionally experimental and sometimes perhaps the connections presented are less than obvious. I hope that they will become clear, nonetheless, and that the occasional lack of detail and rigour can be made up for by inventiveness. The reader of course is the ultimate judge of whether this experiment has succeeded or not.

Chapter 2: Modernity and consumer culture.

To speak of anything we must first have a sense of what we mean. This thesis revolves around words like "modernity", "consumption", and "consumer culture" so it behoves us to develop these terms in a little bit of detail. This is not uncomplicated though. "Modernity" is notoriously difficult to define, and what characterizes "consumer culture": what it means, how and when it came into being can only really be understood in terms of the historical process leading up to it. The following sections try to remedy this confusion a little. First, I'll distinguish three different uses of the word "modernity" as can be used and will be used in the present context. Second, I'll look into "consumer culture". I dissect current fashionable understandings of it, and subject it to an anthropological critique and then go into an account of the making of modern consumption. It is my belief that the only real way to understand "consumer culture" is to look at it as the outcome of a long-term historical process. That is to say I will be doing definition by ostentation.

"Modernity" and its common cousin "modern" are complicated words and in defining them even if only for the purposes of a single enquiry one runs severe risks of oversimplification. The main problem is that the words have different senses that often intermingle in actual usage. "Modern welsh" refers both to the totality of welsh linguistic usage after the medieval period and to the welsh language specifically as it is spoken in Cardiff today, while the epithet "modern design" may refer to the kitchen appliances in a contemporary sales catalogue or be the designator for a particular style or time period encompassing any number of objects. In academic discourses the picture is no clearer. It is exceedingly rare to run across two scholars who are entirely in agreement as to what deserves the predicate "modern" and just what things to group under the heading of "modernity". The present chapter, however, is not an exercise in finding the one right way to use the words. Undoubtedly there is none. However, for the sake of precision I shall proceed by examining the three senses in which the words will be used in the present context. These are as follows: modernity as presentness, modernity as period, and modernity as construct. None of these senses will be privileged in this account – at least not intentionally. I consider all of them complementary and necessary for the story I want to tell.

The first sense of "modernity" is perhaps the most familiar to us in everyday usage. It consists in defining the modern in terms of the present and in opposition to some non-modern or traditional other. It is almost impossible to make use of the concept of modernity without making use of the word in this sense. It follows simply from the fact that if we are modern and modern is a word with temporal connotations of a limited present then something preceding us and not being us must be non-modern. The logic of alterity thus goes into effect and whatever is the negation of the properties that we project onto our "modern" screen becomes a shadow image defining the traditional. What exactly we take to be characteristic of "modernity" and of the "traditional" may of course vary tremendously as may the objects that we use to signify our relation to them. To take an obvious example having a Christmas tree at Christmas today signifies the height of tradition, but it only spread from its "traditional" Rhineland origins in the mid- to late 19th century as a function a sudden flash of fashion among the European aristocracies, and the ensuing middle class imitation of this (Elliott 2002). This sense is also the most common in everyday usage. Whenever you see a commercial selling "the perfect X for the modern man" or when a politician or business leader invokes "the modern way of doing things" this is the sense being used. Consequently, modernity as presentness is the first sense to be distinguished.

The second sense is modernity as historical period or periodizing concept, though narrative category may strictly speaking be more accurate[1]. It involves telling the story of modernity, that is to say writing a history leading up to and including the present. Such stories of modernity can and have been told in a variety of ways. Traditional triumphalist historiography tells the story of progress and development with technological advances, improved productive capacities and rising income levels taking centre stage. In intellectual history it is conventional to begin with Descartes and the cogito, taking this to be the birth of the modern subject and then letting the account continue through an enumeration of – isms, their perceived characteristics and their central figures typically today culminating in postmodernism. In social history the story of modernity often becomes the story of capitalism with colonization, commercialization, the industrial revolution, and imperialism

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[1] The following paragraph draws loosely on Fredric Jameson's discussion of the periodization of modernity (Jameson 2002).

all playing important roles. Furthermore, it is possible to focus on specific processes working over long periods of time taking these to be exemplary of modernity. Examples of this approach would include Adorno and Horkheimer's "Dialectic of Enlightenment" or Durkheim's account of the shift from mechanic to organic solidarity later elaborated by Luhmann into a general vision of ever increasing differentiation. The point is of course that there are a lot of different modernities to choose from and that it is of significant consequence for any analysis dealing with modernity, which one you choose to adopt. I don't personally have much to add to any of these stories, nor is this the purpose of this thesis to do so, but in charting the interrelations between modernity and consumption, it will of course be necessary to make use of some of them.

The third sense is less traditional than the first two, but by no means without precedent. It insists – in good constructionist spirit – on viewing modernity neither as what we are at present are or as the historical period leading up to what we presently are, but as a social or ideological construct that while functional in our lives is not reflective of anything actually existing in and of itself. The most totalizing version of this view can be found in a slim but dense volume by Bruno Latour enigmatically entitled *We Have Never Been Modern*. The subject matter of the book is strangely appropriate to the present thesis. Latour locates a rupture between the social and the physical worlds in the writings of Hobbes and Boyle. In Hobbes the social becomes sui generis and independent of the physical world in which it is embedded, and reciprocally in Boyle the physical world becomes independent of the social processes by which we study it. This rupture Latour takes to be the founding myth of modernity. Modernity is thus constructed on the foundations of a dichotomy between the social and the physical, while in actuality the rupture instead of accomplishing the division leads to an ever increasing proliferation of hybrid objects existing in the interstices between the social and the physical. But it is absolutely crucial to the modern project that this never be recognized. Were it recognized the rupture would cease to be functional and the foundations of modern science and social science would falter. In other words, Latour claims we have never been modern because the ideological construction of what modernity is doesn't actually exist. The rupture is false, ergo modernity never happened (Latour 1993). It is, however, not this totalizing vision of modernity as construct I'm looking to deploy here. Rather, the insight that I want to draw from this is that by focusing on ideas or

concepts, not as ideas or concepts but as constructs – without caring a whit about their truth value – we can gain mileage for cultural analysis especially as concerns the relationships between people and the objects that surround them.

With modernity out of the way, we come now to the second of the key concepts of this chapter, "consumer culture". Don Slater in his book *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Slater 1997) gives an excellent outline of what most people have associated with the concept, which can serve as a useful point of departure. The first common idea is that "consumer culture is a culture of consumption". That is to say consumption itself becomes the focus of social life and has such strength as to continually expand itself to new parts of "the social" until eventually all of culture has become consumption (ibid: 24-25). Second, consumer culture is the culture of a market society, that is to say one in which goods are produced for a marketplace of anonymous consumers. Or much succinctly "consumer culture is capitalist culture" (ibid: 26). The third idea concerns the impersonality and universality of consumption. In principle everything in the known universe can become a commodity and enter into the marketplace. Additionally everyone has the capacity to be and by necessity is a consumer (ibid: 27). Fourth, in consumer society consumption is a matter for the private sphere. It is the individuals who make consumption decisions based on their own tastes and needs without reference to the larger social whole (ibid: 28). The notion that consumption is based on fundamentally insatiable needs – some of them natural, some of them not – and consequently that scarcity is unavoidable gives us the fifth commonplace of the discussion (ibid: 29). Sixth, in post-traditional society identity has become a function of consumption, rather than the other way, and consumer culture has emerged as the privileged site for the negotiation of all kinds of identity formation (ibid: 30). And finally, consumer culture has led to an increase in the significance of cultural factors for power relations, due to the flexibility of status and identity and the aestheticizing influences on everyday life inherent in the market system (ibid: 31).

Now, if one is intent on approaching consumption as a fundamentally social and cultural phenomenon it seems inevitable that one has to question these traditional topoi of the discourse on consumer culture. First, the notion of the atomic, autonomous individual that this account assumes is problematic. Individuality is a much more social thing than what

an account like this would lead one to believe. Second, there's no easy way of separating the public and the private in the way that is suggested here; they always implicate each other. Third, tastes are not individual, but deeply social otherwise a fashion system like the one we live under simply couldn't exist. Fourth, the economic notions of need and scarcity, as Sahlins has demonstrated (Sahlins 1999), are constructions of western culture based on binaries that can be traced as far back as biblical accounts of the fall. I shall return to this discussion later on in the conclusion leaving my objections as they stand here for now. In the meantime we must start by looking at the history of modern consumption in order to understand the proper relationship between "modern" and "consumption".

The historical development of consumer culture has continued throughout modernity. The triumph of the fashion system in Elizabethan England, the expansion of consumption from international trade in the 18th century, the creation of bourgeois consumption in the first half of the 19th century, the making of mass production and mass consumption in the late 19th and early 20th century, the post World War II consumer boom, and recently the new wave of consumerism starting in the eighties have all been interpreted as signalling fundamental ruptures in the history of consumption. It seems that throughout the modern period a consumer revolution is always in process and another one is biding its time just around the corner waiting to come storming down Main Street. The simple fact that there have been new waves of consumerism continuously throughout modernity tells us that the two are indeed somehow related. However, it tells us nothing about the kind of relation. Let us, briefly, go through these major events in the history of modern consumption and see what they can tell us about the relationship between consumer culture and modernity[2].

Consumption among the nobility in Tudor England had been a largely corporate affair. There was a "cult of family status", which meant that the established noblemen zealously guarded their privilege and social rank from any potential intruders. The fundamental feature that made possessions valuable was patina – the natural signs of age accumulated on an object –, and it typically took five generations for "new" entries to the higher ranks to gain acceptance in the established circles, and for their possessions to gain a sufficiently "patinated" look. Anyone acquiring anything under these circumstances would have to

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[2] I should note that my survey is heavily based on two other surveys. Those of Slater (1999: 8-33) and McCracken (1988: 3-31).

realize that it was not simply a matter of one's own self interest, but would need to take into account the interests of the entire lineage. Buying a new set of plates, for instance, would be done with the understanding that they were to last for centuries. With the ascendancy of Elizabeth I to the throne this would change. Elizabeth used consumption as a political instrument in a heretofore never seen manner. Through massive banquets, displays, and spectacles she dazzled the court, and also manifested and legitimated her own power. But equally she forced the nobility into new consumption practices. She did this by centralizing the accumulation of royal bounty, which had previously passed through intermediaries, and therefore been more widely distributed. Under the new regime, the only means a nobleman would have to get his hands on some bounty would be by pleasing the queen. And the way to get her majesty's attention was by going to London and engaging in tremendous acts of consumption. By having to consume massively to please the queen, a new form of consumption based status competition unsurprisingly arose among the nobles, thus damaging the "cult of family status" as it was no longer given that the oldest and most well established families would be the ones most in favour. Furthermore, having to be away from their estates weakened the nobility's ties to their locality and their relationship with their subordinates. The traditional corporate consumption model therefore eroded and was replaced by something much more closely resembling the modern "fashion system" of consumption although obviously only among the aristocracy. This meant that there was an important shift in the symbolic character of goods, it meant that the gap between social classes widened, it meant that "lifestyles" were increasingly differentiated on the basis of consumption, and it also quite simply meant that the aristocracy consumed a lot more than they used to. All factors one might easily deem characteristic of consumption in modernity.

Going into the 18th century we see a genuine consumer boom starting to happen. There's has even been talk of a "consumer revolution" preceding and making possible the "industrial revolution", though that might be taking it a little bit far (see for instance McKendrick et al. 1983 or Mukerji 1983). Whatever the case may be we see a marked increase in the scale and social inclusiveness of consumption in the 1700's, as McCracken puts it: "What appears to be novel in the eighteenth century is the explosive growth of consumption in space and time" (McCracken 1988: 21). Concretely, this means that many

entirely new categories of consumer goods appeared on the market for instance curtains or mirrors, and where it came to traditional categories, such as furniture, the amount available and the choices possible increased tremendously. Furthermore, the market became increasingly stratified and differentiated as concerns price, quality, and the physical and symbolic properties of goods. Leisure becomes increasingly commodified in this period both as concerns the events in which on could participate, and the objects. For instance, this is the period where toys begin to become commodities and widely distributed. The reach of the fashion system, and thus of the new consumption practices reaches a much higher degree of social inclusiveness. Objects become increasingly commodified, commodities become increasingly subject to fashion, and fashion becomes of much more widespread importance in the social system. One should note that this increase in consumption is deeply implicated with the coeval changes in production and international trade, which means that we really do see a radical transformation of the social worlds of Western Europe towards a commercialized culture in this period.

The 19th century saw more radical changes in the processes of consumption. Though there was no boom in consumption in the way we saw in the 18th century the processes of expansion in the number of goods and their variations continued to increase. The most marked developments are the development of advertising and the new channels of distribution created in this period. Of perhaps greatest significance is the development of the department store, which made available goods in the public space on a heretofore unseen scale, standardising the way consumption was carried out in the process. Furthermore, the period saw an expansion of consumer culture throughout the bourgeoisie and it has been argued that new patterns of consumption were instrumental in the definition of the bourgeois subject in this period. Following the trickle down theory of fashion, it can be argued that increasing middle class emulation of aristocratic consumption patterns in this period reinforced the dominance of the fashion system and the importance of consumption for the definition of identity and the demarcation of social rank. Middle class emulators would, in this scheme, have forced the aristocracies to keep grasping for ever new items and goods that could be given symbolic significance to reinforce their privileged social status, which would have driven the demand for ever new types of goods as these symbolic goods trickled down the ladder. All in all in this period we begin to see the

makings of consumption as a privileged arena for the definition of identity on a larger social scale.

The end of the 19th century brings us into the period where contemporary consumption practices crystallize fully. I won't go into the history of 20th century consumption in this chapter. This terrain will be covered in the next chapter when looking at the various approaches that has been used to study contemporary consumption. Instead I want to make a couple of inferences from the previous account. First, it is clear that from early on in the modern period there has been a connection between the construction of identity and the practices of consumption. Second, it is clear that consumption takes an important place among the processes, which define modernity as a historical period. Third, it is clear that its importance has been increasing over time. One could say that it is probably still increasing to this very day. So we can see that the social reproduction of western societies is dependant on these new patterns of consumption from fairly early in the modern period, and it would seem that over time more and more meaning is externalised in consumer goods. It therefore makes sense to assume that way modernity is constructed would also be intricately bound up with consumption practices. The case studies later in this thesis will bear this point out, but before proceeding to do this I will take a closer look at the various ways one might approach the study of consumption from an anthropological point of view.

So now we should have a better sense of what is meant by these key terms. We can see that modernity a variety of uses and that three of these are used in the present context. Furthermore, we have gotten an idea about what "consumer culture" is and how it came to be. Also I hope it has been made plausible that consumption practices have been instrumental in the shaping of modernity both as a historical period and as an ideological construct. That is to say that a prima facie case has been made for the point of the thesis. Given that we've established its importance, we now have to take a detour from the main argument in order to examine the literature on consumption and how we might approach it from an anthropological point of view.

Chapter 3. The Study of Consumption

For much of the early history of anthropology consumption was not considered an appropriate object of study. Certainly, practices of consumption were studied within the context of indigenous societies, but it was typically put under the mantle of general studies of economy, exchange, or ritual and not given much time on its own account. Modern consumption on the other hand was written off as unsavoury, inauthentic; a corruption of culture not genuine culture –and thus not a proper topic for an anthropologist to study (Friedman 1994a: 1-11). The reversal of this tendency has only been fully implemented in the last couple of decades, but since the seventies there has been an increasing interest in studying consumption as a cultural phenomenon in its own right. In the following chapter I will go through some of the major theoretical approaches to this field of study that has been influential on anthropology. I should as always hedge the account, by pointing out that it is by no means exhaustive in scope or in depth. The purpose of this review is to familiarize ourselves with the main theoretical currents that have run through our subject of study. That way we can better go on to develop a model that can be usefully deployed in our context without being accused of not giving proper consideration to those whose approaches differ from our own.

The Frankfurt School and its critical theory have exhorted an inordinate amount of influence on the social sciences in the 20th century. And certainly the importance of its work on the study of consumption has been tremendous. The concept of the "Culture Industry", the industry consisting of the producers of culture and their institutions (educational institutions, the media, advertising, publishing, etc.), which was generated by Adorno and Horkheimer in their seminal *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno and Horkheimer 1976), has become common currency in a range of disciplines, though perhaps few people today would subscribe to the views of Adorno and Horkheimer in unmodified shape. The basic theory is that the culture industry as it has come into being in the modern world serves the purposes of ideology (capitalist ideology that is). That is to say that the objects produced by it are endlessly repetitive variants of the same basic ideological affirmations and their effect is to reinforce said ideology in the social world, and thereby

build and maintain the false consciousness of its inhabitants. Furthermore, in keeping with the dialectical premise of the Hegelian-Marxist roots of the Frankfurt School, it is posited that any negation of ideology will be reintegrated into ideology by being absorbed by the institutions of the culture industry. That is to say any cultural product that successfully subverts ideology will when noticed by the "official" keepers of culture be given a place within "official" culture, and its producer will be integrated into the culture industry, in the way that many avant-garde artists have been subsequently "discovered" by the elite art institutions and given a deified status within the art world, which –according to this theory– neutralizes any subversive potential in their work. Extending this to more general consumption, the meanings of goods become fixed by the agency of the cultural producers, and consumers are driven by the "fake" needs and desires thereby generated. Thus, consumption becomes part of the way capitalist society reproduces itself (Witkin 2002; Adorno and Horkheimer 1976).

Now, there are some obvious problems with this approach. First, one might note that "ideology" today is a highly contested term that can't be used with the assurance this approach seems to require. Second, this study seems to suffer severely from the productionist bias that has plagued many approaches coming out the Marxist tradition. In a sense production creates its own demand here, and the meaning of an object seems to be locked in the instant of its production, or at the latest in its mediation by cultural products. There is no concern for the ways in which consumers actually assimilate and use the products they consume, which makes it very hard to study actual consumption processes in a meaningful way from this perspective. Still the definition of the "Culture Industry" as an entity remains an important theoretical construct, and the point that consumption is bound up with the ways capitalist society reproduces itself is undoubtedly well taken.

Unsurprisingly, the production based approach of the Frankfurt School has generated a response that focuses on the processes of consumption rather than production. Primarily based in the academic context of cultural studies a range of studies privileging the agency of consumers has been made in recent years. For instance, John Fiske has made various studies on how acts of consumption can be used as acts of subversion and resistance rather than being affirmations of ideology, giving, for instance, he gives an example of his

mother trying on all the shoes in a shoe store without buying any as a prima facie example of this (Fiske 2000). A great deal of work has also been done on the parts of popular culture that have typically been considered the most passive, say watching TV, or reading romance novels actually can involve a quite active process of construction on the part of the consumer. Furthermore, studies of various subcultures (punk, hip-hop, skaters, etc.) have shown much about how shared consumption practices can be used to create social identities often in contrast to the officially sanctioned meanings of the goods involved (Storey 2001: 161-170). This approach, however, is liable to the reverse criticism of the Frankfurt School. In focusing exclusively on individual agency it can come to ignore structural factors which might be of significance to the understanding of consumption on a larger social scale. You could say that whereas critical theory locates the meaning of an object of consumption in the object itself; this approach locates the meaning entirely in the consumer not taking into account external constraints on what meanings consumers may generate, which may be as great a shortcoming in the long run.

This critique has not been unheeded, one must hasten to add. For instance, Dick Hebdige, within cultural studies, in a historical study of the meanings of the Italian scooter bike has argued that an approach to the interpretation of the meanings of goods must take the instances production, mediation, and consumption into account as all these are part of the negotiation that creates the meaning of an object and an act of consumption (Hebdige 2000). In general the notion of the meanings of goods as being under continual negotiation in the social arena seems to have emerged as a reasonably powerful perspective in recent years, though it is not going to be privileged here.

A second approach with a classical legacy that still holds considerable influence is the notion of consumption as being primarily concerned with social differentiation. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, one of the first sustained critiques of modern consumption, (Veblen 1915) Thorstein Veblen defined the notions of conspicuous consumption and pecuniary emulation, which have been important in the study of consumption throughout the 20th century. The basic dichotomy underlying Veblen's approach is the distinction between "the instrumental" and "the ceremonial". Something is instrumental if and only if it contributes to some useful social purpose. Something is ceremonial if instead it serves no

concrete purpose, but is done implicitly or explicitly for the sake of tradition. We can note that a similar instrumental rationality to the one that is the target of Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique of consumption (Adorno and Horkheimer 1976) is the ideal for Veblen and that the targets of his critique are the ceremonial aspects of consumption.

In Veblen's dichotomy modern consumption is not modern at all, but is driven by ceremonial concerns of the upper classes that serve to maintain the invidious status distinctions within the social hierarchy. Conspicuous consumption is the name Veblen gives to these practices. That is to say consumption is done for reasons of display rather than utility, and the reason for the display is simply to manifest its possibility for the consumer in question and its impossibility for the audience to the display. So, in a nutshell, the upper classes manifest their social status through consumption and this serves to maintain the divide itself. The fact of this ceremonial divide forces the process of "pecuniary emulation" into display. If certain consumption practices signify high status then someone who has sufficient financial means and wants high status would do well to engage in said consumption practices. So the nouveau riches and middle class alike will emulate the consumption practices of the upper classes in order to move upwards on the social scale just as an upwardly mobile member of the working class will emulate the practices of the middle class position to which he aspires, which, of course, all further drive consumption on the social level. Taken a step further this implies that the upper class must continually move towards new consumption practices in order to maintain their status as their pre-existing practices become absorbed by lower levels of the hierarchy. This process is sometimes referred to as the "trickle-down" theory of fashion; the idea being that fashions and trends move downwards through the social hierarchy, through the processes described.

While Veblen's theory has been very influential, it greatest influence has perhaps been as social satire rather than as scientific theory. Prima facie, conspicuous consumption can only account for a certain subset of consumption even if everything Veblen said was true and it is highly dubious that the process is as simple and clear cut as he makes it out to be. However, it seems clear that consumption for the sake of display is a genuine phenomenon and it is equally obvious that emulation is an important factor in the spread of fashions and

trends. As we will see later the notion of consumption as something ceremonial or ritual has become very important in contemporary anthropological studies of consumption.

A more recent version of the Veblenesque critique of consumer society can be found in Bourdieu's Distinction (Bourdieu 1984). The book is basically a study of how taste is socially produced. Based on a wide ranging survey conducted in France in the 50's, Bourdieu correlates a wide range of aesthetic judgements to class. So for instance taste in music, say whether one prefers opera or popular music, is strongly correlated to class position measured in socio-economic status and level of education. This fact implies that aesthetic judgements are produced socially and are inculcated by processes of secondary socialization, by which agents acquire a habitus, which manifests itself in a certain way of making aesthetic judgements. In contrast to Veblen, then, Bourdieu doesn't think that consumption practices are engaged in explicitly for the sake of maintaining social distinctions. Instead they are a product of the habitus that goes with a certain position in the social system, but like Veblen the total effect of these practices do sustain and reproduce the distinctions between classes. That is to say Bourdieu argues for an interpretation of consumption practices on the level of the total social system, where Veblen focuses on the individual actions of consumers. The cash value, however, is fairly similar. Bourdieu's study, while it has been incredibly influential, has also sustained a great amount of criticism. It is often argued that he overstates the importance of class, and it has particularly been argued that the findings are inapplicable to societies less rigidly class structured than France. Furthermore, it is also often pointed out that it is outdated considering the immense fragmentation that has occurred with the rise of subcultures and the increasing tendency of agents to define themselves in terms of belonging to various communities that are not necessarily structured according to class (Storey 2001: 184-190).

Before moving on to the two approaches that will be the most important for this thesis, semiotics and ritual analysis, I want to briefly deal with a third approach that has its origin within anthropology. This approach, often referred to as the biographical approach and taking its offset in Malinowski's classic study of the Kula Ring (Malinowski 1922) and Mauss's classic study of the gift (Mauss 1990 [1950]), focuses on the circulation and exchange of objects throughout their lifecycles. The central work for this approach is the

1986 collection *The Social Life of Things* edited by Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai ed. 1986). Several key distinctions prevalent in the study of consumption are put into question. The distinction between gift and commodity, the distinction between alienable and inalienable, the difference between barter and trade, all these are examined and questioned in this work. Thereby the approach likewise questions the entire narrative of modern consumption as being coeval with the rise of capitalism, and consumption per se as being a product of capitalism. Instead, it is argued that these things are degrees on a continuum, and that aspects of commoditization, alienability and trade are found, more or less, everywhere. Objects are seen as being participants in the social world with biographies that can be traced and by doing so their meanings and functions in the social system can be decoded, although naturally it is a complicated kind of study to perform. That is to say objects through their life cycle can go back and forth between being commodities and not (Kopytof 1986). Though highly interesting this approach will play a relatively small role in this thesis, but it deserves to be mentioned nonetheless.

If there is one thing that's obvious from all the previous perspectives and more or less taken for granted by them it is that objects aren't simply objects but stand as signs of something beyond themselves. Consumption couldn't be conspicuous if the objects didn't signify, for instance. But, while obvious, this fact is not something primitive that can be left unanalyzed. Semiotics has been one important answer to addressing the meanings of objects and by extension the meanings of consumption practices on a structural level. A useful starting point for discussion the semiotic interpretation of goods is Barthes's Mythologies (Barthes 2000), since it is the text that more or less originated this kind of analysis. In it Barthes gives interpretations of a wide variety of everyday and not so everyday objects from plastic to Einstein's brain, reading them, in a sense, as though they were texts. The theoretical argument is well known: the object as sign divides into signifier and signified which serves as a signifier in a second order system of signification that point towards a signified in the domain of ideology (Barthes 2000: 109-159). So, for instance, a magazine showing a picture of a black man saluting the tricolour while it does signify in a very immediate way, also signifies in a second order semiotic system as a legitimation of French colonial domination (Barthes 2000: 116-117). This is a fairly easily understood way of addressing the meanings of objects. But Barthes does not take it any further than

this, excepting a study of the fashion system (Barthes 1990), which will be discussed briefly in the next chapter.

Baudrillard, on the other hand, is probably the theorist, who has most consistently applied the ideas of semiotics to the study of consumption on a systemic scale. Taking his offset in a critique of Marxist political economy he claims that traditional Marxist analytic has been superseded; use value and exchange value have lost their fundamental importance and instead the fundamental kind of value is sign value: the value that an object has in the semiotic system that constitutes modern consumption. Production has moved from being metallurgic to semiurgic (Baudrillard 1988). In other words, production today is fundamentally about the production of signs not goods. The implication is that we as consumers don't consume because we need objects. The use value is largely though not entirely irrelevant and what really matters is the subject's positioning within the social system and the sign values it is necessary to consume to maintain that position. The implication is also that the old account of the extraction of surplus value is no longer appropriate since the source of value is no longer labour as such. Although, of course, the production of sign values requires labour in its own right the value derived from a sign-product is not necessarily reducible to the abstract labour power invested in it. Baudrillard's account is for all its conviction entirely speculative, making no effort to connect with much real world data, which limits its applicability to actual social scientific study. It also suffers to some extent from the productivist bias that has plagued some of the previous approaches, not caring much about the actual practices that consumers engage in to produce meaning. That being said, we must surely acknowledge that the vision of goods as being involved in a larger semiotic system from which their meanings derive is clearly a powerful one.

In anthropology semiotics has been used to address a variety of problems. Marshall Sahlins in *Culture and Practical Reason* (Sahlins 1976) dedicates a chapter to analysing what he calls, in homage to Levi-Strauss, 'La Pensée Bourgeoise', that is to say the way in which consumption practices serve as generators of meanings in middle class American culture, which serves as a good demonstration of how this approach has been applied to cultural analysis. His primary object of study is the perennial favourite clothing. He argues that

there exists a code for clothing in the same way that there exists one for language and that like language it can be seen to be structured by way of binary opposition and thus forming a semiotic system in its own right. So, for instance, heavy cloths and darker colours would be more appropriate to men, professional occasions, and older people while lighter colours and fabrics would be more appropriate to woman, leisurely occasions, and younger people, and so on and so forth (Sahlins 1979: 166-204).

The cash value of Sahlins approach, then, much like what we saw in Baudrillard is that the meanings of objects become analyzable through the analogy of structural linguistics because objects have a semiotic code homologous to language. That way the entire apparatus of structural anthropology becomes as applicable to modern consumer culture as to the analysis of traditional societies, and anthropological enquiry becomes unified within one approach. There are, however, a lot of problems with a straightforward analysis of the 'object code' in terms of structural linguistics, a la Sahlins. Objects don't combine quite as easily to form new meanings as language does. It essentially isn't generative in the Chomskian sense (Chomsky 1986). And assuming that they do leads to serious theoretical problems, but I will defer this discussion to the next chapter and move on to the final theoretical approach to be discussed in this survey.

While semiotics has been very influential in anthropology in general, perhaps the most successful attempts at studying consumption from an anthropological point of view have taken their offset in ritual studies. It seems that consumption practices shares many properties with the ritual practices found in most cultures and so can be fruitfully studied using largely the same toolbox. An early, but still very interesting application of this approach was made by Mary Douglas and the economist Christopher Isherwood working together on a book called *The World of Goods* (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Like Sahlins they take their point of departure in a structuralist understanding of culture. Though, of course, Mary Douglas represents English rather than French structuralism. In a similar way to the semiotic approaches described earlier they choose to see goods as the carriers of social meanings or the tangible representatives of cultural categories, although they choose to use the metaphor of an information system rather than language for the way they operate. It is, however, not their main concern to describe the structuring of this

system. They take more or less for granted that the workings of the information system that goods provide is tightly integrated with the general system of cultural and social categories and so represent these categories in a fairly straightforward way.

What is really interesting about the book, however, is the way in which it focuses in on consumption as a ritual activity that serves to reinforce and reproduce social/cultural categories. That is to say, somewhat like the structural functionalist analysis of ritual that the purpose of consumption is to maintain the social order. More concretely, it means that when we go shopping or have a dinner party we are engaged in rituals to do exactly that, and that the theatre critic, whose review we are reading, is in reality a "marking service" that serves as the authority on the proper meaning of the consumption ritual that going to see the play constitutes. In a nutshell, culture is constituted by a structured system of categories and in modern consumer society these are created and maintained by consumption practices in the same way that they would be by ritual in a more traditional society.

The book in many ways is more an attack on the reigning economistic theories of consumption like the one's described in the previous chapter than an attempt to provide a comprehensive theory. Therefore it also severely lacks for detail. That is to say that even if one, as I do, agrees with the statements that consumption can be analyzed as ritual process and that goods constitute an information system you couldn't simply take what's in this book and apply it to your own research it is simply not specific enough for that. Also, of course the critiques that have been levelled against the structural functionalist understanding of ritual as always reinforcing the social structure are equally applicable to this understanding of consumption.

A recent interesting application of the ritual approach to consumption is Daniel Miller's *A Theory of Shopping* (Miller 1998). The work is based on fieldwork done in a single North London street containing mainly council housing, and is in contrast to most studies of shopping focused on the daily provisioning needed to maintain a household rather than shopping for expensive items or luxuries. That is to say it is based mainly on the observation of women shopping for groceries. This rather innocuous starting, however,

should not be taken to mean that the study delivers trivial results. Rather, Miller comes to the rather surprising conclusion that shopping in the sense of provisioning and possibly in a wider sense as well can be seen as homologous to ritual sacrifice. Miller even goes on to make a plausible case for the existence of historical continuities that link the two activities, though I'll not consider his argument for that here. The homology he posits is based partly on Hubert and Mauss's classic study of sacrifice (Hubert and Mauss 1964) and partly on recent studies of ritual sacrifice in the ancient world that divides such rituals according to a tripartite structure.

First, there is a vision of excess. The sacrifice to the gods is seen as a form of violent expenditure, the consumption as a form of dissipation of stored wealth. In terms of shopping this is equivalent, in Miller's terms, to the general discourse on shopping. Miller found that no matter who he talked to they all participated in the same discourse on shopping that posited shopping as a basically hedonistic exercise in violent excess. That is to say shopping was seen as a way of violently dissipating wealth in the same way that supplicating the gods would in a ritual sacrifice. Second, this same discourse is negated by the very act of the sacrifice. In ritual sacrifice this negation is achieved by the splitting of the sacrifice between the human part and the part that is given to the gods. This very practical side of ritual sacrifice naturally countermands the previous vision of violent dissipation.

In shopping Miller points to the centrality of thrift as an equivalent negation. Practically, everyone Miller talked to in his study, when it came down actual purchasing, were primarily concerned not with spending, but with saving money. There are a million different ways of being thrifty, mind you, almost any practice can be justified as thrifty, but the importance of the signifier itself is unquestionable. The centrality of thrift in actual shopping negates the vision of shopping as excess and transforms the vision of spending into a vision of saving. Third, we move from dissipation to dissemination. In ritual sacrifice this is constituted by the eating of the sacrifice. Though often ignored, this part of the ritual process is of central importance as it serves to reaffirm the human social order by way of reiterating the primary social categories. This, in terms of shopping is equivalent to the actual consumption of the purchased goods, and as we saw earlier in the discussion of

Douglas and Isherwood's study the consumption of everyday items very much serves to reaffirm the central social categories (Miller 1998: 90-110). This in other words is a strong case for the ritual approach to consumption. We will return to this study later as an example for analysis, but for the current purposes we'll leave it here.

A last interesting application of the ritual approach can be found in the work of Grant McCracken (McCracken 1988). This approach divides the social world into a hierarchically structured set of locations for cultural meanings. Meaning is transferred from higher levels in the hierarchy to the lower ones by specific mechanisms. From the general cultural system for instance meaning is transferred to the world of goods by the workings of the fashion system and the advertising industry. So, in this way, goods serve as a location of cultural meanings that agents can participate in. In this context, the thing to note is that McCracken posits ritual as the mechanism by which agents participate in the meanings of goods.

Specifically, he describes exchange, grooming, divestment, and possession rituals that each serve specific functions in terms of defining an agent in relation to the goods he or she consumes (ibid: 71-92). Exchange rituals refer to rituals of gift exchange such as birthdays or Christmas and serve no function as much as interpersonal influence much as in classical gift giving. Grooming rituals refer to acts of repeated consumption that derive their meaning from the fact that they are repeated on the part of the actors. Putting on makeup would be such a ritual as would going out for dinner and a show. Divestment rituals refer to rituals that are intended to divest physical objects of the meaning that's been attached to them. Redecorating your new house qualifies as such a ritual as changing the interior of a used car you've just bought. The last type is possession rituals, which is probably the most common type of meaning generating ritual in McCracken's scheme. It refers to all the things we do to fully take possession of the objects we consume, such as showing photographs, talking about them to family and friends, etc. In short what you need to do to make an object fully yours and have its meaning transferred to you.

McCracken's approach is an interesting way of attempting an operational model for the interpretation of consumption, though positing specific sites for the location of meaning

and assuming the direction of meaning transfer to be generally unidirectional is subject to several of the same critiques that have be applied to some of the other theories in this chapter as well as a general anti-essentialist critique. I'll return to McCracken in the next chapter though I'll primarily be concerned with his critique of the semiotic approach and his steps towards using performativity as an instrument in analysing the meaning of goods. It should already be clear from the previous account of the ritual types that there is an element of performativity present in his theory.

Now, the order in which these theories have been presented, and the depth with which they have been covered is not random. I did feel, however, that intellectual integrity required covering the theoretical field in some detail instead of just presenting the theories that I intend to use directly. In the next chapter I will take the two main approaches discussed here: the ritual and the semiotic and wed them to speech act theory in order to produce a new way of looking at consumption and material culture. The main things to take away from this chapter are first, that many approaches to the study of consumption take the form of critiques and tend to view consumption processes as inherently detrimental to culture. This thesis will argue against this still quite prevalent position. Second, we can note that practically everyone agrees that an object is not just an object but that it has a relation either in terms of signification or in some other sense to the social world. I will take this point and take it a bit further than most of the scholars discussed here would be comfortable taking it, but I note this near consensus as a useful point of departure. Third, we can see that several useful anthropological approaches have already been developed to this area of study. The approach I'll develop in the next chapter is mainly a combination of these already existing approaches rather than anything fundamentally new.

Chapter 4. The Ritual Consumption of Talking Goods.

The last chapter summarized a large amount of research that has been done on consumption and the meaning of goods. The purpose of doing this was partly to establish the theoretical field and academic tradition that I'm working with and also to introduce some of the main theories that I will be using as points of departure in the present one. When it comes to anthropology we saw that some of the most important results have come from the semiotic and ritual approaches to the analysis of consumption. It seems that almost everyone can agree on the point that goods aren't just physical objects, but that they communicate or signify something beyond themselves, and that that something is intimately related to our cultural systems of meaning. Furthermore, it seems that most anthropologists can agree that consumption processes share something in common with ritual processes. On this background it seems fruitful to try to combine both of these approaches in a common framework. What I'll try to do in this chapter, therefore, is to create an approach that will encompass both of these approaches in a single framework. My thesis will be that this can be done by taking an approach based on the application of speech act theory to both approaches and using the performative qualities common to both the object code and consumption processes as a bridging measure. To do this, I will base myself heavily on an extension of Grant McCracken's critique of the semiotic approach to consumption (McCracken 1988: 57-70), and extend the steps he takes towards performativity as an analytic tool and integrate this with Stanley Tambiah's performative approach to ritual, which I will argue already contains a powerful approach to studying consumption (Tambiah 1979).

Most of the time when people apply semiotics to a new subject area they base themselves on the metaphor "subject area X is in some important aspects like a language." There are of course many other codes or semiotic systems that are unlike language in many important aspect, see for instance Sebeok's work on zoosemiotics (Sebeok 2001), but language understood in the traditional Saussurean way seems to the default. This, while it has constituted an incredibly interesting research program, has proved to be less than fortunate when it comes to studying the ways in which physical objects including consumer goods

signify. Clothing will serve as a case in point. From early on in the history of anthropology the clothing people wear has been seen as communicating something important about the culture in which they live, we need only mention Kroeber's classic study to make this point (Kroeber 1919). It stands to reason that clothing would be an important subject for structuralist analysis, and as we saw in the last chapter, when Marshall Sahlins had to pick a subject for applying structuralism to modern bourgeois society the topic he went for was just that.

Roland Barthes went even further along this road in his study of the fashion system (Barthes 1990). He picked up a years worth of fashion magazines and went on to try to deduce the underlying code of clothing he assumed to be there, again applying the "clothing is language" metaphor. There is, however, an interesting methodological choice he had to make in order to even get started. He had to disregard the actual images of the clothes and rely solely on the captions given beneath them for their meaning in the code. That is to say the meaning of the vestimentary code and the division of items of clothing into vestemes, elementary units of combination in the code, as Barthes describes it is parasitic upon the textual descriptions given in the fashion magazines. He is unable to derive any meaning from the objects themselves. This should make us suspicious about attributing to many language-like qualities to the actual objects of clothing.

We can go further than this though in questioning the validity of this metaphor. In a study conducted in 1982-1983 Grant McCracken set out to experimentally test the "clothing is language" metaphor noting its prevalence and having some doubts as to its validity (McCracken 1998: 57-70). The research design was simple. The informants were asked to look at a sequence of photos of people wearing a variety of outfits and "read" them so to speak that is to say try to give a cultural interpretation of the persons in the photographs. The researchers would pay specific attention to the ways in which these images were interpreted to find out what processes informants used to come by the interpretation they used.

The photographs themselves were divided into three categories based on the perceived level of difficulty from easy to hard. The easy photographs would include outfits that were

assumed to be readily understandable, while the hard photographs consisted of combinations of clothing items that explicitly aren't seen together on a day to day basis. If the "clothing as language" metaphor was correct one would expect to find, following the model of structural linguistics, that informants parsed the outfit into its constituent elementary units and then "read" as a syntagmatic chain. What the researchers found instead was that informants mapped the photographs unto a fairly limited set of primary social categories such as businessman, housewife, etc. and modified by adjectives again mapping unto a limited set of social categories such as wealthy, uneducated, etc. And there was no evidence whatsoever that informants used the individual items in the ensemble to interpret the meaning of the others as one would in parsing a syntagmatic chain. The ensemble was parsed as a whole or not at all.

This was true for all the levels of difficulty. Nowhere did informants begin to "read" the outfits in the sense of reading a sentence. Interpretation seemed to be more a question of puzzle-solving than reading and if the outfit could not be fitted unto the relatively limited set of categories informants used to describe the photographs they would tend to just give up as with a puzzle that's to difficult to solve. So, in structuralist parlance it would seem that there is no axis of combination when it comes to clothing. Outfits are seen as wholes and communicate as wholes, and if something doesn't match the whole it is disregarded, or if there's too much dissonance signification breaks down altogether. If Chomskyan linguistics has made one point it is that language is generative, and if something is not generative it is not language. Nothing can be generative without an axis of combination and therefore we cannot consider clothing a language. The metaphor breaks down.

 This experiment would seem to indicate that clothing is something closer to the call systems of animals than to human language, though this is not an accurate metaphor either. Objects communicate in a code of their own with its own peculiar properties. This code is derived from human language and the social categories of human culture, but does not otherwise have the properties of language although it does constitute a system of signification in its own right. Before I go on to describe some properties of the "object code" let me digress with an exposition of speech act theory, which I intend to make an integral ingredient in the analysis of the meaning of objects.

The theory of speech acts, literally acts of speech, was developed by the philosopher J.L. Austin at Oxford in the 1950's (Austin 1962). Austin proceeded from a critique of the then reigning positivist theories of language that saw it as being primarily concerned with the making of statements, and the purpose of linguistic philosophy to determine the underlying logical structures of the sentences we use to see which were meaningful and which were not (see for instance Ayer 1952). Austin noted in opposition that many of the most common uses of language don't seem to be concerned with making statement at all. When we say "turn off the light" or ask someone if they'd please pass us the salt we are from a logical point of view not making statements of all, yet to claim that these kinds of statements are meaningless seems clearly counterintuitive. Instead, Austin claimed language is as much concerned with doing things as with stating them. Speech in other words is a form of action not separate from action.

This leads him do distinguish the performative utterance as opposed to the constative utterance (Austin 1990: 233-252). The constative is a simple locutionary act. It's the act of stating something, like when you say "this table is red". The performative on the other hand is aimed at accomplishing something. It is not true or false, but felicitous or infelicitous in so far as it is successful or not. That is to say when I say "turn the light off" and you turn the light off my statement is felicitous, but if I say "I now pronounce you husband and wife", and I'm not a priest, we're not at a wedding and the thing standing beside you is a donkey the statement I've made is infelicitous though if the right criteria had been met the statement would indeed have made a marriage take place.

Austin divides speech acts into a tripartite scheme of locution, illocutionary force, and perlocutionary effects. That is to say when we analyze an utterance we can look at what it states, the locution itself, at what it is trying to accomplish, its illocutionary force, and at what it actually accomplishes in the world, its perlocutionary effects (Austin 1962: 109-120). Using this analytical scheme we become capable of analysing any utterance as a form of action, and to judge its relative success or failure. We should note that on a systematic scale Austin is unable to sustain the pure dichotomy between constative and performative and instead is forced to speak of a locutionary and an illocutionary axis of

language (Austin 1962: 148-164). That is to say there are many examples where statements both state something and have a certain illocutionary force attached to them at the same time, and so is subject both to truth and falsity conditions and to felicity and infelicity conditions at the same time. What it is imperative to get from this is that speech acts not only state things about reality, but that they actually to a large extent make reality: a meeting is opened by a speech act, a marriage is entered into by a speech act, a man becomes a criminal by a speech act.

There have been countless follow ups to and applications of Austin's initial formulation. It is no exaggeration to call it one of the most important philosophical positions of the 20th century. Below, for instance, I'll make use of Tambiah's application of speech acts theory to the analysis of ritual (Tambiah 1979). John Searle has been one of the primary inheritors of Austin's legacy. He has done much to systematize the initial formulation and bringing it into a more exacting logical framework (Searle 1969). For instance, he rejects the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary in favour of absorbing the locutionary features within the illocution. Searle was also a participant in one of the most famous philosophical debates of the 20th century that took place between him and Jacques Derrida on this subject.

Austin's original formulation assumes that it is possible to distinguish between parasitic and genuine speech acts that is to say for instance between a bona fide marriage and a marriage ceremony that is part of a theatrical play. Derrida famously made the argument that no such certainty can ever be attained that because of the very fact that once a speech act has been made it is infinitely iterable in any given context and therefore we cannot with certainty distinguish between those uses of the speech act where the criteria for its genuineness are met from those where they are not (Derrida 1988). Searle argued to the contrary that we can distinguish genuine from parasitic by reference to the conditions required for their felicity (Searle 1969). We may not have sufficient information in a given case to make the call, but that doesn't mean the call couldn't potentially be made. To a large extent this argument boils down to the question of whether or not we can ever know enough about any given context to make a certain determination of the speech acts pertaining to that context (Dreyfus 1996). Searle would say yes, Derrida no. For the

purposes of social analysis we needn't strive for that kind of certainty, however. I think it is fair to assume that in most cultures there will be mechanisms in place that socially arbitrates the genuineness of speech acts in cases of doubt. So, for all intents and purposes we can assume a speech act to be genuine if it is socially recognized as genuine and leave this problematic to philosophy and literature.

Now, following the exposition of speech act theory that's just been given I obviously want to argue that there's something about the way in which objects communicate that's closer to performative utterances than constative ones, though of course this can't be sustained as a hard and fast dichotomy on the level of objects any more than it can on the level of language. That is to say I want to argue that the language of speech act theory can be usefully applied to the object world. It we return to the example of the clothing the evidence indicated that the various outfits worked in a binary fashion that is to say they either placed a person in a photograph in one of a fairly limited set of social categories or they failed to signify anything altogether. We can choose to see this simply as signification breaking down. One definition of a riddle after all is that it is a signifier for which we don't understand or can't come up with the signified.

But I want to argue that there's more at work here. Clothes make the man, goes the proverb, and in a quite literal sense I want to hold that this is the case. If you'll forgive the pun, social categories often seem to require "objective proof" that is to say there is a certain complement of objects that go with certain social categories and rather than just signifying a subjects positioning within said categories to some extent establish and/or enact it. The businessman doesn't just wear a business suit to signify that he's a businessman; the fact of wearing a business suit to some extent establishes him as being a businessman, without one he just doesn't fit the category to the same degree, which could help explain the importance of dress codes in many organizations. A king is made by being crowned, a man becomes famous for Kula by exhibiting the objects he's traded for, another becomes trendy by buying the right pair of sneakers, and there are countless examples throughout the world where the possession of certain objects is what places you in a given social category.

What I'm trying to get at, perhaps somewhat clumsily, is that if objects tend to communicate something about primary social categories, which seems to be the case, then they also serve to establish, enact, or maintain them in a very tangible and concrete way. Objects don't just signify about the social world they concretely affect it as well. This position is in line with the one argued by Douglas and Isherwood and also seems to share much with Bourdieu's position as well, but I hope to be somewhat more precise in my description of exactly how objects work than both of these. I should also note that I use the term 'social category' in a way that is wide in extension, but quite formal. I consider a social category to be any term that can be applied to describe a subset of the population in a given society. So male, female, rich, poor, blond, and redhead are all social categories in this scheme. The system of social categories I take to be the total set of all social categories deployed in a given society and any structuring principles that define relations between these categories such as binary opposition or hierarchical organization.

Now to return to the argument, McCracken gives a good example of the performativity of objects in his exposition of the patina system. We discussed the patina system in chapter 2 and so I won't go into detail here, but what is interesting in this context is the way in which the patina accumulating over time is what gives a family its rank. You can't fake this effect. The statement made by the old silver establishes the family's position and rank in a very concrete way that new silver doesn't (McCracken 1988: 31-44). If we imagine a parvenu acquiring somehow the old silver of an old family we get a clearer image of just how this works. The old silver would still signify what it had previously signified, but the effects and the force of the statement would be different. It would be rather like the case of the man who declares another man and his donkey husband and wife. The parvenu would still be a parvenu, just a parvenu who didn't know his place in the scheme of things. If the context had been right, the right effects would have been achieved, but in the wrong context it comes off wrong. It is, thus, a question of a felicitous vs. an infelicitous utterance rather than about simple signification.

This will serve as an introduction to what I mean. I hope to bear it out in more detail in the concrete case studies, but for now let's move on to some other characteristics of the "object code". One feature of objects that has been much remarked on by post-modern theorists is

that they seem to be remarkably polysemic. A cigar might sometimes be just a cigar, but a bottle of coke seems to mean all sorts of things to different people. And I'm not just talking about the obvious distinctions that may characterize the response of a hippie from the response of a capitalist. We can note, for instance, that in the Congo there's a difference between the locally made Coca-Cola and the imported ones, which is used as a marker of social distinction (Friedman 1994b). Examples like this abound. However, while this is indeed a feature of the way objects are used in postmodern consumer culture, it is hardly a very surprising one. If we accept the argument that objects relate primarily to social categories then it follows that what an object communicates is relative to a system of social categories, and probably also to a subjects positioning within that system. Now, if fragmentation is an essential feature of postmodernity and globalization leads to the spreading of consumer objects across the globe, it follows that there should be an explosion in the various meanings attributed to objects on a global scale as new systems of social categories are born, and objects are brought into cultural contexts in which they've never before been located on any significant scale. This, however, I don't think affect the basic validity of my argument in any important way as the method for analysing the functioning of objects will still be valid.

Another feature of objects that might seem paradoxical in light of their inherent polysemy, but which is readily derived from the above description of their performativity is that the meanings of objects tend to be relatively stable in what they signify across contexts. Whether their illuctionary axis accomplishes its perlocutionary effects or not varies, but the locutionary axis seems to be reasonably stable in its relation to a given system of social categories. A last important feature that is worth mentioning here is that objects tend to come in clusters, like the outfits above. McCracken names this feature of the "object code" Diderot unities in honour of a short story by Diderot, in which he describes the gradual transformation of his office from rather worn down to fancy and posh all instigated by a friend giving him a new silk frock. The frock seems to make the writing implements look bad so they have to be replaced, which makes the desk look bad, and so on, and so forth. The cash value is that certain objects tend to go together and make the same kind of statement, and others don't. And the tendency is for people to choose objects that go together in unified clusters (McCracken 1988: 118-130).

Now, having argued that there is an inherently performative aspect in the way objects function I want to go on to do the same for consumption as a social process. First, however, I need to introduce the theory that I'm going to base myself on: Stanley Tambiah's performative approach to ritual (Tambiah 1979). Tambiah argues for an interpretation of ritual as being performative in at least three distinct ways (ibid: 119). First, in the Austinian sense described above. Second, in the sense of performance as in a theatrical performance. Third, in a sense peculiar to this exposition. Basing himself on Pierce's theory of signs and its division of signs into indexes, icons, and symbols he defines the concept of the indexical icon as something which is seems as pointing beyond itself by its assumed resemblance to something in the transcendent reality that is postulated by most cosmologies. Thereby something concrete and tangible comes to point at something in a transcendent realm beyond this one and in this way performs it in both the theatrical and the Austinian senses.

The indexical icon thus points both beyond itself and back to the conventional social world in which it is rooted. It seems clear from this that Tamiah considers ritual a form of social action not simply an illustration of exotic beliefs. This being the case his theory should be equally applicable to self as other. He defines ritual as: "…a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)" (ibid). That is to say rituals tend to be fairly rigidly structured and conventional even to the point of occasionally being boring to some participants, they don't display a lot of variation, and elements within them can either be repeated numerous times over or single elements can fuse whole worlds of meaning within them. It is to a large extent this packing and unpacking of information content into the elements of a ritual that give them their efficacy.

We should, however, not be too mislead by the term "communication" in this definition. Tambiah uses a lot of terminology from information theory and it is in this sense he is using the word. It is central to Tambiah's thesis that rituals act to connect cosmological

beliefs and the social world and in this way equally to function as a form of symbolic action that may imply actual effects on the existing social world (ibid: 129). Cosmological beliefs are embedded within the ritual behaviour and so rituals tell us much about what's central to a given culture's belief system. Especially it tells us something about the things that are taken absolutely for granted. It is important to stress the formality of ritual. It is not intentional, but conventional behaviour. A marriage performed by a fallen priest is still a valid marriage as Tambiah puts it (ibid: 127). Tambiah puts a lot of emphasis on the regulative nature of many rituals. That is to say rituals both help to constitute the social world as in marriage, but may also have concrete perlocutionary effects on that world. In this sense societies often use rituals as self-regulating measures.

Now, let me try to apply Tambiah's framework to a concrete example. To do this let's return to Miller's ethnography of shopping in North London. It has already been established that shopping can be meaningfully interpreted as a ritual activity what remains to do then is to see whether it can be described as performative in the three ways Tambiah posits and whether it exhibits the characteristics of formality, stereotypy, condensation, and redundancy. It is clear from the ethnography that shopping is perfomative in at least two of the senses described above. The title of Miller's main chapter summarizing the results of the ethnographical fieldwork is 'Making Love in Supermarkets' (Miller 1998: 15-72) and Miller is quite explicit about the cosmological and transcendental goals of the activity of shopping: "…the term 'love', which first appears here as a common term by which relationships are legitimated will become used to represent a value that leads us towards the problems of cosmology and transcendence" (Miller 1998: 19).

So, shopping is clearly performative in Tambiah's third sense in so far as it is about sustaining the transcendental value of love and the objects of shopping point towards this cosmological realm as indexical icons. The choice of what to buy then is a question of sustaining love relationships, but the activity also seeks to be performative in the Austinian sense as having a concrete effect on the participants of these relationships. For instance, informants might buy healthier variants of common foods if they feel that their spouses or children are too unhealthy, or buy a different style of clothing if they are unhappy with the way in which they dress. It is, however, always a negotiation between sustaining the love

relationship with the person as he or she is now, and trying to move that person towards an idealized state the shopping subject has internalized.

Nonetheless, the objects are clearly meant to have perlocutionary effects on the recipient subjects. So, in these two senses of performativity the answer to the question 'Is shopping performative?' is clearly 'yes'. The third sense is much less clear. It is not immediately obvious that shopping constitutes a performance in the dramatic sense. But, of course, in a sense most of social life in modern society can be analyzed from a dramaturgical point of view (Goffman 1959) and it can be argued that shopping inherently by the nature requires a deeply internalized form of role-play to sustain itself. Slavoj Zižek, for instance, argues that it is necessary to forget the inherent social relationships in transactions of purchase and instead see it as a transaction of objects rather than subjects. If we didn't the whole event would be defamiliarized and appear as utterly strange. That way any transaction of purchase requires an amount of make-believe in order to sustain itself as real (Zizek 1989: 11-55).

On a more concrete level there is clearly a role of customer as opposed to a role of salesperson in most shopping situations and these roles are certainly invested with a certain dramatic content. We see this clearly in John Fiske's example of his mother trying every pair of shoes in the shoe store without buying anything (Fiske 2000). She is subverting the expected role of the customer, but in doing so she is of course also affirming the existence of these roles, otherwise they couldn't be subverted. This last point brings us nicely over into the second part of the argument, because it demonstrates the deeply conventional feature of shopping. It tends to follow the same path every single time. That is to say the exhibit the property of formality in Tambiah's scheme. The fact that Miller is able to interpreting the act of shopping as following a tripartite sequence of phases that always occur in the same order seems to indicate that the ritual structure is fairly rigid as well and therefore exhibits stereotypy.

As for condensation and redundancy, we see these features clearly delineated in the discussion of thrift and the treat. The general overarching rationalization for purchasing behaviour is found in the concept of thrift. Though anything can be rationalized as thrifty,

it is also true that almost every purchase is in fact justified as thrifty. That is to say there is a large amount of redundancy in these actions. The treat, however, stands opposed to the general drive of thrift. Typically it is a single item that is bought by the shopping subject solely for their own benefit and with no consideration of cost. It thus stands opposed to the whole cosmological idea of shopping as love-making and thrift as the criterion of choice. The treat thus has an importance that fuses many elements into a single object and a single purchase, thus exhibiting the feature of condensation. It should be clear from this discussion that Tambiah's model is more or less directly applicable to at least one example of consumption practice. The homology between ritual and consumption can it would seem be taken quite far indeed.

What I have been trying to do in this chapter is to develop a vocabulary or model that can be applied to analyzing both consumption and the meaning of objects based on semiotics, ritual analysis, and speech act theory. I have argued that we can think of objects as being more performative than constative in the way they operate, and that they can be seen as having illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects. Furthermore, I have argued that there is a wide ranging homology between ritual behaviour and consumption practices so they can be analysed with the same vocabulary. To maintain coherence in the overall model Tambiah's performative approach to ritual analysis was deployed. Therein were distinguished three different layers of perfomativity: performative as in speech act theory, perfomative as in performance, and performative as in indexical icon. Also four different properties typical to riotual Mainly what I would like the reader to take away from this chapter is the basic vocabulary of speech act theory and ritual analysis, and the conviction that they might be usable to describe the workings of objects and consumption. In the following two chapters I will run through a number of different cases that all to a lesser or greater extent can be analysed in terms of this vocabulary and/or exhibit some of the features discussed in the current chapter.

Chapter 5. Modernity in the Living Room.

This chapter contains analyses of three cases dealing with the relationship between home, home decoration and modernity. The first case is a study of the patterns of furniture consumption in Sweden, which shows a close connection between ideas of modernity, the use of furniture, and the creation of national identity. The second case is a study of notions of "homeyness" in North America, which shows the opposite pattern, the home and its objects being used to provide something of a sanctuary from modernity. The third case is from Japan, and reveals the home as a site of blending between tradition and modernity, which apparently is functional but not particularly problematic. So this chapter is an examination of the nexus between modernity, identity (particularly national identity), and the objects which help both express it and to establish it. It is also an application of the previously developed model to some concrete examples that may help shed further light on the uses of objects and the workings of consumption. The focus in this chapter is on the performative aspects of objects rather than the ritual side of consumption the next chapter will deal with these in greater depth, although naturally ritual aspects are also present in the present chapter.

We should not that the layout of the home is a classic locus for sociological study. Bourdieu for instance in examining the dipartite Kabyle house finds that it is structured around a set of binary oppositions that completely governs its spatial layout: "the house is organized according to a set of homologous oppositions – fire:water :: cooked:raw :: high:low :: light:shade :: day:night :: male:female :: *nif:hurma* :: fertilizing:able to be fertilized. But in fact the same oppositions are established between the house as a whole and the rest of the universe, that is, the male world, the place of assembly, the fields, and the market." (Bourdieu 1977: 90-91). This same spatial logic is matched by a temporal logic that dictates work schedules through the seasons. We should note that all this is opaque to the people actually living it. It is part of the structure governing their daily existence but is not something an average informant would be able to articulate in any regulated form (Bourdieu 1977: 89-91). That is to say whether we acknowledge it or not the way our houses are tells much about the structures governing our lives.

The first case deals with the making of the modern Swedish home furnishing aesthetic (Löfgren 1994). While this is primarily a historical study it contains important information about the ways in which objects come to be connected with ideological constructions, and we should therefore not be discouraged from using it although the lack of concrete ethnographic material does of course limit the scope for analysis. As early as the 20's and 30's the Modern movement including functionalism in the home furnishing arena was taking hold of the Swedish elites. The general standard of housing in Sweden at the time was quite low, and the general wealth of the country did not allow those kinds of ideas to take root in any significant way in the daily life of the population at large. It was therefore only in the 50's and 60's with the massive expansion of the welfare state including public housing programmes that fundamentally reshaped the physical conditions of life for a large part of the population.

The basic aesthetic was that of modernism: simple, efficient, functional and it was widely disseminated through public programs and the media. The changes in popular taste stretched across the entire social spectrum and everyday life became aestheticized in a way it had not previously been. It was, however, by no means a unidirectional process. In the adoption of the new aesthetic it was "peasantized" in a number of ways. That is to say the modernist, functionalist aesthetic was fused with local cultural elements and thereby a new and peculiarly Swedish variant of modernism was born. This development was closely linked to other aspects of the modern project such as the welfare state, changes in child-rearing practices, a focus on cosiness and practicality, etc. all forming a nexus of meaning closely tied to a particular understanding of what it means to be modern as well as what it means to be Swedish: "Swedish living meant a special taste for colours and materials as well as an emphasis on the practical, but also a certain set of attitudes towards family life, sex roles, and child rearing as outside observers noted" (ibid: 63-64).

That is to say the physical objects that were brought into the Swedish living room in a very concrete way tied the inhabitants to the larger social whole and the ideological concerns of the state and formal society. In this way we can see the furnishing of the Swedish living room as being performative in Tambiah's special sense of the word. The furniture acts as

indexical icons that are assumed by convention to have a resemblance to the concepts of Swedishness and modernity. Now, this is a fairly clear example of the perfomativity of objects at least in one sense of the term. The objects here have a clear illocutionary force and clear perlocutionary effects in defining the subjects' identities and relation to the social whole. We cannot judge the ritual aspects of consumption in this example due to the lack of ethnographic evidence, but the performative aspects are clear.

We can note that recently there's been a shift in this nexus that is not covered by the article in question. For instance, IKEA that was one of the main engines of dissemination for this particular Swedish construction of modernity today has become for some subjects more operational as a marker of transience than as a marker of modernity. That is to say IKEA becomes what is bought as a temporary measure until such time as one is capable of acquiring what one really wants and is socially recognized as being a temporary placeholder for the eventual acquisition of the real object of desire (Clarke 1998: 97). Whether this is temporary or permanent transience is of course relatively immaterial to the performative aspects of the furniture in question.

The second case I'll discuss is an examination of the construction of "homeyness" in North America based on fieldwork done in 40 families in Ontario (McCracken 2005: 17-49). "Homeyness" is an elusive quality ascribed to rooms, spaces, and physical objects that somehow connotes and creates a sense of home. On a physical level it consists of a taste in colours, fabrics, furniture, building materials, etc. that to the subjects of the study had the quality of homeyness. Specifically it relates to such things as "warm" colours, natural building materials, natural fibre based fabrics, family mementoes, and so on and so forth. What this does in a concrete sense to the informants is make them feel "as though someone lived there" (ibid: 26) in contrast to "cluttered up with a lot of fancy stuff" (ibid: 27). The opposition to the homey is the formal, elegant, and designed interiors in particular those expounded by the modernist aesthetics discussed in the other cases in this chapter. It is interesting to note that the "Scandinavian" aesthetic represented in the last example as being what constitutes a sense of home in Sweden is literally the antithesis to the concept of homeyness as it is examined in this study. One informant in the study found no worse quality in design than "Scandinavian" (ibid: 45).

From the basic physical properties McCracken moved on to the symbolic properties that informants attributed to the homey. He identified eight of these. First, the homey has a diminutive effect on what it touches; homey spaces seem smaller and more intimate. This could be the reason for the preference for darker colours. Second, the homey is variable. It doesn't reduce to consistency or uniformity, but actively eschews these properties. McCracken posits that this makes it feel more "natural". Hence the natural building materials and fibres. Third, the homey has an embracing quality. It is intended to make you feel enclosed for both good and bad and again adds to a feeling of intimacy. The "memory wall" with photographs of the entire family is a typical example of objects that add to the embracing property of a space. Fourth, the homey is engaging. It is intended to draw you into itself and make you feel welcome. This is mainly represented on the physical level by the particular arrangement of objects in a way to indicate "openness". Fifth, the homey has a mnemonic property. It brings to life a sense of the history of the family and the people living in the space and is represented by objects indexical to the people who are living there or their relations. Sixth, the homey is endowed with authenticity. It is assumed to be more real than the world of the public sphere, to somehow be closer to the genuine being of the people who inhabit the space. Seventh, the homey has an informal character. It positively eschews formality and invites people "to be themselves". Eight, it actively situates people within itself. People are embraced and enveloped by the homey so as to become a definite part of it. McCracken sums up: "Homeyness seeks to make the occupant fully occupy homey space and so to claim his or her full attention and affect. The diminutive property makes the homey environment thinkable, the variable property makes it real, the embracing property makes it cosseting, the engaging property makes it involving, the mnemonic property makes it emplacing in time, the authentic property makes it emplacing in space, the informal property makes it reassuring and riskless, and the situating property makes it fully capturing"(ibid: 38).

So there's a clear illuctionary force present in homey objects and spaces, and they also have definite perlocutionary effects. McCracken examines these in detail as well using the term "pragmatic" properties to much the same effect. First, he notes that homeyness functions as an enabling context for the domestic production processes. That is to say it

makes the very concept of the family as it exists in this part of North America and its reproduction possible. Second, homeyness works as a status corrector. Homeyness is archetypical to middle class existence, and is typically avoided by higher status individuals. In a sense because of its embracing, informal nature it works against the grain of that existence, while it enacts the ideal of the middle class family. Third, homeyness functions as a marketplace corrector. That is to say that in a homey space objects are stripped of the meanings attached to them by the marketplace and become available for having new meanings attached to them appropriate to the family context. Fourth and most importantly for our purposes, homeyness works as a modernity corrector. The informants found modern styles inhospitable and unliveable; cold and unforgiving. The meanings attached to objects in the modern style seem to be incompatible with the concept of the family as described here, which may be the reason the homey becomes opposed to the modern. In this way homeyness serves as a way to make spaces perform habitable meanings and thereby correct for modernity. This example, then, shows a very different concept of the home and meaning of its objects than the previous. We'll return to the comparison in the ending discussion of the chapter, but we have yet a variant to examine before this.

The third case is from Japan and is pitched as a corrective to the modernist movement's glorification of the austere simplicity of the Japanese home aesthetic (Daniels 2001). With the rise of modernism many in the west began to look at Japan as an example of a simpler, cleaner, more functional and uncluttered aesthetic based on social harmony and a Zen-like simplicity and traced to the traditional house of the Tokugawa period. For many people this vision of the Japanese house lingers. This article sets out to disprove this thesis and in the process it tells us much about the relation between home decoration, modernity, and japaneseness. The study is based on two in-depth case studies, as well as the authors own experience from extensive field work in the area.

First of all it notes that contemporary housing in Japan like in much of the world is subject to a social division into temporary rented accommodation, and more permanent owned accommodation. The discussion in the article is mostly centred on the second category due to the fact that it is when people move to this category that they tend to start actively

negotiating these issues. Second, most houses are built from models that is to say you go to an exhibition site that shows you the variants, which you then customize. Third, Daniels notes a second social distinction between middle and high status individuals in that the middle tends to follow American models, while high status individuals follow European ones and have a greater veneration for traditional Japanese patterns. Fourth, she notes that in contrast to the prevailing image of the Japanese house as being relatively uncluttered she instead found that they typically were booming with objects of all kinds.

The central issue, however, for the domestic Japanese setting according to this article is a negotiation between two distinct styles "Japanese-style" and "westernized-style". It is important in this context not to get stuck on the labels. Japanese style does not necessarily mean traditionally Japanese in an accurate historical sense, nor does westernized necessarily conform to our own ideas about what western means, rather they are signifiers that are constantly shifting and under negotiation. Concretely this manifests itself in a blending of objects in a scheme that blends both of these styles in a seemingly chaotic fashion. Daniels notes that 90% of contemporary Japanese houses have at least one traditional Japanese tatami room with mats on the floor, a tokonoma alcove built in, and paper walls even if the rooms is in many cases not much used. The kitchen area may be open in American style, but contain a special room for a collection of antique Japanese teapots in a home made cabinet. You can have a home made drawing made in an evening course hanging next to a copy of a piece by Picasso.

The objects in the home are also very much used for the enactment of social relationships. Graduation photos of the kids are a classic marker of middle class existence. The prominent displaying of gifts is also considered crucial for the home concretely manifesting a set of social relationships. The importance of home made bric-a-brac, usually made by the wife of the household in evening courses, is tremendous especially in the cases where as is still typically the case the wife of the household is not employed. These seem to represent the stability of home existence and the reigning construction of gender patterns and are displayed throughout the house.

All in all the impression one gets is the typical Japanese home environment rather than being an austere and aestheticized environment is instead based mainly on the concrete constitution of social categories through the use of physical objects: "The ideal of social harmony based on gendered, framed identities continues to be cherished. However, in practice social relationships in the home, as in wider society, are dynamic and experiential rather than static. Material objects are expressive of these dynamic relationships" (ibid: 225). Crucial for our understanding of this phenomenon is that it is in the negotiation of the traditional and the western that notions of what it means to be modern and Japanese arise. In other words, to be modern and Japanese implies blending the traditional Japanese and the modern western. This is the nexus that the chaotic bled of objects enacts in the home. It is clear from the examples given that the objects don't merely signify this division it constitutes it in a concrete way, nor is the act of making and decorating a home simply a question of aesthetics it is a ritual activity that directly affects social reality. The creation, acquisition, and display of objects in the home thus have a character that is performative and ritual according to the definitions given earlier.

What we see in these three cases are three different ways of contending with modernity and identity through the deployment of objects in the home. In the Swedish case modernity is literally in the living room. The home is an arena for the construction of oneself as a subject in this particular version of modernity and it is intimately tied up with public and collective norms and values. That is to say the "cosmological" or ideological aims of the state and society at large is embedded in the daily lived existence of the home and the objects of the home are specifically chosen to perform this function. The North American case is in some ways diametrically opposed. The construction of homeyness is a corrective to modernity and nothing could be more inappropriate to the living room than the modern. It is however clear that the modernity subjects have to contend with is constructed in fairly similar ways in both these cases; it is the evaluation of it that is different. Perhaps we can also tie this to general cultural differences in attitudes to the public sphere and the state in Scandinavia and North America generally though I don't want to belabour the point.

 What is interesting is that although the attitude towards modernity is different the objects of homey homes are performative in a much similar way and act as indexical icons towards

a no less transcendental goal: that of bourgeois family idyll. The case from Japan shows identity and modernity being constructed in a very different way. The negotiation between different styles, between tradition and the new, between Japan and the west is exactly what defines modern japaneseness. But even in this case the way in which objects are used to establish social relations and the subjects relation to social categories is indicative of the performative power of objects. Now, we haven't seen much of ritual in this chapter, our focus has been elsewhere. The next chapter will delve into the ritual aspects of consumption in greater detail. The main points that should be taken from this chapter are first the way in which modernity as a construct is embedded in the physical environment of the home. Second, I would like to note how important the material contexts are to the social existence of the subjects in these examples. That is to say the examples in this chapter do seem to indicate that the contexts we live in are important to our existence as social beings. Third, the performative aspects in several senses of the word of the objects in this chapter seem to me at least to be fairly clear.

Chapter 6. Objects between Self and Other.

In this chapter I will examine another three cases of the use of objects and the ritual nature of consumption. First, I will examine some rather peculiar examples of the use of mimesis in objects as described by Michael Taussig in *Mimesis and Alterity* (Taussig 1993). Mimesis in Taussig's scheme becomes central to the workings of alterity, which fashions an important analytical tool for the understanding of the other cases in this chapter and perhaps also for understanding consumption practices in general. The point is therefore primarily to set the tone for the next two examples from Belize and Trinidad respectively, which deal specifically with the use of objects to contend with modernity in the postcolonial context. The general nexus that will be examined in this chapter is that of self and other as it is expressed and negotiated in the concrete form of physical objects. The mechanisms of alterity are often closely related to the performativity of objects and ritualized consumption practices, which these examples, I hope, will bear out. By doing this I should also be able to say something about how exactly objects can help create a subject's positioning and identity in modernity.

Mimesis is the foundation of identity. It is by imitating someone or something else that we become sufficiently proficient to be something in and of ourselves. Walter Benjamin in his essay *On the Mimetic Faculty* (Benjamin 1978) posits that the capacity for mimesis is essential to the functioning of our higher capacities. The need and desire to become Other is integral to becoming self. The mimetic faculty in modernity, however, is subject to strict regulation and control. That is to say what is at heart a natural faculty becomes subjected to the needs of society and bent to its will. Adorno and Horkheimer describe this process in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which we discussed in chapter 2 (Adorno and Horkheimer 1976). And we might note that consumption is one of the primary arenas for this organized control of mimesis.

Michael Taussig in *Mimesis and Alterity* (Taussig 1993) takes this perspective as a starting point for an analysis of the relation between the Cuna Indians of panama and the western colonials that came into contact with them. I won't go into the details of Taussig's

argument, rather what I want to look at are three specific examples of the way in which the Cuna use objects to enact the relationship between self and Other. First, we have the case of the nuchu curing figurines. These are wooden figurines used by the nele, or shaman, in rituals intended to diagnose or cure illnesses. The interesting thing about them is that they are invariable cut in the shape of the European Other. What's even more interesting is that Cuna mythology insists that the exterior shape of the nuchu is entirely irrelevant to its functioning; its power is embedded in the wood itself. What this phenomenon expresses according to Taussig is an attempt to somehow gain control over what you are representing as a form of sympathetic magic.

That is to say representing the colonial Other in this way somehow taps into its power and allows you to use it for your own purposes. At the same time of course this also creates a split in the identities of self and Other and thus defines a measure of alterity (ibid: 1-33). Second, we have, which should come as no surprise to a reader of this thesis, the use of clothing. Among the Cuna there is a clear gendered division in the types of clothing worn. Men wear western style clothing, and women wear traditional clothing, usually in the form of homemade molas. This division is a part of a larger gendered division of labour and power, which follows fairly traditional patriarchal lines. We see here on a social level much the same effect that we see in the use of the nuchu curing figurines. Mimesis on the one hand and alterity on the other or mimesis becoming alterity as Taussig would have it (ibid: 176-193).

Third, we have the case of Cuna molas or appliquéd shirt fronts patterned with images from western pop culture. In particular Taussig focuses on a mola in the image of the RCA Talking Dog. The image is a recognizable reproduction, but in the process of having been made into a mola it has also been transformed in interesting ways. For instance, the original dog is listening with a puzzled look, while the Cuna variant is actively talking. Also the gramophone is being held up by stick figures for the benefit of the dog who is for all intents and purposes the protagonist of the piece. This is indicative of the way in which such images at the same time as they mimic also transform. We should also note that the mere fact of putting copies of western images on the traditional product of female labour is pointing in the same direction as our previous examples.

All this seems to fit well together with the Cunas' traditional strategy of playing one colonial power against another in order to maintain independence (ibid: 144-162). That is to say that by the process of mimesis becoming alterity it seems the Cuna are able to carve out a space for their own self-identification in contrast to that of the colonial Other without being subsumed or dominated. It should be clear from the previous example that the Cuna objects are performative in constituting the separation between self and Other. Also they seem to point beyond themselves for this very reason. There seems to be very little separation between consumption and ritual in this example. The use of objects is highly ritualized, but that extends both to the objects of western provenance as to the natively produced. The separation thus seems moot in this case, but the model of analysis still seems to work. The Cuna seem to have found a highly efficient strategy for maintaining the boundaries between self and Other, and this strategy is embodied in the material culture they use and produce.

The second example I want to address in this chapter comes from Belize (Wilk 1994). Under colonial domination a major means of elite domination was constituted by the use of goods. A discourse of time and temporality was deployed to ensure that there was seen a gap between the colony and its metropolis: "In colonial time the colony is described using metaphors that blend the connotative meanings of time, distance and cultural development. Primitive, bachuard, and underdeveloped are such blending terms, while others draw more directly on temporal, cultural, or spatial meanings (e.g. antiquated, uncultured, isolated, natural, savage, barbaric, degenerate, primordial, wild, marginal, peripheral, uncivilized, backwater)" (ibid: 102). In concrete terms this was manifested in the elite's use of foreign goods to create a temporal gap, a special kind of colonial time (ibid). Naturally, the western goods would only be available to those in contact with the rest of the world that is to say to the elite. The rest of the country was consigned to be backwards and mired in tradition rather than modernity.

The western goods thus perform the separation of the colony and its tradition on the one hand and the metropolis and modernity on the other. We can note that Taussig makes the case that it is true for the third world in general that its goods are always already outmoded

so something of this case may be generalizable (Taussig 1993: 212-236). The breakdown of the colonial regime, however, has led to the whole country being 'crazy for foreign' (Wilk 1994: 97). The opposition between 'bright' or 'modan' on one side and 'bushy' or 'krofy' on the other is felt strongly and is very much in thread with the old colonial discourse. The desirability of western and modern over local and traditional is not in much dispute. At the same time it has led to an opening for the creation of a range of new meanings that can be attached to objects and that they can be set to perform, which do not require them to carry temporal force. The discourse of temporality and development was firmly rooted in concrete object form and as the author points out: "Verbal language only works when we agree on the denotative meanings of words…The consumption of goods, in contrast, sends a message even when sender and receiver do not agree on what the message means" (ibid: 101).

Thus the breakdown of an old discourse means that a space is opened for the recreation of the ways in which objects are used in a given culture. A major mechanism for this transformation in Belize is the spread of satellite television. The fact of television time outmodes colonial time because people have instant access to the outside world and thus can be synchronous with it. That is to say the old colonial constructions are giving bay to new ways of positioning oneself as subjects in modernity and naturally objects are central in these new constructions. As the author puts it "…objects of various kinds play a crucial and active role in the construction and use of time and images of personal and collective futures" (ibid: 98). In terms of the present interpretive scheme we see that the old elite used objects very directly to mark the division between themselves and the general population. That is to say consumption as social distinction. But, in this case the distinction is not simply one of status, it also dives the population into different temporal orders and thereby acquires a nearly metaphysical importance.

It is in this sense highly performative in all of Tambiah's senses. The display of goods to mark distinction is clearly dramatic in and of itself and in this case has taken on an added dimension. The temporal discourse on modernity and tradition and its manifestation in the elite's use of goods shows that objects are used as indexical icons pointing towards transcendental values. Finally, the goods are performative in the Austinian sense by

maintaining the social order and the social categories pertaining to it. The new constructions following the breakdown of the colonial order are, however, no less performative in their use of object than the old ones. Goods have become a vehicle for the imagination. As the author says subjects imagine both their individual and collective futures through objects. It is interesting to note that although these are goods existing only in imagination in order for imagination to become reality it needs concrete form, needs to be embodied.

The third example I want to example comes from Trinidad and deals once more with the use of clothing. In this essay Daniel Miller wants to question the validity of the surface/depth dichotomy central to western metaphysics (Miller 1994). He does that through an examination of the division between style and fashion in Trinidad, and in doing so reveals a very interesting use of patterns. Like Belize Trinidad is a country that craves newness and like in Belize there is a clear preference for the modern with the same use of the word "bright" to mean modern (ibid: 79). What is interesting is that whereas fashion exists as a real phenomenon there is an additional category at work: that of being stylish rather than fashionable. We should also note that traditional dress is ubiquitous at ceremonies marking life cycle events and displays practically no variation whatsoever.

So, there is a background of deep conventionality on which there exists a fashion system and on top of the fashion system there is the stylish. To have style is to transcend the standard categories of the traditional clothing system and the fashion system both. It is also a ritual practice that is manifested in impromptu fashion shows that are a ubiquitous part of daily life. These consist of competitive sartorial displays in which the stylish persons show off their individuated styles in front of an audience. Someone who is stylish may borrow from current fashions, but only in order to go beyond it in individuality. It is thus the fit between the outfit, the wearer, and the way in which he engages in his performance that is crucial in determining the success of the stylish person. Just as important to style as individuality is transience. It is imperative that style remains ephemeral, that it is never repetitive, that it is continually new. Style is all surface and no depth, which is not to say frivolous, since it is vitally important for style to remain surface and not be interiorized.

We should note that the stylish person is not always in character, but may wear perfectly conventional clothing for conventional occasions. Miller invokes Henry Gates' in order to account for this phenomenon. Gates argues that there exist rhetorical practices that are in Wittgensteinian terms not involved in the language game of information giving, but instead revolve around the free play of the signifier. Wittgenstein defined poetry in this way, and Gates wants to extend it to a range of practices peculiar to African and African American culture. Miller argues that style on Trinidad can be seen as exactly this kind of practice. He also argues that this undercuts the surface/depth dichotomy of western metaphysics since the whole point of the display is to prevent surface from becoming depth because being is best located on the surface. That is to say where we have seen other examples of goods working to create context that are then interiorized by the utterances made by them, here we have the subversion of the same process. The meanings of goods are not interiorized, but instead transcended and identity is thus kept on the surface.

Thereby is also attained a sense of freedom from obligation and stability, which is culturally valued. In relation to the problematic of this chapter modernity is kept at arms length, not through a resort to any counter-identity or other form of direct resistance, but through a subversion of the metaphysical underpinnings of its ideology. Identity becoming a surface phenomenon means that the objects of modernity cannot perform their function. This example therefore shows the performative nature of objects by showing how the usual uses of goods can be turned around to undermine the "object code" and the features, which are normally characteristic of it. The performance of the stylish person is thus performative in undermining the performative utterances that would normally be embodied in the objects of use. Again, however, it needs to be stressed that this happens on top of a standard fashion system, a traditional clothing system, and a functioning system of social categories. Therefore it cannot be taken to be normative even for the context in which it occurs. We should, furthermore, note that this ethnography was conducted during the time of the oil boom in Trinidad, which brought in a lot of new wealth to the country and that Miller notes that patterns were already changing due to the recession during the last part of his stay there. That being said does not invalidate the general point, but adds the obvious one that the way people deploy goods is deeply affected by socio-economic conditions.

In all of the above examples we see objects being used in consumption practices that can be interpreted or literally are ritual. We also see them being used performatively in various ways. That is to say they fit the general model adequately. More significantly we see in all three cases objects somehow standing between the self and the Other. In the Cuna example the objects active bring about alterity through mimesis. The Cuna by this process manage to define themselves uniquely as subjects in modernity without having to give up their own identity. There's a mimetic aspect to the Belizean case as well and this mimetic aspect like the Cuna one is active in creating alterity and selfhood. However, in Belize the elite's mimicry of western modernity helped create the very separation between self and other that it ostensibly sought to eliminate. The new constructions point to new futures, but the objects of modernity are still the principal vehicle of imagination. The last case from Trinidad shows a different scenario. The sartorial displays seem to mock mimicry by playing on the conventional and going beyond it, thereby creating transient individuality. But this too is a kind of mimetic function that defines self and other in relation to the realities of the modern world brought about by the use of objects. In terms of the main point of the thesis we here see consumption practices being used to define or negate the most intimate relations in the social world those between self and self, and self and other, and objects playing an instrumental part in that definition or negation.

Chapter 7. Conclusion.

"We make our contexts and our contexts make us" goes an adage in the study of material culture. This thesis has sought to deliver a concrete model and concrete examples that can bear this statement out. We started out by showing how consumer culture has been integral to the making of the modern world. We saw that all throughout the modern period consumption practices have taken over more and more of the responsibility for social reproduction. Modernity itself is integrally bound up with the use of objects for its definition. But as we saw in chapter 3 many of the traditional approaches to the study of consumption have been much more interesting in offering a critique than in trying to understand the operations of the practices and objects concerned. We however also saw that recently several new approaches have arisen in anthropology to remedy this situation. In chapter 4 we built on two of those approaches one stemming from semiotics and one from ritual analysis and combined them with speech act theory to generate a vocabulary or model to analyze the meaning of objects and the practices of consumption in analogous ways. This vocabulary was then deployed in a study of the way modernity is embedded in the material fabric of the home in three different cultural settings. We saw that indeed it is very much the case that the way in which the material world is organized impacts the way in which the social world operates. In chapter 6 we went from the context of the home and the family to the construction of the self in modernity. We saw a variety of ways that processes of consumption were used to negotiate this construction in different cultural settings. This showed us the importance of these processes in even the most intimate social relations and cultural constructions. All in all then, the driving message of this thesis can be summarized in the slogan "stuff matters". Material culture and processes of consumption are incredibly important in the making of cultural constructs and in the general reproduction of society.

We've also seen examples from around the world demonstrating how the objects of modernity can engage in a variety of context and constructions all based in one way or another on practices of consumption. But this very fact disproves the traditional notion of consumer culture as somehow a bastardization of real culture. First of all consumer culture

is not one. It needs to be pluralized. Second, consumption practices are a part of a larger cultural reality and act more as an engine for social reproduction rather than as something that can be taken apart and studied without relation to the whole. The cases in this thesis make this point well enough, I think. Consumer culture is as heterogeneous as culture proper because it is culture proper. There is no reason to think that consumer cultures will necessarily have more in common with each other than cultures based on kinship as their primary mode of reproduction. That is to say they will share some things and differ in many. Just as consumer culture is not one, neither is modernity. Modernity as a historical period is one, but modernity on an ideological level is multiple though many share similarities with each other. We have seen a variety of ways that subjects in various cultures have related to their local construction of modernity through the consumption practices described. The important thing, however, for the purposes of this thesis is not whether or not consumer culture is good or bad instead what is important is that in all these cases the objects that surround the subjects of the case studies have important roles to play in their construction of modernity and their relation to it.

On a theoretical note this thesis has tried to apply systematically the tools of speech act theory and ritual analysis to consumption and the meaning of objects. The argument was made that objects don't function in a way analogous to language, but have a peculiar that can best be addressed by taking a performative approach. This was wedded to the argument that consumption is homologous to ritual and can be analyzed using the tools of that trade. In other to create a unified model a performative approach was taken to ritual as well. I hope to have convinced you that the traditional notion of objects as simply signifying something cannot be sustained. I also hope that you'll agree that there are many similarities between ritualized behaviour and consumption practices. Whether I'll have convinced you that it is useful to look at objects as embodied speech acts is a useful approach is more doubtful to me, there may be other approaches equally valid. But that objects are in one way or another important in shaping the social world seems to me beyond dispute. The cash value for the practising anthropologist who buys into my argument is to pay closer to the material surroundings when doing fieldwork. Notice the brand of tennis shoes your informants wear, the fabric and colour of their shirts, the kind of

wood their chairs are made of. Weave this into your ethnographic material and see where it takes you. If my thesis is correct it should tend to lead you somewhere interesting.

Yet another theoretical point needs to be made here. I mentioned in the beginning that my approach to material culture was strongly influenced by Daniel Miller. In an early work he posits that modern mass consumption works in a dialectical fashion with cultural meanings being objectified and externalized in object, which is by necessity self-alienating and therefore leads to sublation or reabsorption. Over time this process leads to more and more meaning being externalized and consumption becoming more and significant as an arena for the negotiation of social meanings and social reproduction. Thus, it is a driving motor in the making of modern consumer society. I hope it is not too far fetched to suggest that the examples we've seen of modernity being objectified in various ways lends some credence to this theoretical position (Miller 1987).

I'm sure most readers will have noticed the absence of references to the debates on postmodernism, postmodernity, and globalization. If there's one place where consumption has been privileged it is in these debates. We touched briefly on Baudrillard's thesis on the transformation of the metallurgic to the semiurgic society (Baudrillard 1988), but only to discard its premise. But these debates seem far removed from the reality that the case studies I base my interpretation on. The fact is that for the cases discussed in this thesis modernity is still the name of the game. The people here don't live in a postmodern world. They are naturally contending with the forces of globalization and postmodernity, but on the level of lived experience it is my contention that they still live in a modern not a postmodern world. The very fact that they still seem to be positioning themselves relative to the modern seems to demonstrate this.

I should acknowledge that many of the contexts in this thesis are postcolonial, and the relative absence of references to postcolonial theorists may be a weakness. I can only plead ignorance on this point. It has not been within the scope of my research to engage with the postcolonial theorists. I also acknowledge that I lack a gendered perspective on the use of objects though this is as much a question of the material available in the cases I've used. It's clear, however, that such a perspective would strengthen the thesis. The lack of

discussion on postmodernity and globalization I see as less of a lack. Let's assume that the world is currently undergoing a major transformation as almost everyone agrees and that this is marked by globalization of capital and culture, fragmentation within cultures, neo-nationalisms and fundamentalisms in response, the compression of time and space, and not least wide ranging commodification to mention just a few symptoms.

How does this affect the findings of this thesis? Whether you want to see postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson 1991), a cultural transformation based on the hegemonic decline of the United States in the world system (Friedman 1994c), the birth of a network society (Castells 1996), or culture being mimetic of the chaos created by a shift to flexible production and a new round of space-time compression (Harvey 1990), the fact is that whatever the correct interpretation of current events is people will still be using objects to make contexts that make them, probably more so since more and more aspects of culture will be commodified. So from this point of view the model presented here will still be valid, though possibly harder to apply. If the meanings of objects become increasingly polysemic, if the old stability of the object code begins to falter, if the social systems that sustain the current uses of objects become fragmented and their categories lose their validity it becomes Material culture is central to culture and the importance of taking it into account when doing cultural analysis is not likely to dwindle. Therefore while the specifics of the cases may change or the model may need to be revised it will remain the case that our objects are partners in our worlds and the way we use them are part of making us who we are.

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