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# **Retailing Retold**

Unfolding the Process of Image Construction  
in Everyday Practice

**Cecilia Cassinger**

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For C.



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Malmö, February 2010

Cecilia Cassinger

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# Prologue

The whispering of the gazes fills the arcades. There is no thing here that does not, where one least expects it, open a fugitive eye, blinking it shut again; and should you look more closely, it is gone. To the whispering of these gazes, the space lends its echo: “Now, what,” it blinks, “can possibly have come over me?” We stop short in some surprise. “What indeed, can possibly have come over you?” Thus we gently bounce the question back to it. Here, the coronation of Charlemagne could have taken place, as well as the assassination of Henri IV, the death of [Edward’s] sons in the tower, and the... That is why the wax museums are here. This optical gallery of princes is their acknowledged capital. For Louis XI, it is the throne room; for York, the tower of London; for Abdel Krim, the desert and for Nero, Rome. (Benjamin 1999a, p. 878)

Walter Benjamin’s project on the arcades of nineteenth-century Paris encloses a set of tensions that provides a backdrop for the argument made in this book. The arcades were the historical forerunners of retailers of the present-day. For Benjamin they are ambiguous places. The arcades stand on the double ground of the old and modern. On the one hand, they speak of a collective past, a vanished time; on the other hand, they are emblems of the prosperous modern world. Built in iron and glass, the most modern materials of the time, they simultaneously constituted narrow passageways through the old neighbourhoods of the city (Buck-Morss 1989, p. 3ff). The glass roofing and insulation that protected dwellers from the discomforts of the street created a world of stories in contrast to the muddy and noisy world outside. Another source of the ambiguity of the arcades is that they are both sheltered places for dreaming and dwelling, and creations of private enterprise and sources of profit. In the arcades a rationally planned structure intersects with the lived experiences of everyday life.

Benjamin’s writing is often described as a work of mourning over what was lost in modernity (Highmore 2002). One of the things he observes as lost in the modern epoch is the ability to exchange experiences. The massive change created by modernisation – from the tempo of everyday life to the restructuration of the geographical landscape – left little opportunity for making sense of the everyday. The inability to make

sense of the modern relates to the devaluing of experience in modernity. Experiences of the here and now do not count for anything because they cannot be calculated and accumulated. It is the collective accumulated experience of culture, rather than the individual's experience, that interests Benjamin. The *Arcades Project* represents a cultural approach which operates on many levels to delineate the collective experience of phenomena. In order to voice the cultural experience of modern everyday life, he uses a montage-like technique where literary and poetic works are juxtaposed to theories of social utopias and the commodity economy. It is all strung together in the arcades where the calculated time of commerce encounters the experienced time of humans. In his work we are allowed to enter these places, to see and sense the arcade in photos, in poetry and novels, in city guidebooks, and in theory. The arcades open themselves to us, and we are invited to partake in the relationships that make up their form.

A vanishing figure in modernity that Benjamin identifies is the *flâneur*. The *flâneur* is essentially an imaginary character appearing regularly in late nineteenth century European literature. He is often depicted as an everyday hero who holds the key to the mysteries of the modern metropolis (Shields 2006). In the arcades, Benjamin imagines the way that the slow strolling of flâneur goes against the fast pace of the crowd moving as one through the narrow passageways. The *flâneur* is a storyteller – the crowd is his story. The leisurely pace of his strolling allows the *flâneur* time to remember, reflect on, and make sense of what goes on in the arcades. His slow movement is an appropriation of the place, which constitutes a form of spatial storytelling that bestows meaning on disparate events which happened either long ago or just recently. The whispering of the arcades gives witness of memories and stories which turn the planned places into spaces full of life.

# Chapter 1

## International Retail Image (IRI) and Everyday Practice

One of the challenges international retailers face concerns how consumers in different markets see them. During the past decade the question of how consumers' images of the retailer are translated from one market to another have received increased attention in the academic literature on retail internationalisation. How are consumers' images of retailers created internationally? Do consumers share images of the retailer across markets, and what types of images are associated with international retailers? In this book, informed by developments in cultural theory, I consider the use of some new resources for thinking about how consumers in two countries shape images of the international retailer.

Previous research commonly approached the way that international retail image (henceforward IRI) is formed as a transfer of image from retailer to consumers, and from one market to another. The aim of research employing the transfer approach is to evaluate and measure images in order to provide better ways to predict and adjust images to the target consumer groups. This calculation of image need not necessarily constitute a problem in itself. Within the limitations of the instrumental criteria used in IRI research, this produces valid and relevant results. Arguments can, however, be made with reference to what these studies overlook. One of the issues at stake here is the reduction of IRI to an instrument for monitoring the effects of retail marketing communication on consumers' perceptions of a retailer. This limits the transfer view to a focus on image from the retailer's point of view and neglects the role of lived culture in the formation of images. The neglect of the relationship between retailing and lived culture is

problematic given that image is an outcome of both the retailer's efforts at projecting desirable images and consumers' efforts to make sense of these images (cf. Alvesson 1990). Since the retailer's image depends in part on the meaning-making activities of consumers, it is also tied to the cultures in which these activities are situated. In the following, I propose that the usefulness of IRI resides in its ability to capture the relationship between retailing and lived culture. To this end, the formation of IRI is conceptualised as a construction process whereby consumers give meaning to retailing in everyday practice.

This chapter will proceed as follows. First, I give a brief introduction to the general research field of retailing that this study is positioned within. Second, I identify some of the problems with the assumptions underpinning the studies on the transfer of IRI. These assumptions will be further expanded on in Chapter 2. Third, I outline an alternative approach to the study of IRI, one which understands retail image as an outcome of everyday practice. Finally, I present the aims, contributions, and organisation of the book.

## Introducing Retailing

To date several definitions of retailing exist in the literature. An early definition of retailing is provided by Fri (1925, p. 1) who suggests that retailing consists of "activities of the merchant in bringing about the most advantageous proportion between sales, stocks, and profits. It includes not only the buying of goods, but the active solicitation of the patronage of customers through aggressive promotion of sales." (cited in Peterson and Balasubramanian 2002, p. 10) Dunne and Lush (2008, p. 4) write that retailing consists of "the final activities and steps needed to place a product made elsewhere in the hands of the consumer or to provide services to the consumer." They further state that the retailing function can be performed by any firm providing products or services to the final consumer. Researchers generally agree that retailing is something more unique than just the application of marketing. Davies (1993), for instance, argues that retailing needs to be seen as a much broader activity than just the sale of a small quantity of goods to the end consumer. He defines retailing as

The management of resources to supply the product and service needs of the end-consumer, encompassing the supply chain of any physical products and the exchange process involved. (Davies, 1993, p. 6)

According to his definition, retailing encompasses both the physical movement of goods and the exchange with the end-consumer.

In this book I approach retailing from a cultural perspective. Recent research on retailing from a geographical perspective highlights the ways in which the distinction between economy and culture blur in the study of the subject. Wrigley and Lowe (2002, p. 3) argue that in order to be able to account for the complexities of retailing, explorations of the economic structures of retail capital need to be combined with analyses of the cultural logic of retailing. The assumption here is that the spatial organisation of retail capital is related to the cultural practices of consumption (see, e.g., Marsden and Wrigley 1995).

In a similar vein, Dowling (1993) draws attention to the role of retailers as cultural institutions. In retailing, Dowling argues, specific institutions are constituted by sets of discourses or wider sets of ideas about the world that govern, among other things, the advertising of a retail place, treatment of employees and shoppers, interaction with other firms, and relations with the wider society. This is accomplished, she writes, by creating attractive store-images through the physical layouts of the stores. In agreement with Dowling (1993), I view the retail institution as a physical place set up in order to organise the consumer's experience of the retailer in a particular way. Nicosia and Mayer (1976, p. 67) offer a useful definition of the retail institution as a "unique pattern of interaction among activities, people, and places through time." As commercial environments organised for the purpose of buying and selling goods, they argue, retailers partake in shaping meanings of products and even ways of life.

Retailing stands in a close relationship to everyday culture. In contrast to other companies, such as manufacturers, what makes retailers special is that they are places through which people regularly move, sometimes even visit on a daily basis. Today, retailers are defining characteristics of most of the larger cities. With much of urban space taken over by retailers, retailing fulfils many of the functions of communal institutions in a manner that goes beyond the exchange of goods for



money (Gottdiener 2003). Stores are used not only for buying things, but are places for other types of practices, which are then, in their turn, re-enacted in other places such as the home, school or workplace.

For the purpose of investigating IRI in the current study, the questions are understanding how consumers give meaning to these places and what this process looks like in an international milieu. Due to the predominant view of image formation as transfer, little is known about what is involved in the process whereby consumers' images of retailers are shaped. Before delineating a possible way to comprehend this process, I first problematise the commonly held view in the retail literature of image formation as a transfer, arguing for the need to incorporate lived culture into IRI studies.

## The International Transfer of Retail Image

There is a never-ceasing interest in the concept of image in the field of retailing. In a special issue of the *Journal of Business Research*, the organisers of a recent North American symposium on retailing research state that a central theme that emerged across the symposium was the importance of retail image (Babin et al. 2006). The organisers note that today, as in the days past, retail image is defined as what the retailer means to the consumer.

Obviously, interest remains in just how a "retailer" is represented in the mind of the consumer, and how this representation creates feelings differentiating one retail experience from another. Thus, as in days past, a retail strategy's effectiveness remains limited to the extent that a store's image or personality is misunderstood or misinterpreted by management. (Babin et al. 2006, p. 1280)

Due to the influence of information processing theory, the vast majority of retail image studies see image formation as a cognitive process. The excerpt conveys the idea that images are formed in the consumer's mind as mental representations of the retail store. This is one of the most common definitions of retail image. It was also the definition incorporated into studies seeking to understand the role of image in retail internationalisation. In the 1990s, studies dealing with IRI as an alternative source of competitive advantage in the retail internationalisation process began to appear in the retail literature

(Brown and Burt 1992; McGoldrick and Ho 1992; Blunch 1996; McGoldrick, 1998; Burt and Carralero-Encinas 2000; Burt and Mavrommatis 2006). These studies concerned the possibility of transferring a standardised image of the retailer from the home market to other markets. The interest in image came primarily from researchers approaching the retail internationalisation process from a market-based perspective. Researchers argued that consumers' images of retailers in foreign markets played a crucial role in differentiating the retailer in a way that would render replication by competitors more difficult (Burt and Mavrommatis 2006). Due to the need for differentiation, the importance of intangible assets was given more emphasis in studies on internationalisation. Davies (1992), for instance, suggested that one of the strategies that international retailers can use to craft a unique position in the consumer's mind is the development of a distinctive image in the marketplace.

In a seminal article Brown and Burt (1992) introduced a view of internationalisation based on the transfer of the position of a retail brand in the domestic market to foreign ones. While previous retail image research was hesitant to incorporate theories from brand management, IRI was to a large extent treated as brand image. The retail brand was typically defined as "the merchandise owned, controlled and sold exclusively by a retailer, wholesaler or distributor" (Carpenter and Fairhurst 2005). In contrast to the communication of the manufacturer's brand image by means of advertising, the image of the retail brand is predominately viewed as something built up through communication activities in the store (Davies 1992). Hence, research on IRI primarily deals with store-based internationalisation (Burt et al. 2005). Because the store is the main point of contact between the retailer and the consumers, consumers' perceptions of the store are focal (Burt and Mavrommatis 2006). The environment in the store, including merchandise, prices, display, atmospherics, and so on, should be organised in a way so as to convey how the retailer wishes to be seen by consumers. Previous research underscores the ability of the physical environment of the store to influence consumer behaviour and to create images of the store (Baker 1987; Bitner 1992). The studies on international transfer of retail image incorporated therefore the conceptualisations and measurements of image from the research tradition on store image.

Store image refers to the customer's perception and evaluation of the symbolic and functional meaning of a particular store (He and Mukherjee 2007). The beginning of retail image research is generally allocated to the pioneering work undertaken by Pierre Martineau (1958) on store image. Martineau argued that store patronage is tied to the congruence between the personality or image of the store and the self-image desired by the consumer. On Martineau's work followed a number of studies that sought to conceptualise retail store image as a holistic construct, while measuring it in terms of consumers' perceptions of store attributes. This meant that while the store was conceptualised as an overall impression in the consumer's mind, it was measured in terms of consumers' judgements on store attributes (see, e.g., Farhangmehr et al. 2000; Amirani and Gates 1993 for applications). In studies on retail image, there is thus often a mismatch between how store image is conceptualised and operationalised.

What separates research on IRI from research on retail image in the domestic market is that the first is understood less as what the retailer means to the consumer and more as an instrument for evaluating the success of internationalisation. The principal question in the studies on IRI concerns the transferability (or fit) of the competitive components of image in the domestic market to other countries where the national culture is expected to differ (Burt et al. 2005). The most common way to define retail internationalisation is as a transfer of either retail operations, retail concepts, or management functions from one nation to another (Burt 1991). In the context of internationalisation, nation is typically equated to market. For example, Dawson (1994) defines international retail operations as "the operation, by a firm or alliance, of shops, or other forms of retail distribution, in more than one country." (p. 268) Of course, as he points out, even if this definition is useful, it is a little too clear-cut, and many of the cultural differences facing retailers in other countries also face them in their own countries. Myers (1996, p. 43) maintains that an alternative view of the market, as something other than a homogenous area surrounded by national borders, would put the very idea of internationalisation in question. His contention can be further understood in view of two central assumptions that underline research on the international transfer of retail image. These two assumptions include the concepts of *cultural*

*distance* and *communication as transmission*. In the following, these assumptions are briefly considered.

## Cultural Distance

The concept of transferability originates in the concept of psychic or cultural distance (Burt et al. 2005). Psychic distance generally refers to the perceived degree of similarity and difference between the home market and the foreign market. Vahlne and Widersheim-Paul (1973) originally defined psychic distance as “factors preventing or disturbing the flow of information between potential and actual suppliers” (quoted in Evans et al. 2000, p. 376). Evans et al. (2000) point to the importance of perceptions for understanding the concept of psyche embraced by this term. They argue that a more appropriate explanation of the term is given by Lee’s (1998, p. 9) definition of cultural distance as

international marketer’s perceived socio-cultural distance between the home and the target-country in terms of language, business practices, legal and political systems and marketing infrastructure. (quoted in Evans et al. 2000, p. 377)

The difference between psychic and cultural difference are perhaps most distinguishable by the way that they are operationalised. Psychic distance is typically operationalised in terms of differences in political systems, business practices, educational and legal systems. Cultural distance, on the other hand, is commonly operationalised by using Hofstede’s (1994) influential four (and sometimes five) dimensions of national culture.

The influence of cultural distance on the idea of transferability is reflected in the ideal that IRI should be approximately the same across markets. To become truly international, it is argued, a firm needs to *transcend* cultural differences in overseas markets (McGoldrick 2002, p. 545). In order to do so, cultural distance needs to be made predictable through calculation. For example, in Benito and Gripsrud’s (2005) study, cultural distance was worked out according to the Kogut Singh index, which is comprised of four dichotomist relationships considered universal to the countries included in the study. The thought that cultural distance needs to be transcended in the internationalisation of

retailing is also connected to another old debate in marketing, namely that concerning standardisation and adaptation to foreign markets. In their study of the store brand image of the Spanish limited line grocery discounter Dia in the Greek market, Burt and Mavrommatis (2006) put forward that a standardised strategy to internationalisation implies “the creation of a standard to be applied and hence transferred, not achieved and hence situated”. They argue that when retailers internationalise, they should aim for a standardised position relative other retailers in the market, rather than a standardised image from a consumer perspective. Their study underscores the dominant idea of fit between the home market and the host markets. The aim is to manage a retail image in the new environment that harmonises with the one at home. The focus on fit brings me to the next assumption that underpins the transfer of IRI: communication as transmission.

## Communication as Transmission

The transfer of IRI builds on a linear view on communication from retailer to consumer. The linearity of communication has its origins in the transmission model of communication. The transmission model was originally developed for mathematical purposes to ensure that radio waves reached their target destination (Stern 1994). The model is reproduced in many marketing textbooks and is probably familiar to most readers. It consists of a linear progression of the message from sender to receiver via a channel (or medium). Image is placed at the very end of the model as an effect of transmission. Communication is regarded as successful when the image on the receiver’s end corresponds to the sender’s intended message. The entities in the model are isolated from one another and from external influences such as culture.

The transmission model was imported into the social sciences during the 1960s and was used especially in mass communication research where messages need to be transported across large spatial distances to a large number of people. The communication theoretician James Carey (1992) argues that the transmission view of communication builds on the metaphor of geography or transportation. To transfer means to transport or hand over something from one point to another. It is not difficult to see the resemblance between his argument and what has been said so far about IRI transfer. With this metaphor in mind,

communication becomes a technology for distributing knowledge, ideas, and information further in space in order to produce desired end-effects. Space needs to be made calculable, by means of fixed coordinates and the clustering of objects in regularised ways (Harvey 2001). In addition, the transmission over vast differences to a vast number of people also means that time needs to be converted into space, so that space can be predicted and conquered. As an example of how time is reduced to space in the social sciences, Carey mentions the modern historian who uses time merely as a container to tell a narrative of progress and expansion.

The transmission model reflects the control of IRI across distances in both culture and geography. If space is made calculable by means of fixed coordinates, then we can better understand how comparisons between different countries and competitors can be made of consumers' perceptions of store attributes (cf. Keaveney and Hunt 1992). In view of a mathematical conception of space, the store attributes are the same, regardless of time and place.

## Problems with Image Transfer

Over the years, the transmission model has been the subject of much critique in culturally informed disciplines, most notably in cultural studies (see, e.g., Hall 1980a). Stern (1994) proposes a revised communication model for advertising which accounts for the interaction between advertisers, consumers and promotional texts. She writes:

Despite the postulation of noise and feedback, the traditional model fails to capture the interactivity of communicative intercourse between advertisers and consumers in several ways: it presumes that the source and the recipient are singular constructs; it does not account for message content that can be activated in a variety of forms; and it assumes a passive message recipient as the object of information transmitted by the source. (Stern 1994, p. 5)

The critique put forward by Stern highlights that the binary of sender and receiver in the transmission model is tied to a set of other binaries such as retailer/consumer, production/consumption, and active/passive. The set up of the model thus prevents the incorporation of the consumer as an active part in communication. The consumer is

reduced to a recipient of information. The focus on control of information in the transmission model makes it difficult to embrace the consumer as an active party in communication. What is missing, and this is also part of Stern's point in her article, is an account of what consumers do with the information during or after it is received, and how it is used in everyday life. In organisation studies the model has also been the subject of a similar type of critic (e.g. Deetz 1992). In her study of the construction of city image, Barbara Czarniawska (2000) notes that the instrumental focus of the transmission model of communication makes it unsuitable for capturing human communication. This is, she writes, because human communication is about the construction and reconstruction of meaning. Thus the model is unable to account for meaning, since meaning cannot be sent; it needs to be understood as something created between humans in social interaction.

It is not that studies on the international transfer of retail image neglect the consumer's role in the formation of image. After all, IRI is defined as how the retailer is positioned in the consumer's mind. However, the role played by the consumer is severely reduced. Despite the conceptual definition of retail image as what a retailer means to a consumer, previous research captures consumers' attitudes and judgments on store attributes, rather than the meanings consumers assign the retailer. Zimmer and Golden (1988) used an open-ended format to investigate how consumers described a store's image when not presented with specific store attributes. They found that even though consumers use specific store attributes to think about a retail store, they tend to describe store images in terms of their total impressions of the store.

### From What to How

Zimmer and Golden's findings point out that the use of pre-specified attributes reduces the richness of consumers' imageries. Consumers are approached with questionnaires on which they are asked to rate their preferences for a set of pre-defined store attributes. The results are aggregated into an overall judgment, which is equated to image. Hence, image is turned into a mere effect of marketing communication in the store. Previous research on IRI, therefore, tells us *what* images consumers hold of the retailer, but not *how* they are constructed. The mere transfer or circulation of images reveals little about what the

retailer means to its users. Without an awareness of how consumers make sense of the images projected by the retailer through marketing communication, we cannot know what these images mean. Attending to how consumers make sense of what a retailer offers them would mean approaching image as constructed in a process of meaning making. Since we do not know beforehand what meanings consumers may assign the retailer, IRI needs to be seen as emergent in consumers' meaning-making practices. The focal point of research, then, is not IRI as such, but the meaning-making process via which it is produced. Naturally, the what and the how are difficult to separate, and, as I will demonstrate later, it is necessary to consider the specific images that a consumer assigns a retailer in order to understand how they are constructed.

Furthermore, in order to be able to capture image as meaning, attention needs to be shifted from culture as an obstacle to be transcended to culture as a resource for the construction of IRI. Previous research often points to the importance of retailers responding to the local culture in order to be successful in internationalisation (cf. Dawson 1994). When culture is considered, however, it is normally in terms of the cultural distance perspective, where culture is categorised as national culture and defined according to a set of variables. It is, therefore, not the lived culture that is considered, but scientific schemas of what the lived culture in a particular country involves.

## Image Construction in Everyday Practice

In order to be able to consider IRI as an outcome of the relationship between retailing and lived culture, I depart from the assumption that consumption is one of many practices of ordinary culture. "Culture is ordinary" as the British cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1958/2000, p. 32) expressed it in a key essay.

A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested. These are the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and we see through them the nature of culture: that is always both traditional and creative; that is both the most common ordinary meanings and the finest individual meanings. We use the word culture in two senses: to mean a whole way of life –



the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or the other of these senses; I insist on both and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about culture are questions about our general and common purposes, yet also questions about deep and personal meanings. Culture is ordinary; in every society and in every mind. (Williams 1958/2000, p. 32)

In this essay Williams places emphasis on the ordinary character of culture as the process by which every society gives meaning to the world (Levinson and Broman, 2000). In opposition to the high culture of the fine arts, he argued that culture is both about tradition and social reproduction as well as creativity and change. Williams' view of culture puts emphasis on the close connection between culture, meaning, and communication. Meaning is constructed in processes of communication through language, which not only forms a culture but a society. Studying culture, then, is not different from studying society. The cultural meaning and values of society reflect and express social and institutional relations (Du Gay et al. 1997). Culture, in this tradition, is stressed as continuously practiced in order to construct the world. The world does not present itself to us as it is, but always through the meaningful relationships we have to this world. This definition of culture places emphasis on culture as a symbolic structure of meaning, but also recognises the way in which we continuously construct phenomena in the world. When we interpret the world, or speak about the world, we simultaneously actively intervene in this world. Understood in this way, culture is a lived labour carried out in the course of every life, and is both the preservation of meaning and construction of new meaning. I am aware that all cultural theories are founded on different ways of explaining and understanding actions, in that they emphasise symbolic structures of meaning as being necessary for knowing the world. This does not, however, mean that all cultural theories view the construction of meaning as taking place in practices.

## Consumption as Spatial Storytelling

The understanding of consumption as a practice in ordinary culture adopted here is informed by the work of the French cultural theorist Michel de Certeau (1984), who understands consumption as a form of tactical storytelling. In his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de

Certeau seeks to upgrade the practices of everyday life. Particularly important among the practices of everyday life is consumption, described as silent mode of production.

To a rationalized, yet expansionist, and at the same time centralized, clamorous and spectacular production corresponds another production called 'consumption'. The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its way of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order. (De Certeau 1984, pp. xii-xiii)

Consumption gives meaning to commercial products and environments by producing new spaces within them. In order to be able to grasp the relationship between production and consumption, de Certeau distinguishes between *place (lieu)* and *space (espace)* to demonstrate the tension that exists between every planned physical environment and the social practices undertaken in these places. Place and space are created by two different logics of everyday practice that de Certeau calls *strategy* and *tactics*. Even though the concepts of strategy and tactics build on the same metaphor of war as those employed in business literature, their meanings differ insofar as strategy and tactics are here referred to as narrative practices corresponding to two different orientations in a story.

Strategy corresponds to practices typical for economic, political, and scientific rationality. The execution of strategy relies on a demarcated physical place, which installs a certain order, a law of the proper (p. 49). The law of the proper resembles the way that places are organised for purposes of control and surveillance. For example, the prison, the factory, and the retail store would be examples of places set up according to the law of the proper. While place is the geographical and physical location, space is created by the way that place is put into practice and given meaning. De Certeau argues that space only becomes meaningful through social practices whose context is place. These social practices de Certeau calls tactics.

Tactics are identified with everyday practices, most notably with consumption. As indicated in the citation above, market forces dominate consumers, but for that reason does not make them passive. Instead, through tactics consumers appropriate places set up by

someone else by giving them meaning whether or not this was intended. In contrast to strategy, tactics have no place to depend on. Instead, the execution of tactics relies on time as experienced. I will here understand tactics to refer to how consumers make sense of the experiences of place by narrating them. Thus, place constitutes a frame within which spaces are created and made meaningful through tactics. Understood as tactics, consumption is a narrative practice of making sense of things that consumers have had little say in producing. Because they lack their own places, consumers are forced to restless movement. The movements and expressions of the tactics undertaken by consumers, writes de Certeau, create *spatial stories* whether they intend it or not. “Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice.” (p. 115) These practices include using spatial indications to narrate something that happened, producing geographies of action. Through storytelling consumers give new meanings to a place by reorganising it to make it meaningful to themselves. Spaces, then, are constituted in consumers’ storytelling about place. The ideas of strategy and tactics provide conceptual tools with which to understand how IRI is constructed in the spaces produced in consumers’ storytelling about the retail environment understood as place.

## Storytelling

Strategies and tactics correspond to two different narrative orientations that are found in every story. These two orientations are the narrative and the way that the narrative is communicated to an audience. There are many ways of understanding narratives and stories (see Chapter 3). In this study, I follow Czarniawska’s (2004) understanding of story as an emplotted narrative. According to her, while in its simplest form, a narrative is a chronological succession of events, for a narrative to become a story it needs to be made sense of through the assignment of a plot. Drawing upon the philosopher Tzvetan Todorov, she offers a definition of the plot as a “passage from one equilibrium to another.” (p. 19) She further writes:

Usually, plots are much more complicated and contain chains of actions and events, oscillating states of affairs, apparent actions, and wrongly interpreted events, as in suspense or mystery, but a minimal plot is enough to make sense of a narrative. Thus the famous excerpt used by Harvey Sacks (1992, p. 223-6) as material for two lectures (“The baby cried. The mummy picked it up”) needs to be completed by

a third sentence (e.g. 'The baby stopped crying') to become a story.  
(Czarniawska 2004, p. 19)

A plot is thus constructed through a complication of some form, which disturbs the initial situation and leads to a new one. If narrative events are given meaning by being made sense of through the insertion of a plot, then this also offers a comprehensible way of understanding storytelling as a meaning-making practice through emplotment. Spatial storytelling is anchored in the sensemaking of experience via language. The link between sensemaking (Weick 1995) and emplotment is that both practices select and link seemingly disparate events into a complete whole. Stories are emplotted on the basis of how we make sense of things that happen. Depending on how they are made sense of, the same chronological order of events can be told in different ways and therefore mean different things. Understanding storytelling as anchored in sensemaking enables the understanding of the construction of IRI as a process that can be captured in retrospect through storytelling.

In the current study I am interested foremost in the practice of constructing image (meaning) through storytelling. I realise however that an investigation into image construction necessarily also involves a consideration of the images that are the outcome of this process. In focusing on spatial storytelling, I wish to direct attention to how the sensemaking of the physical environment of the retail place informs the construction of images. Understanding the process of IRI construction in a spatial sense shifts the focus from IRI as something formed through an overly simplistic transfer from a retailer to the consumer's mind, to IRI as constructed in practice. Moreover, attending to consumers' spatial storytelling enables investigating IRI as a joint construction, involving both the retailer and the consumers, without losing sight of their inherently asymmetric relationship.

Having identified the problems with the previous research on how consumers' images of the international retailer is created, and having proposed an alternative approach to the analysis of this subject, I will now present the aims of this study.

## Aims of the Study

The problem posited in this book relates to the issue of how consumers' images of international retailers have been considered in previous research as being created as a transfer from retailer to consumer and from one market to another. This view, I argue, reduces the complexity of how IRI is created by neglecting the role played by consumers in giving meaning to retailing. This need not constitute a problem per se. In view of the approach adopted here, however, which sees consumers as actively giving meaning to retail environments and products, a more in-depth understanding of how IRI is constructed also needs to incorporate the lived culture of consumers. By lived culture I mean ordinary cultural practices, which escape mathematical calculation and scientific models. The focus on this culture is important if we are to grasp image as meaning, rather than as an effect of transfer. One of the issues at stake here is the question of what the relationship between consumers' images of retailing and the images projected by retailing look like. While international retailers exert considerable efforts to create and develop a particular image through marketing communications, little is known about what consumers make of these images.

The aim of this study is twofold: to outline a narrative approach to understanding how international retail image (IRI) is constructed in everyday practice; and to explore the implications of this approach by investigating how consumers in two different markets construct images of an international retailer.

The objective is to propose a means by which to understand and grasp how the image of an international retailer is constructed in consumers' everyday practices across two markets. In line with the definition of retail internationalisation presented above, with IRI I refer to consumers' images of a retailer in at least two countries or markets. I take image to refer to the meanings consumers attribute to the retail environment set up by retailing practices. Recognising that sensemaking is a site where meanings inform action, image is not seen as a passive representation of a retailer, but an enactment of the same.

In order to demonstrate how the approach outlined in this thesis can contribute to extant research dealing with the international transfer of

retail image, I study how a highly institutionalised retail image in the home market is translated into a market expected to differ in terms of culture. This is investigated through an empirical study of how consumers' images of the international furnishing retailer IKEA are constructed in the Swedish city of Malmö and the Chinese city of Shanghai, places where the retailer has been established for different lengths of time.

## Possible Contributions

The possible contributions to retail studies entail demonstrating how the image of the international retailer is constructed in two different markets where consumers have had different lengths of time of experience with the retailer. The main aim is to provide a theoretical contribution of the process of IRI construction. Providing a more theoretical account of this process is warranted, given that the concept is, for the most part, treated in a fairly instrumental way in previous studies. The study also provides empirical insights into what the construction process involves.

The idea of the transferability of image is old idea in retail studies, and my aim is not to dismiss these previous studies. Rather, the ambition is that the approach to IRI construction I am proposing here will reveal some of the complexities involved in the process, and offer fresh insights into the usefulness of the concept of IRI. Hence far, few attempts have been undertaken to understand IRI as an outcome of the consumer's construction of meaning in his or her everyday culture. Despite the attention drawn to the unique position of retailing at the nexus of culture and economy in the new retail geography, culturally informed perspectives seldom engage with perspectives informed by retail management. Hopefully, this study will inspire more investigations located in the borderland between retail management and lived culture.

## Organisation of the Book

The argument made in this book is organised in nine chapters. The first four chapters make a case for and outline the cultural approach to IRI

construction. The subsequent four chapters demonstrate the applicability of the approach by means of presenting how IKEA's image is constructed in everyday practice. In the last chapter I pull the threads together and draw conclusions from the findings. The individual chapters are organised according as follows.

In Chapter 2 I continue to consider previous research on IRI. The chapter argues for the need and relevance of approaching IRI construction in a spatial sense. To make this argument I consider the problems with the previous literature in more depth and demonstrate that the transfer perspective on image relies on a control of space and time that needs to be complemented with another conception which is able to consider lived culture.

Chapter 3 gives an outline of the differences among narrative, story, and storytelling and explains how they relate to meaning. Particular attention is paid to what storytelling is and what it captures.

Chapter 4 accounts for the methodological consequences of the spatial storytelling approach for investigating IRI construction in practice. Since the approach of the study makes it difficult to define IRI *a priori*, I propose that image can be seen as unfolded in storytelling. I motivate the decision to focus on the international furnishing retailer IKEA and describe how consumers' storytelling of IKEA was accessed, collected, translated, and analysed. In the explanation of the analysis of the stories, I attend to how the epic was used as a narrative frame to unfold the tensions between strategy and tactics.

The aim in the analytical chapters is to employ the storytelling approach to delineate the construction of typical images of the retailer. Chapter 5 introduces the reader to the proper order of the place. I consider the way that IKEA presents the store visit as a form of quest narrative. I argue that it positions the consumer as the hero in the store narrative, constructing consumption as a heroic act. Within the labyrinthine structure of the store, time and space collapse, creating the impression of a stable order.

Chapters 6 to 8 present the analysis of the consumers' stories of retailing. The chapters are structured according to three different spaces analogously organised along with three different plots that I identify in

Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, which serves as the guiding thread through the chapters. The intention with making use of these plots is to demonstrate three different time orientations in the stories, and therefore three different types of spaces. These spaces are in turn generative of three types of images of IKEA. Variations in image are presented to account for the differences in storytelling about IKEA in the cities of Malmö and Shanghai.

In Chapter 9 I summarise the findings made in the analytical chapters by translating consumers' spaces into three established classifications of space. Then I tie the argument together by suggesting that IRI construction is a retrospective narration characterised by a set of spatial tensions between lived culture and the planned retail environment.





# Chapter 2

## Spatialising Image Construction

In this chapter I argue for the relevance of studying IRI construction in everyday practice. I suggest that previous research interprets the creation of IRI according to two predominant views of communication: the transmission view and the cultural view. These views are not explicitly articulated in the literature, but are identified here as central assumptions underpinning the previous research on IRI. I first describe what these views involve and then illustrate how they are articulated in the literature on retailing. Most of the previous studies approach IRI formation as a transfer, where culture is conceived of as a barrier to retail expansion. A less common view that can also be found in previous research is the cultural view of communication. This view underpins studies which regard IRI formation as a process which evolves over time. In the last section of the chapter, I outline another view on communication as the production of space. I argue that this view helps in understanding how IRI is constructed in everyday practice.

### The Transmission View of Communication

Even though communication is seldom addressed per se in the retail image literature, there is an implicit reference to the transmission view of communication in the understanding that image can be *transferred* from the retailer to consumers, and from one market to another. Above all, the transmission view underpins articles on the role of image in retail internationalisation, but it is also a central assumption in studies that consider store image formation in a national context. The origin of communication theory is generally ascribed to Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's (1949) *Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Fiske 1990, p. 19). Their model of communication is often referred to as the

transmission model. The model was developed within a mathematical theory of communication where information was measured in terms of bits per second. The original purpose of this model was to help ensure that radio waves and telephone signals reached their target destinations. Shannon and Weaver attempted to work out a way in which channels of communication could be used most efficiently. It should be noted that, for them, the main channels were telephone cables and radio waves. The model deals with how to send the greatest amount of information along a given channel, and how to measure the capacity of a specific single channel for carrying information. Shannon and Weaver were particularly interested in understanding three interrelated problems for communication: 1) a technical problem: how accurately can the message be transmitted? 2) a semantic problem: how precisely is meaning conveyed? and 3) an effectiveness problem: how effectively does the received meaning affect behaviour? (ibid.) The authors assumed that a solution to the first problem, of accuracy, would lead to a solution for the other two.

From the perspective of transmission, communication is a linear and fairly uncomplicated transfer from sender to receiver, or retailer to consumer. The transmission model gives a straightforward picture of the process of communication. The generalisability and simplicity of this communications model, sometimes considered the foundation of communication studies, made it very attractive among diverse academic disciplines, including marketing. The model gained popularity in both communications and marketing studies during the 1950s and 1960s (Stern 1994; Lorimer 2002). The components of the transmission model include 1) a source (sender); 2) a channel (medium) which transmits the message from one point to another; 3) a message resulting from the signal obeying a set of predetermined rules; and 4) a destination (receiver). Between the source and the channel is the encoding process where the message is constructed by the retailer, and between the channel/message and the receiver is the decoding undertaken by the consumer. Ideally, a message should be decoded in agreement with how it was encoded. The ideal is transparency and clarity of communication, where an image is delivered like an object to a receiver (Stern 1994; Czarniawska 2000).

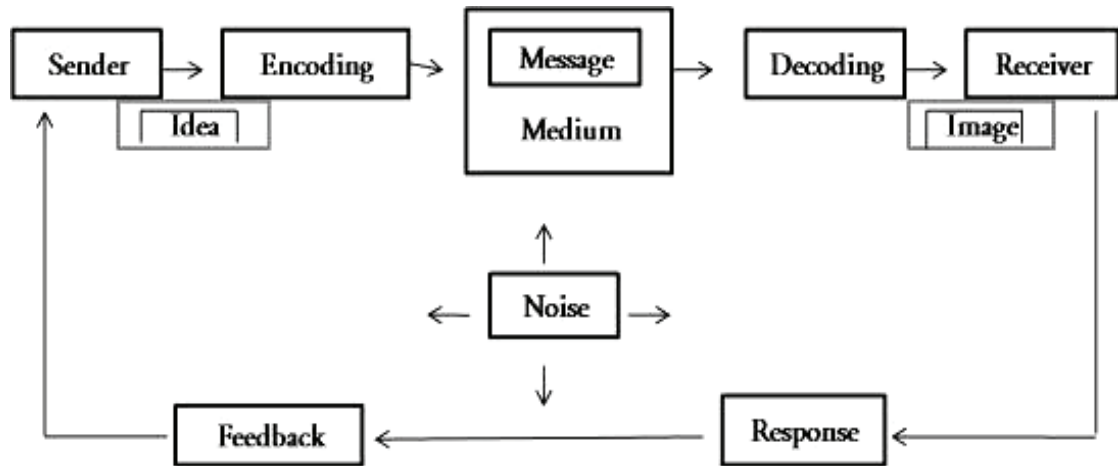


Figure 1 Elements of the communication process (adapted from Kotler et al. 1991, p. 688)

In a commonly used marketing textbook, the model is represented as shown in Figure 1. This model recognises that noise may intervene in the process, and that this may, in the end, distort the image. While Shannon and Weaver understood noise as crackling on a telephone line, in marketing noise consists of external factors intervening at the point when the message is received (Kotler and Armstrong 1991). At the bottom of the model there is a feedback mechanism running from the receiver to the sender. Even if it is possible for the receiver to give some form of feedback to the sender, the channels that may be used for such responses are little elaborated upon in the marketing literature. According to the transmission model, it is possible to transfer an image because signals are governed by a code – a set of predetermined rules that protects a message from distortion while it is being transferred from sender to receiver (Carey 1992, p. 17). The role of image as an effect of the sender’s ideas is indicated in the diagram as a box between decoding and the receiver.

Burt and Carralero-Encinas (2000) point out that an influential definition of retail image is based on the identity prism offered by Kapferer (1986) for understanding brand identity in an advertising context. Figure 2 shows the identity prism adapted to a retail context.

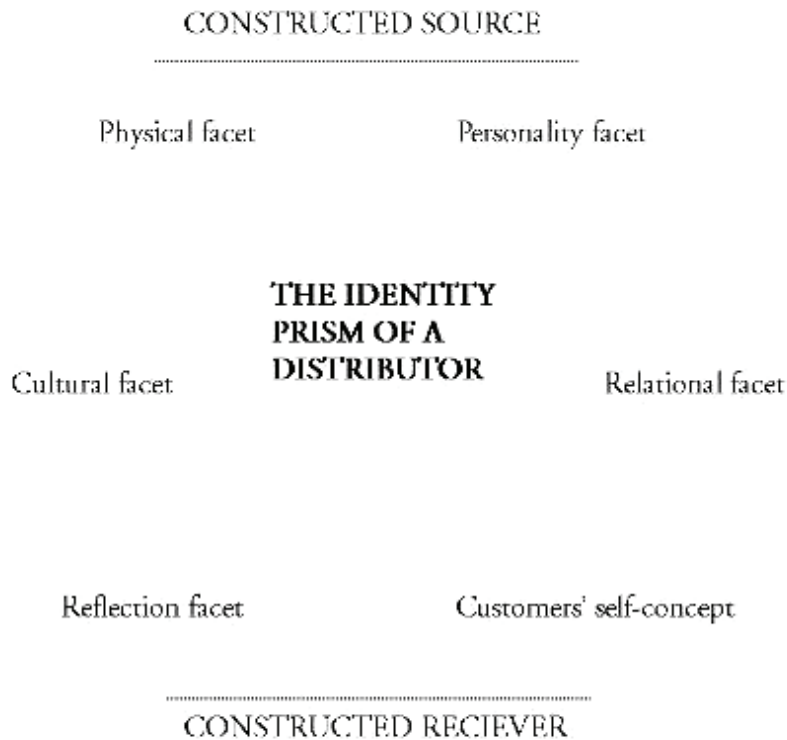


Figure 2 The Identity Prism adapted to the distributor (McGoldrick 2002, p. 429).

The identity of a brand, articulated from the corporate viewpoint, is thought to constitute the prism and the magnifying glass through which an image is formed on the side of the receiver. The prism proposes that consumers interpret the retailer according to a set of facets including physical, personality, cultural, relational, reflection, and customers' self-concept. The identity prism underscores the influence of the transmission model by positing that the facets of retail brand identity are projected on the receiver to create an intended image. I will not go through all the facets in the model here (see McGoldrick 2002 for a detailed account). What interests me about this model is its similarity to the transmission model of communication; it underscores the binary sender/receiver and, by extension, retailer/consumer. It also follows the same principle of convergence between sender and receiver associated with the transmission view of communication. The way that a corporation wishes to be seen, its brand identity, should correspond to the way it is seen by the public, that is to say, to its image. The identity prism resonates with studies that view image as something

formed by the way consumers perceive the symbolic and functional dimensions of the store.

## The Store as the Medium of Transmission

In retailing, the medium for communicating with consumers and establishing a presence in the consumer's mind is typically the store. Since no one has actually seen a retailer (or any other organisation for that matter), the store is employed to personify the retailer. Alongside the development of small corner shops into large-scale retailers in the 1950s, personal communication with consumers was lost. When the retailer's activities became more detached from those of the consumer, a trademark was no longer enough to maintain a relationship with consumers, and more refined ways to communicate at a distance with customers were developed (Slater 1997). While manufacturing firms sought to re-establish communication with the customer by investing products with a personal image, retailers used the store environment to convey image. Marketing techniques were developed to ensure that the intended messages of the store would not be distorted when received by the customer (Doyle and Fenwick 1975/1975). Customers' images of the store are considered important because a favourable image is believed to lead to patronage of the store. Jain and Etgar (1976-1977) maintain that the image a store projects has considerable impact on the shopping decisions of its consumers. If the image of a store is favourable, then consumers are more likely to patronize it. Lincoln and Samli (1981) make a similar argument, claiming that "developing and maintaining favourable images within selected market segments can lead to increased sales and profitability".

Since the late 1950s there have appeared many articles dealing with the task of evaluating and adjusting store images so that they would appeal to customers. Regardless of their approach to store image, most researchers acknowledge his legacy. In a seminal article entitled "The Personality of the Store", Martineau (1958) stated:

Clearly, there is a force operative in the determination of a store's customer body besides the obvious functional factors of location, price ranges, and merchandise offerings. I shall show that this force is the store's personality or image – the way in which the store is defined in the shopper's mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an

aura of psychological attributes. [...] The shopper seeks the store whose image is most *congruent* with the image she has of herself. (p. 47)

Martineau's argument was that stores have personalities or images that ideally should be congruent with each consumer's own conception of him- or herself. Store image refers to a customer's perception and evaluation of the symbolic and functional meaning of a particular store, while brand and company images refer to the meaning given to a particular brand or company by customers. Definitions of retail image varied broadly. In Table 1 a selection of definitions of store image that are often cited is presented. The majority of them are taken from the *Journal of Retailing* and were published in the 1970s.

Table 1. Selected definitions of store image

<b>Definitions of Store Image</b>
the way in which the store is defined in the shopper's mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes (Martineau 1958, p. 47)
the total conceptualized or expected reinforcement that a person associates with shopping at a particular store (Kunkel and Berry 1968, p. 22)
a structure of some sort tying together the dimensions that are at work in the store (Lindquist 1974-1975, p. 30)
It is reasonable to view the customer as rationally evaluating the store on a multi-attribute utility function. Store image, therefore, rather than being an irrational concept may be regarded as the consumer's evaluation of all salient aspects of the store as individually perceived and weighted (Doyle and Fenwick 1974-1975, p. 40)
A store's image is a composite of dimensions that consumers perceive as the store. Store image is an overall picture that is more than the sum of the parts, for the parts interact with one another in the consumer's mind (Marks 1976, p. 37)
Set of attitudes based upon evaluation of those store attributes deemed important by consumers. Since attitudes are a learned phenomenon store image is dependent upon an individual's experiences concerning a store (James, Durand and Dreves 1976, p. 34)
The sum total of the strategic and tactical actions taken by a given store or chain of stores is the 'product' or 'image' which the store represents to the consuming public (Ring 1979, p. 25)
Image is a cognition and/or affect which is inferred either from a set of ongoing perceptions and/or memory outputs attaching to a phenomenon (i.e. either an object or event such as a store, a product, a sale etc.) and which represents what that phenomenon signifies to an individual (Mazursky and Jacoby 1984, p. 147)
an image is not anchored in just objective data and details. It is the configuration of the whole field of the object (Dichter 1985, p. 76)
A gestalt impression (Zimmer and Golden 1988, p. 266)
stereotypical image of typical users of a particular store (He and Mukherjee 2007, p. 44)

Most researchers understand image as more than the sum of its parts (Keaveney and Hunt 1992). On a conceptual level, it is common to see image as a holistic impression of some sort in the consumer's mind. For example, Lindquist's (1974-1975) definition is similar to Zimmer and Golden's (1988) gestalt approach, where different dimensions fit together and create an overall impression of a store.

It is also common to see image as a composite of consumers' perceptions of functional and symbolic dimensions of the store (Mark 1976). In a review article on previous research on store image, Mazursky and Jacoby (1986) found that the following store attributes were frequently examined: merchandise quality, salesclerk service, merchandise pricing, location, merchandise assortment, general service quality, and atmosphere or pleasantness of shopping at the store.<sup>1</sup> In studies adopting the attribute-base approach, consumers are commonly asked to indicate their preferences for a set of specified store attributes on a five to seven point Likert scale consisting of bipolar adjectives, and modelled after the semantic differential scale (see McDougall and Frye 1974).

The studies carried out on the role of store image in the context of the retail internationalisation process involve mainly measuring functional store attributes using similar kinds of questionnaires. This has enabled measurements of consumers' images of store attributes across competitors and markets. A favourable store image is seen to contribute to international retail success by being closely tied to factors such as entry barriers to foreign markets, store patronage, and customer

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<sup>1</sup>Mazurky and Jacoby's findings can be compared to Lindquist's nine attributes which are frequently cited in studies on international retail image (e.g. Burt and Mavrommatis 2004). Because of their influence, I present them here: 1. Merchandise (the service and/or goods offered by the retailer), 2. Service (salesclerk service, ease of merchandise return, delivery service, presence of self-service), 3. Clientele (social class appeal, self-image congruency, store personnel), 4. Physical Facilities (facilities such as elevators, washrooms, lighting, air conditioning, store layout, aisle placement and width, carpeting. and architecture), 5. Convenience (locational convenience, parking), 6. Promotion (advertising, symbols, sales promotions), 7. Store Atmosphere (customer's feeling of warmth and acceptance), 8. Institutional Factors (reputation, reliability), 9. Post Transaction Satisfaction (customer satisfaction with purchase and store).



satisfaction. Because the store attributes are regarded to be the same regardless place and time, consumers' perceptions of them are also comparable across different countries and competitors. Keaveney and Hunt (1992) refer to the attribute-based approach as piecemeal-based processing. They write that piecemeal-based processing is based on the assumption that consumers' images of the store are formed as an overall judgment of attribute ratings each time they visit the store. According to Keaveney and Hunt, this is a problematic assumption since it neglects the consumers' previous experiences with the store. Instead, they argue that consumers are likely to form images of categories of stores on the basis of their previous knowledge of them.

### On the Control of Image

In store image research, the transmission view of communication is retained by considering the store as the medium of communication. The influence of the transmission model is also evident in the belief that the image conveyed in the store can be controlled by retail management, and that that image is projected by the store rather than being constructed by consumers. Store image research holds that stores have personalities and images. In cases where the retailer has a strong brand name, an overlap between store image and corporate image occurs. Consumers may, for instance, hold a favourable view of a retailer in general, while disliking a particular one of its stores (He and Mukherjee 2007). Doyle and Fenwick wrote in a special issue on store image of the *Journal of Retailing* (1974-1975):

A store's image can at least partly be controlled through decisions about store facilities, layout and advertising. The resulting image has a significant impact on the store's appeal to shoppers. (Doyle and Fenwick, 1974-1975, p. 41)

The measurement of image using an attribute-by-attribute approach attests to the transmission view of communication with its emphasis on control of the message and the neglect of meaning. Image is an asset that the retailer has invested in financially. Image is seen as something which belongs to the firm, and it can thereby also be created and monitored. For example, Joyce and Lambert (1996, p. 24) acknowledge that "retailers spend a great deal of time and money on store environments to create images that offer them competitive advantage in the crowded marketplace".

Pelligrini (1996, p. 87) writes that the physical experience of the store gives “substantial communication advantages with respect to manufacturers both in terms of efficiency and efficacy”. The store reduces the costs of communication, since in-store communication is less expensive than advertising. Moreover, he asserts, the impact of in-store communication is stronger because greater control can be achieved over many levels of communication, from the design and packaging of products, to the design and shape of the merchandising of stores, to the contents of advertising messages. Here the influence of the transmission model on store image research is underscored by a common belief in the viability of the transferability of images. That is to say that the image is made into an effect of transmission.

The studies on store image considered in this section provide an historical background to the research on the transferability of image when retailers internationalise. The attribute-based approach was, above all, incorporated into the studies on the role of image in store-based internationalisation (Burt et al. 2005). Prior to the 1990s, research on retail images was predominately located within the national boundaries of the market (Akehurst and Alexander 1996). Even though it is commonly recognised that major retailers today are international, studies on retail images in an international context are scarce. Most studies on IRI transfer are therefore based on research undertaken on retail store images in a domestic market. Attempts to apply theories of corporate branding to processes of retailer internationalisation (Burt and Sparks 2002; Moore et al. 2002) are mainly carried out with respect to strategies undertaken by retailers in the market. When it comes to investigating international retail images from a consumer perspective, scholars predominately turn for models to store image research. Next, I consider research on the international transfer of retail images, where the transmission view of communication is primarily expressed in regards to the control of space through calculations of distance.

## International Transfer of Retail Image

Theories of retail internationalisation were developed in the mid-1980s as a response to the academic discussion concerning the applicability of international strategies modelled on manufacturing firms, which up

until then had also been applied to retailing. The reworking of the models pertaining to manufacturing firms were considered warranted in view of the increased number of retailers establishing themselves overseas, independently of manufacturers, which prior to the late 1970s had been the drivers behind internationalisation (Akehurst and Alexander 1996). In contrast to manufacturing firms, for which the focus in internationalisation is on trade, retail internationalisation is predominantly tied to the establishment of operations (Davies and Ward 2000). The increased number of international retailers was seen as warranting a theoretical framework specifically tailored to the particular nature of retailing. This led Salmon and Tordjman (1989) to adapt theories of standardisation and adaptation to retailing. They distinguished between the global and the multinational retailer. While the first pursues a standardised strategy, as though the firm's markets were homogenous, the second adapts retail operations to each particular market. Whether retailers can, in fact, be global is debated. Bunce (1989) differentiates between a standardised position and a standardised image. He argues that although tangible dimensions of the retailer may vary among the countries where the retailer is established, the retailer can still attain a standardised position across home and non-domestic markets. While image refers to how the retailer is seen in the eyes of consumers, position refers to how it is positioned relative to competitors (Burt and Mavrommatis 2006).

The academic discussion on internationalisation mainly concerns what constitutes a competitive advantage in a new market. Two traditions can be discerned in this conversation. The first tradition of research approaches competitive advantages from a market-based perspective, whereas the second approaches the issue from an organisational perspective (Akehurst and Alexander 1996). Given my interest in consumers' images of the international retail firm, the market-based approach is the most relevant to my discussion of IRI construction. This tradition imported many of the conceptualisations and operationalisations of retail image from store image research. The difference was a greater emphasis on the retail brand.

The transfer of the retailer's store brand image became central in discussions of retail internationalisation in the 1990s. The retail image literature on internationalisation builds on a terminology of transfer

designed to overcome the cultural barriers of the foreign markets by using a standardised approach. The principal question for advocates of a market-based approach is related to the transferability (or fit) of the source of competitive advantage in the domestic market into foreign host environments (Burt et al. 2005). Image is considered to be an important competitive advantage in internationalisation. As retailers have grown in size and begun to invest more in advertising, recent years have witnessed a growing interest in applying theories of branding to retailers (Pellegrini 1996; Davies 1992; Ailawadi and Keller, 2004; Carpenter and Fairhurst, 2005). In a special issue of the *European Journal of Marketing*, the editors Stephen Brown and Steve Burt (1992) were among the first to underscore the transfer of retail brand image as a source of competitive advantage in the retail internationalisation process. They write:

Another view of internationalization is that based on the transfer of a retail brand with its associated images from consumers, across national borders. Retailers in most countries, particularly the UK, have invested heavily in the past decades in market positioning and in building image. Through the construction and maintenance of a retail brand (in its widest sense) the consumer gains a clearer understanding of the package or tangible and intangible values received in the exchange process. Hence, providing satisfaction ensues, consumer loyalty increases. Yet, if image is the key to success in domestic markets, is it correct to assume that the same image travels across borders? (Brown and Burt 1992, p. 81)

The question for Brown and Burt is how a retail brand, with its associated image for consumers, can be transferred from domestic to overseas markets. In a later study, Burt and Carralero-Encinas (2000) examine the role of store image in internationalisation. Their study proceeds from the assumption that retailers that have invested financially in building a successful image in the domestic market will want to create a similar image in foreign markets. Therefore, they emphasise the need for a standardisation strategy which enables the transfer of an existing image from home to the markets of other nations. I provide an excerpt from their study to demonstrate the weight given to the transferability of IRI in these studies.

As retailers in domestic markets are developing their brand image as the key source of competitive advantage, an appreciation of the

*transferability* of this image is crucial when moving into non-domestic markets. This is particularly pertinent for those retailers who choose to internationalise by standardising and replicating the domestic marketing effort and brand identity. (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000, p. 433)

Burt and Carrelero-Encinas (2000) contend that functional attributes can be used to influence symbolic and experience-based dimensions of the image in order to establish a coherent image. Tangible attributes of the store are thus understood to transfer more easily, and they can be used to monitor the experiences and symbolic meanings of a retail store. Burt and Mavrommatis (2006) carried out a study of the transferability of a standardised image from the market of one country to another. They found that, although retail image varied between countries, position relative to competitors was the same. Their conclusion was that retailers should standardise relative positions within the market, rather than their retail images.

## Transcending Culture to Expand

The view that IRI can be transferred stems from the way that internationalisation is understood to function. To transfer means to move or transport someone or something from one place to another. As such, it is not only a metaphor for how an image is constructed between sender and receiver, but it also describes the way that the internationalisation of retailing is thought to work. The thinking is that successful internationalisation is based on a transfer of retail formats in a way that overcomes cultural barriers. According to Alexander (1997), the internationalisation of retailing can be defined as

the *transfer* of retail management technology or the establishment of international trading relationships which bring to a retail organisation a level of international integration which establishes the retailer within the international environment in such a way as to transcend regulatory, economic, social, cultural, and retail structural boundaries. (Alexander, 1997, p. 37)

Alexander concurs with the view on internationalisation held by McGoldrick (2002), who points at the need for retailers to transcend culture in order to become international:

We often point to the close connection between retailing and culture. Local culture, both consumer and business, affects the how and wherefore of retailing. If this is the case then how can retailing be international? How can a retail idea or format successfully *transcend* culture? (McGoldrick 2002, p. 545)

Here it is possible to discover an intimate connection between the transfer view and the idea of cultural distance touched upon in the introduction. The ideal scenario provides for the transfer of a domestic image to foreign markets in a way that transcends cultural differences. Cultural difference, then, is conceived of in the literature as a barrier to expansion.

Previous research acknowledges that differences in national cultures are likely to influence the transfer of retail images, which is why issues of standardisation and adaptation are frequently discussed. The influence of culture is also acknowledged in the notion of cultural distance, which is regarded as a determining factor in deciding which country a retailer decides to enter. It is popularly held that retailers minimise costs related to a perceived uncertainty when entering countries anticipated to be culturally proximate (Gripsrud and Benito 2005). When international issues are in question, so is culture, albeit in an etic sense deemed not to disturb the bordered spaces of markets. According to an etic perspective, cultures operate in accordance with a set of universal dimensions tied to the politically defined borders of the nation (Fletcher and Fang 2006). Hofstede's (1994) thesis, *The Software of the Mind: The Consequences of Culture*, is an example of this view. At the time of its publication, Hofstede's work was revolutionary by being among the first studies to highlight the influence of culture on overseas corporate activity. Here, for the first time, the applicability of US management practices in other cultural contexts was scrutinised (Usunier 1998, p. 27).

Hofstede understood culture in terms of national cultures, and he identified four universal binary dimensions according to which all national cultures can be classified.<sup>2</sup> From his point of view, cultures

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<sup>2</sup>These dimensions are: individual vs. collective; femininity vs. masculinity; high vs. low power distance; high vs. low uncertainty avoidance. Later, after having undertaken a larger study in East and Southeast Asia, Hofstede added a fourth

exist separately from one another; their relationships are characterised by clashes and confrontations, rather than by mutual influence. They are stable entities characterised by different historical pasts (Hofstede 1994, p. 5). Hofstede's framework has been, and still is, influential. Between 1987 and 1997 it was cited no less than 1,101 times in the business literature (Steenkamp 2001). Replications of his study show that the four dimensions remain fairly stable over time (see, e.g., Dawar and Parker 1994; Sivakumar and Nakata 2001; Straughan and Albers-Millers 2001). Even though Hofstede is still the target of considerable criticism within and outside of the business literature, his conception of culture is by and large accepted in the retail literature. The close relationship between internationalisation and transcending culture suggests that culture is an obstacle that must be overcome, if a retailer is to internationalise successfully. One way to overcome obstacles is to turn them into calculable entities, so as to make them predictable.

An etic view presupposes that space is inert. In the spatial-interaction models used within retailing, space is a mathematical formula closely tied to the buyer decision process as it relates to store patronage (see Gosh and McLafferty 1991 for reviews). These models have been revised to enable them to take into account the selection of which foreign markets to enter. For example, Gripsrud and Benito (2005) found that the factors influencing retailers' choices of which markets to enter are highly influenced by cultural and geographical distances to the potential markets. In their study, cultural distance was measured according to the Kogut–Singh index, which is based on Hofstede's four dimensions. Geographical distance was measured according to the air distance between London and capital cities in question.

## Problems Associated with the Transmission View

Despite being the target of much criticism over the years, the transmission model of communication still serves as the dominant way of understanding retail image as a more or less intended effect of marketing communication on the reception side of the process. The

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dimension related to perceptions of time, which he originally labelled Confucian time (Fletcher and Fang 2006).

transmission view is the most common way of understanding communication in retail studies. Not at least is this view reflected in a belief in the transfer of image to distant places, and in its close connection to purchasing behaviour and store patronage (Baker 1998). At the heart of the transmission model is the desire to extend and control information in time and space.

The main problem with the model is in reference to its neglect of the lived culture where meaning is constructed. It is also problematic because, when the image formation process is located in the minds of consumers, it is invisible. It appears as though an image is simply transferred to consumers via marketing communication. Everything not included in the model is understood to be peripheral, something which does not need to be taken into consideration. Consequently, the model paints an overly simplistic picture of what is involved in communication.

The critique toward the transmission model relates primarily to its neglect of meaning in human communication. Criticism comes mainly from cultural studies and media and communications theory, but examples can also be found in marketing and organisation studies. For example, in his book on marketing communication, Richard Varey (2002, p. 19) argues that the tools to develop communication in modern capitalist societies were to a large extent driven by the needs of marketing. Mass communication made it possible for mass advertising to generate wants and desires that enabled mass consumption and thereby also mass production.

Traditional models used in marketing communications, linear and two-way models of communication, place an emphasis on consumption as behaviour, and they can therefore not account for communication as a cultural or shared process. Varey contends that these models treat identity, image, and meaning as psychological concepts that arise in the mind independently of the surrounding environment. The use of the transmission model found in many student textbooks reflects the prevalent view in marketing about communication. Buttle's (1995) review of a large number of articles on marketing communication shows that little or no theorising is done with reference to communication. He argues that the communications models used in



marketing generally lag behind those of communication studies and are in need of revision. Buttle identifies five assumptions central to the view of communication found in marketing. Among these are: the individual as the unit of analysis, the principle concern for the effect of the message that the intention of the sender determines the meaning of the message, and that communication is effective when the sender's encoding corresponds to the receiver's decoding. In a similar manner, Deetz (1992) gives an explanation for the popularity of the transmission model in management studies. He writes that the concept of transmission is retained for purposes of control and maintaining asymmetrical relations between those in power and those without power. The technical mode of transmission can only work if identity, meanings, and views of the world are taken for granted and shared among the members of a culture; an ideal he regards as highly unrealistic.

While the studies on IRI modelled on functional store attributes tell us about the salient store attributes of the retailer, they tell us little about how consumers' construct meanings of retailers. These studies assume that the image of the retailer corresponds to the opinions and evaluations of store attributes that consumers are asked to evaluate in the surveys. Keaveney and Hunt (1992) further argue that the operationalisation of store images in this way fails to capture the richness of images on a conceptual level. There is thus a mismatch, they argue, between how image is conceptualised and the way that it is operationalised, stemming from an inconsistency between theory and method in store image research. The measurement of attributes, they claim, cannot account for the symbolic dimensions of images.

In the transmission model, to communicate is to transfer a ready-made message. Czarniawska (2000) offers another way of approaching the way image is constructed. Coming from a constructionist perspective, she argues that the transmission model of communication fails to capture human communication because of its focus on information rather than on meaning. Meaning is always produced in human interaction when the image broadcast is made sense of. In a study of the construction of city images, she demonstrates how it is possible to understand the emergence of image in the relationships among the actions of people from different organisations – municipal, state, and

voluntary. She traces the growth of the construction of a model image and the use of this image for the construction of images of and in other cities.

On the basis of reader-response theory, Stern (1994) provides us with a more complex transmission model of communication. She argues that advertising has more in common with the well-crafted text of the novel than with everyday speech. Her revised model increases the number of actors involved in the sending and receiving of a marketing message. In order to emphasise the creative activity of marketing messages, she replaces the original triad of sender-message-receiver with sponsor-advertisement-consumer. In addition, she expands this new triad by adding three dimensions to each step. Stern argues that each of the components in the triad involves different roles assumed inside and outside the text. For example, the financial sponsor of an advertisement is different from the person who crafts an advertisement and its discursive content. Similarly, a consumer includes an imaginary implied consumer located within the text who serves as the ideal interpreter of the message.

Outside the text, the consumer takes on the roles of the sponsoring and the actual consumer in relation to the advertisement. The final meaning of an advertising message is constructed through the interplay of these various consumer roles located inside and outside of the text. In considering the consumer, Stern draws on reader-response theory, which views the consumer/reader as an active participant in producing meaning, rather than merely responsive to the transmitted message. The theory of an active consumer rather than a consumer whose behaviour is contingent on the activities of the retailer is an indication of the limits of the transmission model, which cannot provide much insight into what happens with a message when it is picked up and interpreted by the consumer. The reason for this is the model's neglect of the dimension of meaning.

In the preceding sections, I have sought to show that the transmission model is strongly represented in research on IRI as transfer. The idea of transfer makes it possible to advocate a standardised strategy for the expansion of retail operations to other national markets by overcoming cultural barriers. This is because, according to the transmission view of communication, external factors such as culture are not considered.

Transferability is tied to the idea of communication as a device for controlling space, and, ultimately, behaviour (Carey 1992). Controlling space is only possible if space is defined in geometric terms. The transfer of image is therefore typically assigned to the geographical borders of the nation. The international is thus defined as two or more markets where the term *market* stands for nation (Dawson, 1994, Akehurst and Alexander 1996). The most common way of understanding culture from this perspective is in terms of an etic perspective. Among the influential theoretical frameworks that adopt an etic view is the one proposed by Hofstede (1994). As has the transmission view, Hofstede's research has also been targeted for much criticism for overlooking lived culture. For example, Fletcher and Fang argue that an etic approach is especially unsuited for the study of regions that do not follow the neat boundaries of the nation-state, where several ethnic groups are likely to be found within the same borders. In their study of doing business in Asian markets, Fletcher and Fang demonstrate that Hofstede's binary dimensions tend to construct cultural difference in terms of either/or, which does not capture the favour of thinking in terms of both/and found in an Asian worldview. Another problem that the authors see with Hofstede's study is that it was carried out during the cold war era, before the fall of the iron curtain and the advent of globalisation. His dimensions thus reflect a period of time marked by specific political priorities and national stereotypes.

While the studies on IRI modelled on the attribute-based approach tell us about the store attributes of the retailer, they tell us little about the role of the consumer in how image is formed. These studies simply assume that the image of the retailer corresponds to the opinions and evaluations of the store attributes that consumers are asked to evaluate in the surveys. In the next section, by tracing the cultural view of communication in the previous research, I consider another view of how IRI is formed. This view differs from the transmission view in that it puts the emphasis on how an image develops over time and is given meaning by consumers.

## The Cultural View of Communication

In response to the weaknesses of the transmission model, Carey (1992, p. 16) proposes a ritual view of communication where communication is about participation, sharing, and meaning. In contrast to the transmission view, the ritual view of communication places emphasis on how a message contributes to the construction and preservation of a meaningful cultural world, rather than the extension of the message in space. He suggests that communication is “a symbolic process whereby reality is continuously produced, maintained, repaired and transformed.” (p. 87) It is thus not the effect of the message that is the focus of attention, but the role of the message in the receiver’s life. The communication as culture perspective follows a different conception of space as temporally experienced and produced via practices. The ritual view of communication is not oriented towards an extension of the message in space, but in time. Its focus is on the maintenance of an ordered and meaningful world, and on the representation of shared beliefs. In contrast to the control of the message across geographic space held by the transmission view, the ritual view sees control as embedded in culture. A message does not correspond to an objective world but invites us to participate in the message. It becomes a part of the drama of everyday life. In what follows, I identify the cultural view as an assumption that underpins previous studies on how the formation of IRI is understood.

## The Development of Image over Time

The understanding of culture according to the transmission view of communication is not the only position within IRI research. Studies undertaken on the formation of IRI recognise that consumers develop images of retailers over time. In particular, it was found that, when it comes to the experiential and symbolic dimensions of an image, there is an awareness that these dimensions are complex and are built up on the basis of the interaction between the retailer and consumers in particular national markets (Burt and Carralero-Encinas 2000; Burt and Mavrommatis 2006). So far, little or no research has been undertaken on the issue of the development of IRI over time, but there is acknowledgement of the issue.

McGoldrick (1998) considers the issue conceptually in an article on spatial and temporal shifts in the development of IRI. He begins by presenting snapshots of Marks and Spencer's positioning in Hong Kong, the UK, and France at particular points in time. He elaborates hypothetically on these findings by adding a time dimension to how image is developed. He argues that consumers' images of a retailer will improve as trust between the retailer and consumers grows. Trust is believed to increase with the more and longer experience a consumer has of the retailer. In the first stage of entering a new market, McGoldrick suggests, consumers' images of the retailer are neutral. Because consumers have had little interaction with the retailer, they have not yet formed impressions of it. With repeated experience of the retailer, the consumers' trust grows and its image is improved. In the final stage, trust is developed between the retailer and the consumers, which is likely to lead to favourable images of that retailer. As an example of this final stage, he describes how Mark's and Spencer's image in the UK has become synonymous with trust since it has been transferred from generation to generation over a longer period of time. In order for a retailer to develop into an institution, which is the criterion for favourable images according to McGoldrick, it needs to be established for generations. In part, the view of image as something developed over time resonates well with studies that consider retail internationalisation from an institutional perspective. The consideration of image as it develops over time, and the recognition of retailers as embedded in cultural as well as economic relationships, provides another way of understanding how consumers' images of international retailers are constructed. These studies have not so far explicitly considered IRI construction.

In other strands of retailing research that do not proceed from a market-based approach, international retailing is often seen as culturally embedded. Building on sociologist Mark Granovetter's notion of the embeddedness of markets, these studies regard retailers as embedded in networks of social relationships. From an institutional perspective, internationalisation is primarily a question of conforming to institutional norms in order to achieve legitimacy in the market. Bianchi and Arnold (2003) examine how an American firm failed to gain legitimacy in Chile because of its inability to comply with institutional norms of retailing in the new market. In conclusion, they

state that retailers who do not manage to embed themselves in the broader social network in host environments are likely to fail at becoming international. According to Bianchi and Arnold (2003: 6), institutional norms are “expectations of behaviour that are acceptable within an institutional environment and act as unwritten rules of proper social conduct to which organisations must adhere in order to become legitimated”. Norms refer not only to the economic environment of retailers, but also to the institutional environment, which is characterised by cultural and moral demands. Therefore, retailers are here seen as embedded in relationships of an economic and cultural nature. The social actors that shape the institutional norms in the retailers’ social environment and give them legitimacy are not only competitors, but also employees, consumers, governments, politicians, churches, unions, etc. The institutional approach accepts that retail organisations are embedded in networks of social relations and concentrates on the norms and rules in the environment according to which retail firms must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy.

With reference to the transferability of store-based operations in national markets, Burt et al. (2005, p. 195) note that this may be problematic for retailers who have “become so embedded in their domestic context that institutionalisation occurs”. In their study of the image of Wal-Mart in the US, Arnold et al. (2001) argue that the favourable image of Wal-Mart is due to the manner in which the retailer has symbolically connected itself to the dominant ideologies of American life. Through institutional semiotics they demonstrate that Wal-Mart flyers convey images of frugality, family, neighbourhood, and patriotism that reflect environmental norms and local symbolism. In contrast to previous research on store image, Arnold et al. argue that “the environmental norms component of institutional theory provides a basis for attributing meaning to retail artefacts as opposed to the atheoretical, trait-based nature of image research.” (p. 248) Furthermore, they claim that a semiotic approach helps capture some of the symbolic dimensions of the retailer’s character.

In semiotics, the receiver plays a more active role. Semiotics prefers the term author instead of sender, reader instead of receiver, and text instead of message. Reading denotes a great degree of activity, and it is a

practice that we learn to undertake. It is to a large extent determined by the cultural experience and knowledge of the reader. The reader helps to create the meaning of the text by adding to it his or her own experience, attitudes, and emotions. A model which seeks to capture the relationship by which meaning is constructed in the circulation of a text, through elements of production, distribution, and consumption, is cultural theorist Stuart Hall's model of encoding/decoding. This model follows a text-based approach to meaning construction, but it sees meaning as something created via a cultural process.

### Encoding/decoding

An influential approach to how the meaning of television programmes is constructed, that developed out of discontent with the transmission model, is the encoding/decoding model. This model emphasises that an analysis of how meaning is constructed needs to consider the institutional frameworks for the production of the text, the symbolism of the text, and the everyday practices through which the text is used and interpreted. In the encoding/decoding model there are no individual senders and receivers. Both sender and receiver are decentred for the code; that is to say, the structures of meaning located on either side of the message.

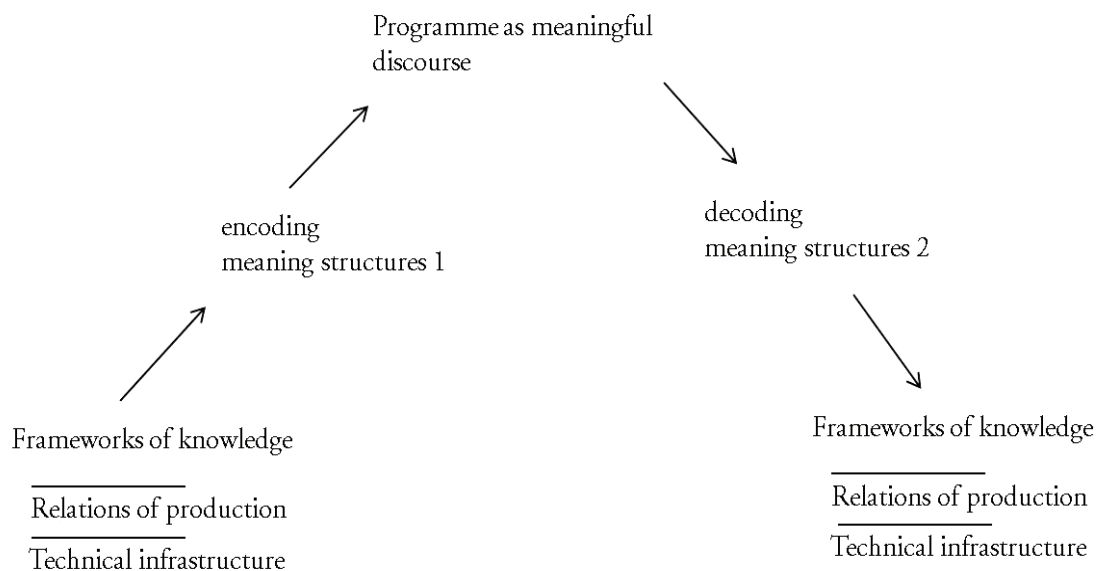


Figure 3 Encoding/decoding (Hall 1980a, p. 130)

Hall argues that culture is a practice standing in a reciprocal relationship to other practices, such as those that are economic, ideological, and political. At the time of his work, it was deemed necessary to redefine culture to prevent the concept from being reduced to a simple residual effect of other forces (Hall 1980b). If previously culture had been considered in terms of the content of a set of texts endowed with more or less universal meanings, the focus was now on how cultures were created through practices. There was thus a shift in perspective from the *what* to the *how* of culture. Central to this shift is an understanding of language as discourse not merely representing the world, but actively shaping it. This is because language is both an ordered system and a means of expression. It is both a system of signs deriving meaning by virtue of their relationships to one another, and an articulation of this order in speech. To speak is to interfere with the dominant structure by using it in communication with others. Analysed as practice, language does not merely reflect the world; it expresses that which is impressed upon it. Culture, then, is understood as a signifying practice; a way of giving the world meaning.

In the encoding/decoding model, a receiver is active in interpreting the semiotic resources provided by a sender according to his/her experiences and the cultural world to which s/he belongs. Therefore, the message received is not the product of representation but of the expression of language in real relations and conditions. In this sense, there is no immediate fit between the encoding and the decoding. When attention is paid to expression, communication is something other than transmission. Communication between sender and receiver is reciprocal, however, not symmetric.

In the encoding/decoding model, the message is put into circulation through its production. The production of a television programme involves institutional structures of broadcasting, relations of production and institutional knowledge, the expectations of the audience, and so forth. At the same time, both the producers and the audience are part of a wider socio-cultural and political structure, which is why it is difficult to separate the production of the message from its reception (Hall 1980a, p. 129). Yet, even though production and reception are related, production is predominant because it articulates the message in the first place. Hall saw a television programme as being structured by



the operation of codes within the chain of syntactic units (i.e., sentences) in discourse. In its discursive form, a television programme is always translated and transformed when acted upon in decoding.

But it is in the *discursive* form that the circulation of the product takes place, as well as is distributed to various audiences. Once accomplished, the discourse must then be translated – transformed again – into social practices if the circuit is to be both completed and effective. If no ‘meaning’ is taken, there can be no ‘consumption’. If the meaning is not articulated in practice, it has no effect. (Hall 1980a, p. 129)

Hall argued that meaning is constructed discursively, through communication. Discourse needs to be translated into social practice for meaning to be created. If no meaning is taken, he writes, there can be no consumption. If meaning is not articulated in practice, it has no effect. An event must become a story before it can be a communicative event. Raw data or raw material cannot be transmitted. It must first be translated into a communicable form. Production constructs the message and it is here that circulation starts. Of course, production is not without its discursive aspects; it is also involved in, and framed by, meanings and ideas, historically defined technical skills, knowledge about routines, assumptions about the audience, cultural beliefs, and so forth. Topics, images, and knowledge are drawn from a larger socio-cultural political structure of relations of which they are a distinct part. In this way, the audience can be said to be both the source and the receiver of messages. The reception and consumption of images is thus also a moment of the production process, although the latter is predominant because it is the point of departure for the realisation of the images transmitted. Production and reception of a message are therefore not identical, but they are related; they are differentiated moments within the totality formed by the social relations of the communicative process as a whole. The meaning structures created on either side of the encoding and decoding are not the same; they vary due to the translation of the discourse of the programme into different contexts, a process which may be the subject of misunderstandings and other distortions. There is therefore, according to Hall, a lack of equivalence between the two sides of the communication process.

## Decoding – Three Hypothetical Positions

There are three hypothetical positions that the audience can take in decoding a television programme: *dominant reading*, *oppositional reading*, and *negotiated reading*. Dominant reading is based on the assumption that there are certain preferred meanings encoded in the programme. The reader who accepts these meanings operates within the dominant code of the programme. Agency becomes here an effect of structure (or the code). The second reading is that of opposition. The receiver deliberately decodes the message contrary to its intended meaning. Readers who become aware of, and are able to reflect over, the codes operating in marketing messages may be empowered by this awareness so as to resist the meanings imposed on them. The third hypothetical position is the negotiated reading. Negotiation involves incorporating or adapting dominant structures into one's own situational context. Using a television programme in accordance with the demands of daily life creates a space where the dominant interests are negotiated in relation to one's own needs. The negotiated position involves a mismatch in communication because the intended message is transformed. Negotiation is different from resistance in the sense that we are seldom aware that we are negotiating. Although we may accept and believe in the dominant interests in a society, how we choose to act on them in everyday life is another matter.

I present Hall's encoding/decoding model here as an example, which is grounded in cultural practice, of an alternative to the transmission model. These types of models are sometimes referred to as "circuit of culture" models, and they are useful for understanding meaning creation as an ongoing process involving different agents and practices (see also Johnson 1986-1987). Practice theory has important implications for understanding the construction of IRI. From a practice-based perspective, IRI is not a projection, but is mediated and negotiated among people and their environments. This means that it becomes ontologically difficult to separate images from the world as it is presented to us. In other words, it becomes difficult to separate the image from the retailer, because the image of the retailer is the retailer as we come to understand it. Hence, image as an outcome of practice is an artefact of practice, and it shapes the phenomena of which it is an outcome. From this perspective, image is not seen as an abstract entity

of the mind or in the mind, but an outcome of shared meanings of the retailer.

## Problems Associated with the Cultural View

Along with the transmission view and the cultural view of communication follow certain conceptions of space and time. Transmission is associated with the linear extension of a message in space that needs to be made calculable for meaning and culture and to remain stable in time. The cultural view, on the other hand, emphasises the ongoing construction of meaning in various practices and the relationships to norms and institutional frameworks that frame the way that meaning is constructed. The cultural view, therefore, emphasises how meaning is constructed through communication over time. It is underscored by an understanding of meaning as something shared among members in particular contexts and handed down from generation to generation (Carey 1992). On this view, it follows that particular acts of encoding and decoding become secondary to the cultural frameworks and historical patterns in which these acts are situated. Thus, processes of encoding/decoding are seen as immersed in broader structures of historical continuity (Falkheimer and Jansson 2006). What practices of reading, writing, walking, or whatever we undertake to give meaning to the phenomena of the world, actually *do* to the world is set aside for the interpretation of these practices relative to the context in which they are situated. Moreover, as Johnson (1986-1987) points out, the encoding/decoding model attributes a central role to production because it is in production that a message is first articulated. The problem with this is that it tends to reduce all aspects of culture to production.

## Communication as the Production of Space

An alternative view of communication that is not traceable to previous research on retail image is of communication as the production of space. The view of communication as the production of space sees meaning as being created spatially via the use of time. Within media and communications studies, communication as spatial production has recently been introduced to the agenda. Among others, the Swedish

communication theorists André Jansson and Jesper Falkheimer (2006) argue that meaning is constructed by cultural as well as spatial mediation. An understanding of communication as spatial production, Falkheimer and Jansson argue, incorporates both the transmission view and the ritual view of communication. They write that “Within the production of space, transmission and ritual are always interwoven – as are material, symbolic and imaginative processes.” (p. 17) Examples of research dealing with the production of space from a ritual perspective that the authors draw attention to include works on the role of media in building the nation and works on how time-space compression in the twentieth century alters the way we think of the world: it becomes smaller due to the blurring of geopolitical boundaries. What these studies have in common is that they consider how communication contributes to a production of meaning in a spatial sense, something that impacts the way we conceive space. The new retail geography recently called attention to how space is socially constructed. For these researchers, consumption practices related to retailing produce spaces in which understanding of, for example, gender, history, and the home can be negotiated and reconsidered (Crewe 2000).

## The Production of Space

Research on how space is produced often involves a critique of structuralism and representation. Instead, the goal is to investigate lived spaces from the viewpoint of everyday life (Lash 2002, p. 117). Much of this research deals with urban sociology and with the relationship between the city and its inhabitants. The question that French sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1991) and others influenced by spatial theory have asked is how to get away from a regime of representation and consider embodied and lived space. In other words, they were interested in finding a way to understand space from the perspective of those who lead their lives within it, rather than through abstract theoretical concepts of space and structures of symbolic meaning and representation. For Lefebvre, everyday life constituted a concrete realm where an alternative form of life was sought (Shields 1999, p. 66-67). If modernity is the grand project of the new, then everyday life represents, for these authors, the insignificant, even forgotten, side of this project. It is in the realm of the everyday, where those who follow its regularised

rhythm have little chance of becoming aware of its sequential course, or realizing that lived spaces can be found.

Communication as the production of space provides a way of understanding how meaning (or image) is created in a spatial sense. Lash (2002, p. 116) provides a metaphorical way of understanding spatial production through the weaving of the spider. The spider extends its body by weaving a web and it is in an analogous manner, he suggests, that humans produce space. We orientate ourselves in the world by extending our bodies. Through the production of space, a body extends itself in the world by copying itself, symmetrically and asymmetrically, and by occupying space with its web. The production of space is a kind of mimesis, a particular way of imitating the world, which produces a spatial imagery. By weaving a web, humans also extend their imageries across space. The particular mimetics of humans is a poetics of space in which meaning is central to orientation in space. Meaning is constructed because of the way that organisms are symbolic in a spatial sense. Spatial practices differ from signifying practices in the sense that, in addition to representing the world, spatial practices also perform representations in the world.

Lefebvre (1991, pp. 38-39) considers how social space is produced through a threefold dialectics, which includes spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space (or spaces of representation). I will briefly mention these complex dimensional practices here, since they capture tensions within social space that I will consider later. The first refers to a commonsensical understanding of space as taken for granted in everyday life and dialectically produced during its course. It sees space as defined visually via perception. The space of modernity, Lefebvre argues, is mapped in a highly visual way. The urban milieu is defined by its linear boulevards, its high rises, and its commercial shopping malls, where a visitor is conditioned to behave in a certain way. This is different from what Benjamin observed in the nineteenth century arcades, in the wandering of the *flâneur*, whose slow and aimless strolling created an alternative space within the boundaries of the planned one.

The second dimension refers to the way that space is planned using scientific expertise such as cartography, geography, or by mall designers and urban planners. This constitutes the abstract dimension of lived

space. The knowledge whereby this space is created is, in capitalist societies, linked to the governing mode of calculation and rationalisation. Another thinker who has considered the production of such space at length is the geographer David Harvey. Harvey (2001, pp. 244-247) is interested in how capitalist relations have socialised people from across a variety of geographies into a time discipline that is typical for industrial organisations, as well as into a mathematical specification of land and territorial rights. Maps, for instance, enabled imperialism, just as clocks enabled efficient work in the factory. He points to the struggles and conflicts implicated in the accepted notions of time and space. For example, the association of cyclical time with a traditional world of myth and ritual, while linear time is associated with death, history, and great deeds in the political sphere.

Contemporary market institutions fix time in terms of interest rates and an economic calculation of the future. Harvey argues that capital accumulation is bound to geographical expansion and reductions in the costs of communication and transportation. In order to overcome spatial hindrances and to “annihilate space with time”, spatial structures are created which ultimately act as barriers to further accumulation. This creates a contradiction within capitalism, which can only be circumvented by further expansion. By expansion is meant an intensification of social wants and needs, and geographical extension. The tendency of capitalism, therefore, is to establish a universal set of values founded on abstract social labour as defined on a global scale. This is because space for accumulation must exist or be created if capitalism is to survive. As a consequence of the conditions of capitalism, Harvey observes that the physical landscape is created in the image of capitalist logic.

The third and final dimension refers to space as lived through the social imaginary of space. This space is produced through reflexive thinking and constitutes a way for us to realise ourselves as persons. As examples, Lefebvre provides slums, *barrios*, and *favellas* that lie outside the dominant conception of space, and appropriates it by the insertion of alternative practices. These alternative practices and protests produce a differential space, which challenge the order set up by relations of capital. One of Lefebvre’s noted interpreters, Rob Shields (1999, p. 167), argues that Lefebvre’s conception of social space should to be

understood as an overall process of the production of space and its configuration in different historical time periods. According to this perspective, space is simultaneously a thing and a process, as well as a cultural creation and an ongoing practice. Lefebvre (1974, p. 19) writes:

It is a question of discovering or developing a unity of theory between fields which are given as being separate...Which fields? First, the physical, nature, the cosmos, – then the mental (which is comprised of logic and formal abstraction) – finally the social. In other words, this search concerns logico-epistemological space – the space of social practices – that in which sensible phenomena are situated in, not excluding the imaginary, projects and projections, symbols, utopias. (quoted in Shields, 1999, p. 155)

The traditional distinctions between the material and the symbolic, matter and mind, are less defined in what Lefebvre takes social space to be. The three dimensions consisting of the geometric, the lived, and the represented, then, constitute social spatialisation. It is both non-discursive and discursive; abstract, conceptual, and lived. Therefore, problems identified with image transfer can be translated into spatial terms by saying that a view of conceptual culture corresponds to Lefebvre's (1991) notion of abstract and the conceptual space, while communication as spatial production would involve all three dimensions, including the lived realm (spaces of representation).

## Place and Space

Another study that considers the production of space from the viewpoint of everyday practice is de Certeau's (1984) the *Practice of Everyday Life*. At this point in the argument I would like to consider the central concepts of strategy and tactics, and place and space, in his work, since they will constitute the narrative approach I propose to use to investigate IRI as an outcome of consumers' everyday practices.

According to de Certeau (1984, p. 34ff), the practice of everyday life implies two different logics, which he describes as analogous to the techniques of warfare: strategy and tactics. Hence, de Certeau's description of strategy builds on the same metaphor as the traditional way of understanding strategy in management (see, e.g., McGoldrick 2002, p. 135). This managerial view looks at strategy as a way of

explicitly shaping the long-term goals and objectives of an organisation; of defining the major programs of action needed to achieve those objectives; and of deploying the necessary resources to realise those objectives. In contrast to how strategy and tactics are understood by management, however, de Certeau understands these concepts in a narrative sense.

De Certeau describes strategy as a technique used by institutions, such as cities, armies, and retailers, to create and delimit a place that can be circumscribed as proper, and tactics as the response of the weak and those who cannot count on having a proper place. Place is constituted by an abstract spatial pattern of elements that are distributed according to the “law of the proper”. Here place implies an indication of stability, a fixed location where elements are distributed in a relationship of coexistence. This is what is meant with the law of the proper. Two things cannot exist in the same place simultaneously, but must be situated alongside one another.

Strategies are the calculations by which institutions or other powerful actors are able to establish and distinguish their own physical places from the surrounding environment because they are superior in power and size. In de Certeau’s thinking, these strategies create places characterised by a geometric and synchronic structure, which corresponds to how space is understood by narratology (see the next section). De Certeau (1984) writes:

the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers, competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research etc.) can be managed. As in management, every “strategic” rationalisation seeks first of all to distinguish its “own place,” that is, the place of its own power and will from an “environment”. A Cartesian attitude, if you wish; it is an effort to delimit one’s own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other. It is also the typical attitude of modern science, politics and military strategy. (p. 36)

In contrast to strategy, consumers’ tactics do not depend on calculations of space but on experiences in time. Tactics is the use of an



object by those that are not its makers. One of the central tactics in everyday life that de Certeau identifies is consumption. De Certeau understands consumption as an art of using commercial products, environments, magazines, and other things that consumers have had little say in producing (p. 30). He argues that consumption is an invisible practice, since it is difficult for consumers to make material impacts on the physical world, which is controlled by predominately economic interests. Therefore, consumption manifests itself as an invisible form of production related to time, experience, and stories.

Because they lack their own places, consumers' tactics depend on time. Everyday consumption practices are understood as collective "ways of operating" and "modes of action" that produce their own paths, wandering lines through the landscape of functionalist rationality, argues de Certeau (p. xviii). These practices are tactical in nature and resemble tricks and cunning, sudden manoeuvres, poetics undertaken by those with little power in order to outwit the planned physical environments set up through strategy (p. xix-xx). De Certeau's conception of practice involves regularised ways of acting that follow a specific logic rather than emanating from subjective intentions. The individual consumer is thus seen as a vehicle of this logic, rather than its initiator. Consumers' tactics intervene in the dominant order of a place, transforming it into embodied and lived spaces. De Certeau maintains that

a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus, it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight and self-collection: it is a manoeuvre "within the enemy's field of vision," as von Bülow put it, and within enemy territory. It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions blow by blow. [...] What it wins it cannot keep. (p. 36-37)

In contrast to place, space involves movement and direction (p. 117). Space, in this sense, is the way a place is practiced. Place is the delimited physical environment in which spaces are created by the way

it is used. The geometrically planned street is transformed into space by walkers who use it. The practice of reading produces a space within the written text, a relational pattern of signs. Space is thus reliant on place for its existence.

In moving about in a sphere which is not their own, consumers have an exile-like existence. Restricted by laws and regulations of what they can and cannot do, and offered commodities which they have not produced, the way for consumers to create a space of their own is through the use of time. The time frame of a consumer intervenes in the established order of events and creates a disruption, a delay. This leads, according to de Certeau, to an invisible form of production in everyday life (p. 35). It is invisible because the practices of tactics are scattered, and one is only able to make an impact on the proper by moving about without being seen. In contrast to the rationalised and spectacular mode of economic production, the productive mode of consumption is more covert and clandestine in nature. Production, in this latter sense, is about making do with things one has had little say in creating; about making space for oneself within that which is not one's own. The tactical practices of everyday life structure or encode the planned environments, the places of institutions like corporations, or of cities and regions, into spaces of their own.

A way of capturing the tension between place and space, de Certeau suggests, is through story. The relationship between space and place may be compared to a word being spoken, as opposed to its being found in a dictionary. Place is transformed into space and space is transformed into place by time. Space is the action of using a place, such as movement (walking, travelling), and the elapse of time. Consumers inscribe a spatial pattern, a spatial story, into a place, something that was not anticipated by its designers. He writes that tactics transform the sphere of the proper into places haunted by memories. "The practices of consumption become the ghosts of the society that carries their name." (p. 35) Like ghosts, past events form wandering lines that resemble spatial stories through an inert place. They circulate without being seen, discernible only through the objects that they move or wear away.

The way I use de Certeau's concept of strategy is as the way in which a retail store is encoded into a place of the proper. Given the reciprocal

relationship between strategy and tactics, these concepts help direct attention to the relationship between retailing and consumption in the process of IRI construction. The relational view of how space is brought into being shifts the focus of attention from either a consumer-focussed understanding or a retailer-focussed understanding of image construction to the tension between the two.

## Conclusion

Like all everyday practices, practices of consumption occur in space and simultaneously produce this space as the symbolic and material structures of everyday life. The focus on consumption as practice may be seen as a response to a wider recognition that culture as a transmission from generation to generation is becoming deficient (de Certeau et al. 1998, p. xi), which warrants approaches that see culture as practiced. Strategy and tactics were developed by de Certeau (1984) to capture the way practices of lived culture appropriate institutionalised forms of cultural representation, images of utility and rationality, and taken-for-granted norms and routines. The everyday man or woman constructs the meanings of everyday life through the tactics of coping with what he or she has not taken part in defining. Tactics are used to understand how ordinary culture is both culture viewed from the perspective of tradition, and the familiar and specific means used by people to appropriate a culture that they have had little say in creating.

In this chapter I have sought to demonstrate how the view of culture as practices provides an alternative way of understanding the communication of image as the production of space. Understood in this way, image is neither formed through a transfer nor the decoding of a projected image. Instead, a view of communication as spatial production puts the emphasis on how images are produced as meaning via practice. Communication as the production of space is useful for understanding how IRI is constructed through the organisation of space in everyday practice. The idea of merging the mental, symbolic, and material in considering the construction of images aids in the comprehension of IRI construction as taking place in lived culture, rather than as something transferred invisibly.

In the same way that we regarded the body as being constituted by the way it is perceived, thought of, and lived, we may consider a retailer in the same manner. A retailer may be conceived of by consumers as store maps and layout plans. At the same time, it is a lived mythological reality for its many consumers who bring their memories and stories to play in the manifestation of the retailer in their lived experiences. Under such circumstances, it seems difficult to separate the image of the retailer from the space in and through which this image is produced. The proposition that an image is difficult to separate from the space in which it is produced problematises the modelling of image on specified store attributes. Instead, considering image as space leaves the question of what images are modelled open, and treats images as meanings that emerge in practice.



# Chapter 3

## Storytelling

The story does not express a practice. It does not limit itself to telling about a movement. It makes it. (de Certeau 1984, p. 81)

This chapter deals with the question of how IRI is produced via consumers' storytelling tactics. The aim is to outline a way of understanding the construction of IRI from a narrative perspective. In Chapter 2 it was stated that everyday practice may be seen as being made up of two kinds of operation: strategy and tactics. Retailing and consumption, I suggested, are examples of strategy and tactics, respectively. Strategy and tactics construct place and space and are therefore useful to consider in the construction of IRI, since they make possible an understanding of how a retail place is given meaning, and thereby an image, through consumers' tactical sensemaking of place. How exactly, then, is a retail place transformed into space? In other words, how are the meanings, and therefore the images, of place constructed in consumers' tactics?

The presentation of how narrative meaning is created in this chapter parallels the problematisation of views on the communication of IRI in Chapter 2 in that it moves from a structural study of meaning as something inherent to a narrative (cf. transmission view), to symbolic interpretations of meaning (cf. cultural view), and finally to how meaning is constructed in practice (cf. spatial production view). The presentation in both of these chapters is made in order to stress the overall proposition of this book that IRI is constructed in the tension between retailing strategy and consumption tactics.

## Ways to Narrative Meaning

In the following, I consider the construction of narrative meaning along with three ways of understanding stories. I am considering these three ways, because they relate to the view on narrative meaning adopted here. I begin by considering the construction of narrative meaning within the narrative itself, as posited in the structural tradition of narratology. The reason for this is that it provides a background to my later argument, in Chapter 5, that strategies of retailing communicate meaning in a manner similar to the one posited by narratology. I then move on to consider how the meaning of the story is constructed in interpretivist approaches. I then outline what I mean by storytelling here. In this case, the construction of meaning is presented as the process by which the narrative is turned into a story via practices of sensemaking. Finally, I show how the construction of narrative meaning is linked to the construction of space, and I provide concrete examples of spatial storytelling and its centrality in everyday life.

### Structuralism

The scientific study of narrative originates in narratology or the structural study of narrative. In the broadest sense, a narrative refers to any spoken or written presentation. In a more restricted sense, narrative may be seen as “the kind of organisational scheme expressed in story form.” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 13) Another definition of narrative is provided by Czarniawska (2004, p. 17), who writes that a narrative is “a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected”.

The focus of narratologists is on identifying and uncovering in a narrative text the deep-structures (or codes) which are believed to generate meaning. Narratology based its methods on the insights of the structural study of language<sup>3</sup>, which gave narratologists tools for analysing narratives without having to employ the cause and effect relationships of the natural sciences that had been used previously. The meaning of literary elements could now be explained by virtue of their

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<sup>3</sup>The development of the structural study of language is commonly attributed to the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (Polkinghorne, 1988).

locations in a network of relationships contained in a story (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 79). The methodology of narratology can be described as hypothetic-deductive, whereby a logical structure is hypothesized and then tested against the narrative. The goal is to identify certain functional units beneath the surface of the narrative, and then establish a set of rules for determining how they are related internally. By means of these units and rules it is then possible to predict the characteristics of any type of narrative.

The purpose of narrative grammars is to make the study of narrative predictable by systematising the regularities of narratives. In the narrative studies undertaken by scholars such as Russian formalist Vladimir Propp (1895-1970), linguist Algirdas Greimas, and French literary critic Roland Barthes, narrative meaning is constructed in a text through a geometry inherent to the narrative (Gibson 1996, p. 7; see Czarniawska 2004 for a comprehensive review of structural approaches to analysing narrative). The most famous example is perhaps Propp's study of one hundred Russian folk tales (Czarniawska 2004, pp. 76-80). Propp found that the same types of actions were performed by the characters in a narrative, even if the content and details of the stories varied. In all, he identified seven spheres of action and thirty-one fixed elements that fit his sample of stories; and, although tales from other cultures reveal additional elements, they too are composed of recurring patterns. Propp argued that stories are created in accordance with a limited number of functions that an action plays for the characters involved in the plot.

Later, Greimas reworked Propp's analysis by replacing the term *character* with the term *actant*, which enabled him to demonstrate how actants change roles during the course of events in a story (see, e.g., Greimas, 1987). He argued that stories are structured around the change of states in actants, which transform their roles in the story. For example, as a story unfolds, a rescuer may actually turn out to be a villain. Drawing upon the studies of these scholars, the American literature professor Joseph Campbell (1949/2004, p. 30) made a similar attempt to formalise some of the world's greatest mythical stories. He argued that these stories followed the pattern of what he called the monomyth. The monomyth describes the adventures of the hero as being composed of a circular movement: from the call to adventure,



through the road of trials, to an eventual return to everyday life. Along the way, the hero faces complications and challenges that he must meet and he/she is either aided or hindered by helpers and opponents.

Many narratologists believe that narrative structures are universal and can be applied to all narratives, regardless of time and place. Since geometric structures are inherent to narrative, the intelligibility of the narrative and the geometry of the text are inseparable (Gibson 1996, p. 4). Space in the narrative is determined by these universal geometric structures. Along a geometric plotline, time is comprised of individual moments of “now” (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 127). Time is contingent on the chronological succession of events within the narrative and is used to locate the whereabouts of objects across space. The length of time between events is estimated by means of clocks and chronological instruments. Consequently, time is universal to the structural conception of narrative and disconnected from the human experience of time.

Geometry is associated with modern civilisation and consists of linear patterns and rectangular shapes. Surfaces are blank and neatly demarcated from one another; each thing has its own place in a predictable and regularised order (Lefebvre 1991, p. 50). The same type of geometrical space and time is identified by de Certeau (1984, p. 40) as characterizing the law of the proper which governs how places are set up through strategy. In commercial places, like retail stores, time is reduced to space by means of a strategy of rationalisation and efficiency designed to meet financial measurement of performance. The consequence is that the meaning of a place is stabilised and generated via the proper order of things and by neat boundaries in the physical environment.

## Interpretivism

There is yet another way of approaching how narrative meaning is established. This way of approaching meaning reflects interpretative approaches to analysing the symbolic meaning of stories. Gabriel (2000) argues that interpretivist approaches see stories as symptoms of, for instance, repressed desires, unconscious motives, and hidden wishes. The task of the researcher, he writes, is “to unmask the hidden symbolism of stories, reading them as depositories of meaning and

expressions of deeper psychic, interpersonal, and social realities.” (p. 15) Interpretivist approaches see the meaning of the story residing in a hidden structure underpinning the story that the researcher needs to reveal. Stories are taken as representing motives that the one who tells the story is not often aware of.

An example of an interpretivist approach is found in the early studies on retail image, which were influenced by the Motivation Research (MR) school of thought, founded by psychoanalyst Ernst Dichter and his colleague Pierre Martineau (the latter was mentioned in Chapter 2 as the founding figure of retail image research). Motivation research had a significant influence on the study of the meanings of consumer products because it shifted attention from the functional to the symbolic dimensions of goods. Arvidsson (2006, p. 59) draws attention to the ambitions of motivation research to go beyond the properties of the product and focus on the relationship between products and customers; this was an important step in the development of brand management. With a point of departure in Freudian psychoanalytic thought, motivation research sought to uncover consumers’ hidden and subconscious motivations (Stern 2004). Motivation research helped develop a terminology for thinking about organisations, products, brands, and stores in anthropomorphic terms, as possessing souls and personalities that should ideally mirror those of the consumer. Dichter’s insights on the “magic meanings and mysterious origins” of everyday products had a strong influence on branding and advertising research (Stern 2004, p. 167).

The legacy of motivation research on contemporary consumer research on stories mirrors the interpretive approach as described by Gabriel insofar as it is concerned with unveiling the symbolic, and often hidden, meanings of stories. These traditions, especially during the 1980s, incorporated theories from Marxism, phenomenology, literary criticism, and psychoanalysis, applying them to the study of consumers’ stories and narrative structures in soap operas and advertisements. Consumer researchers interested in narrative theory, for example, showed how consumers impose a chronological structure upon narrative events and organise them into a meaningful story (see, e.g., Thompson, 1997; Stern et al. 1998). A common assumption in these studies is that the consumer’s story is a repository of information about

cognitive and affective responses to brands, advertising, and interpersonal exchanges. Chronological movement gives the story a sense of going somewhere by organising events and experiences in a temporal progression toward some destination or goal state (Thompson 1997). The stories consumers tell are analyzed as temporal trajectories in which past events are connected to the concerns of the present and future expectations about organising experiences into a coherent self-identity.

Several studies in marketing and consumer research also examine the hidden symbolic meanings in the narrative structure of retail environments. Kozinets et al. (2002) explore themed flagship brand stores in terms of the mythological narratives conveyed via their physical and symbolic structures. Sociologist Mark Gottdiener (2003, p. 132) demonstrated how built retail environments are structured for the purpose of facilitating and masking exchanges between consumers and producers. One of the ways in which this is done, he argues, is by drawing on narrative tropes and themes. The narrative structure of the store is also pointed out by Goss' (1993) study of the largest themed retail and entertainment complex in the U.S., the Mall of America. Goss found that within the Mall of America a mythical realm is created, one which "evokes personal memory and collective mythology with the overall effect of evoking natural relations with, self, other, and object-world" (p. 87). Central to the narrative communicated here is the theme of transport and a narrative of nostalgia. The spatial and temporal displacement via transport constructs the experience of the Mall as a shopping trip, a bodily and imaginary journey to distant places and past times, that is undertaken in states of dream and distraction.

Interpretive approaches focus on the symbolism of stories, and are less interested in how meaning is constructed in the practice of story making. I am not denying the value of these studies; however, for my purposes here of studying image construction in practice, I am more concerned with narrative structure and the actions taken in relation to structure, than with the interpretation of the symbolism of stories.

## Sensemaking

The third view of how narrative meaning is constructed, considered here, is through seeing stories and storytelling as devices of sensemaking. Gabriel (2000, p. 17) offers a definition of the story, close to the one I am using here, as based on the sensemaking of experience. According to this definition stories and storytelling are devices for sensemaking. Sensemaking offers a more complex view of how narrative meaning is generated because it sees the telling of a story as a practice of constructing meaningful unity from disconnected and disparate events and situations. In this view, storytelling is a means of creating order in a seemingly chaotic world, and of bringing unity to the fragmented.

Sensemaking refers to a practice of making sense of ambiguous situations. According to Karl Weick (1995, p. 17ff), who has written extensively on sensemaking in an organisational context, sensemaking has seven properties. These define sensemaking as 1) grounded in identity construction, 2) retrospective, 3) enactive of sensible environments, 4) social, 5) ongoing, 6) focused on and by extracted cues, and 7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. The focus on plausibility rather than accuracy in sensemaking is something that I will deal with in the next chapter, when I explain the method by which the construction process of IRI is unfolded. Here I would like to highlight four properties of sensemaking that makes it particularly useful for studying IRI construction: sensemaking as retrospective, social, ongoing, and enactive of sensible environments.

Sensemaking helps us understand storytelling tactics as a social process of turning the seemingly disordered into an intelligible storied order. Consequently, IRI is involved in a process of continuously being created. This is also one of the reasons why it is more important to understand the mechanisms behind an image, how it is constructed, than understanding the image itself, or the specific images that consumers hold of retailers. The specific images of the retailer are interesting, but they are bound to change. Weick writes that “conduct is contingent on the conduct of others, whether those are imagined or physically present.” (p. 39) This is important because sensemaking can occur without face-to-face interaction, since it is possible to rely on imagined others or symbols when making sense. That is why

sensemaking can be captured through language, because it is through language that the social is mediated, at least as it is understood here.

Sensemaking occurs retrospectively. According to Weick, time exists in two forms, as duration and as segments. The way we experience the world in the present is as pure duration. Therefore, we are not able to reflect upon what is going on around us. In order to be able to talk about experience in a meaningful way, duration needs to be transformed into concrete events. Sensemaking is about intervening in duration and making things that have already happened meaningful (pp. 25-26). It is the retrospective unfolding of circumstances which turns them into a coherent situation. It is only by telling oneself or others about what we have experienced that experiences become meaningful to us. In sensemaking, what happened is organised via the way we tell about it retrospectively. "People can know what they are doing only after they have done it," as Weick puts it (p. 24). The meaning of a life or an event arrives in hindsight, when thought becomes reflexive and gives shape to what happened.

The concept of sensemaking ties action and cognition together. This means that action has already taken place when sensemaking begins. Thus it is always done retrospectively. Weick uses the word *enactment* to illustrate the process when people construct the environments they face in organisations (p. 31). In making sense we label and categorise so as to define space and time. People create their environments and these environments then restrain their actions (p. 31). We act on the environment on the basis of how our experiences of the environment were previously made sense of. Enactment means that people receive stimuli from their own actions. The point here is that environments create people's actions and people's actions create environments. This means that the images generated in sensemaking of past experiences of retail stores enact them as specific environments.

On the basis of our images, we construct environments as particular realities. Images guide and frame the actions we undertake in relation to these environments. The way we make sense of our experiences with a particular setting will influence how we continue to act towards that setting. This is why, for example, Benjamin mourned the vanishing of the *flâneur* in modernity, because the *flâneur* was able to reflect and make sense of his environment retrospectively; he thus also came to

experience it in a different way and act within it in a different manner. The *flâneur* saw things in the arcades that the fast-paced people in the crowd could not.

The concept of sensemaking differs from an interpretative approach to meaning construction insofar as it does not rely on textual cues that can be interpreted. It proceeds from the assumption that active agents intervene in the world via the construction of sensible events (Weick, 1995, p. 4). Enactment serves as a framework within which cues used in sensemaking are selected and used. The concern of sensemaking is why certain cues are singled out and how they are constructed, put into frames, and revised based on actions and their consequences. People are able to enact an environment by making it part of their intentions in acting towards it. This is not a one-way relationship since the environment also restrains the actions that can be taken towards it.

### Emplotment

Sensemaking alone is, however, not enough to understand how narrative meaning is created. In order to understand how a story is made and how it is able to convey a meaning, the way the story is emplotted needs to be considered. Czarniawska (2004, p. 19) argues that in order for a narrative to become a meaningful story, it needs to be emplotted. Emplotment is the practice of making a story by means of adding a plot to a narrative. To become a story, a narrative is assigned a plot; that is to say, events in the narrative are arranged via speech or writing to convey a point. Quoting the philosopher Tzvetan Todorov (1971/1977, p.11), Czarniawska takes plot to mean

the passage from one equilibrium to another. An “ideal” narrative begins with a stable situation, which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are never identical. (2004, p. 19)

According to this definition of plot, stories involve a transformation from one state to another. The way of emplotting narratives naturally depends on the perspective and interests of the person who tells the story, but it also relies on the cultural conventions of storytelling. We only need to think of the many ways in which a particular event can be

experienced to realise that there are many different ways of narrating the same happening.

Emplotment is a way of understanding how narrative meaning is generated – not chronologically, but through plot; that is to say, transformation from one state into another one within the story. The plot orders events in the narrative in order to, in the end, convey a particular meaning. To further specify how this is done, I consider sensemaking as a way of thinking about emplotment as something we also practice in everyday life. Organisation researchers have pointed to the close relationship between sensemaking and stories (see, e.g., Czarniawska 2004, 1998). Gabriel (2000, p. 17) states that insofar as various types of official documents, images, bodies, work of arts, photographs, and material objects make sense, they are stories. Weick sees stories as products of previous efforts at sensemaking. He writes:

Two stories in the repertoire, connected in some way, generate meaning. At a minimum, a set of stories represents one third of meaning, awaiting simply a second occasion to which one story from this set can be connected to some aspect of the occasion. Because the story in the repertoire has a punch line, the connection between the old story and a new event raises the possibility that outcomes can be predicted, understood and possibly controlled. (1995, p. 129)

Sensemaking is similar to emplotment since it organizes seemingly disparate events into a coherent whole. Analogously, storytelling and sensemaking rely on sequencing to create clarity and coherence. The passage borrowed from Weick's book, suggests that meaning is generated when two or more stories in a repertoire of stories are connected, or when an old story is expanded with the addition of a new event. One of the important functions of sensemaking is to make a seemingly chaotic world comprehensible by framing it in particular ways. Sensemaking is useful for considering the specific characteristics of the construction of images in storytelling. It enables us to capture IRI construction as a meaning making practice.

## Types of Stories

Researchers with an interest in ways of emplotment highlight different ways of categorising and labelling stories. Gabriel (2000, p. 61) proposes a typology of organizational stories based on four generic poetic modes of giving meaning to events. The generic poetic modes are: comic, tragic, epic and romantic. Each of these modes involve typical characters (e.g. trickster, villain, hero, lover), a distinct plot focus (e.g. misfortune, trauma, success, love), a predicament (e.g. accident, crime, trial, gift), poetic tropes (e.g. unity, malevolent fate, agency, emotion), and emotions (e.g. aggression, fear, nostalgia, love). Gabriel found that these poetic modes often overlapped in the stories of organizational members leading him to add four hybrid poetic modes to the typology.

Czarniawska (2004, p. 24) draws attention to the connection between emplotment and the four classical rhetorical tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Each of these rhetorical tropes represents a different way of organising narratives, in either speech or text, to produce a particular outcome. In turn, she writes, the tropes correspond to four conventional narrative forms in the European literature. It is often argued that such narrative forms are resilient because they are constantly reproduced in popular culture. In the following, each is considered briefly.

The basic plot in romance concerns a hero or heroine's quest for a lost sacred object, such as a treasure, love, or happiness. To attain the desired object, he or she must pass through a number of rituals and trials. In romance the villains stand for the evil forces in the world, whereas the hero or heroine symbolise the power of the good (ibid.). The quest narrative is a conventional template for structuring a story which underpins many stories, particularly romantic ones (see Chapter 5). Tragedy holds that laws of fate govern human life. These laws are successively unfolded through the crises that are at the centre of narration. Tragic stories are usually used as resources to express or deal with fear, anxiety, or anger. Comedy, on the other hand, does not view humans as ruled by fate, but as taking part in a higher unity that, in the end, is resolved via a happy ending. Comedy involves humorous complications and the split between two societies, one desirable and one incomplete. In the end, the characters make the transition to a new



and better society (ibid.). Gabriel (2000) adds that comedy involves a form of self-mocking humour where the characters adopt a playful and ironic attitude in the face of misfortune. The attitude prevents the comic story from turning into a tragedy. Further on, in Chapter 4, I will return to the classification of stories when presenting how the empirical material was analysed.

## Spatial Storytelling

In line with the ideas of de Certeau, who takes tactics to mean a kind of spatial storytelling, I would like to consider theoretically, from a narrative perspective, the process by which strategy and tactics construct IRI. To this end, strategy and tactics are understood as two different levels of the story: the narrative (*enoncé*) and how that narrative is told (*enunciation*) (cf. Czarniawska 2004, p. 79). The distinction is similar to the one between *histoire* and *discours* made by linguist Emile Benveniste (1902-1976) (Kristensson Uggla 1994, p. 225). While *histoire* presents past events as though they are narrated by themselves, without the intervention of a speaker, on the level of *discours* a speaker intervenes and relates his/her knowledge of events, thereby bringing the narrative into existence by using it in telling the story. Through the study of consumers' storytelling, we are able to understand how the tension between strategy and tactics constructs meaning, and thereby images. I will take strategy to mean narrative in a structuralist sense and I understand tactics to refer to the process of turning that narrative into a story through sensemaking practices.

Understood as a practice of making sense of narrative, storytelling is spatial in the sense that the plot involves a movement, a transformation, from one state to another, moving from a beginning to an end. To de Certeau (1984, p. 89) all stories are spatial practices. He states that in narration we insert directions and references to places and geographies, which turn storytelling into a spatial practice.

Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice. For this reason, spatial practices concern everyday tactics, are part of them, from the alphabet of spatial indication (“It’s to the right,” “Take a left”), the beginning of a story the rest of which is written by footsteps, to the daily “news” (“Guess who I met at the bakery?”), television news reports (“Teheran:

Khomeini is becoming increasingly isolated...”), legends (Cinderellas living in hovels), and stories that are told (memories and fiction of foreign lands or more or less distant times in the past). These narrated adventures, simultaneously producing geographies of actions and drifting into the commonplaces of an order, do not merely constitute a “supplement to pedestrian enunciations and rhetorics. They are not satisfied with displacing the latter and transposing them into the field of language. In reality, they organize walks. They make the journey, before or during the feet perform it (De Certeau 1984, p.89).

The practice of consumption is storytelling in circulation. Lacking place, consumers are forced into restless movement. Much of what we do with goods in practices of consumption consists of mundane events, such as eating, sleeping, decorating a home, getting dressed for work, pulling up zippers, etc. By expressing the experiences of these events through the story, however, we give them significance and make them an important part of our lives. Meaningful spaces within a place are created through consumers’ temporal experiences communicated through the story. Stories, de Certeau writes, “make a hit or coup,” by way of inserting a past or a quote to modify an equilibrium (p. 79). Stories collect events together and set them apart in unforeseeable ways. The temporality of experience does not conform to chronology, but reflects an experienced and lived time, which it is possible to obtain access to retrospectively.

For de Certeau tactics rely on memory and obeys other laws of organisation than the place of the proper. Tactics invisibly intervene in the planned order of place by means of the use of time in the story. While in the midst of things, in the present now, he argues that we are unable to distinguish one thing from another. It is only by reflecting on events or actions in retrospect that our experiences of them can become meaningful. These experiences are made meaningful when made sense of through a story. In this way storytelling becomes a process of transforming the physical retail environments of retailers. Experiences frame a place in particular ways and thereby restrict the actions that can be undertaken within that place. Because sensemaking is enactive of sensible environments, it contributes to the understanding of how spaces frame the way consumers practice a place.

## Narrative, Time, and Space

Narrative links time and space. While the narratologists approached the narrative as a closed system, with its own time and space, the hermeneutic tradition within the humanities proposes that time is not only dependent on clock time but also on the human experience of time (Kristensson Uggla 1994, p. 412). The centrality of narrative in our everyday lives is reflected in the everyday language used to organise our experiences. Our actions exist in narrative time and at the same time they create time by taking time to do. We often employ expressions like tomorrow, soon, or now to orient ourselves temporally. We say 'first happened ... and then ... and then'. In this manner we actively organise past events in a logical narrative sequence so that others can understand what happened. In this way we order experience in a succession that is similar to that of a narrative.

Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (2001, p. 127) calls attention to how the temporal organisation in everyday life invests seemingly dull routines with meaning. Tuan demonstrates how the to-and-fros implicated in the routine of going to work are surrounded by ritual centred on spatio-temporal movement. Each day is a new day. We go to work in the morning and return home at night. In the morning, the workplace lies ahead in one's future. The future is characterised by uncertainty, the unknown, and the potential for surprise. If only something would happen today that hasn't happened before, we may perhaps think on the way to the office. At the end of the day, the office worker returns home. Home is now in his or her future, in the sense that it takes time to get there. She or he returns home, retracing her or his steps in space, going back to the familiarity of the home. The home in this sense becomes a familiar image of something in the past, and, in the ideal sense, of origin or beginning.

An example of how stories produce meaningful spaces is found in the mythology of the land among aboriginal communities in Australia. Invisible networks of lines, rather than borders on the map, mark aboriginal land. These lines are commonly referred to as *songlines* because they are thought of as the Creator's footsteps (Sand 2008, p. 200). In the aboriginal creation myth, the Creator wandered across the Australian continent and created, or sang, plants, animals, mountains, and waters by singing their names. The anthropologist Helen Verran

(1998) shows how aboriginal land exists as sites that are connected to a pattern of kinship relations and stories about how the spaces were made. The songlines are transferred from generation to generation and have many functions, such as the transfer of the land of one generation to the next, coordinating one family's songlines with those of other families, and mediating connections between lines and the body's movement, memories, and events.

The borders of the land are not fixed once and for all, but need to be confirmed and built successively through song. Singing rituals in this way performs space. Songlines exemplify how spatial storytelling not only represents space, but also performs it. This is why de Certeau, in the introductory citation, states that stories do not merely express a practice, they create it. Storytelling intervenes in the narrative order and transforms it. It gives meaning to seemingly disparate social events and arranges them into a coherent, intelligible whole. Stories help in this way to illuminate the images the retailer, but they also point at something else important: the way that images change the retail environment by giving it meaning which frames the way we act towards it.

Seen as a spatial storytelling, image construction is a joint process between retailer and consumers. By focussing on the seemingly trivial and concrete in everyday life, it is possible to gain access to something larger that can help us understand retail image better. Stories are rarely told in isolation from other stories. Our own stories contain traces of the cultures we are situated in, the stories we heard as children, the stories told by the central societal institutions, as well as the stories of retailers and other corporations.

## The Storyteller and On Being Told

From the understanding of consumption as spatial storytelling follows the assumption that consumers in their roles as storytellers are not the inventors or authors of stories. Instead, storytelling becomes an oral mediation and performance of stories. This view of storytelling and storytellers coincides with the role of the storyteller in premodern times. In earlier times, a storyteller was regarded as someone who performed, mediated, and enacted a story, rather than its author. The concept of

the author emerged in the Middle Ages, when written texts became more popular, along with the view that intentions are located in the human subject (Barthes 1977, p. 141). Up until then, the meaning of a narrative was not sought in an author, but in the performance of the story, something which was typically carried out by a mediator, such as a shaman or troubadour (ibid.). In an essay about these ancient storytellers, Benjamin (1999b) further elaborates on the loss of the ability to exchange experiences in modernity. He describes the ancient storyteller as someone who tells stories that communicate experience. He writes that

storytelling is always the art of *repeating* stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens to impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of *retelling* them comes to him all by itself. This, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled. This is how today it is becoming unravelled at all its ends after being woven thousands of years ago in the ambience of the oldest forms of craftsmanship. (1999b, pp. 90-91)

Storytelling is the art of repeating stories, a craft that can be compared to that of the artisan. Traces of the storyteller's experience cling to the story the way "handprints of a potter cling to the clay vessel." (p. 91; see also Gabriel [2000, p. 15] for an elaboration of Benjamin's work on the storyteller.) Storytelling does not present the essence of things, as does a report, but is lived and embodied. For Benjamin, storytelling is the opposite of the written novel. A novel reflects the temporality of the modern, which is linear and progresses towards death and immortality. According to the linear orientation in the world, it is only in death that the meaning of one's life revealed. In contrast, storytelling involves many deaths during one's life.

## Being Told

In a similar vein to Benjamin, Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero (2000, p. 83) writes that the meaning of one's life must be revealed through a story told by someone else. In contrast to the idea that the meaning of one's life can only be revealed posthumously, when one is dead, she writes that we are able to grasp the meaning of our lives so far

by recognising ourselves in the stories of others. She argues that we can only know who we are through the stories others tell about us. To know who I am, and for my actions to become meaningful, the course of events of my life so far must be made sense of by another human and be retold. It is through the story told about a subject that an identity is built. The meaning of a life is created in relationships with others and through their stories. For Cavarero, the self is *narratable*, meaning that, as humans, each of us desires to hear our story told by another human. She observes that the question frequently posed to strangers, “Who are you?”, almost instinctively leads to the answer, “Who am I?”, which returns the question to the inquirer. In other words, narrative practice is at work in the most basic of human relations. While it is commonly believed that we perform our identity by expressing, displaying, and making claims to who we are – and perhaps who we would like to be – through storytelling (e.g. Mishler 1999, p. 19), in line with Cavarero’s argument, we also reveal who others are through the stories we tell about them.

Cavarero grounds her reasoning about the narratable self in a logic that she finds in philosopher Hannah Arendt’s (1958) thesis on the human condition as something rooted in the category of birth as opposed to the category of death. The category of birth stands in contrast to the category of death, which presupposes the distinction between essential being and appearance. In the category of birth, being and appearance coincide, so that appearing in the world is constitutive of being in the world. From this reasoning it follows that language and the communication with others is crucial for developing the self. Cavarero (2000) writes

The primacy of the visible thus has the merit of exemplifying the reason for which an identity constitutively exposed to others is also unmasterable. Indeed, the one who is exposed cannot know *who* is exposing because he/she does not see him- or herself. It is therefore, argues Arendt, quite likely ‘that the “who” which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others remains hidden to the person himself; like the *daimon* in Greek religion, which accompanies each man through his life, looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible to those he encounters.’ (p. 21)

For this reason, in Cavarero’s theory of the narrative self being told by another human is always constitutive of the self. Near the end of the

thesis, I return to the theory of the narrative self in order to demonstrate the implications of Cavarero's thinking for the construction of IRI. Cavarero's focus on the relationality of storytelling helps us to understand consumers as storytellers who bring back retailing through the story. Each storyteller cannot simply invent her own language, but depends on received narrative resources that are familiar to her community (Stone-Mediatore 2003, p. 36). Therefore, as consumers, we do not invent stories in isolation from our communities of belonging, culture, and history. Unavoidably, they are always retellings of other stories. These retellings involve pieces of other stories, conventions of telling that we learn from popular culture and from friends and family, and ideas of what is appropriate and inappropriate to tell, or what is worth telling, to others (Frank 1995).

The telling of autobiography and biography are activities that the modern epoch tends have forgotten, something which is usually thought of as occurring posthumously. Cavarero, however, shows that this kind of telling takes place in everyday life, particularly among lovers and women where the desire to hear one's own particular story told is stronger than among other groups<sup>4</sup> (p. 89). She is interested in finding a way to understand the self as coherent while at the same time acknowledging that it emerges in different versions in manifold stories. Key to her argument is the personal name that unites disparate stories of the self. This name works as the glue between one's own story, the autobiography, and the biographies that only others can tell. The name of a particular hero turns a story of – potentially – anyone into an unrepeatable story of a specific someone (p. 143). With Cavarero's (2000) terminology, we could say that place corresponds to the autobiography of the self, while consumers' stories constitute micro-biographies which retell the autobiography so as to give it significance. From Cavarero's narrative perspective, we can understand how retailing and consumption are linked through story.

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<sup>4</sup>Cavarero's thinking originates in a strand of Italian feminism that, in the 1970s, sought to upgrade women's experiences by means of establishing alternative spaces, outside masculine institutions, where women could exchange stories and memories (Cavarero 2000, p. 58).

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined a way of understanding the image construction process from a narrative perspective by suggesting that retailing strategy corresponds to the narrative level of a story, whereas consumers' tactics refers to how the narrative is made sense of. In the way that the narrative event is made sense of through the manner by which the story is told, place is transformed into space or space is transformed into place. In making sense of a narrative event we relate it to previous experiences and other narratives, in order to give it a coherent story. According to de Certeau (1984), the movement implied by the reorganisation of events in the way that the story is told turn storytelling into a spatial practice, or, as I have termed it here, spatial storytelling. Here I have sought to demonstrate what characterises spatial storytelling by showing how the construction of meaning (and therefore image) in spatial stories is different from interpretivist and structuralist approaches. Spatial storytelling is about the storyteller's active making of meaning, storytelling as doing. This is different from structuralist and interpretivist approaches that presuppose the initial existence of something to be read and interpreted. For the construction of IRI as it is considered here, the focus on spatial storytelling implies approaching the process of IRI construction as the transformation from retail place into consumers' lived spaces and vice versa. In the tension between place and space, I posit that it is possible to capture IRI.





# Chapter 4

## Unfolding Image Construction

Who's there? Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself. (Shakespeare 2003, 1.1.1-2)

The purpose of this chapter is to recount how the process of IRI construction was unfolded. By unfolding I mean here the unravelling of the process of sensemaking by which events are turned into stories. Previous research tells us little about this process and, from the perspective of everyday life, we are not able to grasp the process because it occurs in many different places simultaneously.

The opening lines of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, quoted here, is a call to identify one's self. They capture the play's enigma concerning whether the ghost at Elsinore exists, or is merely the inner voice of the Danish prince, Hamlet. The lines reveal that the mere appearance of an agent in a story is not enough to reveal his or her character. For the character to enter the scene, she or he needs to be unfolded through gestures and speech. The answer to the question "Who's there?" can only be found in the action of the characters in the scene. The theories of narratology formulated in the 1960s changed the view of the character as having an internal essence. Instead, characters were thought to depend upon the plot and to be created through the unfolding action in a story. In order to analyse a character, attention was paid to typical modes of action in the story, that is to say, typical plots (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 89). By developing an understanding of the characters in the story, it is possible to reveal the meaning of the story and identify the plot. According to a structuralist perspective, a character in a story does not correspond to a real character outside the story, but is a constellations of verbal statements held together by the name of the character. Polkinghorne (1988) draws a parallel between characters in stories and how images of

people are created from fragments of gossip and rumours. The fragments are arranged so as to fit with each other and form a coherent image of the person. Sociologists of science and technology adapted the theories of narratology concerning the assembly of character to understand how scientific facts are socially constructed (see Latour 2005 for an overview of Actor-Network Theory). Within this tradition, Karin Knorr-Cetina (2001) uses the notion of unfolding as a method to understand how abstract phenomenon, such as, for instance, financial markets, are constructed as complex epistemic objects. Epistemic objects are defined as unfolding structures – always changing entities – in a process of being defined.

The notion of unfolding refers to the evolution of a sequence of which certain segments (and possibly other segments) are gathered together by applying identical names to them. The process of naming and unfolding (and dispersion) is independent of one another, and might even stand in contradiction to one another. (Knorr-Cetina 2001, p. 92)

The concept of unfolding is useful in understanding how IRI construction involves the arrangement of many different instances of consumers' storytelling tactics. I should mention that I use the concept of unfolding as a source of inspiration rather than as a methodological rule. Nevertheless, I share with science and technology studies an interest in how concepts, facts, ideas, and, in my case, image emerge in practice, rather than being defined beforehand by the researcher. Understood as a gradual unfolding, IRI is involved in an on-going construction process. With respect to what was said about sensemaking in the previous chapter, this process neither begins nor ends. Hence, this study interferes in the midst of events and captures the process as snapshots of instances of image construction.

In the following, I describe how the empirical material was accessed and collected, and how at a later stage it was reconstructed through transcription, translation, analysis, and presentation in the final text. The chapter concludes with reflection over the melancholy involved in such reconstruction.

## Selection of Research Sites

The construction process of IRI was captured through consumers' images of the Swedish furnishing retailer IKEA. With operations in over thirty-five countries, IKEA is an example of an international retailer. Since the 1980s, IKEA has employed a highly standardised marketing communication strategy. Over the years, IKEA has told a range of stories about its mythical founder figure, its Swedish origins, its low-cost policy, its product range, and so forth (Martensson 1987). These stories are distributed by IKEA's key media: the website, the catalogue, and the store. IKEA is relevant to this study because it is intimately connected to the geographies of the locations of the store and to the home. While all retailers are inherently geographical in nature, IKEA explicitly promotes itself as an organiser of home space. I will not give a detailed introduction to IKEA here, allowing the consumers do the work in the analysis.

Consumers' images of IKEA were investigated in the cities Malmö and Shanghai. These two cities were employed as examples of markets in which the retailer has been established for a longer, respectively shorter, period of time. While Malmö represents the domestic Swedish market in which IKEA has run operations since the 1950s, Shanghai represents what the retail literature calls the host market, in which IKEA has been established since 1998. The choice of Shanghai was motivated by the fact that I had previously spent time in China for the purpose of language studies. I knew Shanghai – a city I had visited prior to the data collection – and I could therefore more easily find my way around. I also spoke Mandarin well enough to conduct simple inquires and interviews. Knowledge of the language facilitated access to informants. For example, it enabled direct contact with the informants without the mediation of a translator. In finding access to IKEA consumers, this was helpful given that it is important to establish trust between the researcher and the informants at this stage, something which is better done through face-to-face interaction than through another person.

The second reason for selecting Shanghai has to do with establishing a point of contrast to the Swedish context. As a Swede, I have had long experience with IKEA, and I am well familiar with the retailer. I think I was six years old when I visited IKEA with my parents for the first time.

I have a vague memory of getting a green bureau and matching green curtains. Since then, I have been to IKEA many times. From the time I started school until today, I have bought numerous pieces of furniture and other products at IKEA. I have been left in the children's playroom, and have consumed numerous meatballs, salmon sandwiches, hot-dogs, and ice cream. In order to be able to gain a fresh perspective on IKEA and see things anew, I needed to put the retailer in a different light. The stay in Shanghai allowed me to discover things that I would not have noticed in the Swedish context. An anxious struggle with my own experiences of IKEA and how they framed what I observed in the store and in the homes, however, diminished as soon as I began to think of images of IKEA as emergent and unfolding. What I hitherto had known as IKEA lost its stable character, and began to shift. This methodology allowed me to see things in places where I had initially thought there was nothing to be seen.

## The Home

Fieldwork was carried out in the IKEA stores and consumers' homes in Malmö and Shanghai during the years 2004-2007. Observations in the stores and interviews with store managers were carried out in both cities, which provided a background to what the consumers' told me in the interviews. Since IKEA furniture and products are, for the most part, used in households, the home was considered a suitable location for carrying out the study. In talking to consumers in their homes – as opposed to meeting them at IKEA or in a public place – I wanted to capture the sensemaking concerning how products were put into practice and used after their purchase. I was interested in how practices of using IKEA products were organised in storytelling, and in the types of spaces that these practices produced, via which IKEA products became meaningful at home.

While experienced, lived time does not belong to the home, narration does (cf. Cavarero 1995). The home is traditionally characterized by inertia; it serves as a point of contrast to the public sphere and the progression of history. Domestic space is a space for caring for, rearing, and feeding children, recreation after a long day's work, resting. It is a private and personal space of one's own (Bennett 2002). In this realm

which has been created by and for ourselves, I reasoned that reflection was possible to capture.

Several studies point to the leakiness of the boundaries between the home and the public world (Bennett 2002, p. 26). For example, in a seminal study of how Australian women understood their homemaking in the post-war period, Lesley Johnson (1996) found that women saw homemaking as a means of contributing to the future development of the nation. She calls attention to the home as a site where the public and the private intersect.

In this scenario, women were active participants in modern social existence, they were central to what they believed to be the project of this new world – ensuring people could be in control of their own lives, to define their futures [...] Home was not a bounded space, a fortress into which the individual could withdraw and from which all others could be excluded. Their modernity was about actively creating a place called home, securing a future for their children and an everyday life in which personal and intimate bodily relations could be properly looked after. (Johnson, 1996, p. 461, cited in Bennett 2002, p. 27)

Like the retail store, the home is also a place, an institution that acts as a means of regularizing everyday practice and particular kinds of social relations, for instance, between genders and generations. How these social relations are organised varies historically and geographically. The home, therefore, is not only a private space, but a place where public and private overlap, where strategy encounters tactics in storytelling.

## Selection of Informants

Since I was interested in how IKEA consumers made sense of their use of IKEA's products, stores, and furniture, one criterion in selecting informants was that they had previous experience of decorating with IKEA's products and furniture. The number of IKEA products in a home, however, was not regarded as important. Both consumers with more IKEA products at home and those with fewer IKEA products at home were included in the study. The reason was that I suspected that the use of IKEA products could vary among these consumer groups. Another selection criterion was that the informants have had a say in the decoration of their homes. Of course, influencing what a home

looks like may involve many different things. To facilitate finding people who had decorated their own homes, selection was restricted to those having employment. Therefore, students were not considered because they were assumed to live in more temporary housing arrangements.

In Shanghai, I recruited informants outside the entrance of the Shanghai IKEA store during one week in April, 2005. Visitors were most often approached in the evening (from 6 pm – 10 pm) because a greater number of people were in circulation during that time period. Visitors going into the store were randomly asked to participate in the study. The initial recruitment resulted in ten completed interviews. The sample was fairly homogenous, consisting of men and women from ages twenty-four to thirty-five, unmarried and couples, with or without children, typically working for a domestic or foreign firm. Several of them knew a little English and had a university education. At the time of my data collection, an IKEA employee described the sample of informants as being their typical consumers (interview with co-worker W).

In order to broaden the sample, “snowballing” was later used. Broadening the sample was necessary, I thought, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the environment in which the interviews I had conducted were situated. Broadening the sample provided insight into stories that were not common among the informants I had recruited, but were among other communities in Shanghai. At the time of completing the first round of interviews, I had got to know people in Shanghai and I also knew the city, better enabling me to strategically seek out informants whom I suspected differed from those that I initially had captured in the IKEA store. For example, I asked neighbours in the apartment building I lived in, as well as people with whom I had become acquainted, who I suspected could differ in their use of IKEA products, due either to different lifestyles or living conditions such as, for example, apartment size or the number of people living there. Collaboration with native speakers in the environment where research is being carried out is important because it provides access to views of the world in that environment (Usunier 1998, p. 49). In Shanghai, I collaborated with an associate professor at Fudan University School of Management who helped me compose a

letter which introduced the research to the informants and who also helped me understand the possible role of IKEA in relation to consumer behaviour, old and new interior decoration practices, and the role of IKEA.

The collection of empirical material in Shanghai guided the one carried out in Malmö. Informants in Malmö were strategically recruited to provide a similar kind of sample as had been used in Shanghai, to capture the same age and professional groups. In Malmö, informants were initially accessed through personal contacts and snowballing. Thereafter, the selection was widened to include informants that were suspected of differing from the initial ones.

In both cities, informants were selected on the basis of the IKEA store that they usually visited. It happened that an informant shopping in the Malmö store lived in a smaller city or a suburb of Malmö. Given that I was not interested in accessing the typical Malmö resident, but users of IKEA, informants living outside Malmö were occasionally included in the selection. In order to ensure the anonymity of the informants, the names and places by which an informant can be identified have been changed in the thesis. In cases where the Shanghainese informants referred to themselves by their English names, I have used other English names.

## Using Photography to Provoke Storytelling

Stories can be captured in several ways. One way to capture stories is as they naturally occur, for instance, on the bus or in the local bar, either by overhearing conversations or conducting observations in environments in which the storytelling is likely to occur (Gabriel 2000, p. 139). Another way for researchers to capture stories is by provoking informants to tell stories. If storytelling is understood as a device for sensemaking, then one of the difficulties with capturing sensemaking is that it is a rapid process, which escapes attention. Often the products of sensemaking are captured as pre-existing stories, instead of the process itself. In order to capture sensemaking practice, Weick (1995, p. 85) writes, we can watch how people deal with paradoxes, dilemmas, and implausible events. Situations in which sensemaking occurs thus presuppose some degree of uncertainty.



In order to capture storytelling, photographs were employed in the interviews. In visual anthropology, photos are commonly combined with interviews and observations to portray and document the social. Anthropologists Collier and Collier (1986) use the term the photographic inventory to denote that photography is a visual record of the relationships among people, things, and artefacts in the household. They found that photographs were useful, in combination with open-ended interviews, in obtaining knowledge. Collier and Collier argue that photos tend to strengthen an informant's memory. While a photographic inventory is thought to reflect the person who is living in a home, I employ photos here to enquire about the role of IKEA at home.

## Interviewing with Photos

The method of combining in-depth interviews with photographs is sometimes referred to as autodiving (Heisley and Levy 1991). Autodiving is commonly used when a researcher seeks to generate or elicit subjective accounts from informants. As the name implies, autodiving builds on the idea that the informants drive the interview by initiating topics for discussion. According to Heisley and Levy (1991), the purpose of autodiving is to give an informant an increased voice in the interview. The idea is that, by talking about the photos, the informant influences the direction of the conversation, rather than just answering questions formulated by a researcher. The goal is to capture the informant's own experiences and personal narratives. Because the informant is expected to be the one who directs the conversation during the interview, the relationship between informant and researcher is regarded as more symmetrical than in an interview structured by the researcher's questions (Clark-Ibanez 2004). The researcher and the researched become collaborators rather than opposing parties in the format of inquirer/respondent. During the interview I experienced that informants showed an interest in talking about the photos. Because of their willingness to spend time talking to me, most interviews required two to three hours. I experienced that informants were keen on explaining what was depicted and why the photo had been taken. They took actions to explain their actions, rather than providing accounts.

Providing accounts means that the informant does not tell about his/her own experiences but refers the investigator to other sources of information (Czarniawska 2004, p. 54). Jokes and tall tales are examples of accounts. Accounts, therefore, do not tell about something that happened but instead draw upon some form of common-sense understanding. In a similar vein, Gabriel (2000, p. 25) distinguishes stories from narratives based on opinions, proto-stories, and reports. These narratives cannot capture storytelling because they draw upon general observations and are not anchored in the concrete experience of the storyteller. To avoid such narratives and accounts, I brought a set of prepared questions to the interview involving how, where, when, and by whom IKEA's products were used. Even though these questions remained in my bag most of the time, I attempted to direct the conversation towards the issues raised in these questions when they were not introduced by informants.

The purpose of interviewing with photographs was to evoke storytelling. One of the downsides of evoking storytelling in the interview is that the storytelling is carried out and framed and performed for the benefit of the researcher (Gabriel 2000, p. 137). Hence, the researcher's interests unavoidably define that which is told. Stories are always told for a purpose. In this case, the purpose was often to explain to me or tell me something about an informant's home so as to make it into my story. In the Shanghai context, this was expressed by informants telling me that "in China it is common to ...", while in Sweden the stories often revolved around the fact that I shared many of the experiences informants told about. Sometimes informants also wanted me to share details about my own apartment. Did I use IKEA furniture? I came to realise that the home is a very private sphere, and that opening it to a stranger for scrutiny is a sensitive issue. The photos worked as a door opener because the informants were usually willing to take photos. In some cases in Shanghai I took it step by step. I first suggested that we meet in a nearby café and talk about the pictures and then, toward the end of our conversation, I asked if I could visit their homes.

Kvale (1996) notes that the qualitative interview is a construction site for knowledge created as a joint result of activities of both informant and researcher. He writes that the interview is literally an inter-view, an

exchange of opinions between researcher and informant. What is considered important in the interview is the “inter”, that is to say, what goes on in the interaction between informant and researcher. Rather than trying to access some hidden meaning in an informant’s account, Kvale writes that attention should be paid to the meaning constructed via the relationship between the teller of the story and the person receiving it.

The relationship between informant and researcher complicates an objective view of the research process, because the story becomes a question about specific embodiments and not transcendence. Strathern (2004, pp. 34-35) argues that rational knowledge is not about detachment, but about recognising a partial position: a view from the body rather than from a detached, anonymous voice from above. Increased awareness that there are many different perspectives from which to understand the world transforms objectivity into an issue of diverse viewpoints. According to her, this is not so much an issue of highlighting numerous perspectives as it is about grounding observations and interviews in a time and place.

Interviewing with photos was a time-consuming project. It involved leaving and picking up disposable cameras for development of the photos during a longer period of time. On several occasions, the photos turned out dark, because someone had forgotten to use the flash. In such cases, I gave the informant a digital camera to facilitate re-taking the pictures. Photo-elicitation was also a relative expensive technique and, in retrospect, I believe that digital technology could have been utilised better. As some of the participants informed me, today many people have digital cameras and know how to upload pictures directly onto photo sharing databases, which could have facilitated the work. As a method for capturing storytelling, however, the photos were helpful, and facilitated the analysis process and aided my memory of what the homes looked like. In the analysis, it concretised IKEA in a way that complemented direct observation.

## Status of the Photos in this Study

Visual studies sometime come with problematic claims related to that visual stimuli are able to evoke more authentic and profound information from informants. Sociologist Douglas Harper (2002), for instance, contends that we respond to visual images differently because the part of the brain that processes visual stimuli is evolutionarily older than the portion that processes text. I will here regard photographs as a means to access how consumers make sense of their use of IKEA products at home. As I see it makes little sense to question whether some ways of constructing meaning are truer than others. What is more important is that the informants' stories are anchored in lived experiences.

Photographs are considered useful for prompting informants to talk about themselves and their everyday lives. Petersen and Ostergaard (2005) used photos in a study about knowledge sharing in an organisational context. They identify four different ways of viewing the status of photos in studies employing photography as a research method. First, the researcher can take the photos, analyse the photos, and reach conclusions based upon this analysis. Second, the researcher lets informants take the photos, but analyses them on his or her own. Third, the researcher takes the photos and analyses them together with the informants. Fourth, the researcher lets the informants take the photos and discusses them with the informants. In this study I have adopted the fourth approach. To facilitate the concretisation of IKEA, the informants were asked to take photographs of their homes. The aim of the photos was to encourage informants to tell stories about IKEA situated in a specific time and place. Written instructions were handed out together with disposable cameras to the informants. I also informed them that the study was about IKEA. The strength of this approach is considered to be that it captures the informants' thinking about the research topic and allows for the generation of themes from the informants' points of view (*ibid.*). In addition, the approach is believed to reduce the control of the interview by the researcher, which is otherwise predominant.

In the first instance, the photos are in themselves the goal, while in latter approaches they are only the means to an end. Petersen and Ostergaard (2005) consider the approach, where informants take the

photos by themselves, as the one in which a researcher has the least control over the interview. The photographs direct the insights of the informants and the thoughts that they attach to the photos. In this approach, the motive is not as central as in the other categories, since the purpose of the photos is to capture the informants meaning making of them. They also serve to point out that whenever we see something, we construct a story around it in order to comprehend what we are seeing. If I had taken the photographs, this would have said more about what I regarded as important than about what is regarded as important in the lived culture.

In cases where researchers go into unfamiliar environments and take photographs, there is a risk that the photos are taken of, what Clark-Ibanez (2004) calls, visually arresting things. Photos of visually arresting things focus on subject matter that seems exotic and different to the researcher, while they mean less to informants. Allowing the informants to take their own photos was particularly important in Shanghai, where my understanding of interior decoration did not always apply. On the other hand, while the visually arresting may be especially prevalent in environments that are new to the researcher, it can also be found at home. Holbrook and Kuwahara (1998) state that when a researcher took photos, they were found to be less significant for informants, regardless of context. The photographs did, however, serve another purpose in Shanghai, in that they were used as aids in reducing the language barrier. Even though most of the interviews were carried out in Mandarin (occasional ones were done in English), my knowledge of the language is limited to everyday small talk. The interviews were recorded and upon arriving home, I received help with the translations (see below). In the interviews, therefore, the photos served as a way of assisting with the communication between the informants and myself. They became a common point of reference, to which the conversation was tied.

There is no assumption in this study that photography captures meanings that can be read off the image by any interpreter. The photos were used to capture the informant's situated sensemaking (i.e. the process of story making) of IKEA. In order to underscore the function of the photos in generating storytelling, in Chapters 6-8 I first present the informants' photos and thereafter the way that they are narrated.

The photos are also included in the analysis to anchor the spaces of IKEA, produced in informants' narration, in time and place. The photos included in these chapters are not regarded to have meanings in themselves. In order for the photos to have meaning, they need to be narrated.

## Defamiliarising the Home Environment

The photos were also used for the purpose of creating an estrangement before the mundane so as to encourage storytelling. In the mundane environment of the home, it can be difficult to articulate how things are done in a particular way, because this is self-evident to those who live there. Hence, it becomes invisible. In research dealing with daily life at home, photographs have been suggested as a means of objectifying the familiar so as to make it possible to reflect on it (Heisley and Levy 1991). The idea of using photographs is thus to make the home appear more unfamiliar, and to make an informant reflect on what has happened there. To illustrate the unfamiliarity that photographs may impose on a familiar environment like the home, it is useful to recall what literature critic Susan Sontag (1977/2002) wrote about photography.

Photography, which has so many narcissistic uses, is also a powerful instrument for depersonalizing our relation to the world; and the two uses are complementary. Like a pair of binoculars with no right or wrong end, the camera makes exotic things near, intimate; and familiar things small, abstract, strange, much farther away. It offers, in one easy, habit-forming activity, both participation and alienation in our own lives and those of others – allowing us to participate, while confirming alienation. (p.167)

Sontag argues that since photographs are taken to be shown to others, the researcher needs to proceed with caution when assigning photographs the status of having direct access to people's memories and experiences, or being able to elicit stories of greater truth than is available via other methods. The photograph gives an image of reality framed by the person who took the picture. Photographers always impose standards on their subjects in deciding how the picture should look and because they prefer one exposure to another. Given that the camera is an interpretative device through which experiences are made

manifest, it was important that the informants took the photographs. We must also be aware of, however, that the informant's photographs directed how they framed IKEA in the interview. The camera lens tends to be directed towards the spectacular and out of the ordinary things that we consider worth showing to others (p. 22).

The photographic image, Sontag writes, portrays that which the photographer regards worthy of portraying. "Nobody exclaims isn't that ugly! I must take a photograph of it," as she puts it (p. 85). Her suggestion corresponds to Clark-Ibanez's (2004) observation that people have different notions concerning what does or does not belong in a photograph. The event captured by a photo has already taken place. Since the photo itself is mute, the only way for the event to return to the world is via a story. Without a story it is merely a surface. Because photos are snapshots of something worthy of showing to others, it is possible that they also inform stories about cultural conventions in home interior decoration.

The camera makes the world manageable, and it singles out certain aspects of reality. In this way, taking photos and telling stories are parallel means by which consumers organise and make sense of their experiences. Photographs are thus invested with memories and do not depict the world but frame how the person who took the photos makes the world meaningful. Photographs make it possible for an informant to re-experience a moment and share it with an interviewer. This means that the same photograph can have many different meanings, each dependant on who is doing the narrating (Burt et al., 2007).

## Complementary Methods

In the end, several of the interviews turned out as group interviews since many of the informants had spouses with whom they lived and who wanted to be present during the interviews. Even though initial contact had been established with a single person, when I arrived to conduct the interview it was common that another family member joined in the discussion. In these cases, I have included the other person(s) on the list of informants (see Appendix II) and indicated in the presentation of empirical material who is participating in the conversation. I did not see the group interviews as problematic, but

rather as opportunities to let the informants decide the direction of the interviews.

The group interviews relied more on interaction among family members than between myself and the informants. As researcher I took on the role of moderator. This is in line with Morgan's (1997, p. 10) description of the focus group interview as a group interview, which relies on the interactions within the group based on topics provided by the researcher. The informants had often decorated their homes together and they could remind each other of why certain things were done. They also triggered and supported each other in telling me about how IKEA's products and furniture were used. In the group interviews I felt that informants were more active in selecting and generating themes for discussion. The disadvantage with group discussions is regarded to be that they provide less details and depths of experiences of the informants, as compared to the individual interview (*ibid.*). On the other hand the individual interview may put increased pressure on the informant to explain him or herself before the interviewer. In terms of depth and detail of experience, I did not notice a considerable difference between the individual interviews and the group interviews. A probable explanation is that the group interviews I conducted involved family members and often spouses who lived together and therefore felt comfortable to express themselves before one another.

That observations can enrich the representational data attained in interviews is pointed out by Czarniawska (1998, pp. 30-31). She writes that while interviews necessarily capture representational accounts of practice, observations can inform novel readings of these accounts to, for instance, capture the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life. Interviews and observations enrich one another. Conducting the interviews at home gave me an opportunity to observe the contexts in which storytelling occurred. Observations were used to situate consumers' storytelling tactics and IKEA's strategy in a historical and social context so as to be able to treat them as cultural practices. In addition to observations in the homes, I also conducted observations in the IKEA stores in Malmö and Shanghai. The purpose of the observations was to capture how the store was structured and to determine what consumers related to when they made sense of the place set up by IKEA.



In the observations of the stores, I took photographs of the way each store was set up. Some of these photos are presented in Chapter 5 to provide insights into the structure of place. In addition, field notes documented what was observed in order to aid my memory upon returning home.

Key co-workers at IKEA were interviewed to help understand the set up of the stores and the general distribution strategies of IKEA. The interviews were carried out with store managers, people in the local marketing departments, and occasionally in Älmhult. These interviews were not analysed as storytelling, but were used to support my own observations and provide background information concerning the distribution strategies.

## On Translation

The present thesis is a product of translations among three languages to which I am connected to in different ways. The Swedish language is my mother tongue; it is the rhythm of my thinking. Mandarin is a language I have struggled to grasp for over ten years. English is the mode in which the scientific text is composed. While the interviews were conducted in Swedish, Chinese (Mandarin), and sometimes English, they were subsequently translated into a single resource in English.

Translation raises questions of what it means to be true to the original text, and what such an act implies. Etymologically, the English word *translate* means to transfer, to remove, to displace. In an essay on translation, Sontag (1997, p. 338) states that the act of translation signifies a change of site or condition; the prefix *trans-* indicates an action in space. In medicine, for example, to translate once meant to transfer a disease from one person to another, or from one part of the body to another. Working in different languages unavoidably involves disruptions in meanings. To translate from one language to another, Usunier (1998, p. 65) contends, is to translate culture and transfer meaning from one place to another. Translating from one language to another is not a value-free operation. This is because words in different languages do not immediately correspond to one another. Articulating

something about something to someone is simultaneously about expressing a particular worldview.

When a translation is made, the meaning of the word, rather than its lexical equivalence in another language, needs to be attended to. Each language has its own customs and the task of the translator may therefore be understood as finding comparable customs in another language (Sontag 1997). Any translation is thus bound to transform the original statement. The transcript is not the interview, but a representation of a lived situation (Kvale 1996, p. 182). The written transcript therefore involves a discrepancy between what is addressed to a specific listener and a written text addressed to a wider audience.

In the transcription of the interviews, I have followed the recommendations of Kohler-Riessman (1993, p. 56), whereby the researcher makes an initial rough transcription (and translation) of the interview, and then goes back to examine specific parts considered more relevant than others. The interviews were transcribed directly from Swedish and Chinese into English. The aim was to convert Swedish and Chinese into readable English which captured the point of the story. Given the interest in stories, in conducting the translations the aim was not to arrive at a literal translation, but to capture the organisation of events in the storytelling. After the first rough translation from Chinese into English, a Chinese linguistics professor compared the translations to the recordings. Together with him I discussed possible ways to convey what was said in Chinese in English. He clarified things in the interviews that I did not understand due either to language or cultural barriers.

## Analysing Storytelling

The primary unit of analysis was informants' storytelling of IKEA. A secondary unit of analysis was the structure of the IKEA store experience (to be presented in Chapter 5). After the interviews were transcribed, they were analysed as storytelling. Analysing interviews *as* stories is a common method of revealing meaning in an interview account (Mishler 1999). While I understand sensemaking as the process whereby events are turned into stories (cf. Gabriel 2000), sensemaking alone does not construct meaning. In order to examine the

meaning of storytelling, I examined the relation between of events in informants' narration.

Usually interviews have no clear beginnings and endings, but are comprised of different episodes where both researcher and informant are involved in the creation of a story. While there are no pre-existing stories to be found in the informants' interview transcripts, the way that previous experiences are made sense of resembles storytelling. We relate events that have occurred via a structure which produces a particular meaning. In the analysis, therefore, in the absence of pre-existing stories, the researcher must attend to how the organisation of events conveys a point. To put it a little differently, researchers need to attend to how stories are emplotted. With *emplotment* I mean temporal ways of organising the events in the story to convey meaning (image).

Given the aim of the thesis of investigating IRI construction in everyday practice, I needed to understand consumers' image construction as a collective activity. Common ways of making sense of IKEA were therefore identified as typical ways of emplotting a story. In identifying typical ways of emplotment, I looked at how events were organised in a story to convey meaning about IKEA. Tentative plots were identified in consumers' storytelling and compared to one another to single out typical and atypical ones. These plots were construed according to Czarniawska's (2004) definition of plot presented in Chapter 3 as conflicts or complications leading to a transformation within the story. In the informants' stories, these conflicts were identified as being related to the tensions between strategy and tactics. Because tactics thrive on strategy, I reasoned that it was not enough to consider consumers' tactics alone; they had to be put in relation to retailing strategy. After the identification of typical plots, I tested them against possible fictional characters who could be used as sources of analogies. This way of working may be described as hypothetical-deductive (Czarniawska 2004; Polkinghorne 1988), whereby a researcher identifies a certain type of plot, which is then compared to and revised in relation to the empirical material.

The challenge in the analysis was how to present in the final text the differences and similarities in storytelling about IKEA internally, within the Swedish and Chinese informant groups, as well as between the two cultural groups. I also struggled with how to present the connection

between the complexities involved in what the informants told me about IKEA, and IKEA's marketing communication strategy in the store. Another problem concerned how to employ the structural devices from narratology, such as narrative, character, and plot. Could they really account for a lived culture? In the end, I followed Czarniawska (2008), who regards structural devices useful for examining resemblances among patterns of organising storytelling, rather than as universal structures underpinning stories.

In order to present the analysis of the different plots in the final text, I employed an epic mode of emplotment as a narrative frame in which to link the plots found in the consumers' stories with the strategic set up of the IKEA store experience. The epic was employed for the purpose of demonstrating the relationship of the narrative practices of strategy and tactics. This means that neither IRI nor the retailer is an epic story, but that it is useful to understand the construction process of IRI in this manner.

Parallel to analysing consumers' stories, I looked for similar patterns in Swedish and Chinese literary fiction. The reason for using contemporary works was to show that the characters of the epic have relevance in both countries. I should point out that my knowledge of Swedish and Chinese contemporary literary fiction is limited. In the selection of examples from these literary traditions, I chose works that could add to an understanding of how images of IKEA were constructed. The works should thus not be seen as representative for the Chinese or Swedish literary traditions.

Organisation researchers have pointed to one value of literature being that it can reveal the taken-for-granted and present seemingly trivial events in novel ways (de Cock and Land 2006; Czarniawska 2009). Literature does not just confirm and cement norms and values in culture, but can sometimes enable us to see things differently by presenting events in a new light. This is because literature is not based on facts, but on inspiration; literature sees things differently. While literature bears traces of cultural conventions, it is open to negotiation. In being (re)read and retold, literature is always open to new interpretations. Literature and the interpretation of literature offer devices by which to understand the cultural in other ways than models and abstract concepts of culture can. This is because fiction and

literature are not science; they represent something else. They are invested with an image of what might be, rather than something that already has been.

## The Epic

Tell me, Muse, the story of that resourceful man who was driven to wander far and wide after he had sacked the holy citadel of Troy. He saw the cities of many people and he learnt their ways. He suffered great anguish on the high seas in his struggles to preserve his life and bring his comrades back home. But he failed to save those comrades, in spite of all his efforts. It was their own transgression that brought them to their doom, for in their folly they devoured the oxen of Hyperion the Sun-god and he saw to it that they would never return. Tell us this story, goddess daughter of Zeus, beginning at whatever point you will. (Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 1, lines 1-11)

One of the most renowned examples of the epic mode of narration is Homer's ancient poem *The Odyssey*. Homer opens the poem by calling out to the Muse, goddess of poetry, to tell the story of king Odysseus' painstaking journey home to Ithaca after the end of the Trojan War. On his way, Odysseus encounters many obstacles in the form of monstrous creatures and seductive forces, while constantly being subjected to the wrath of the sea god Poseidon. *The Odyssey* does not follow a linear progression from beginning to end. It begins in the middle and moves back and forth between various times. Therefore, the poem involves a different unfolding of characters in different time frames. The Muse is the primary narrator. In her narration, the voices of other storytellers are strung together. The storytelling is multivocal. The reader pieces together the adventure through different plotments, including that of Odysseus himself. And all the while Homer himself hides in the background.

The epic's plotment is characterised by a set of tensions that mirror those between strategy and tactics that I seek to explore in the construction of IRI. One tension has to do with individuality and representation. The mode of the epic is the mode of narrative as representation. Another tension refers to the universality of the gods and the individuality of humans. In the epic there are ordinary men and there are the gods. It presents a mixture of the universal and the

individual. The Muse who tells the story is a subject of this world who simultaneously produces and speaks in the language of humans (Zupancic 2008, p. 23). The Muse embodies the tension between the extreme of universality, the world of the gods, and human individuality. Thus, it is the Muse who represents the characters in the story. For example, we are never presented with the inner voices of the characters; they unfold to us through their actions.

There is also a tension in the epic of the narrative structure, and the way that the characters are revealed through this structure. *The Odyssey* is structured as a quest narrative of homecoming. Odysseus' quest is to bring his crew safely home to Ithaca across a troubled sea. In Ithaca, he is confronted with the task of regaining the throne from Penelope's suitors who, in Odysseus' absence, have occupied the royal palace. Previous research demonstrates that strategic narratives from an organisational point of view are often structured according to a quest narrative (Barry and Elmes 1997; Boje, 2001). The findings of previous research lend support to my analysis of the IKEA store experience as a quest narrative: a journey that becomes a quest for the consumer.

### Three Characters in *The Odyssey*

In the analysis I seek to play out the tensions between strategy and tactics in unfolding three characters in *The Odyssey*. These characters were identified as the hero, the weaver, and the spirit. These characters, I argue, reflect three different kinds of emplotment, based in reason, routine, and myth, that I found to correspond to three typical temporalities found in consumers' storytelling tactics. The figures of the hero, weaver, and spirit are archetypal in nature and belong some of the world's most famous legends and story heritages. They are found in the epic, but also in other ancient works, such as the Chinese *Classic of Poetry*. I am aware that my interpretations of these characters may diverge from recognized literary and narratological analyses. Rather than archetypes, however, I have used them as figures of thought to guide the identification of plots in consumers' storytelling. The meanings of classical works of fiction are not written in stone, but change with the needs of the present. In the essay *What is a Classic?* the writer J. M. Coetzee (2002, p. 16) notes that the literary classic endures by way of being continuously tested and scrutinised. The literary classic

is assigned its status posthumously by a tradition of apprenticeship, which subjects it to an ongoing critique. From his viewpoint, then, the classic is not related to a transcendental order of the high arts, but is what survives of the human.

In part the analysis of how consumers organised their storytelling practices about IKEA around central tensions was informed by my reading of the characters in *The Odyssey*. These readings are based on interpretations of *The Odyssey* coming predominantly from accounts that seek to problematise the linear time frame that occurred as a consequence of modernity (see, e.g., Frykman and Löfgren 1979, p. 21ff for an outline of what this temporality involves). This was done in order to unfold other temporalities at play in the informant's storytelling, than the linear time of progression that characterise place. In particular, the analysis of the tension involved in the unfolding of the characters was guided by Cavarero's (1995, 2000, 2005) work on the figures of *The Odyssey*. Cavarero highlights the different temporal dimensions that are at play in the poem to examine the universal underpinnings of the Western philosophy. Her work thus reveals the existence of complex temporalities and spatialities in the epic. She does this by revealing that another temporal logic than that of the (male) hero's linear path, from birth to death and into immortality and legend, are at play in the ancient classic (see Chapter 3).

## Narrative and Cultural Difference

The point of employing the epic is to illustrate the construction of images, of IKEA in everyday culture situated in the Chinese city of Shanghai and the Swedish city of Malmö. The aim is not to illustrate differences in national culture, but differences in giving meaning to IKEA's products and promotional material in relation to the length of time that IKEA has been established in the two cities. Yet the study raises the question of whether it is possible to represent the Chinese informants' storytelling by means of *The Odyssey*, which, has been argued to be a particular Western mode of narration (cf. Gu 2005). If stories are cultural products, then cultural differences become a question of different ways of telling stories, linked to particular literary heritages. In the analysis, I seek to deal with this problem by alternating

between the Chinese and Swedish fictional stories, letting them frame and reframe one another. It should be noted that what defines national culture is always changing, especially at the present time when ideas and stories are disseminated more rapidly among countries by information technology and marketing. The question of the western heritage of *The Odyssey* is nevertheless warranted.

Writers of the twentieth century give *The Odyssey* a great deal of attention.<sup>5</sup> In the volume *Homer in the Twentieth Century*, editors Barbara Graziosi and Ellen Greenwood (2007) place Homer's Western identity in question. They argue that the academic study of Homer experienced a shift in the twentieth century when Homeric writing was linked to, and found to be similar to, many oral epic traditions from around the world. The analogy, for instance, between the Homeric epic and epic traditions of the ancient Near East and modern Africa was part of a larger shift away from narrow notions of the western literary canon and toward a broader conception of world literature (pp. 3-4). Up until then, Homer was viewed as the defining author of the western literary canon, and his poetry was taken as an elevated model against which all other poetry was measured. This is one of the reasons, Graziosi and Greenwood argue, why the suggestion that Homer's poetry is similar to other forms of literature was long found to be disturbing.

*The Odyssey* was written at roughly the same time as the ancient Chinese *Classic Book of Poetry* (*Shi Jing*). The literary and poetic traditions in China and Greece are thought to begin with these two poems. In *The Siren and the Sage*, Shankman and Durrant (2000, p. 67) argue that there are differences, but also many similarities, between these classics. The works differ in terms of structure. While *The Odyssey* is a unified sweeping narrative about the journey of a single hero, the *Classic Book of Poetry* is composed of three hundred and five, often diverse, short poems. These poems span a longer period of time, with the earliest ones dating from the early years of the Zhou dynasty (1045-256 BC), and the latest to the sixth century BC. The poems also differ

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<sup>5</sup> In Sweden, the story is preserved by, amongst other, Eyvind Johnsson's *The Swell of the Beaches* (1946). In Johnsson's interpretation Odysseus is transported into modern times and made to represent a fragmented and insecure man that struggles to return home after the end of the Second World War.



in terms of their criteria for successful poetry. Poetry is derived from the verb *poiein*, meaning “to make”, and a poem is a fabrication, a made thing. In contrast to the *Classic Book of Poetry*, then, sincerity is often beside the point in Homeric poetry, because it does not necessarily speak the truth in either a literal or historically accurate sense. In the Chinese classic, poetry should be a “tasteful and sincere externalisation of what already exists within heart and mind” (ibid.). The emphasis in *The Odyssey*, on the other hand, is on the ways in which a character is unfolded in action.

In terms of similarities, Shankman and Durrant continue, both works constitute responses to the political turmoil of their respective eras. The *Classic Book of Poetry* is primarily a textual record of the centuries of transition from the heroics of the early rulers in the Zhou dynasty to the confusion among rulers that followed this period. It portrays a past centred on the concept of the Heaven’s charge,<sup>6</sup> in which a ruler obtained the right to rule from a divine source. The *Classic Book of Poetry* expresses nostalgia for an age where sage-like kings ruled the state. In a similar way, the Homeric poem portrays a glorious past in which the gods actively intervened in human life.

## Evaluating Stories

Qualitative researchers differ in their attitudes towards questions of reliability, validity, and generalisability. With reference to the latter concept, Kvale (1996, p. 233) maintains that in everyday life generalisation occurs more or less spontaneously. Analytical generalisation differs from spontaneous generalisation insofar as it involves a reasoned judgement about the extent to which the findings from one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation. It is based on an analysis on the similarities and differences of the two situations. In contrast to examples of spontaneous generalisation, a researcher needs to specify and support evidence, and to make arguments explicit, so that readers can judge the soundness of the generalisation claims.

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<sup>6</sup>Sometimes called the Mandate of Heaven.

Weick (1995) states that the criteria of evaluating sensemaking need to be linked to plausibility rather than to accuracy. This is because sensemaking is often done at a rapid pace and therefore it is rarely accurate. In sensemaking, the past is reconstructed, which means that it seldom occurred in the same way as it is remembered. The truth of sensemaking thus does not reside in accuracy, but in the meaning of the story. Weick writes that

in an equivocal, postmodern world, infused with the politics of interpretation and conflicting interests and inhabited by people with multiple shifting identities, an obsession with accuracy seems fruitless, and not of much practical help, either. Of much more help are the symbolic trappings and sensemaking, trappings such as myths, metaphors, platitudes, fables, epics, and paradigms (see Gagliardi, 1990). Each of these resources contains a good story. And a good story, like a workable cause map, shows patterns that may already exist in the puzzles an actor now faces, or patterns that could be created anew in the interest of more order and sense in the future. The stories are templates. They are products of previous efforts of sensemaking. They explain. And they energize. And those are two more important properties of sensemaking that we remain attentive to when we look for plausibility instead of accuracy. (1995, p. 61)

In keeping with Weick, stories are plausible because they explain and energize. In a world of shifting identities and multiple truths, who should and can decide what is accurate? Criteria for how stories should be evaluated, hence, differ from the criteria of reliability and validity. To be credible, stories need to seduce, perplex, and intrigue. This is because stories are not truths or facts. They are concocted plots, and that is what makes them useful for investigating images and meaning, which are based on experience (Gabriel 2000, p. 18).

In the context of stories, and the broader field of narrative inquiry, it is therefore necessary to talk about other means of evaluation than those derived from the natural sciences. Stories do not provide facts or reliable accounts of the world. Instead, they tell us about the meanings of worlds. Events are not presented in stories as they happened, but as informants would have wanted them, or experienced them, to have happened. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about the evaluation of stories using terms from the natural sciences because these terms bring with them a claim of an existing reality that can be captured. This is not the point of stories. When evaluating stories, the criterion of

trustworthiness is considered more relevant (Kohler-Riessman 1993, p. 66).

Trustworthiness is related to the internal coherence of a story, and concerns the elimination of inconsistencies and gaps, but it is also connected to persuasion. One way in which the persuasiveness of a story is strengthened is through a presentation of how the story was produced. This can be accomplished by considering the role of the researcher for the storytelling, and by describing the context in which the story was told (*ibid.*). Even though it is difficult to apply a functional measure of validity to evaluate stories, the researcher can make the empirical material transparent, so as to enable others to follow a similar path in collecting and analysing stories. Kohler-Riessman (1993, p. 68) mentions four ways in which validity can be created in narrative research: 1) convey how interpretations were produced, 2) make visible how the study was undertaken, including the alternative interpretations that could have been made, 3) make visible how transformations were made across the levels of interpretations in the research process (attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing, reading), 4) make primary data available to other investigators.

In presenting the findings, attention was paid to the crafting of stories in order to give the reader a sense of a lived culture. The observations made in relation to the interviews were useful in the analysis of stories because they help situate the story in a context and bring it to life. To convey my role in the creation of the stories, I have included my own presence in the interviews as far as has been possible. In his study on crafts artists,

Presenting findings from the field means constructing them anew. No matter how faithful one is to what was observed, writing up a text is always about transformation. The stories in the different sites are tied together by the researcher's body. The stories encountered in Shanghai came to influence what was seen in Malmö at a later date, and vice versa. What took place in one site influenced the way I framed other sites, and therefore what I was able to see in them. Mol (2002, p. 34) writes that in the past researchers were purportedly able to enter situations with either objective mindsets or with access to natives' frames of mind; today, researchers acknowledge that they are situated in the many different stories that are always with them. This means that

researchers cannot walk in and out of environments without simultaneously forming relationships to them in one way or the other.

## Instead of a Conclusion: Reconstruction

This chapter has given an account of the method by means of which the research was carried out. I have described how past events were reconstructed in order to tell us something in the present. Writing a thesis is a process of reconstruction and the assembly of different things into a logical and consistent whole. This thesis is composed of reconstructions undertaken by me as a researcher and by my informants. Consumers' storytelling reconstructs events as they are remembered. The researcher reconstructs their storytelling when representing it in the analysis. The ready-made product ideally carries no messy traces of the one who produced it (Sand 2008). The logic of IRI construction is what is left in the end when the complex course of events has been unfolded and folded numerous times. What is lost in these reconstructions, we do not really know. All we know is that a reconstruction of the past is different from that past itself.

The reconstruction of that which has already taken place, in light of the present, is a form of melancholy, captured by Benjamin (1999b, p. 249) in his analysis of the angel of history. Benjamin writes that where we see a chain of events, the angel sees one single catastrophe, which constantly piles wreckage in front of his feet. Just when the angel is about to awaken the dead and mend that which has been broken, he is carried away by a tremendous storm, which propels him at enormous speed into the future. With his back towards the future, his face is turned to the past; his eyes stare at the pile of wreckage that builds up in front of him. This provides us with an image of the melancholy nature of reconstructing the past in the present. Narratives build on past images that project the present into the future. These images are always changing, but the narratives created to assemble them are conservative and slow to change, and can thus never describe the now as it is. There is always a temporal lag. Benjamin looks at these narratives hoping to discover something new in them. How can we see something differently in age-old myths that will reveal the present in new ways? Benjamin's philosophy of history seeks to disengage the idea

of the new with the idea of progress. He describes the relationship of memory to the future in the following way:

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from conformism that is about to overpower it. (Thesis VI, 1999b, p. 247)

The researcher reconstructs what has happened in the field back home at the desk. This reconstruction builds on a mesh of recorded accounts, tales, and memories of smells and feelings of how the events occurred when he or she originally tried to capture them. While no researcher escapes reconstruction, what makes it melancholy is the awareness that the moments of history are lost. Some of these events are preserved through the recordings, field notes, and interview transcripts which serve to remind us of the times and places in which they happened. Novels and poems are products of previous attempts of sensemaking and their value resides in what they are able to tell us about our own time. In this sense, despite the losses that re-reading the classics involve, these losses are necessary to make them relevant to the present.

# Chapter 5

## The Narrative Structure of Place

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from his mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (Campbell 2004, p. 30)

In terms of being a demarcated physical place with its own name, as well as a scripted environment that attempts to parcel consumers' experiences in particular ways, the IKEA store is an example of the place of the proper (de Certeau 1984, p. 35). Here I argue that the in-store retailing constructs a particular spatiality which resembles the quest narrative. Understanding IKEA as a narrative enables us to grasp the relation between the place and the spaces produced within it. In the following, I present the IKEA store as a quest narrative by identifying commonalities between how IKEA communicates the store visit to consumers and the organisation of the quest narrative.

### IKEA as Quest

The standard path of the hero's adventures in epic stories commonly follows traditional rites of passage: separation-initiation-return. Working in the borderland between comparative literature and religion, Campbell (2004, p. 30) made an extensive effort to explain and formalize the narrative structure of the hero's adventure or the monomyth. In a broader sense, the monomyth falls under the category of quest narratives. The quest narrative is the basic fairytale plot in which the hero goes in search of something, undergoes tests and trials, and encounters magic helpers and opponents to achieving his or her goal. The quest narrative is a conventional template of repeating

patterns in successful stories. Its form is traceable to the ancient Homeric epic, folk-myths, and religious stories. Quest narratives are also common in contemporary films, particularly Hollywood productions (e.g., *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*) (Boje 2001). In *The Wounded Storyteller*, the sociologist Arthur Frank (1995, p. 117) argues that the significance of the quest narrative for persons who are ill is that it affords them a distinctive voice as tellers of their own stories. The quest narrative empowers them to take control of their illness and search “alternative ways of being ill”. It also helps them make sense of illness as a journey or a process where the purpose of the illness is gradually recognised.

According to Campbell, the hero’s adventure is divided into three stages: departure, initiation, and return. In the departure, the mythological hero leaves everyday life – either voluntarily or after having been lured or carried away – and embarks on the adventure by proceeding to the first threshold.<sup>7</sup> Here, the hero must to defeat a shadow presence which guards this first threshold of the adventure in order to cross it and enter into the realm of darkness. Beyond the threshold, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar and strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests) and some of which provide him with magical aid (helpers). In this dream landscape of ambiguous and curious forms, Campbell writes, the hero must survive a succession of trials. If the hero endures, he or she re-emerges from the kingdom of horror (e.g., resurrection, return) with the boon that restores the world (p. 246).

Many of the seventeen elements Campbell identifies as composing the monomyth correspond to other schemes within narratology (see Chapter 2). Central to these narrative structures is the premise that the

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<sup>7</sup>In the classical mythologies on which Campbell’s scheme is modeled, the hero is typically male and represents a specific type of heroic masculinity. The origins of the quest narrative are, however, believed to predate the establishment of patriarchal structures (Caudill 2003). In her study of fan-fiction writing devoted to *Xena: Warrior Princess*, Helen Caudill argues that in claiming the quest as a patriarchal narrative, critics have ignored its ancient roots which incorporate a long tradition of female warriors. It is just that when women have taken up a quest, she argues, interpreters like Campbell often deny them the role of hero and define them instead as handmaidens of the male objects of their quests.

hero reluctantly leaves his home and everyday life in order to go on an adventure, returning to that same everyday life after the adventure with a boon of some sort. During the adventure he is usually aided by helpers and held up by opponents. Usually, mythical stories contain a few of these elements, but not all of the elements are necessarily found in one and the same story. I reproduce Campbell's diagram here, since I find it overlaps IKEA's organisation of a store visit for the consumer. I base this proposition partly on my observations of the organisation of the store and partly on a set of guiding principles concerning the store visit that IKEA offers consumers called *A Day at the Store*.<sup>8</sup> At the time of my data collection, these guidelines were published on the retailer's website in thirty-five countries (see Appendix 1 for the full version), and were sometimes included at the end of the IKEA catalogue. They represent an ideal manifestation of the IKEA store visit.

Like the hero's adventure, *A Day at the Store* presents the store visit as a journey that becomes a quest, beginning and ending in the consumer's home. *A Day at the Store* consists of twelve steps that take the consumer from home to the store and back again. In between the beginning and ending at home, a series of trials in the IKEA store await the consumer. The narrative positions the consumer at the centre of action, as the hero, in relation to who the retailing activities at the store become aids or tests for completing the quest. Figure 4 summarises the resemblances between the monomyth and *A Day at the Store*. In the figure the adventure is portrayed as a circular progression from everyday life – into the unknown – and back again. Each of the three main stages contains individual steps of the adventure, which in Figure 4 are replaced by the steps of *A Day at the Store*.

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<sup>8</sup> *A Day at the Store* also bears a close resemblance to The Buyer Decision Process well known to marketers. The Buyer Decision Process consist of five steps that a consumer ideally should go through in relation to the exchange: 1) need recognition, 2) information search, 3) evaluation of alternatives, 4) purchase decision, 5) postpurchase decision (Kotler and Armstrong 1991, p. 143).



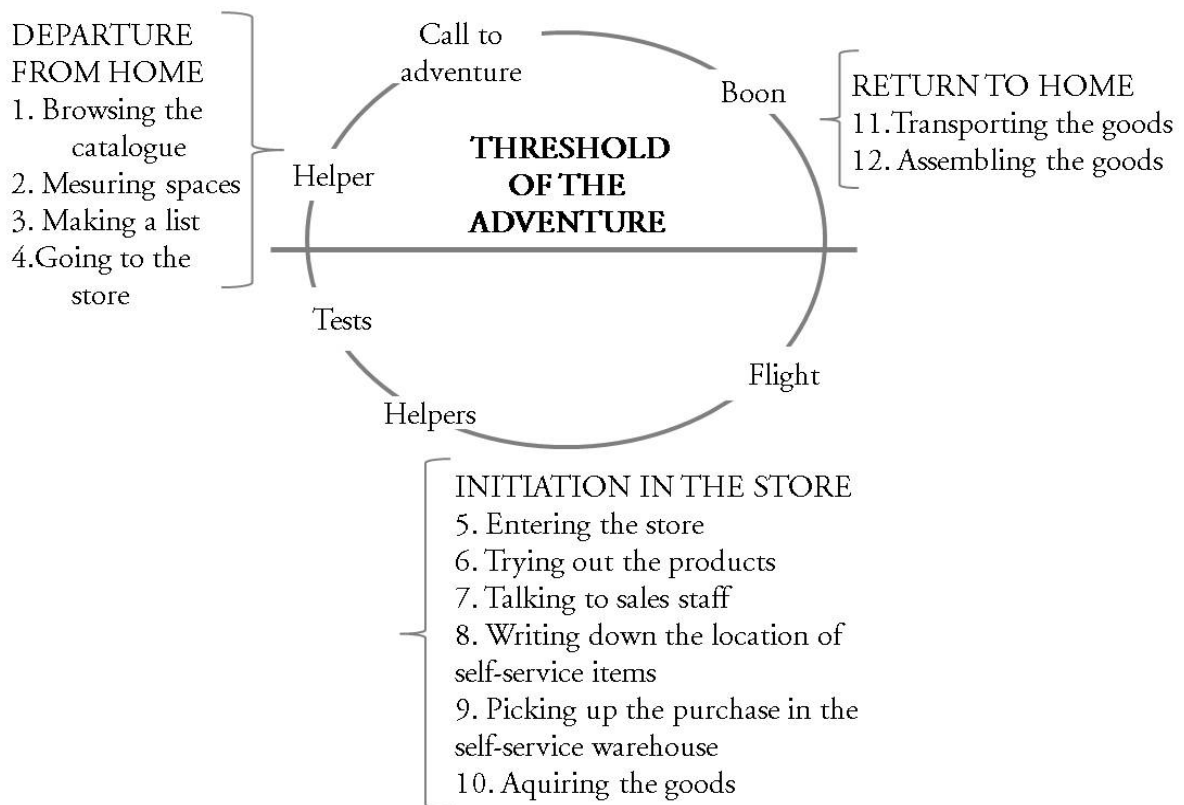


Figure 4 Narrative structure of place (based on Campbell's [2004, p. 245] diagram *The Hero Cycle* and *A Day at the Store*)

The first stage of the departure involves the call to adventure (Steps 1 and 2 in the figure). In *A Day at the Store*, the first step takes place before the consumer arrives at the store. The IKEA catalogue makes the initial call. In Sweden it is mailed to a large number of households and in Shanghai it was mailed to households within a radius of ten kilometres from the store. In 2006, due to distribution problems, IKEA stopped handing out the catalogue in Shanghai and introduced a slimmed-down version published more frequently (interview with IKEA co-workers K, 2005, and P, 2007). Through the catalogue, IKEA extends itself into homes and it may also be kept at home for a longer period of time, or at least until the issuing of the next catalogue. Typically, at first the hero refuses the call to adventure, until he is convinced by a helper that he is the chosen one or for some other reason must embark on the quest. The overcoming of the refusal is what Campbell calls the crossing of the first threshold, leading to the second stage, initiation.

The consumers' adventures take place in the unknown land of the store. *A Day at the Store* furnishes a series of instructions intended to familiarise them with the store layout. In the initiation stage of a quest, the hero encounters a series of trials that need to be overcome if he is to continue on his journey. In the IKEA store, trials also await the consumers. These trials are made up of tasks that need to be completed to allow progress towards the cashiers and finally exiting with the goods. In the IKEA store, consumers try out and select products, write down their product numbers, and pick them up at a self-service warehouse located close to the cashiers. In Malmö, there is also a separate warehouse, located near the main store, where the larger items can be picked up. These tasks are described in steps 6 through 9 and performed in the store by the customer with the help of a range of artefacts that IKEA provides (described in more detail below).

One of the most well-known examples on the road of trials in mythology is the twelve labours carried out by the Greek hero Heracles. These labours represent Heracles' transition out of his tragic existence (cf. Campbell 2004, p. 91). Heracles was the offspring of Zeus' love affair with Alcmena. From birth, Hera, Zeus' jealous wife, torments him.<sup>9</sup> On one occasion, driven to a state of madness by Hera, Heracles slays his own children. The killing of the children is a turning point of the story, and leads to the initiation stage. To repent his crime, Heracles is forced to carry out twelve labours. The undertaking of the labours turns the initiation stage into a form of catharsis through which he reconciles himself with his misdeeds and enters into a new order. At the end of his life, Heracles attains divine status and is admitted to Olympus. The labours of Heracles highlight the potentially symbolic function of the initiation stage in the store as a transition from one state into another.

The final stage of the quest is the return. The hero arrives home to his or her everyday life with solutions to the problems that provoked him to go on the journey. The consumers exit the IKEA store with the goods and take them home for assembly (step 12). They are now

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<sup>9</sup>The interference of the gods in human lives is common to the epic story and the monomyth contained by it. The meaning of Heracles name is, for instance, "glory of Hera".

bearers of knowledge acquired at IKEA ready to be implemented at home. This knowledge is the boon of the adventure and connected to the moral of the quest narrative. Accepting the necessity of one's own suffering is integral to the boon. Campbell argues that the moral of a quest narrative has to do with the hero's transition from agony to atonement. The challenge for the hero is to convince those at home that it is the suffering along the road of trials that makes possible the boon.

Figure 4 is used here as a blueprint of how IKEA organizes the store experience for the consumer. The interchange between the home and the store in the figure reveals that the store is not the only place where the construction of IRI is likely to occur. In addition, the road of trials in the store cannot be considered in isolation from the other stages of the quest. In contrast to the views found in previous literature on the subject, this means that IRI construction is extended into the home, where the consumption of the retail offerings takes place. It is also at home that the retail experience is made sense of since this involves seeing it in retrospect, as described previously in the thesis. Next, I demonstrate that the layouts of the IKEA stores principally follow the sequence of this model.

## A Glimpse of the Store Sites

From the outside, the store appear as a two storey blue box with four yellow letters on the roof: I K E A. Apart from occasional windows open in the façade in occasional showrooms, and the restaurant and café, it is not possible to look into the store from the outside or to look out from the inside. While the world outside is chaotic, loud and characterised by conflicts, the fortress-like blank walls of the mall offer consumers a sheltered visit (Gottdiener 2003, p. 132). The store as a shelter against chaotic city life is perhaps truer in Shanghai than in Malmö, due to the Chinese store's central location nearby the subway and light railway station *Renmin Gongchang* (People's Stadium). Geographically, all big box stores are located in the city centre and the three surrounding districts of Pudong, Minhang, and Baoshan. So far, this spatial organisation of retail facilities is functional since most people live in the central area. Over the past twenty years, Shanghai has

undergone unprecedented urban renewal and expansion. Urban renewal partly relies on the redevelopment of the Central Area and expansion of the transportation network (Wang and Zhang, 2005). The expanded transportation network has created many accessible locations for construction of large retail facilities, adjoining either highway interchanges or subway stations. The latter is important, because automobile ownership is still low in Shanghai compared with Euro-American standards. This means that in Shanghai people may incidentally walk past IKEA on their way to or from work, or on their way to other stores. To attract passers-by into the store, an exhibition case is placed outside the store close to the street. In the case, IKEA displays the latest offers (Photo 1).



Photo 1. IKEA store in Shanghai

From a distance, the large characters written on top of the exhibition case announce: “Yi tuan zao? Yijia jiaju you banfa” (translation: “Bad at organising? IKEA knows how”). Through this case, IKEA becomes integrated into a form of constructed street life. The marketing manager in Shanghai explained that people in Shanghai like *rennao* (translation: “bustling activity”) and therefore IKEA has tried to make the square outside the store into a place where people can come together. On one side of the case, street vendors sell flowers and pirate copies of the latest DVD blockbusters. When I pass, one of them greets me with a phrase I hear them repeat continuously during the day:

“Hello miss, buy DVD?”, which says something about the international clientele that enters the store or about my own appearance. These sellers never pass the exhibition case but stick to their allotted place close to the road. On the other side of the case is a food stand at which, at the time of one of my visits, people were queuing to buy tofu soup for five Yuan. Behind the food stand, taxis are lined up. While IKEA’s taxis can be found in the underground parking garage, domestic firms employ the taxi drivers outside the store. The waiting drivers sit on the sidewalk engaging in small talk or playing board games. The way from the case towards the entrance is lined with streetlights on which IKEA has placed paper signs promoting products at extra low prices.

In Malmö, IKEA is located outside the city centre in the area of a former airport (Bulltofta), with few other shops nearby. It is possible to bike or go by bus to the store, but the majority of visitors arrive by car. This is testified to by the crowded parking lot outside the store. The playground outside the store indicates the centrality of the presence of children in the Malmö store (Photo 2).



Photo 2. IKEA store in Malmö

Outside each of the stores are three signboards highlighting three central aspects of shopping at IKEA. The first signboard depicts a red heart-shaped pillow stretching out two arms. It reads: “It’s ok to change your mind just return your purchases within 60 days accompanied by

your original receipt and invoice.” The second displays a yellow car under which it says: “Getting your furniture home couldn’t be easier. Flat-packs are easy to transport. We have taxis, taxi-vans and home delivery available.” The third signboard portrays a product tag stating: “Want to know more about the product? Look at the price tag! It gives you information about the product and where to pick it up.” These three signboards prepare the consumer for the visit and serve as glimpses of what is to come next.

## Into the Labyrinth

The construction of IKEA’s stores was inspired by the architecture of the New York Guggenheim Museum.<sup>10</sup> The Guggenheim is constructed according to a central geometry, which brings to mind a spiral turned upside down, allowing visitors to experience simultaneously several sections of work on different levels while walking down the slopes of the spiral.<sup>11</sup> This means that, by following the winding path, visitors can see the art exhibition without having to enter the galleries in the traditional sense. IKEA stores follow a similar principle. The store is divided into three sections: the furniture exhibition on the second floor and the marketplace and the self-service warehouse on the ground floor.

At IKEA, the entrance and exit doors are located close to one another, which means that the beginning of the road of trials is also the end. In the place of the circular rotunda, though, a linear pathway runs through the store, taking visitors from the second floor to the cashiers on the first floor. Visitors are directed to walk on this path by black arrows on the floor, store maps, and signposts hanging from the ceiling. On each side of the pathway, the display of furniture is organised according to particular units of the home: kitchen, living room, home office space,

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<sup>10</sup><http://www.ikea.com/cn/IKEAhistory>

<sup>11</sup>The Guggenheim museum was completed in 1959. The architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, sought to break with the mathematical conception of space in the modernist tradition by integrating landscape and buildings. “Here is the ideal I propose for the architecture of the machine age”, wrote Wright, “... for how an American architecture should develop in the image of trees” ([http://www.guggenheim.org/the\\_building.html](http://www.guggenheim.org/the_building.html)).

children's room, bathroom, and so forth. Along the pathway, low price goods and special offers are stacked. On the first and second floors in the IKEA store, maps of the store layout are provided. The pathway is indicated by the winding blue line on the map in Photo 3.

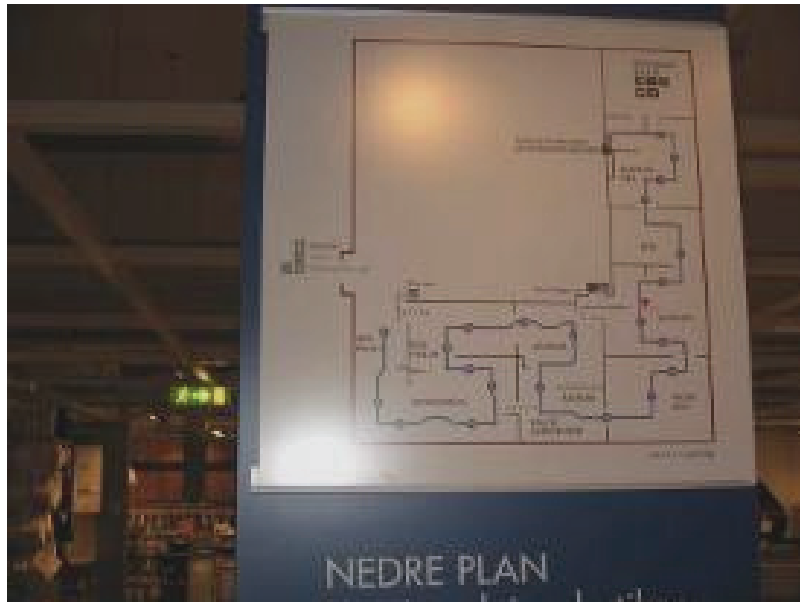


Photo 3. Store Map

Photo 3 was taken in the Malmö store and shows a map of the furniture exhibition on the second floor. On the second floor, consumers begin the journey through the IKEA store by trying out and writing down notes about selected products on display in realistic home settings. Thereafter, they proceed down to the market hall and the self-service warehouse to pick them up. On the way down to the first floor, it is possible to stop at the IKEA restaurant, which serves as a passage between the two floors (located at the top of the map). The map describes the place which is IKEA according to a calculable geometry. It is a device to prescribe and control actions and movement in the store.

According to de Certeau (1984, p. 121), maps and charts serve as important representational strategies for the purposes of claims to ownership and military surveillance. From the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, maps were successively disconnected from itineraries, that is to say, from movement in time. Thus, they tell us little about the embodied adventure of the hero. Older maps, often used for the purpose of pilgrimages, typically included calculation of distances in terms of the amount of time it would take to cover the

distance on foot, and information on what was worth seeing along the way. These maps described spatialising practices, where and when to pray, provided pictures of successive events that took place in the course of the journey, and so on. In this sense, they were closer to history books than geographical maps. The modern map, on the other hand, colonizes space making the traces of the practices that once produced it invisible. The IKEA map reveals that the store is organised according to a winding labyrinthine pathway, which it is only possible to take in at a single glance on the map. In order to experience the store, one needs to walk through it. To be deciphered, the store, so to speak, needs to be worked through. The organisation of the store experience has several features in common with the ancient geometry of the labyrinth. Labyrinths are central tropes in quest narratives and constitute obstacles that the hero needs to decipher in order to make progress.

Among the oldest mythical labyrinths is the one constructed by the artist-craftsman Daedalus to hide something of which King Minos and his court were both ashamed and afraid: the bull-demon Minotaur, the bastard offspring of the queen's relationship with the sea-god Poseidon (Campbell 2004, p. 13). Labyrinths are also ceremonial pathways to another stage or dimension; a bridge from the profane to the sacred world (Saward 2003). They symbolise the path that follows the cycles of time, life, death, and rebirth. Particularly, in the ancient Greek myths, these geometries form tests that the hero needs to overcome to rescue or acquire a sacred object. The labyrinth is a magical place of exploration and discovery but it is also something that needs to be negotiated. To get through the labyrinth and emerge safely at the other end, the hero needs to discover how the labyrinth is constructed.

## Deciphering the Store

The labyrinthine organisation of the store contributes to positioning the consumer as the hero in the journey from home to the store and back again. Because labyrinths are not just walked through, but need to be deciphered, the store visit is staged as something that needs to be accomplished. On the road of trials, helpers aid the hero. In the tragic tale of King Minos, Theseus, who is brought to Crete as a sacrifice to the Minotaur, eventually ends up slaying the monster. Theseus only



manages to find his way through the deceptive labyrinth by using a ball of thread given to him by Minos' daughter, Ariadne, who knows the secrets of the place (Campbell 2004, p. 23). Theseus is the slayer, but not the one who deciphers the labyrinth. Campbell writes that as long as heroes pursue the sacred path that helps set up for them, they are safe from harm. In a parallel manner, the visitor in the IKEA store is not the one who decodes the labyrinth. The way through the store is already pre-configured by IKEA's in-store communication. The consumer's quest is configured in the store as a linear narrative trajectory. In this section, I demonstrate how the store experience is pre-configured as a quest via the sequencing of consumers' actions. This sequencing gives rise to a geometric time and space found in the interpretive schemes of narratology, as well as in research dealing with the organisation of time and space under capitalism.

IKEA stores are governed by textual communication. Visitors follow an Ariadne's thread of signposts and an array of shopping devices that IKEA offers as guides through the store. In both cities, having entered the store by taking the escalator up to the second floor, tools are provided that the consumer needs for the visit to the store. The tools include: yellow bags, store guides, paper measures, pens and paper, lists.



Photo 4. Shopping devices

The store guide is composed of the store map and an empty page where consumers can write down the identification numbers of goods and where to pick them up. Behind the guides, yellow shopping bags for carrying small goods through the store are stacked. Larger trolleys are available both outside the store and on the ground floor where consumers pick up products and furniture. On the second floor these devices are not needed since the tasks performed there are related to practices of planning, looking around, and trying out products in their fully-assembled forms. In the showrooms all products are equipped with tags in different colours informing the buyer about quality, country of origin, designer, and location in the store. Product tags also contain information concerning where to find the goods in the store and suggesting possible ways of combining it with other products. Photo 5 shows a sign that gives information on how to read the product tags and how to find goods on the first floor.



Photo 5. How to find your items?

In each area there are signs defining the space and specifying the actions it is possible to undertake within that space. These instructions contribute to making the store into something that consumers need to decode by, so to speak, working their way through it. Signboards lead

consumers forward towards the cashiers. Similar to road signs, these signs with directions hang from the ceiling in the store showing how to navigate through the different areas marked out on the map. They not only state how to move forward, but also tell how to return to a particular area, and show when it is possible to take a shortcut from one area to another.



Photo 6. In-store directions

In many stores, the pathway is complemented by shortcuts from one section to another so that one can diverge from the path in order to move more rapidly through the store. The smaller arrow on the signpost in Photo 6 indicates a short cut from the furniture exhibition to the market hall in the Malmö store.

## The Narrative Geometry of the Store

The ultimate purpose of any retail facility is to sell consumer goods. For this purpose, sociologist Mark Gottdiener (2003, p. 130-131) argues, the function of mall design is to disguise the exchange relationship between producers and consumers. An integral part of IKEA's retailing strategy is the idea that the customer plays an active part in realising the retail offerings. IKEA explains that by finding, transporting, and assembling the goods by themselves, consumers help reduce the price. In this way, work becomes central to consuming IKEA products. The

set up of the store as a labyrinth that needs to be deciphered underscores work as a central motif in the store design. Work as a central motif mirrors the idea of the “partnership with the customer”, which is at the heart of the IKEA concept. “We do our part, then you do yours, together we save money for a better everyday life.” (<http://www.ikea.com>)

IKEA also provides consumers with instructions on how to exit the store with the goods. Throughout the visit, IKEA takes the role of the helper assisting the consumer not only in carrying out the tasks, but by systematically doing them in a certain order – as the hero on the road of trials. In the journey from entrance to exit, consumers are encouraged to try out and select furniture and products. In order to acquire the goods, a consumer must find the product in the furniture exhibition, write down the identification numbers of the different parts that it consists of, and proceed to the self-service warehouse to pick it up. This is accomplished in the store by guiding the consumer to do things in a specific sequence. First ... then ... and then. Sequencing obviously resonates with narrative.

## Sequencing

Doing things in sequence is facilitated by the linear geometry of the labyrinth. It is consistent with spatial and temporal geometries identified with facilitating economic competition and the accumulation of capital. Human geographers and sociologists interested in the spatialities and temporalities of capitalism have identified a resemblance between the shape of the labyrinth and the standardised grid-like architecture of the city (Sennett 1991). These grids are set up like crosses, and it is argued that they are necessary for the purpose of facilitating economic competition by serving as a neutral space with no particular historical value of its own (p. 62). At the end of the last century, the reconstruction of many of the cities in Europe according to a straightforward model of broad linear streets made it easier to control the movement of inhabitants. In the arcades project, Benjamin observes the restoration of Paris under the leadership of the architect Baron von Haussmann. The restoration involved tearing down old neighbourhoods, including the arcades whose passageways ran through them, in order to create boulevards in Paris on which police and troops

could move more easily to counter worker uprising (Buck-Morss 1989, p. 89). With the creation of this new kind of neutral economic sphere, Benjamin sees the slow and aimless strolling that constitutes *flânerie* as a successively disappearing act. Within the grid, order is sought in how space is used by a kind of classifying and naming that is universal in meaning. This order converges with the one observed by Lefebvre (1991, p. 307) in his description of abstract space as a medium of exchange that tends to absorb use. Abstract space embraces a rationality that reminds him of the factory. Like the factory, the IKEA store is a particular spatial configuration based on accumulation, calculation and planning. After all, IKEA stores are semi-public places controlled for profit-making purposes. The in-store planning and design have affinities with the surveillance carried out on the shop floor. While the conveyor belt originally was used to produce cars, at IKEA it is used to retail and consume furniture and products. The consumption of IKEA's goods partly involves work traditionally carried out in the factory. The logic of the factory is today found in fast-food chains, self-help stores, and restaurants using buffet lines, where the consumer is confronted with a sequence of assembly-line tasks as though on a conveyor belt (Dolphijn 2004, p. 26). In the IKEA restaurant, activities are organised according to the scripted structure of the buffet line, where the consumer assembles the meal in five steps.



Photo 7. Sequencing

Activities carried out in the store are organised according to a similar sequential pattern. The signpost in the restaurant reads: 1) take a cup 2) pay in the cashier 3) choose and take coffee or tea. The sequencing of consumers' actions organizes the time-space in the store. Through sequencing the amount of time required to carry out the tasks is minimized and the use of space is optimized. People in the restaurant are instructed concerning where to line up and where to do what (e.g., where to pay, where to find trays, where to sit, etc.). Thus sequencing serves the purpose of minimizing the time it takes a consumer to carry out an activity, allowing more consumers to enter the restaurant area.

The principle of saving time in order to optimize the use of space may be further understood in light of Harvey's (2001, p. 245) argument that Marx's renowned statement that capitalism seeks to "annihilate space with time" through investment and innovation in transport and communication systems creates a tension between overcoming space and the immobile spatial structures required for such an endeavour (p. 257). Efforts to transcend spatial barriers for purposes of accumulating capital simultaneously give rise to permanent ones that act as a hindrance to further accumulation. This means that the accumulation of capital is bound to both geographical expansion and reductions in costs of communication and transportation (p. 244). Therefore, the store will ultimately serve as a spatial barrier and need to be expanded geographically. The only way, according to Harvey, in which capitalism can circumvent the contradiction in space is by expanding by intensifying social wants and needs and geographical extension. If capitalism is to survive, new room for accumulation must be continuously created. Photo 8 shows a couple in the self-service warehouse. The sign behind them says: "Save time – load your trolley this way."



Photo 8. Save time and space

The photo captures the progressive road of trials through the store. The couple looks ahead, towards the final destination of the cashiers, the man pointing the way forward. Behind them, a sign establishes the relationship between sequencing actions in time and the construction of space in the IKEA store. This, of course, is not unique for the Shanghai store, it works the same way in Malmö. The relation between time and space in the photo indicates how time-space in the IKEA store relates to the structural analysis of narrative undertaken in narratology. The consequence of sequencing actions is that time is spatialised by being conceived of as units placed in relation to one another. Space is calculated as the area in the store, and time is measured according to how long it will take to carry out different tasks and move through the store. This consequently constructs a time-space similar to that found within the structural analysis of narrative.

## Empty Time-Space

The narratological conception of time is of time as *chronos* (Gibson 1996, p. 181). Time is viewed as instantaneous movements along a geometric line. What is more, time exists in an objective sense independent of human awareness. Clocks and other chronological instruments are employed to define the length of time between events on a timeline. The sequencing of the events in a narrative is conceived

of as “logically and chronologically related.” (ibid.) Polkinghorne (1988, p. 126ff) argues that the consequence of treating time as a component of the semiotic structure is that narrative is turned into a set of actions that pass along a geometric line according to a calculable conception of time. Measurable time then is necessary for sequencing. Since it is always measurable, time in narrative can always be segmented or taken apart. The narratological model is always structural: it describes a structure – the relations between phenomena rather than the phenomena themselves. It therefore works disjunctively and invariably involves a geometry or spatialisation of time. “Time units” are spatialised simply in being placed “in relation to each other”.

In the absence of the temporalising activity of humans, place resembles a spatial trajectory from one point to the next without anchorage in worldly time. In this geometry, time and space are thus unified. The attempt to unite space and time creates a world of its own outside the messy and disorderly one. In the IKEA store, the spatial pattern absorbs use (cf. Lefebvre 1991), and thereby temporality. The unity of time and space is found in narratology and in the operations of modern technocracies, which attempt to unify the lived space of everyday life with the conceptual mathematical space of science.

Due to the meticulous planning of place through rationalisation and homogenisation, the diverse meanings of place that experience creates are lost. Within the walls of the store, IKEA’s retailing practices create a realm disconnected from the calendar and clock-time of the world. The store has a particular rhythm of its own. For example, there are no windows in the store through which one can observe the shifting weather or daylight. The clocks in the showrooms do not follow clock-time, but display different times. Speakers announcing different special offers, limited-time bargains, and opening and closing times contribute to constructing this rhythm. Depending on where one is in the world, the voice over the speakers has a different language, promoting local offers, providing a reminder that IKEA’s place is tied to a distinct geography.

At IKEA, the body becomes the consuming body and it is inscribed everywhere. The store is a spatial manual of where and how to insert one’s body into the structural narrative of the store. The consuming body should move along the pathway, it should pick up things along



the way, rest, eat, lie down, and so forth. The effect of this inscription of the body in place (or abstract space) is that the body is transported to a different place – a here and now – where there is no space for past experiences or memories. The “I” exists in the abstract space only as a sign-bearer and is therefore reduced to representation (Lefebvre 1991, p. 308). This space does not allow for personal experiences and it reduces the individual consumer to one among the mass of consumers or a single consuming body. Plans, signposts, and maps are privileged over embodied experiences. The tasks that the hero or the consumers engage in *A Day at the Store* take time to accomplish, but the experiences of carrying out the tasks are not included in the store narrative. The monomyth transcends time, culture and geography – it represents a universal structure presumed to exist in all stories.

Regardless of whether it is evening or morning, the retail store looks the same because it is continuously being restored to its proper shape by the staff (Cochoy 2007). The role of the staff is to keep the place ordered so that it appears to be untouched by time. In the IKEA store, the staff moves like shadow figures in the background, ensuring that the day runs as planned. Their main task is to maintain the status quo in the store, to wipe away all traces of customers as they move through the store, so that each customer has approximately the same store experience. The staff does not promote the products; this is done by standardised product tags and brochures and pictures of imaginary people who use them at home. The absence of staff in the store underscores that the store is something that consumers should accomplish on their own, and that the staff is only one among many helpers in this quest.

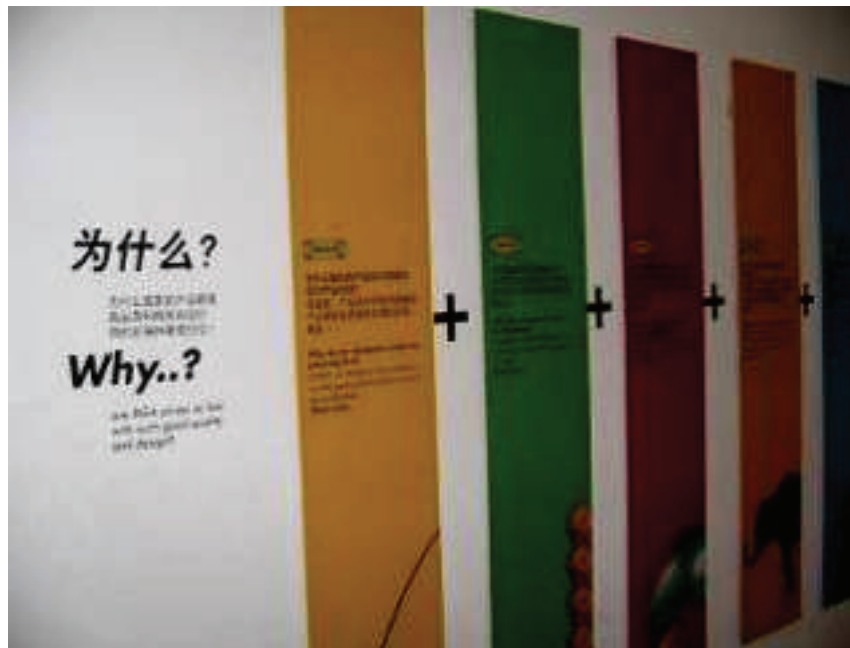


Photo 9. *Weishenme?* Why?

On walls in both the Malmö and Shanghai stores, the IKEA concept is explained. This communication is constructed as a number of common questions from visitors that IKEA answers. On one of the signs in Photo 9 the role of the staff is explained. It says:

Why is there no staff around when I need them? Everything important is on the price tag. By coping on your own you do not have to pay for unnecessary help. That's why. (Signpost, Malmö and Shanghai stores)

The role of the staff, in other words, is to leave the customer alone and maintain the universality of the structure of the quest narrative that consumers are expected to enact in the store. In this way the consumers partake in an age-old story that is revisited daily.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that there are similarities between the temporalities and spatialities of the store and the time-space of the monomyth. The monomyth belongs to the structural analysis of stories found in narratology. The present approach holds that time is spatialised in narrative, which turns it into a serial succession of “nows” across space (Gibson 1996, p. 181). It is suggested that this conception

of time and space coincides with the analysis of time and space in places, such as the store, defined by the accumulation of capital. The rationale behind analyzing the organisation of retailing practices in terms of the monomyth is to construct a framework within which it is possible to grasp what may be involved in the tension between place and space. The circular trajectory of the monomyth also lends support to the interrelation between retailing practices in the store and consumption practices at home. It suggests that the two are not easily separated from one another.

In the above, I have sought to demonstrate how the structure of the place is set up through the sequencing of actions designed to optimise time and space in the store. While self-service retail environments like IKEA, offering highly scripted and staged environments, are often seen as transparent, hiding nothing from the spectator (cf. Davies and Ward 2002), something seems to escape this view. Regardless of the time of day, the store keeps its shape by endlessly being restored by the co-workers at IKEA. This contributes to the standardized appearance of the IKEA store and its disconnection from the surrounding world.

Indeed, like narratology's conception of narrative, the store is a closed geometric system. Through the quest, we are able to understand how the store is set up as a medium for communicating a particular image of IKEA centred on optimising time and space. The quest places the consumer as the hero in the adventure of the store. Going through an IKEA store the consumer does not just shop, he or she also comes out of a labyrinthine structure with a boon consisting of economic gain obtained by carrying out most of the work by him- or herself. Consumers are not heroes for long. Campbell writes that heroes seldom stay at home for very long. Soon, they start to plan and prepare for the next adventure, which in this case means another visit to the store.

# Chapter 6

## Heroic Spaces

“Draw near, illustrious Odysseus, man of many tales, great glory of the Achaeans, and bring your ship to rest so that you may hear our voices. No seaman ever sailed his black ship past this spot without listening to the honey-sweet tones that flow from our lips and no one who has listened has not been delighted and gone on his way a wiser man. For we know all that the Argives and Trojans suffered on the broad plain of Troy by the will of the gods, and we know whatever happens on this fruitful earth.” “This was the sweet song the Sirens sang, and my heart was filled with such a longing to listen that I ordered my men to set me free, gesturing with my eyebrows. But they swung forward over their oars and rowed ahead, while Perimedes and Eurylochus jumped up, tightened my ropes and added more.” (Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 12, lines 184-195)

*The Odyssey* is a story of homecoming. Set in the aftermath of the Trojan War, it narrates the adventures of the cunning warrior Odysseus during his ten-year homeward journey to Ithaca. The trickster character of Odysseus bears a resemblance to one of the most popular figures in Chinese legends, the cunning monkey hero Sun Wukong, from the novel *A Journey to the West (Xiyou Ji)* (Shahar 1992). Another trickster figure in Chinese mythology is the Lord of the Granary. It is told that the Lord of the Granary, when captured by the Goddess of Salt River, outwits her by offering her an intimate love token, a waist girdle, which turns out to be a hunting weapon. The myth ends with the Lord Granary killing the Salt Goddess aiming for the girdle with his arrows (Birrell 1993, p. 179). The structure of the narrative of the Lord of the Granary resonates with how Odysseus is seduced and held as prisoner by goddesses like Calypso and Circe, whom he eventually outwits.

This chapter employs the episode of Odysseus’ encounter with the Sirens as a way to comprehend the emergence of images of IKEA in

consumers' storytelling practices. The common denominator of images of IKEA emerging here is that they result from stories based on a mode of emplotment based on reason. The spaces that this emplotment represent are close to the narrative geometry of place presented in the previous chapter. The argument here is that in the stories about heroic spaces, the image of IKEA emerges as a principle of organisation based upon a narrative geometry of place. This means that the temporalities of these stories are oriented towards the here and now. These stories were common in my empirical material and they were the ones I found hardest to interpret since at first they seemed so mundane. They typically narrate fairly instrumental practical, technical, and utilitarian aspects of using IKEA products, which at first glance seem to concern a neutral way of acting, disconnected from cultural and historical narratives.

## Establishing Place

The term *heroic* derives originally from the name *hero*, “given each free man who participated in the Trojan enterprise and about whom a story could be told”. (Arendt 1958/1998, p. 186) At the time, heroic courageousness meant the freedom to speak and act, and revealing oneself to the world. The courage to act was the same even if the hero turned out to be a coward (ibid.). Indeed, Odysseus represented for Homer a new type of hero (Shankman and Durrant 2000, p. 22). The events narrated in *The Odyssey* refer to the decaying Greek culture based on the Greek mainland in Mycenae. In an attempt to understand why the Mycenaean age disappeared, Homer attributes part of the blame to the behaviour of heroes like Achilles and Agamemnon who, at crucial moments, are guided by passion rather than reason. Odysseus is, for Homer, a new heroic figure that acts according to reason rather than according to his own feelings. As Achilles<sup>12</sup> declares when Odysseus attempts to persuade the warrior to join his fellow Greeks and re-enter battle: “As hateful to me as are the gates of Hades is the man

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<sup>12</sup>The literary critic Northrop Frye (1976, pp. 65-66) employs Odysseus and Achilles to distinguish between two common types of hero, distinguished according to the principles of *forza* and *froda*, or violence and fraud. He argues that violence and fraud help construct tragedy and comedy, respectively, and forms a cycle that can be found at the heart of all Western literature.

who hides one thing in his mind and says another.” (ibid.) The reason of Odysseus is perhaps best articulated in his encounter with the Sirens. One of the dangers that Odysseus and his men must face on the route back to Ithaca is the island of the Sirens.<sup>13</sup> The beautiful but lethal song of the Sirens exposes sailors to their destinies and draws them into the shadows of death. Their song vocalises the hero’s life-story from beginning to end, in a way that is usually only possible when one is dead. “We know all,” they sing (Cavarero 2005, p. 105). If the Sirens know everything that has happened and will happen, the cost of their information is the future. For how can one continue to lead one’s life while knowing how it will end? The allure of the Sirens is about loosing oneself in the past, being forgotten, and hence being made mortal. By directly invoking the past with the promise of pleasure that the song involves, the Sirens threaten the linear order of progress.

In order to be able to enjoy their song in solitary safety, Odysseus plugs his sailors’ ears with beeswax, so that they can row without distraction, and tells them to tie him to the mast of the ship. In this way, Odysseus not only escapes the Sirens, he conquers them (ibid.). He is the only human who gets to hear their song and continue living. Indeed, the song makes Odysseus mad. He wants to surrender to the call and enjoy the song for eternity. He screams at the sailors to release him from the mast. But the sailors hear nothing. With their ears full of wax, they are deaf to what goes on around them and they continue rowing. The scene of Odysseus tied to the mast displays both a desire to experience a total immersion in being and, at the same time, a will to retain one’s individuality. Odysseus – alone of all men – does both, although the tension is unbearable. In the end, he survives the Sirens’ song and thereby reason establishes itself over the mythical. In the modern age this episode has been interpreted as the ultimate defeat of unreason and the victory of reason (Cavarero 2005, p. 113).

The common denominator of images of IKEA presented here link to reason and the modern. These images, I argue, are created as a consequence of reproducing the narrative geometry of the store at

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<sup>13</sup>Homer gives no clues as to what the Sirens look like. In visual art they are often depicted as three creatures with the heads of women and bodies of birds (Cavarero 2005, p. 109).

home. Consumers' narration of how they implement IKEA practices tends to follow the strategic mode of narration found in the IKEA store. Consumers' stories presented here tell how the organisation of the home, conveyed via the place of the store, is established at home. In these narratives, IKEA is assigned images associated with Odysseus, who is commonly understood to embody the rationality of the modern subject (see below). Because narrative geometry is constructed according to a predictable and logical pattern, there is little room for difference. Consequently, the images of IKEA in heroic spaces differ less between Shanghai and Malmö than in the other spaces. Versions of these overriding images are found in images of cunningness and purity, which are described in the following.

## Cunningness

One of the ways in which IKEA emerges in consumers' stories is as a clever mode of organisation. It obviously echoes Odysseus' cunning stratagem to rescue himself from the Sirens, as well as resonating with IKEA's claims to be a "provider of solutions to problems," rather than a retailer of products (interview with co-worker A). The cleverness of IKEA comes out in both Shanghai and Malmö, albeit in different ways. What an image of cunning does is that it establishes spaces at home that resemble the IKEA place in terms of an orientation towards the utility of space. In couples' homes, cunning was also tied to establishing individuality and private spaces within the home. This finding is not surprising, since two people need to agree on how to lead life at home. But it also tells us about the way that the principles of value of the modern world enter into the home and link our intimate – perhaps our most intimate – spaces to the organisation of public life. In the following, I give three examples of how images of IKEA emerge as cunning in that they are experienced as enabling private spaces within the home. The first concerns solving conflicts, the second is about providing a clever system, and the third deals with teaching people how to organise.

## Solving Conflicts

I begin with an example of IKEA's cunning found in how Mia makes sense of a wardrobe that she and her fiancée Sven have installed in their large kitchen. After a longer break in their relationship, Sven recently moved into Mia's two-room apartment. To make the apartment suitable for two persons, it has been divided into different sections to which particular tasks are tied.



Photo 10. "Solution"

Mia: um, this is another storage space we found at IKEA. We bought these high gloss doors so that it would match the other closet. In here I have all my stuff (opens the door and reveals clothes on hangers and four shelves with shoes in rows). It is not that deep so you need to hang the clothes in this way, with the front facing the outside, and then you pull them out like this (pulls the hangers straight out of the closet). I also bought these light-weight plastic hangers so that it would not be too heavy.

C: How did you come to think of this?

Mia: It was a solution that IKEA suggested in the store. I thought that it was perfect, or we thought that it was precisely what would fit in here. I think it is from the Pax series, which contain lots of different modules where you can decide everything: design, colours, size, and style. It is really amazing how much fits into this small closet.



Mia's referring to the wardrobe as "a solution that IKEA suggested" underscores the position of an IKEA product as something that is brought into the home to sort out where and how things should be kept. Describing an IKEA product as a solution confirms the role that IKEA adopts in the quest narrative, as a character who aids the consumer by with a set of guidelines. Here this set of guidelines stretches into the home and is established as part of everyday practice. It seems to establish IKEA as a specialist on a particular mode of organisation at home, or as another informant, Elsa, puts it:

Elsa: In comparison with other companies, I think IKEA is particularly good at practical solutions. If you do not care about the price, nicer looking furniture can undoubtedly be found elsewhere. It is the combination of good furniture at good prices that is their main concept. But then I feel that they have created a niche in creating smart solutions, I mean more practical and clever things, a bit for everyday life.

As was the case with Odysseus, IKEA survives in the home not by means of strength, but by being clever. Continuing to talk about the way IKEA informs everyday practices, Mia and Sven specify this mode of organisation as the creation of individual space. On the left side of the wardrobe in the kitchen area, a closet is built into the wall. Hiding the content of the closet are twenty-five small doors, made of the same high-gloss white material as the wardrobe. I ask Mia and Sven if they have divided up the space in the closet between them.

Mia: Well, I guess so. Sven has his personal stuff on this side (points at the closet), and I have my things on the other side.

Sven: ... which, in reality, means that I have this row (points at a vertical row of four doors)

Mia: Yes, exactly, he has little space (Laughter).

Sven: I just wanted to point that out (Laughter). No, seriously, Mia has more stuff than I do.

C: Is it important to have one's own space at home?

Mia: No, but I guess ...

Sven: ... for practical reasons I think it is.

Mia: Yes, for practical reasons and to simplify things. At first we just said “ah, how can we fit everything into this small space. After all, it is just one room, although it is big.”

Sven: I also think we divided the space because we have different conceptions of what things should look like.

Mia: Of course ...

Sven: ... that is to say, we have different control needs and habits ...

Mia: eh ... Sven is not that scrupulous about things ... um but by dividing things between us, we do not quarrel as much about “who washes what” and “why have you not washed my clothes” and so on. When I was single, I lived here like a princess. But when another person moves in, what do you do? You go to IKEA and buy two separate laundry bins. So, now Sven has his and I have mine.

Sven: And here we have taken a photo of them to show them to you (Laughter)

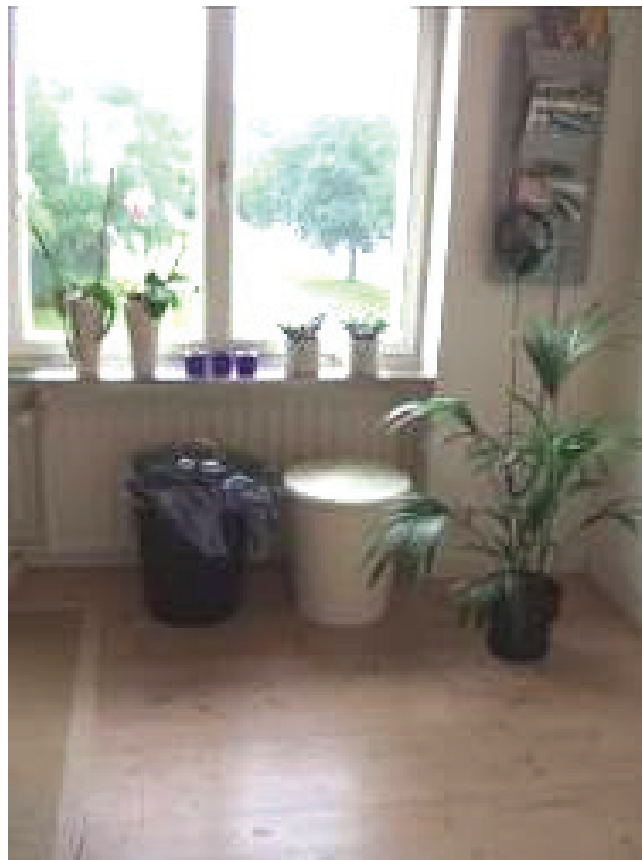


Photo 11. “Sven and Mia”

The dialogue between the three of us in the interview reveals the role of IKEA in their home. Mia and Sven's bins, in black and white, respectively, tell us about how IKEA is given images of individuality through the way Mia and Sven make sense of organising with IKEA. By dividing space between them, Mia and Sven divide tasks between them at home. Knowing where everything is at home makes life run more efficiently. It can prevent quarrels and it saves time by preventing looking for things. It is clever because it is based on an idea underlying the order. Things are not randomly placed there. They are put there according to a plan decided beforehand. Each thing has its own place and each space its own function. IKEA's standardised products, in different colours, make such divisions possible. The bins, the wardrobe, and the closet create a unity, but for the people who live here, they serve the function of boundaries, demarcating Sven's space from the space of Mia. Maintaining order is about creating the kind of regularity where the inhabitants know where to do certain things and who is allowed to do them. Along with Lefebvre (1991, p. 263), the western mode of home organisation is characterised by "the reign of the facade over space." The facades of mirrored wardrobes, sideboards, and chests help dominate the private sphere of life and liberate it from contradictions, so as to turn it into a straightforward and unambiguous sphere.

The goods put behind these facades are categorised and classified, making the order that the facades of furniture achieve easy to manoeuvre in, since they create predictability. Doors, wardrobes, and other enclosures from IKEA's range of products represent facades that set up a seemingly contradiction-free space. Doors hide things that one does not want other people to see because they are private. When living together with someone else in a relationship, this also becomes a way of demarcating one's own things and space from that of the partner, of creating zones of privacy within the home. The façades protect and defend what is inside from the gaze of the other person. In the darkness behind the door, one's own space is kept safe.

## A Clever System

IKEA as a clever principle of organisation is also apparent in the way Nils describes his use of the bookshelf Ivar. Nils lives with his girlfriend in a small apartment consisting of a large room and a small room in which the 120-centimetre IKEA bed fits precisely. In the other room, the bookcase Ivar covers one of the walls.



Photo 12. “A clever system”

Nils: I guess Ivar is one of those bestsellers at IKEA; it is a cheap and flexible solution and all that ...

C: How do you mean?

Nils: That you can move shelves around as you like, and that you can easily attach additional sections to the sides. You see, I have connected these two sections to one another. It is one narrow and one wider section put together. If this side is removed, I could easily attach more shelves to it (points at Ivar). It is like Lego; you can build it in any way you want. It is a clever system.

C: What do you keep in Ivar?

Nils: Well, obviously, books; and then we have made this area into an office space organised according to different themes. For example, this pile of letters is Emma’s and that is mine (points at the organisers).

Ivar lacks both a front and a back. It is composed of a set of wooden shelves attached to a frame on each side, and supported by two steel cross-braces in the back. Nils narrates it as a rational solution. In the fourth shelf, organisers from IKEA are placed to separate his piles of letters and papers from his girlfriend's. Smaller boxes and paper organisers are used to create individual spaces within Ivar. This makes it possible to categorise things by demarcating them from one another. On the top shelf are board games, on the second are practical books, like guidebooks and telephone directories, on the third are office items, like pens and staplers, and on the fourth shelf are two paper holders for Emma's and Nils' letters. Further down, different types of coloured papers are stored; at the bottom are larger paper holders containing labels identifying their contents.

## Learning to Organise

The use of IKEA as a cunning way of organising is also found in Lin and his wife Xing's home in Baoshan, located about one hour's drive from Shanghai.<sup>14</sup> Lin picked me up at the train station and we drove towards their apartment. Lin works for the office of foreign affairs in his hometown. Lin and Xing's apartment is among the larger ones that I visited. It consists of five rooms and has a garden terrace attached to it. The entire interior is from IKEA. The arrangement follows a linear principle where products come in sets of two or three and are placed in rows or opposite one another.



Photo 13. "Decoration to fill up the place"

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<sup>14</sup>Baoshan is an assumed name.

Lin: I do not know why I did it in this way, it looks nice and since the house is quite big, I felt that we needed more decoration to fill up the place. I have also seen it in the catalogue (winks at me).

Lin opens a door in the bedroom and we enter a small room that has been turned into a walk-in closet. A wardrobe frame in birch wood has been inserted into the room. Drawers, clothes rails, shelves, and hooks are added to the frame to enable shirts, blouses, and trousers to hang in rows, and clothes to be neatly folded and kept apart.



Photo 14. “Keeping things in place”

C: Huge place ...

Lin: You think so? I never knew that you could organise it in this way. I learned this at IKEA, smart isn't it?

C: Is it difficult to keep track of what goes where?

Lin: What? I don't think like that. The socks go here, the ties here and so on. It's practical. Keeps things in order.

C: How did you put together all this?

Lin: Nah, it is not difficult, just follow the instructions (Laughter).

Lin's clothes are on one side and his wife's clothes are on the opposite side. Lin pulls out a drawer, revealing several compartments in birch plywood in which rolled up ties have been placed. Some of the compartments are still empty. Then he pulls out another drawer displaying socks folded in rows beside one another. Below is an empty laundry bag in white cotton, and beside it is a collection of shoes organised on tilted aluminium racks. One section has been made into a place where towels and bed linen are kept. In the middle of the room are a bench and a beige carpet. Three lamps hang in the ceiling.

The manner in which Lin makes sense of the walk-in closet illustrates how IKEA's role in helping the consumer on the quest continues after arriving home with the goods. The boon that the consumer brings with him- or herself is here related to a new way of doing things at home., For the Swedish informants, this was more self-evident, because of their having had a longer experience of IKEA; for Lin, IKEA offers him a way of arranging that he has not thought of before.

## Modelling the Private on the Public

Some elements in the way IKEA is described in the heroic spaces suggest a relation to larger narratives of the home, such as a right to private space, and the utility of space that was stressed in the reformation of the home in the 1930s. In the early decades of the twentieth century, architects inspired by scientific management set out to transform the cluttered bourgeoisie home on the basis of Frederick Taylor's rationalised machine production. The allocation of time and work in the factory, where each individual was assigned a role of responsibility, was taken as a model for the organisation of the modern home (Guillén 1997). Architects did not see their primary task as decoration, but the organisation of life. The model that was used by these modernist architects in, for instance, the Bauhaus group, was the public sphere. This meant that spatial planning of the home was made in the image of the planning of cities.

In Chapter 5, I described the geometry of city space and its affinities with the IKEA store. The similarities between the two are the imperative of control. In both Shanghai and Malmö, IKEA figures in public settings such as restaurants, cafés, and dentist's offices. In a

corner of Shaanxi Road, Wang Yan runs a small boutique where she sells bags she buys from Guangzhou. According to the price tags, some of the bags cost several thousand Yuan. In the ceiling, Wang Yan has put up four white IKEA pendant lamps in a row, and on the floor there are small stools in plastic on which we sit and talk about the photos she has taken.



Photo. 15 “Tour”

Wang Yan: This staircase leads to the living room (*keting*) on the second floor. The living room serves as a passage to the other rooms. To the left is our reading room (*shufang*) and a bedroom. To the right is the bathroom. My bedroom is on the first floor, but I did not take any photos of it. I mostly took photos of the second floor, um, I think it is more special than the rest of the apartment. The sofas are from IKEA (points at Photo 15) ...very comfortable...very expensive (Laughter). This sofa cost around 1700 Yuan, but for the whole set I think I paid over 4000 Yuan, pretty expensive, huh? Mm, IKEA is expensive in comparison with other stores.

Wang Yan narrates the organisation of the home as a journey from the front door to the bedroom on the second floor. Her narration is an example of what de Certeau (1984, p. 120) calls the tour. The tour is the everyday narration of movement within place. In contrast to the map's scientific representation of place, the tour is the lived enactment of this representation. Wang Yan's categorisation of the rooms reverberate the order of place where elements have their own distinct



place. She relies on directions similar to how one would describe the way to a place in the city to a stranger: walk straight down the road, turn left at the crossroad. The home is organised according to a principle that is commonly found in the public sphere, where the home is often experienced as an expression of individuality and personality. And, of course, it is, but surprisingly much of what we do at home is not dissimilar from practices carried out in a canteen, the office, or the café. In light of the fact that the home was once subjected to the same kind of rationalisation as the public sphere, this observation is not novel. In the midst of the twentieth century, home life was introduced to a parallel kind of control. As in the rest of the Euro-American world, in Sweden an extensive social engineering project was undertaken which followed the idea of reforming life at home according to the principles of scientific management (Hirdman 2000, p. 198). Standardisation and the idea that all people have essentially the same needs were central to this project. The aim was to maximize the utility of work at home as more women went into employment.

Another aspect of the social engineering of the home involved the cultivation of democracy. World War II created a fear that something similar to the Nazi regime could establish itself again, which made politicians conscious of a need to foster democratic values, beginning in the domestic sphere. Through the use of standardized measures such as flow charts, work at home was planned and calculated to run more efficiently. In order to optimize time spent doing house work, and for political reasons, the home was separated into different areas, in order to subject it to improvement (*ibid.*). This way of dividing space to make life at home function in an uncomplicated manner is not fundamentally different from the way consumers describe their use of IKEA products. Creating a space free of contradictions, where each chore and each thing has its own place, enables an ordered life.

## Defending Order, Conquering Mess

In a series of novels and poems, the Swedish writer Kristina Lugn comments on the effects of the order that the building of the Swedish welfare state has brought about. The following excerpt describes heroic struggles from everyday life to establish reason and order, and to keep the threatening chaos at bay:

Everyone who should have fallen head over heels in love with me has moved to the countryside instead. There they sit on their sheepskin rugs in front of their fire stoves and eat root vegetables that they have prepared collectively. And they have themselves to thank for everything that they certainly have not received for free. While I go here and bleed. One has to pull one's socks up, they say. One has to go for a run once in a while. Because it makes one think much clearer. [...] When you have finally married me, I think you should move to the countryside with me. You probably have grown tired of restaurant life and the wear and tear of the big city. You could perhaps become head of the national dental service in some small hole in our rectangular country. [...] So that I finally get to sit in peace and quiet in the evening breeze by a window with chequered curtains and well-cared-for geraniums. In peace and quiet. And sing myself to sleep. While the children are very happy and play in the moonlight beneath the birches close to the abyssally deep water of the bay. (Lugn 2000, pp. 43-45, my translation)

The narrator in this poem portrays herself as a middle-aged, neurotic spinster who, in an attempt at sorting out her messy life, searches for a normal, routine life. The way out of her misery is via normality and the control of needs, primitive instincts, bodily fluids, and improper odours, all presented through dark comedy. The dream of a proper life involves a stable everyday life where everything is ordered and well-managed, like the model of the Swedish home. The disorganised domestic sphere is a symptom of the narrator's perceived failure to lead an ordered and normal life. She is alone, outside the communion of friends and family. Like Odysseus, the more the contemporary individual struggles with controlling his or her self, allowing that self to be tied harder to the mast via disciplining regimes, the stronger the desire to surrender to the Siren's song becomes.

It is often argued that surrendering to the song of the Sirens is about surrendering to chaos, nature, lust, and the feminine, which, in ancient mythology, is typically closely linked to nature and the unregulated life of animals (Cavarero 2005, pp. 108-109). The Homeric episode in question has been analysed as the triumph of the rational modern subject over the irrationality of myth, as well as the equation of truth with classifying thought, based upon divisions stemming from that between nature and culture. Odysseus is often seen as the prototype of the modern subject, as a man who controls his own destiny by disciplining himself and his body. In Horkheimer and Adorno's (2002) reading, for example, the Siren episode is about the modern subject's

struggle to preserve itself. In order to establish reason as the self's master, modern man needs to deny the aspects of the self that cannot be controlled. The stronger the desire is towards the instinctive, the tighter he needs to tie himself to the mast. From this perspective, man's selfhood is grounded in the control of the self. Only Odysseus is allowed to hear the Siren's song, even though it would not have taken the entire crew of sailors to steer the ship. The sea was calm that day, and there were no wind or waves when the cursed islands came closer. A god held back the waves and an almost surreal silence surrounded the ship (Cavarero 2005, p. 105). Following Horkheimer and Adorno's reasoning, we could say that one man is given the opportunity to conquer chaos by means of reason and thereby become a modern subject. Since the sailors were not given the opportunity to listen, they could not conquer chaos. In this way, Odysseus comes to embody the mind; the sailors, the body. He listens passively while they deafly work to steer the ship past the danger.

The work of sociologist Nicholas Rose (1999) on the fostering of civility in western liberal society emphasizes that the control of the self is historically portrayed as a virtue of the modern citizen. To this end, order was shaped and maintained by images of disorder as the lack of self-control. This lack typically manifested itself as "emotional outbursts, childish behaviour, drunkenness and dreams," regarded as standing in sharp contrast to the ideal of the "rational conscious and well-regulated life." (p. 43) In this way, a series of other distinctions (e.g., adult/child, men/women, civilised/primitive, normal/lunatic) were tied to the distinction between order and disorder. The difference today, following Rose, is that order is no longer imposed by political experts, but operates through the logic of freedom of choice (p. 88). The languages, values, and techniques of political expertise is taken over and disseminated by market mechanisms, such as retailers, and internalised as the individual's desire to be a responsible individual who is in control of his or her own life. That this order is no longer imposed through political policies was seen in the example of Lin who "learned" a new form of home organisation at IKEA.

## Purity

The idea that each thing has its own place is a principle central to modern scientific thought. Thinking analytically rests upon making the concrete abstract through categorisation. By being kept at one place in a particular kind of furniture, things are classified as belonging to a more general category of things. Elsa's description of her shoe cabinet furnishes another example of how IKEA products are used in agreement with this principle.



Photo 16. "For shoes"

Elsa: Here is my shoe cabinet. It is fairly new. The surface material is um, I think it is called foil. I am not sure what it is, but I think it contains plastic. It is probably not the most solid piece, but it is actually very good because it occupies very little space. I was in a bit of a hurry when I bought it, and afterwards I thought, um, okay, where should I put it? (Laughter) But then I realised that it fit well in the hallway. You almost do not see it, because the colour is nearly identical with that of the wall.

C: What do you keep in it?

Elsa: Shoes that I do not use that often. I have a shoe rack, from IKEA, where I keep my boots, since they cannot fit in this one. Each drawer forms one compartment. The intention, I think, is that each compartment should hold two pairs of shoes. It is definitely not enough space for all my shoes. I could make use of at least two of these.

C: Can you put something else in it than shoes?

Elsa: Hm ... well, I could probably put gloves and scarves and similar things in it. The problem is that it lacks a back panel; so smaller items would risk falling down behind it. It stands on a kind of base, and I have fixed the upper part to the wall so that it will not tilt over. It could work with other stuff, sure, but I haven't tried. I use it to put shoes in and nothing else. (Laughter)

The librarian Elsa has always lived alone. In her apartment in Malmö she has lived for almost eight years. The shoe cabinet contains shoes that are not used often, which Elsa does not wish to display openly in the hallway. While the cabinet has a façade, it lacks a proper back panel, which makes it difficult to use for something other than shoes. The front faces the observer, while a wall hides the imperfect back side. Like Odysseus being pressed against the mast, the shoe cabinet faces the challenges of conquering disorder up front. The way an IKEA product is portrayed here is as something that is easily broken. The strength of the shoe cabinet is not physical, and it has problems with holding certain things. Likewise, Odysseus is a fragile being, entirely subject to the whims of the fickle gods. Lacking physical strength and divinity, Odysseus has to resort to cunning to survive. Cavarero (2005, p. 112) notes that, in the encounter with the Sirens, Odysseus does not attempt to find an alternative route around the island. Nor does he trust his reason to overcome the primitive forces of nature. Instead, she writes, Odysseus resorts to a minor form of rationality: cleverness. What overcomes the Sirens is not reason itself, but the techniques of self-preservation that reason offers. As seen in the example of the shoe cabinet, even though IKEA may not offer the sturdiest pieces of furniture, its products still fend off disorder.

When brought into the household, the shoe cabinet makes many smaller items invisible; they become, one might say, generalised into one larger piece of furniture. Elsa says that little space is occupied by collecting a large number of shoes into a single piece of furniture, one

which almost melts into the wall. In this way, it is the IKEA product itself, and not the individual things, that occupies space. The furniture assembles the shoes and organises them in a logical manner: two pair of shoes in each compartment; sixteen shoes are reduced to one shoe cabinet. Smaller things are enclosed by larger things, which then define their being. Many small items are incorporated into a single large piece. In this way, a predictable structure is achieved, one which is reminiscent of the classification of positive knowledge in science. In *The Poetics of Space* philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1958/1994) comments on the making of this structure using a reading of Henri Bosco's novel *Monsieur Carre-Benoit à la Campagne*:

The only piece of furniture among all that he possessed, for which Carre-Benoit felt real affection was his solid oak filing cabinet, which he contemplated with satisfaction whenever he passed in front of it. Here, at least was something reliable that could be counted on. You saw what you were looking at and you touched what you were touching. Its proportions were what they should be, everything about it had been designed and calculated by a meticulous mind for purposes of utility. And what a marvellous tool! It replaced everything, memory as well as intelligence. In this well-fitted cube there was not an iota of haziness or shiftiness. Once you had put something in it, even if you put it a hundred or ten thousand more times, you could find it again in the twinkling of an eye as it were. Forty-eight drawers! Enough to hold an entire well-classified world of positive knowledge. M. Carre-Benoit attributed a sort of magic power to these drawers concerning which he said that they were "the foundations of the human mind." (p. 77)

The example of the filing cabinet, which Bachelard (1994, p. 75) calls *the drawer metaphor*, is employed to parody the approach used in philosophy to describe the nature of concepts. Knowledge is classified by being put in ready-made drawers or concepts. He writes: "Faced with any new object, reason asks 'in which of its earlier categories the new object belongs? In which ready-to-open drawer shall we put it?'" (ibid.) From this perspective, the shoe cabinet is a ready-made concept, which classifies the things put into it. It cannot hold things like scarves and hats, because it was not intended to do so. It is simply not possible to put just anything into the shoe closet. "To put just anything, just anyway, in just any piece of furniture, is the mark of unusual weakness in the function of inhabiting," Bachelard continues (pp. 78-79). The sacredness of the

administrative order embodied by the filing cabinet is, however, turned upside down when the protagonist discovers that the maid has put rice, mustard, salt, and coffee into it. With horror, Carre-Benoit realises that the cabinet has been turned into a larder. This comic story illustrates the pure nature of heroic spaces – where each thing has its own place – that the use of IKEA products brings about.

## Novel

The stories from Shanghai about heroic spaces are very similar to the ones told in Malmö with respect to using IKEA as a rational mode of organisation. What makes them a little different is that, in the use of IKEA products in Shanghai, it seemed more important to create pure or unambiguous spaces by only decorating with IKEA furniture or products. In some cases, this meant that entire homes were bought at IKEA. This practice was described as being related to the making of something that differed from a non-Chinese way of furnishing the home. Lin conveys the image of IKEA in a particularly clear manner, and I will therefore revisit the bedroom in his apartment.

Like the rest of the home, the organisation of the bedroom follows the division between mine and yours previously described. For example, on each side of the bed are two identical bedside tables holding two identical table lamps. Above the bed is a large wedding photo of Lin and Xing. The windows are half covered with curtains in flowery red, white, and yellow patterns. They are made in a thick material, possibly to protect from sunshine and light. Closer to the window is a shorter curtain in translucent white lace. In front of it, on the windowsill, is a large cactus in a blue and white porcelain pot.

Lin: My wife made the curtains and put up the wedding photo, I think it looks ... hmm ... I do not know ... too traditionally Chinese perhaps. Otherwise, I did all the decorating. One Saturday I drove to the IKEA store in Shanghai and filled the car with stuff. It is so convenient they have everything there. Almost all the decoration and the furniture here are from IKEA. Of course, my wife helped, but I did most of the planning. You know I have been to Sweden, right? I really

liked the atmosphere there; it is a part of me now, so I wanted a Scandinavian style in the whole apartment.

Lin wants everything to be set up as it is displayed at IKEA. The issue seems not to be so much about IKEA, as about his memories of Sweden. The Swedishness here associated with IKEA is underlined by Lin's reluctance to let his wife have a say in the decorating. Here IKEA receives a further image in terms of being closely associated to Sweden. Organising the IKEA way is a method of organising the Swedish way. As Lin recalls, the interior decoration of Swedish homes looks like those portrayed by IKEA. In Sweden, homes usually follow this mode of organisation, whereas in Shanghai they do not. IKEA's way of setting up the home is relatively new in China. (I will return to the theme of the new and the old in Chapter 8.) IKEA, then, is a way of breaking with the habits of the past. Yu Nan and her husband hired designers from B&Q to decorate the entire apartment.



Photo 17. "Something different"

Yu Nan: We could never imagine that we would be able to spend so much money on the home, so I guess we wanted to do it right. All the furniture is in a European style and not the traditional Chinese style. The Chinese style would not have matched the designers' recommendations and the way they planned the apartment. From the start we knew that we didn't want to go with the heavy red wood (mahogany) Chinese style, so we did it in this way. Even if I call it "the



European style,” I don’t know if it really is European, since I am not that familiar with what the European style looks like. All I know is that I wanted something different from the Chinese style that I grew up with, something simpler and lighter.

The images of IKEA emerging in heroic space are not vague. The linear time-orientation (past-present-future, first ... and then ...) used in these stories gives rise to spaces that are unambiguous. This means that images of IKEA follow a binary logic of either/or. In Yu Nan’s description of the past, a Chinese style is referred to as complicated and dark, while the European style that they have chosen for their present apartment is tied to simplicity and light. Xie Sini latches on to this discussion when she shows me around her two-room hotel apartment located in central Shanghai. After completing her MBA in Paris, she moved back to Shanghai to set up a Shanghai division of her father’s tool manufacturing company. Like Lin, Xie also drove to the IKEA store one weekend to buy everything she needed for the apartment.



Photo 18. “Something entirely different”

Xie Sini: I bought the things in the loft from IKEA when I moved in. One Sunday afternoon I drove to the store and bought everything. It was really convenient, everything in the same place, saved me a lot of time. I work long hours; I do not even have time to cook for myself. I guess IKEA is more for young people here, old people like my parents prefer the heavy furniture in rosewood (*hong mu*). They are used to an

entirely different style of both furniture and home life. Do you know what rosewood is? Ming and Qing style furniture are typically made of rosewood.

C: I think I have seen this type of furniture at the Shanghai Museum.

Xie Sini: (Laughter) That is the *real* stuff. Real rosewood furniture or antiques are very expensive. The local stores have cheaper replicas, and when people talk about rosewood furniture they usually mean this type of machine-produced fake rosewood. I'd rather buy something entirely different – like IKEA (Laughter) – than the imitations.

IKEA offers something that Xie feels the home furnishing tradition in Shanghai is missing. She explains that colours are not common in Shanghainese homes. Xie's storytelling revolves around using IKEA goods to save time. In her mind, decorating apartments takes time, but buying everything at the same time, in the same place, reduces the time she had to spend looking around for furniture. The focus on saving time in Xie and Lin's storytelling resonates with the IKEA store narrative, in which the optimisation of space is central to saving time. Purity at home seems to be created in the same way: through the optimisation of space to save time. The order thus created is, like the other kinds of order in heroic spaces, predictable. Boundaries between things and categories are stable and knowable. Using IKEA products is trouble-free and rational in these stories. Elsa's shoe cabinet's ordering of her shoes in a logical way also saved time by having them at the same place.

The order in Xie's loft is predictable and she easily finds things she needs. Facing the stairs is a washbasin and a chest of drawers in white plastic, in which Xie keeps her make-up products. To the left of the washbasin, behind two glass doors, is the bathroom. Beside the chest of drawers is a clothing rack where Xie's fiancée keeps his clothes. At the other end of the loft is the bedroom, demarcated by a glass wall. In front of a large window stands an unfolded sofa bed decorated with pillows. Beside the glass doors to the bedroom is a wardrobe covered with a white transparent white cloth. In between the wardrobe and the bathroom, Xie has constructed an office space from where she runs the company. As in the other apartments, in heroic spaces IKEA products are used to define the different functions of spaces, such as working, sleeping, grooming, and so on. There is no mixing together of things.

Each thing has its own place: her clothes and his clothes. This resembles the labyrinthine construction of the IKEA store with its isolated exhibition spaces of furniture.

## Conclusion

Heroic space is an example of how an IKEA place is brought into the home and how home spaces are transformed into the place of IKEA. These spaces are close to IKEA's own organisation of place and contribute to maintaining a standardised way of organising the home in both Sweden and China. The way IKEA organises the store, and the way that this is reproduced in the organisation of the home, leads to images of IKEA as a problem solver in Malmö, while in Shanghai this store organisation was tied to a novel way of organising home life. Consumers in Malmö were well-familiar with the IKEA's furniture and home organisation. Shanghai, however, IKEA was made sense of as something different. IKEA's way of organising at the home was made meaningful by an association with a relatively new style of home life that was made possible by the reforms in the beginning of the 1980s (Wang and Zhang 2005). These images converge in *reason*. The stories recognize IKEA as helping the consumer achieve an order at home that optimises space and time. In this way, the store narrative of the consumer arriving home with a boon is reproduced in these stories. At the same time, these spaces are perhaps those that most closely resemble the public realm. The division of space and the construction of private property at home mirror a wider set of historical narratives related to the engineering of home interiors on the basis of an increased scientific thinking about the set-up of the home. Like Odysseus tied to the mast, images of IKEA emerge as a form of reason that dominates everything.

In the storytelling IKEA's products and furniture stabilise reason. They defend an order which maintains control and classification, positioning unplanned messiness as its distinct enemy. The binary of structure and mess is linked to what it means to lead a proper life. Order is, however, always threatened by disorder. The story of Odysseus involves a quest to bring himself and his crew safely back to Ithaca – a quest in which he fails. In the end, his men are killed, and it is Odysseus alone that is washed up on the familiar shores of the island. The heroic thus also

leads to complication and disorder. Maintaining order simultaneously breeds continuous iteration and work in the household, which brings me to the woven spaces.



# Chapter 7

## Woven Spaces

“My lords, my Suitors, now that noble Odysseus is dead, restrain your ardour, do not urge on this marriage till I have done this work, so that the threads I have spun may not be altogether wasted. It is a shroud for Lord Laertes. When he succumbs to the dread hand of remorseless death that stretches all men out last, I must not risk the scandal there would be among my countrywomen here if one who had amassed such wealth were laid to rest without a shroud.” That is what I said, and they magnanimously consented. So by day I used to weave the great web, but every night I had torches set beside it and undid the work. For three years I took them in by this stratagem. A fourth began and the seasons were slipping by, when through the connivance of my shameless and irresponsible maids they caught me at my task.” (Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 2, lines 95-106)

When Penelope’s story begins, Odysseus has been away at sea for almost twenty years, and no one knows if he is ever to return.<sup>15</sup> Demands for a new king are raised, and the queen is pressed to choose a suitor and to remarry. Penelope agrees to decide on a suitor once the shroud for King Laertes is finished. In order to postpone her decision, however, she weaves by day and secretly unweaves the same cloth by

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<sup>15</sup>The character of Penelope, daughter of king Icaros and the Naiad Periboea, appears frequently in contemporary popular culture. Margaret Atwood’s (2005) novel, *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus*, for instance, considers the hanging of the twelve maids who reveal Penelope’s stratagem to the suitors. The Finnish-Swedish writer, Märta Tikkanen (1992), interrogates the myth of the feminine through Penelope’s second name, Arnaía. Arnaía embodies the legend of Penelope: the myth of devotion, eternal waiting, and longing; the one to whom the hero one day intends to return and tell everything. In Tikkanen’s prose-poem, Penelope’s destiny is the destiny of women who lived long ago, as well as those living today.

night (Cavarero 1995, p. 11). In this part of the book, I analyse the organisation of consumers' storytelling as being analogous to Penelope's endless work of weaving and unweaving. Once IKEA's furniture and products are brought into the home they are, or at least this is the argument made here, subjected to similar types of routine practices carried out in the course of everyday life. The rhythm of Penelope's weaving reveals the rhythm of routinised everyday practices. Everyday practices involve an endless doing and undoing, following the kind of circular time caused by shifts in weather, season, and daylight. Circular time is infinite and continuing, which consequently means that one experiences having time. Contrary to the stories of heroic spaces, where images of IKEA were found to be connected to saving time, woven spaces construct IKEA as prolonging time. This conception of time produces a space defined by shifting boundaries in which it is not always self-evident just what IKEA is.

## Iterating Place

Woven spaces demonstrate how IKEA constitutes other kinds of space than heroic spaces. If the heroic space is described as establishing place by conquering disorder, woven spaces both bring things together and set them apart, in a movement characterised by iteration over time. IKEA is woven together by the habits of everyday life. Stories of weaving are not restricted to Homeric epics, but exist all over the world. In Chinese mythology, the daughter of the Jade Emperor, Weaver Maid (*Zhi Nu*), is comparable to Penelope. The story of Weaver Maid and her companion, Draught Ox, was originally used to explain astronomy and the constellations of stars and planets. In the *Classic Book of Poetry* it is written:

In the sky there is Han River; it looks down and is so bright. At an angle is the Weaver Maid. All day long she makes but seven moves; though she makes seven moves she does not finish her pattern. Dazzling is the Draught Ox, but he is not yoked to a carriage. (Birrell 1993, p. 167)

This poem tells us that weaving is tied to themes such as failure and uselessness. Although the maid weaves, she fails to finish her cloth, and although the draught ox is a powerful draught animal, it is not yoked to

a carriage, rendering it useless.<sup>16</sup> Along the same lines, despite a long struggle, the suitors discover Penelope's stratagem, and she does not succeed in changing the situation. Like Penelope's weaving, consumers' storytelling practices are a means of inscribing standardised goods, both materially and symbolically, with their own times. Here, the character of IKEA as helper is not clear-cut. Instead, IKEA is integrated with consumers' bodily craftsmanship and used as a means to achieve other things. Similar to the traditional association of weaving with uselessness, images of IKEA are not tied to utility, but with what IKEA enables the consumer to do. This leads to, I suggest, images of IKEA as a routine. In the following, three variations on IKEA's image as routine are presented.

## In Progress

In the mythological stories, weaving is often used as a metaphor for constructing a story or a world. Weaving is interrelated with storytelling. Woven and embroidered textiles were among the first recordings of society's myths, stories, and sacred beliefs. In Greek culture weaving was regarded as important for weaving the narratives of culture (Snyder 1981). Hence it follows that the weaver is a natural metaphor for the creator, and just as a world can be created, so it can be unravelled and destroyed. The creator thus has the power to destroy, since what is created can also be destroyed (Kruger 2000, p. 23). Even though it may seem a little far-fetched, a story about weaving from the Sioux Indian tribe is revealing of this continuity. It tells of a woman weaving a blanket strip for her Buffalo robe. Every time she turns her back to the loom, her dog unravels the blanket. The story explains that this process of creating and destroying, weaving and unravelling, day followed by night, has been going on for centuries. The moment the weaver finishes the web, the world will come to an end (*ibid.*). Like the weaver, a consumer has the capacity to create and destroy.

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<sup>16</sup>In the era of the Han dynasty (202 B.C.-A.D. 220), poets linked the two star deities romantically as unhappy lovers. From that point onwards, weaving also changed its meaning to productive work (Birrell, 1993).



Understood as weaving, consumption is a work of craftsmanship, both bringing together pieces into a whole and setting them apart. In the case of consuming IKEA's products, the most basic form of craftsmanship is the assembly of furniture. In its assembly, consumers weave together different parts to make the furniture. Informants described the ardour of this work of assembly and disassembly. Ingrid and I meet in her three-room apartment, where she lives by herself. During her student days in the Swedish university town Lund, she assembled many things from IKEA, and she regards herself as an experienced assembler of IKEA products. Here, however, she tells me about the difficulties she experienced when piecing together an IKEA bookcase.



Photo 19. (Dis) assembled

Ingrid: it was bloody tough. [...] I do not know how long it took. It feels like forever. It says in the instructions that you are supposed to be two persons to assemble this thing ... but I did it by myself. It is basically made up of several boards, which makes it easier to transport. Actually, it is not difficult to assemble, but the problem for me was to hold together the frame while inserting the shelves into it. The first two shelves went all right. Problems started as I inserted the third and the fourth shelves. It was really difficult (she demonstrates how she held the bookcase together). This board should go into here. I hit it and hit it on this side, but then the opposite side hung loose. When I hit the other side, the side that I had just affixed was detached from the

shelves. I continued repeating this hitting for a long time. I was so angry that I almost started to cry. I just sat here and recovered my breath and thought: “bloody, bloody bookcase”. The construction itself is not particularly complicated. It is just that you need to be careful, so that you do not miss a step. If you miss one step then you have to go back and redo everything. It is like an equation. In the end, it turned out okay; it is still a little skew, though not as much as it could have been.

The bookcase stands in Ingrid’s living room. It measures 185 centimetres in both width and height, towering over Ingrid’s own height of 170 centimetres. Ingrid’s experience of assembling IKEA furniture is double. On one hand, it is filled with frustration, while on the other it is an accomplishment. After all, she managed to put it together by herself. In this sense, the bookcase is detached from IKEA, becoming one’s own responsibility to complete. If the bookcase turns out skewed, then it is because the consumer has failed to assemble it in the correct manner. The assembly process points to the centrality of bodily work in practices of consuming IKEA. In describing the assembly, Ingrid demonstrated how her whole body was engaged in balancing the frame while simultaneously inserting the shelves. Assembly takes time and produces a space onto which the time of crafting is inscribed.

Just like the irregular pattern of a woven cloth displays mistakes in weaving, IKEA’s furniture is imprinted with the errors and successes of its assembly. That screw could have been turned harder; this frame could have been straighter; that shelf was inserted in a hurry; and so forth. The image of IKEA here is one of a project resulting from one’s own time and craftsmanship. This image partly connects with the emphasis in the store narrative on doing things for oneself. The stories told here, however, can be seen as problematising the neutral depiction of assembly in heroic spaces as something straightforward and uncomplicated, by revealing the differences that work itself creates. The Swedish art scholar Monica Sand (2008) suggests that, while in front of the loom, Penelope asks herself what difference the repetition of everyday life involves. While one would think that the construction of a heavy piece of furniture, like a bookcase, would be of a more permanent nature, self-assembly seems to be intertwined with disassembly. Ingrid continues:

Ingrid: I am moving in a few months, so I have to disassemble the whole thing again, otherwise I cannot move it (deep sigh). I do not know how to do it. I guess it is just to remove the top shelf and then start pulling out the rest. I am probably going to cry again (Laughter).

The analogy to Penelope is expressed in the way that IKEA products are thought of as caught up in the iteration of assembly and disassembly. IKEA becomes a project in progress that continuously needs to be worked on. In this way, the space IKEA products occupy at home is only defined temporarily. A similar story to Ingrid's is told by Sun. Sun is originally from Hangzhou and she moved to Shanghai some years ago to work as a sales assistant for a Korean firm.

Sun: I bought a wardrobe from IKEA two years ago. At the time, I rented an apartment in Hangzhou and needed a wardrobe. I went to IKEA because I thought that it would be convenient to disassemble if I needed to move somewhere. It had a white cloth instead of doors. The cloth was very nice, looked like linen or cotton ... hm. Cotton is more transparent and gives a more open and natural feeling than doors. My friend helped me install and assemble it at home (Laughter). It wasn't *that* complicated. There were some instructions in the box on how to do it. It was, umm, fun, an interesting experience. Before I moved to Shanghai, however, I sold it. I realised that it was difficult to bring it with me. I sold it to a foreign exchange student who liked the Western style. She bought it in one piece. It was too much trouble to disassemble it.

The disassembling of products from IKEA adds to its image as an ongoing project. It also conveys the profane nature of the IKEA spaces. IKEA products and furniture are relatively unproblematically brought into and out of the household, assembled and disassembled, bought and sold. Profane consumer goods are typically characterized by being approached causally and with no intention of reverie or devotion. Belk et al. (1989) call attention to the fact that what is considered profane or sacred is not tied to products in and of themselves (e.g., expensive or high involvement products are not necessarily sacred), but is a process of investment of sacredness or profanity. It is also possible for objects, places, and people to move between the worlds of the sacred and the profane.

In order to maintain the sacred, it is important to prevent a product from entering into the profane world of everyday consumption. This is

achieved by, for instance, putting it behind glass or marking it as a distinct object in some other way, such as including it in myths and rituals. Practices of consumption thus create an orientation towards goods that define their sacredness or profanity. I am mentioning the consumer research undertaken by Belk and his colleagues here to underscore that the routinised practices undertaken in woven space construct IKEA as profane by involving it in the iterations of everyday life. What is important here is that IKEA is given the image of a work in progress, continually being done and undone.

## Remaking

The analogy to Penelope's iteration in woven spaces identifies a form of social spatiality that Mol and Law (1994) term fluid space. In contrast to geometric space, fluid space relies on boundaries that move back and forth, sometimes they are fixed according to the principles of geometry, but sometimes they are more difficult to determine. As Law and Mol (1994) put it:

In a fluid space it's not possible to determine identities nice and neatly once and for all. Or to distinguish inside from outside, this place from somewhere else. Similarity and difference aren't like identity and non-identity. They come, as it were, in varying shades and colours. They go together. (Law and Mol 1994, p. 660)

A fluid space, then, is a space of mixtures, which are sometimes, but not always, separable from one another. Not differently from how fluids can move back and forth, boundaries come and go. IKEA does not define space once and for all, but allows for shifts in space and in this way images of IKEA emerge as part of the routines of the home. This is done by using IKEA products in unanticipated ways, so as to continuously modify the way those products manifest themselves at home.



Photo 20. "Repainted"

Lina: The shoe rack is also from IKEA (points at Photo 20). I painted it in a similar colour as the mirror. I think it only comes in untreated wood at IKEA. Petter thought that it was unnecessary to buy a new one: "Why buy a new one when the old one works?" (Imitates his voice) So, I painted it white instead.

Repainting IKEA products, or changing their original shapes, add to the image of a work in progress. IKEA products are being continuously renewed so that consumers can experience them as relevant. Renewal is a form of the practice of routine which is also found in other informants' homes, where IKEA's products are used in unanticipated ways. As a librarian, Elsa's major interest is reading fiction. In her living room, books pile up. For a long time she has sought a way to organise her paperbacks, but without success.



Photo 21. "Reused"

Elsa: These pocket shelves are my latest purchase from IKEA (Photo 21). They were not used like that at IKEA ... it was I that ... um, I am very satisfied. By myself I was looking for narrow shelves for paperbacks and I went to IKEA. At first I could not find anything. There were no shelves with the right measurements. Then, I entered one of the kitchen showrooms and discovered these cases over a kitchen sink. So, I made some measurements and discovered that they were precisely the size of a paperback. It was just what I was looking for. Originally, they were placed the other way around. When I bought them, I planned to put them in a long row, but when I came home they looked nicer spread out like this, with some space in between them.

Elsa demonstrates how using IKEA products enable a consumer to engage in a form of restricted creativity connected to unanticipated use. Being creative is a way of exercising one's freedom. Rose (1999, p. 88) argues that, in advanced capitalist societies, expertise operates through the logic of choice. With this, he means that we have come to govern ourselves with the languages, values, and techniques disseminated by the mass media and the mechanisms of liberal, late capitalist society. According to this logic, the modern individual is not only obliged to choose, but also obliged to be free. Knowing what is the best practice at home, then, is a matter of responsibility. From this perspective, it is not

IKEA that provides knowledge of how to decorate, but consumers who come up with these ideas. The emerging image of an IKEA product as something that can be used in diverse ways underscores IKEA as a project in progress. Its boundaries are allowed to shift slightly and it is not seen as important to use an IKEA product in the prescribed way. The next example tells about rebuilding with IKEA. I follow Agnes and her two small children, Ellen and Gunnar, up the narrow spiral stair leading to the loft, where Agnes and her husband's bedroom is located.



Photo 22. "Rebuilt"

Agnes: Is it okay? (Turns around to check that I am okay in the winding staircase leading up to the loft) We did not want the staircase to be that big; it would have occupied too much space. The ceiling is a bit low up here. Originally this was the attic and it was completely open. We put up a wall here. Behind that door is just storage. At the same time, we built these chests of drawers into the wall to save space. It is Malm as you can see. My husband thinks that building these kinds of things are great fun.

The loft is tailored to fit IKEA's furniture, while simultaneously changing the appearance of the IKEA products. Arguing along with Rose, the logic of advanced capitalism is founded on the notion of sovereignty, and therefore it demonstrates the ability to make creative use of resources to maximise benefits, and it is part of the way governing in the name of freedom works. I think it is possible to understand the use of IKEA products in woven spaces as being

governed by this logic. The mode of governing can be contrasted to the political ideal of home organisation described in the outline of the narrative structure of place as historically governing home space. Here the home should not only establish a well-defined order, it should also demonstrate the freedom of the person who lives there. Woven spaces are then a question of the ability to switch from one structure to another, or from one style to another. The use of IKEA furniture for multiple purposes exemplifies how such spaces are created. Images of IKEA, then, are produced through a process of iteration which construes IKEA as something that needs to be continuously revised in order to be made meaningful. Using IKEA as a project in progress gives rise to a related image of IKEA as provisional.

## Provisional

Penelope's weaving and unweaving creates an interim time. Interim time is not forever but limited. Upon Odysseus return, Penelope's time come to an end. When a permanent order establishes itself, this time is gone. Sometimes we may be waiting for a product and use IKEA products in the interim; at other times we may not have the time or financial resources to buy other than IKEA products. For example, during a limited period of time when the children are small, or when one is single. In moments when a consumer feels unhappy with an IKEA product, but retains it to deal with wear and tear, interim space establishes itself. Lars tells me that he is in a slow process of finding things that he really likes for his apartment. The furniture he is satisfied with at home, he has bought at the upmarket design firm of Olsson & Gerthel in Malmö.





Photo 23. "Temporary"

Lars: I recently bought this lamp (points at Photo 23), which was really needed. I have looked around for lamps for a long time, and in the meantime it has been so boring and dark in here. The lamps have all been bloody expensive and very nice. I mean around 7000 crowns and so on. I do not think it is worth paying that much for a lamp, so for now I just bought this one for fifty-nine crowns from IKEA. It is completely fine, though I will probably switch it soon.

IKEA's goods are employed to maintain the present state, while waiting to enter another. Lars anticipates replacing the IKEA product within the near future. While he is saving up to buy the expensive lamp, the one from IKEA is used provisionally. The IKEA product provides something the consumer is not really attached to. An IKEA product is not an end in itself, but is used to make everyday life run more smoothly. When informants have their real apartments, or when they decide to live in a place permanently, IKEA items are sometimes thrown out. A version of IKEA's provisional image is found in Xu Mei Jing's narration. Before she and her husband bought their apartment, they shopped a lot at IKEA.

Xu Mei Jing: I will tell you about Yijia ... um, IKEA, is it ea in the end? I K E A, okay, IKEA. We shopped quite a lot at IKEA before we had our own home, and my husband loves the design at IKEA. But I feel that IKEA is more for young people who live alone. When we bought this huge apartment we realised that IKEA may be too simple

or, um, we felt that we wanted an impression of higher quality furniture.

In Shanghai, IKEA is better known as *Yijia*<sup>17</sup> and is here made sense of as being more suitable for young people's homes, or for someone who is still unmarried. The stories of (un)weaving teach us that when repetition stops, the situation that it supports will change. A transformation of circumstances typically involves the loss of freedom, death, or the end of the world. In the home, IKEA furniture is injected into an order, which it then iterates. As with weaving, when the practices of routine that maintain an IKEA product in the home come to an end, the result is that the IKEA product is discarded. In 2005 Olof and his girlfriend moved into an old rental apartment in central Malmö. The apartment has several rooms, but the one Olof spends most of his time in what he calls "the TV-room". In here Olof has installed a surround sound system and here he engages in his interests of playing television games and watching films. Among his first purchases was a sofa to have in front of the television.



Photo 24. "Temporary"

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<sup>17</sup>*Yijia Jiaju* (translation: proper home furniture)

Olof: I needed a cheap sofa ... and I like red so I bought this from IKEA. Besides, it is the first sofa I have bought. Everything else is inherited. I thought that it ought to be cheap so that ... well, I guess one could buy a sofa for 5000 crowns, but I want the possibility of being able to replace it after five years; and if the cat scratches it, it is not the end of the world. These sofas are worn out relatively quickly, the cloth is not the best; it is okay. I would rather have it this way than buying something really expensive that I feel could never be replaced, but still wears out anyway.

Olof, who works as a project leader at a museum, is something of a collector. He admits that he likes it when things wear out. He takes pleasure in watching things decay. He tells me that behind the sofa is an old photograph of the harbour in Malmö. It depicts a ship setting off towards a distant country. People are seeing their relatives off. They are all men except for three women in the foreground wearing fanciful costumes typical for the turn of the past century. The photograph is torn and was about to be thrown away at the museum when Olof rescued it. In his story, old things are central, which implies that IKEA items are replaceable. It does not matter if the cat scratches the sofa, or if the cloth wears out, since it is just IKEA.

Worn IKEA furniture would have been impossible in Shanghai where it is important that IKEA is new. The idea of IKEA products as something that can be discarded is of fundamental importance here to how consumers use those products. The idea that it is okay to allow wear and tear on IKEA furniture determines the social life of the sofa and defines the way in which it is related to. For Olof, the value of IKEA furniture seems to be that the wear and tear on it is okay it because he can always buy a new one. This image reinforces the weaving and unweaving of space. IKEA products are brought into the home but they are not there to stay. In the Malmö context, this aspect of IKEA was frequently brought into the conversation. Siv approaches the matter from a different angle than Olof. Showing me a photo of one corner of her one room apartment, she says that she wants to revive the home once in a while.



Photo 25. "Temporary"

Siv: What I like with IKEA the most is the price. IKEA has lots of basic stuff. If you buy a frame at IKEA you can buy smaller things elsewhere like cushions or bedcovers and all that. I think about my bed, which is kind of boring in itself, but then I can revive it with a few cushions and well ... I do not know. Another thing is that it is relatively easy to switch IKEA items for other things. If I do not want to have these pictures all my life (points at Photo 23), that is okay. I do not remember what I gave for all three of them, but something around 500 crowns. That is a little bit symptomatic of how I use IKEA products ...

There is thus a destructive component of IKEA products according to which they can be brought in and out, as Penelope's shroud could be unwoven or destroyed, because they are just IKEA. In the same way as the shroud mattered little to Penelope, to consumers it is not IKEA per se that is important; rather, the important thing is that it enables customers to iterate an order in the home while simultaneously looking for things they really want. From the point of being assembled and installed in a home, an IKEA product is successively destroyed or, to put it differently, unwoven. It begins a slow process of decaying until it is finally thrown out. To prolong their lifetimes, IKEA furniture and products are renewed and re-woven by, for example, repainting and rebuilding. The image of IKEA as a project in progress is tied to IKEA's profanity. Because the relationship to IKEA products is a casual one, it can also be altered.

## Inert

The task of Penelope is not to make cloth but to prolong time. The seemingly uselessness of this circular practice is a theme which recurs in the Chinese writer Yu Hua's novel *Blood and Plum Blossoms*.<sup>18</sup>

The time had come to cast Ruan Haikuo out of the house and onto the open road. And so it was that, on that bright morning, she began to speak once again of that momentous morning fifteen years before, of how she had seen her husband's body lying lifeless in the weeds: "I couldn't even see his eyes." After fifteen years of speculation, she told her son, she had failed to determine who had killed his father: "But there are two men who may be able to help." The men she spoke of had sung and sparred with Ruan Jinwu twenty years earlier at the foot of Mount Hua. Indeed, of all the swordsmen Ruan Jinwu had encountered throughout his long career, they had been the only two he had never managed to best in swordplay. One or the other, she continued, would certainly know exactly on whom he was destined to take his revenge for the death of his father. (Yu 1996, p. 181)

Yu's anti-hero Ruan Haikuo is forced to go on a journey to avenge his father's death. Ruan Haikuo gets lost and ends up walking in circles. In the end he is told that his father's killers are already dead. The journey embodies the meaninglessness of inherited blood revenge. It is a ritual that he must undertake, but it does not lead him anywhere. The ritual is, however, central in the story to both his mother, who longs for it, and for Ruan Haikuo who experiences it as his duty. In terms of completing the quest for revenge, however, the journey is useless. The analogy with Penelope concerns the way that her work does not produce a result: the shroud for Lord Laertes is never finished. Thus, in terms of utility, her weaving is useless, since it does not result in a utilitarian outcome. Between the weaving and unweaving, Penelope is able to bring time to a standstill, and so to prolong the time of her isolation. Precisely because her practice does not produce a result, and hence is not defined by utility, it is able to intervene in time (Cavarero 1995, p. 13).

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<sup>18</sup>The novel *Blood and Plum Blossoms* parodies a popular genre of martial arts fiction (*wuxia xiaoshuo*). The quest narrative underpins these stories, and plots typically revolve around a hero who wanders in an idealized and traditional China to take his revenge on some ruthless enemy (Jones/Yu, 1996).

Penelope's abode is unchanging – it is always the same. Penelope is the unending work of weaving and unweaving; she is a reflection of the rhythm of a single place (ibid.). The endless weaving and unweaving is a way of slowing down the tempo of a constant repetition of waiting for Odysseus' return. Through the repetition she becomes one with her working practice, the weaving creates a time of belonging-to-herself. The events from which Penelope retreats are the events of men of history and of heroes. When Odysseus returns she will be absorbed by history again and she will no longer have her anomalous space.

In this section, I consider images of IKEA tied to the inertia that the practices of routine at home establish. I begin by recounting a story from Shanghai. Li Chun lives alone in an older apartment in central Shanghai. The little spare time she has from the long hours she works as a sales representative for an Italian white goods company, she spends at home. In the apartment, Buddha statues, a bowl with gold fish, flowers, tourist souvenirs, her own aquarelle paintings, and cloth in different pastel colours, are placed in relation to IKEA's furniture and products. Typically, IKEA's furniture is covered with blankets and cushions to protect its outside from dust. In this way, Li's abode becomes a protected place.



Photo 26. "A space of one's own"

Li Chun: I relax at home. Drink wine (Laughter), listen to music, and watch films (pulls out a drawer in the TV bench in the bedroom displaying a wide selection of DVDs and CDs). I also paint and build models (points at an airplane model). Usually I go out for dinner or eat at work, but I enjoy cooking at home very much. Simple Chinese dishes like fried vegetables and such. The home is a place of one's own, so it is important that it conveys a peaceful atmosphere.

Among the images of intimate spaces that Bachelard (1994, p. 137) considers, is the burrow, a hole dug by an animal and forming its abode. The abode of the burrow is created by the rotation of a body in its own space. The comfort of the burrow derives from the fact that it is formed from the body's own shape and the track of its movements. This space is hence made from the inside outwards. In IKEA's furniture, spaces created are created by the body or the imagination. These spaces are made and renewed by a sequence of repeated actions across time to the material structure of the furniture. Space is organised in IKEA products, while at the same time it is organised by IKEA products. This kind of woven space withdraws from those marked by categorisation and division of tasks, and transforms place into inhabited and living spaces. Therefore, the image of IKEA becomes integrated with one's own experiences and the meaningfulness of being at home.

## Immortal

The repetitive process of weaving and unweaving reveals the logic of the home (Sand 2008, p. 15). Actions carried out at home seem like an infinite series of repetitions, which do not produce anything durable. Laundry bins are filled and emptied, food is cooked and eaten, beds are made and unmade, things are spread out and organised, and so forth. These repetitions are not primarily tied to the result of actions, but to the enactment of an on-going situation with its own value: the feeling of being at home. Central to the making of these spaces is the body. We can just think of the way that the body makes spaces in beds, sofas, rocking chairs; these are then unmade by straightening out the sofa cloth, or covering the bed with a bedspread in the morning. These are all mundane activities that most of us engage in daily, and they bring IKEA's products into the rhythm of everyday practices that does not seem to lead anywhere, except for maintaining order in the home. An image of inertia is related to the way Li make sense of the use of IKEA



at home. In this place, IKEA products successively become enrolled in habits and routines, which seem to prolong the time that the products are used at home.



Photo 27. "Washed"

Li Chun: I bought this sofa at IKEA three years ago. Actually, I wanted a dark red one but there were none so I ended up buying this white one. When I bought it, my friends said that it would immediately get dirty, but that has not yet been a problem. I usually cover it when I have guests over and, besides, the cover is washable and possible to switch for some other colour. I have washed it once, and it was no problem.

The example of Penelope can be read as a way of trying to problematise these habits and routines by asking how the repetitions differ from themselves (Sand 2008, p. 283). Penelope weaves and unravels the fabric of her cloth in an endless movement. As long as she engages in this weaving and unweaving, she is the wife of no one. The labour is rendered useless by undoing, utility and the results of her work are not the most important things; the practice of weaving is (Cavarero 1995, p. 29). The place for these monotonous and repetitive movements is the home; the home is kept the same by these activities. Although Penelope cannot change the conditions of her existence, she can manipulate time through her actions. In between weaving and unweaving, a space of difference, her own, is inserted into the present. Cavarero suggest that mind and body are united in Penelope's iterative



work. She is doing work while simultaneously she is this work. Without it, she has no means of establishing herself.

In Li Chun's hands, an IKEA practice becomes both the repetition of a difference *and* the making of one. In the necessary daily chores of the household, she makes and unmakes (repetition), while at the same time trying to define the present moment by her own activity. We can see here that the maintenance of her sofa, so as to protect it from wear and tear, differs from that in Olof's storytelling. This uncovers how their sensemaking tactics concerning IKEA differ, and, in a more general sense, it also tells us about IKEA's image in Malmö and Shanghai. While heroic spaces are linked to an understanding of time as chronological, where actions are purposeful and aim for utility, (un)weaving spaces are an outcome of an understanding of time as circular, where actions form practices of a habitual and routine nature. Agnes lives in a house outside Malmö with her husband and two children. In their living room is a sofa similar to the one Li Chun had.

Agnes: This sofa is from IKEA, I think it is called Ektorp or Eketorp. I think it is great because it is possible to remove the cloth and wash it. It is very convenient when you have children; it tends to become covered with lots of smudges and vomit. It is also possible to buy a new cover if ... um ... something should happen. First I went, um, should I wash the whole thing at the same time, in case the colour changes, but then I decided to wash it piece by piece. It worked out well. I have not noticed any difference or change in colour.

In between the making and unmaking, a space is produced, which temporarily creates immobility and upholds a situation where nothing seems to change. The sofa always looks new; its colours do not change. This relates to the practices of using products in everyday life for different purposes, but also to how they are subjected to practices of renewal. Practices of renewing the appearance of consumer objects by, for instance, removing dust, or what Gregson et al. (2009) call social and physical "dirt", is unquestionably related to discourses of domestic health, hygiene, and what it means to lead a respectable domestic life. The important point of mundane practices of renewal is that objects are in a continuous process of becoming at home. Gregson et al. write:

practices of cleaning, wiping, polishing and so on can be seen as concerted attempts to arrest decay; to stave off the corrosive and

contaminating effects of other physical substances on both people and things; to protect and conserve consumer objects. In short, these practices endeavour either to keep consumer objects in or return them to their pristine state (as when new), to freeze the physical life of things at the point of acquisition and to mask the trace of consumption in the object. (2009, pp. 251-252)

To be forever without change, Cavarero (1995, p. 99) writes, corresponds to the immortality of things divine, and the idea of eternity. The earthly lives of humans are, by nature, transient and temporary. As mortals, we are subject to death and involved in a cycle of replacement where the old is replaced by the new. A way of slowing down the tempo of this circular process is through attempts at immortalising an IKEA product by maintaining its original shape as long as possible.

## Unnoticed

The final version of the image of IKEA as routine that this chapter considers is IKEA as unnoticed. This seems to be a direct consequence of the routinisation of IKEA into the household. IKEA products become one with the practices of the home, and are made invisible. In particular, when an IKEA product has been in a household for a long period of time, it seems difficult to separate that IKEA item from other things. IKEA furniture is passed on from generation to generation, or from person to person. Elsa hesitates before many of the photos.

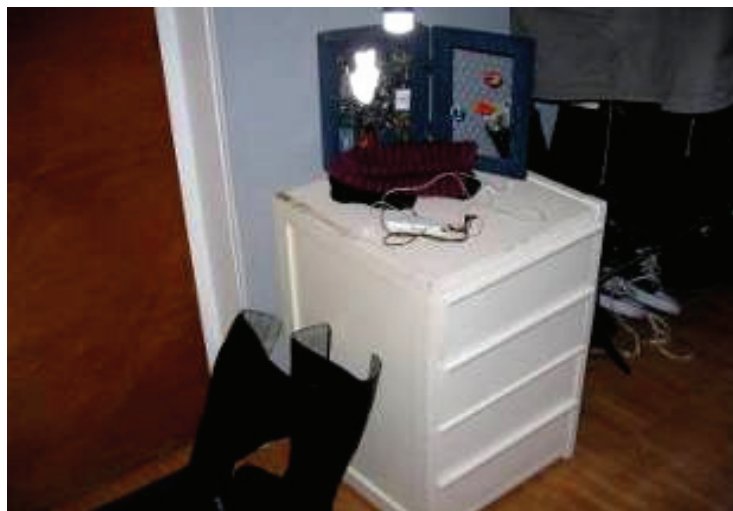


Photo 28. "IKEA?"

Elsa: This might be IKEA, but I am not sure. I found it in a container outside my apartment. We have a container here a couple of times every year, and I always look in it to see if there is anything that I can make use of. And then it fitted precisely under my desk. That bureau (points at Photo 28) could also have been bought at IKEA once upon a time, but the same thing is true here, I am not sure. I found it in the attic at my former apartment. (Laughter) It is probably much older and it seems too robust somehow to be IKEA.

Particularly in Malmö, where IKEA products had been inherited or bought second-hand to a greater extent than in Shanghai, such these accounts as these were common. In these spaces, IKEA is forgotten. Spaces become so “at home” to us that the objects constituting them become interwoven into the environment.



Photo 29. “IKEA?”

Olof: I do not know how long I have had that lamp, most surely around ten years. It has acquired a kind of yellow hue. I must say that it has worked very well. It’s probably an IKEA product. No, it must be IKEA. I got it from the woman who lived before me in my former apartment and somehow I have never managed to get rid of it; you always need light so, mm, well ...

As a consequence of inheriting much of his furniture and many interior products, Olof’s home contains traces of the lives of generations. In Malmö, handing down the culture of home from generation to generation also involved handing down products from IKEA. There is

the old sofa that grandmother used to have, there is the bed from IKEA I bought as a student, that is the bureau I found in a container, the lamp that the person who lived here previously used to have. The histories that these products present made informants doubt which products in their homes were from IKEA, and which were not. Consequently, at times, IKEA itself became less well defined.

## Invisible

A version of the image of IKEA as unnoticed is found in the homes where IKEA's smaller products are integrated with other larger products and, therefore, play a less central role in the home. Petter and Lina live in a two-room apartment with a kitchen. In the main room there is a matching set of furniture consisting of bookcase, glass cabinet, and a sofa table in teak that Petter inherited from his family. He and his brother, who is a carpenter, renovated all the furniture. On an empty white wall is a framed large piece of cloth in black and orange colours, from the Finish brand Marimekko. Around the sofa table, below the window, stand an armchair and a three-seat sofa in black leather. At first, the only thing they can think of that comes from IKEA is a bendable cutting board that Lina's mum gave them. Successively, however, the origins of various items are revealed.

Lina: I think the bed is from IKEA ... It's from IKEA, right? We should change it because it is half-broken. Petter brought it from his dormitory room ... a couple of craftsmen that were fixing the air-regulating system stood on it ... ah so unnecessary.

Petter: It is strange, when we sit here and talk, I realise that we have many things from IKEA. When I heard that we were going to participate in the study, I hesitated, because I thought that we did not have anything from IKEA. But when you think about it, our whole bedroom is IKEA, and lots of things in the kitchen are from IKEA.

C: Why do you think that you do not think about IKEA?

Lina: I think it relates to what Petter said before, that we use IKEA as a complement to other things. The bigger furniture, for example, is not from IKEA. The things we have from IKEA are smaller things in the kitchen, that we are really happy with, but which usually are put in drawers or behind closets, so we do not think about them. On the other hand, we have a large mirror from IKEA in the hallway, and the

lamp in the bedroom, the curtains, and the bed is from IKEA ... um ... well it is strange.

The furniture in the Swedish apartments was usually not dated to a specific year, as was common in Shanghai where all the furniture had been bought at the same time. In Shanghai, images of IKEA as unnoticed emerged therefore a bit differently. IKEA's being or non-being was tied to the difficulty of discerning IKEA products from other recently bought products. For example, Yu Nan and her husband hired designers from the British furnishings store B&Q to decorate their apartment.

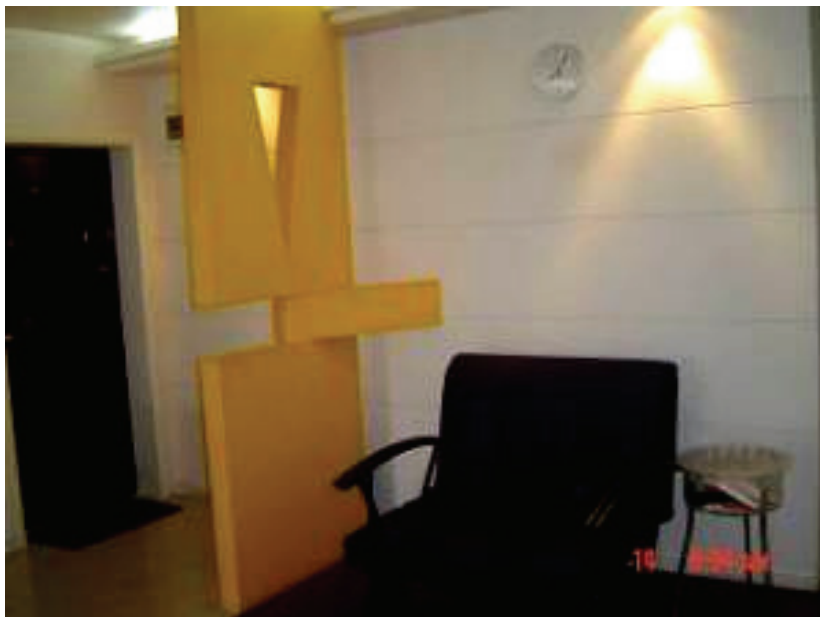


Photo 30. "IKEA?"

Yu Nan: Um, I'm not sure. Let me think for a moment ... wait now, I remember – this clock is from IKEA – white, gives a clean impression. Um, I cannot really separate what is from IKEA and what is from B&Q. Is this IKEA? Our photo frames are IKEA, I remember buying them.

Yu seems to find it hard to separate IKEA's products from those of B&Q, since she regards them in approximately the same way. A way of understanding why IKEA's products go unnoticed in these stories can be traced back to Mol and Law's notion of fluid space. Because woven spaces result from the iterating practice of weaving and unweaving, its boundaries are not fixed as is the case in heroic spaces. Therefore, boundaries, as do metaphoric fluids, move back and forth. The

difference between Malmö and Shanghai is that in the Malmö homes the routinised use of IKEA products was interwoven into a longer period of history, while in the Shanghainese homes the interweaving was with contemporary things. Thus, even though the image resulting from practice is approximate in these spaces, practices differ due to the length of time that IKEA's products have been present in the homes.

## Conclusion

Woven spaces generate images of IKEA tied to *routine* within the home. Within the epic, the home is marked by inertia. It is a place from which heroes depart and to which they return. Therefore, the home is placed in a state of waiting, and nothing of concrete value is produced there. In Cavarero's (1995) reading, however, Penelope becomes an interesting character, since she uses domestic time to interfere in the linearity of the hero's adventure. By prolonging the time of her own seclusion, she maintains order until Odysseus arrives home. Hence, it is she that makes it possible for him to resume his position as king of Ithaca. The home is indeed a site, however mundane, in which place is re-enacted. The figure of Penelope elucidates the way that the larger narratives of science and political policies are transformed at home. Weaving may be seen as a metaphor for the struggle to keep the everyday life together. In an extreme version, this is embodied by the literary figures of Scheherazade and Penelope who struggles for their existence by telling stories and weaving cloth.

The tension between weaving and unweaving creates a space where the image of IKEA emerges as routine. In the process of weaving, the two poles of creation and destruction are inscribed, and it is the continuous iteration of these that constructs images of IKEA. Sand (2008) suggests that when sitting in front of the loom, Penelope asks herself the question: what difference does it make if I unweave? Variations of the image of routine were found in images of IKEA as a project in progress, provisional, inert, and unnoticed. I suggested that woven spaces could be understood as fluid spaces, allowing IKEA's boundaries to move back and forth, thereby leading to an increase in diverse expressions of IKEA's image. In Malmö, these routine habits belong to an established way of doing things at home, while in Shanghai they were relatively

new. Consumers in Malmö were more likely to engage in practices of re-building IKEA's products at home, mixing them with older products, buying used

IKEA furniture, and even inheriting IKEA products from relatives. This made the IKEA items less distinct in these homes so that they achieved an almost invisible status. Consumers in Shanghai, on the other hand, were less likely to experiment with IKEA products in terms of repainting or remodelling them. Like the rhythm of the routine, the image of IKEA reflects the iteration of place that constructs images of IKEA as interwoven with everyday life. Use of IKEA products is not an end in itself, but serves as a means of achieving other things which continue the practices of routine at home.

Weaving spaces foreground the consumer's body in the construction of the retailer's image. Penelope is the space that her unweaving and weaving creates. Similarly, IKEA's image is found in the narrative space in between creating order and destroying it at home. Image is made and remade; it is transformed through a dialectical process of creation and destruction, mobility and immobility, within the routinised course of everyday life. The circularity of time was illustrated through making sense of IKEA as something that is crafted and re-crafted, used and reused, assembled and disassembled, and passed on from generation to generation. Next, I consider spiritual spaces, which lie beyond a systemic establishment of IKEA.

# Chapter 8

## Spiritual Spaces

At this point Athene, Daughter of Zeus, decided to intervene. She checked all the other winds in their course, bidding them calm down and go to sleep. She summoned the strong North Wind with which she flattened the waves in the swimmer's path, so that Odysseus, favourite of Zeus, might be rescued from the jaws of death and come into the hands of the sea-faring Phaeacians [...] This inward debate was cut short by a tremendous wave which swept him forward to the rugged shore, where his skin would have been torn off him and all his bones broken, had not the bright-eyed goddess Athene put it into his head to grab hold of a rock with both hands as he was swept in. He clung there groaning while the great wave swept by. (Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 5, lines 381-387, 424-429)

There is a fine dividing line separating the humans and the gods in *The Odyssey*. Divinities frequently intervene in the human realm, either in disguise, in the form of thought, or incarnated as natural forces. In the episode recounted, Odysseus is torn between his patron, the goddess Athene, and his antagonist, the sea-god Poseidon. While Athene aids him in his quest to make progress towards Ithaca, Poseidon holds him back, making life miserable for the hero. The forces of the divine are beyond the control of the heroes in a quest. Analogously, in this chapter, the image of IKEA is constructed as something beyond the control of consumers, and it is also something irreversible.

### Transcending Place

The organisation of spatial stories in which images of IKEA emerge is modelled here on the character of the divine and its relation to the human in *The Odyssey*. Rather than speaking of gods and goddesses, however, I prefer the term *spirit*. The reason is that I believe that it



better captures the nature of the divinities in Homer's ancient poem. Even though Odysseus can do little to influence the way his destiny is controlled by higher powers, there is some leeway for him to influence the gods by, for example, impressing or flattering them. By using wit and cunning, Odysseus partly manages to steer his own destiny. In the ancient stories, gods help only those who are worthy of help (Homer/Jones, 1991, p. xxxvii). The relationship between god and human in such mythology is thus very different from how that relationship is conceived of in the formalised world religions developed later, where God is omnipotent.

The English word *spirit* derives from the Latin *spiritus* meaning breath or breathing into (Merriam-Webster open dictionary). In Christian theology, for example, a common way of receiving the Holy Spirit is through breath. The spirit is thus a figure standing in direct contact with humans, mediating the relationship to God. In the Christian tradition, the spirit is linked to the mind, enforcing the Cartesian split between mind and body. The wisdom of God is hidden in a mystery accessible only to those who possess the spirit. In the ancient religions, the spiritual is understood to be incarnate in animals, humans, and objects as a form of animate force. In this view, spirits, like mythological gods, are among people and integrated into the everyday lives of humans. In the classic *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, the Chinese historian (or the historian of the strange, as he liked to call himself), Pu Songling (1640-1715), considers ghosts, fox-spirits, and abnormal human experiences that he thought strange.

“Foxes also drive men to their death”, said Li. “What makes you so different?”

“You are speaking of the fox-spirits that feed themselves by sucking the life out of men. I am not that sort. You see, the truth is, there are harmless foxes, but never harmless ghosts. Ghosts are too dark; they belong forever to the realm of Yin”. Hearing this exchange, Sang could deny the truth no longer: Lotus Fragrance was a fox-spirit and Li a ghost. (Pu 2006, p. 220)

In Chinese mythology, the boundary between the natural and the supernatural is considered to be more elastic than in western mythology (e.g., heaven and earth). The supernatural creatures such as ghosts and spirits in these tales may be understood as beings from our own

experience in a darker form of existence. Spirits in these tales can be accepted as both psychologically induced and materially present (Zeitlin 1993). It is, for example, possible for humans to reduce the power of spirits and, as one story recounts, even bite spirits to chase them away.<sup>19</sup> It is in the sense of everyday life that de Certeau (1988, 1998) considers the spiritual. De Certeau wrote considerably on Christian spirituality and the hagiography or geography of the sacred realm. This interest laid the foundation for his later work on the transition from orality to what he referred to as “the scriptural economy”, which concerned modern practices of writing and religion (Napolitano and Pratten 2007).

De Certeau allocates “the death of God” to the later Middle Ages when the presence of God was translated into textual scriptures. From that point onwards, the presence of god was condemned to a realm outside historical rationalism and the social. The consequence was a loss of the unmediated presence of God, which he sees as coinciding with the birth of the modern subject and its constant introspection about that which was lost (ibid.). The loss often expresses itself as something that cannot be named, a language that cannot be believed, or a trace, which cannot be seen. These observations led de Certeau to focus on the unseen and to use terms such as *ghostly* and *haunting* in his works on the rationalisation of urban space. In the essay *Ghosts in the City* (1998), for instance, he worries that the architecture of renovation and the reuse of old buildings in the city will displace the past in such a way that the

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<sup>19</sup>In Chinese mythology, ghosts and fox-spirits represent a kind of hyper-femininity, associated with the opposing and interdependent forces of Yin and Yang. The powers of Yin and Yang divide nature into two parts. Yang is the principle of light, warmth, life, and is male. Yin is the principle of darkness, cold, death, and is feminine. Yang is identified with the heavens from which all light and life emanate. Yin, on the other hand, represents the earth which, when not acted upon by the heavens, is a dark, cold, lifeless mass. Fox-spirits and ghosts are considered to be symbolically reciprocal to women and thus the force of Yin, assuming the shape of beautiful women who seduce men to attain the light and the complementary energy of Yang. According to legend, foxes are incarnated in beautiful women who seduce and make love to young scholars in order to suck out the forces of Yang, in order to attain immortality. The fox disappears every morning, and returns every evening, all while the scholar’s health and strength are declining (Pu/Minford 2006, p. xxv).

ghosts of former times will no longer be able to haunt them (de Certeau et al. 1998, p. 135). The target for his critique is, of course, the modernist architecture represented by the Bauhaus group and the Haussmannisation of Paris. The ambition of the modernists was to break with the past in order to provide a fresh start, while preserving the past in the form of fetishist monuments (ibid.). It is in relation to this development that de Certeau (1998) puts his hopes in memories and narration that, like spirits of an ancient past, invisibly circulate within established places, forming embodied spaces full of life.

The way spirit is used here has a versatile character; it represents a mediating force, a ghost of the past, and an incarnation. Spiritual spaces converge in that they transcend the structures of place of IKEA. The stories told about IKEA transcend place by making it part of varying pasts and beliefs in Malmö and Shanghai. In line with the fickle character of the spirit, images of IKEA produced in spiritual spaces are more heterogeneous than those spaces referred to previously. What they have in common, however, is that they construe images of IKEA as a form of modern superstition: sorcery – a haunting shadow of the past or haunted by the past.

## Sorcery

The first image of spiritual spaces concerns IKEA as sorcery, the use of spirits that produce unnatural effects in the store in order to achieve economic gain. On a winter's evening in Malmö, Olof and I seated ourselves around his dining table to talk about his photos. Olof brewed coffee and I brought muffins from a bakery close by. From a hideaway on the top shelf in one of the tall integral closets typical for apartments built in the 1920s, Olof's cat watched me throughout the interview. One of the stories Olof told was about his friend's visit to the IKEA store. It went something like this:

Olof: Some time ago a friend got, um, an IKEA psychosis. We went to the IKEA store because he was going to buy some small things. I cannot even remember what it was. It started already when we arrived on the second floor, where IKEA states "Look, here is some really cheap stuff." Before we had even passed the sofa department, he had grabbed a yellow bag and filled it with tea candles and other "damn cheap stuff", as he put it. As we passed the bookshelves, he told me, "Olof,

this is not working, we need something else to carry this in.” Up until then he had just randomly grabbed things, before we had even reached the things he came there to buy. In the end, I pushed a trolley, while he carried two yellow bags filled with stuff, though he was only going there to buy some cups or a lamp. I cannot remember what it was. When we arrived at the check out area, the speakers in the ceiling announced: “Bing Bong. It is now closing time and we ask our consumers to calmly complete their shopping.” At the checkout, he put all the products on the conveyor. The cashier said, “Okay, that adds up to X thousand crowns.” He looked in his wallet and discovered that he did not have enough money. He turned to me, “Olof do you have any money?” I replied, “No, I don’t have that much money on me.” At that time, there were no cash machines inside the IKEA store. He went to find a cash machine, but after some time he came back without having had any luck. When he saw all the stuff on the conveyor he began to realise the madness of it. So, he started to put away things that he did not really need, while the cashier irritatingly pressed the “deduction button”. Half an hour after closing time, we came out of IKEA. There is something strange with this IKEA psychosis, where one starts grabbing things just because they are so cheap.

In Olof’s story, the IKEA store’s narrative captivates his friend. He loses himself in the store and loses control of what he is doing there. By assuming the character of the hero in the quest narrative of the store, who diligently follows the prepared way, the friend appears psychotic in Olof’s eyes. The friend is described as someone who is not able to control his actions; the quest narrative takes over his agency. The analogy to a narrative of being possessed by a holy spirit is close to hand.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2, 1-4)

The Acts of the Apostles, also referred to as The Acts of the Holy Spirit, describes instances where the spirit establishes a connection between God and human by taking possession of mind and body. In the excerpt, the spirit arrives suddenly, as an unexpected gift, without prior notification and without the disciples asking or wishing for it. It takes possession of the body and the individual’s ability to speak and think,

not unlike how Olof describes his friend's transformation inside IKEA. The store somehow made him lose control over himself and it took over his agency to act. In this telling, the image of IKEA emerges as something beyond the consumer's control. Siv told a story parallel to Olof's about her fiancée's performance in the store.

Siv: I like to shop at IKEA but Anders gets so stressed when we are there. He says that the place makes him nervous. For example, if we are going to buy a bed, he just wants to take the bed and leave. Then, when we pass the plants, he says, "Should we take a plant? Okay, let's take a plant and leave." I like to stroll around in peace and quiet and look at things. Perhaps I'll have a coffee in the restaurant and pick up some small things, like candles and cushion covers, while I am there. But just wants to leave, "Take it and let's go!" (Laughter)

Siv narrates her fiancée's visit to an IKEA store as stressful. She feels that Anders wants to get out of the store as soon as possible, since he displays an almost panicky sentiment when at the store. Anders wants to take what he needs and leave the store as quickly as possible. He brings to mind Lefebvre's writing about a driver who

is concerned only with steering himself to his destination, and in looking about sees only what he needs to see for that purpose; he thus perceives only his route, which has been materialised, mechanized and technized, and he sees it from one angle only – that of its functionality: speed, readability and facility. (1991, p. 313)

According to the quote, space becomes defined in common sense terms by the perceptions of the abstract subject. Siv makes sense of Anders' acting as stressful; indicating that his behaviour is not typical for how she thinks an IKEA store should be experienced. Siv's story is thus an inverse version of Olof's. Anders, then, is possibly someone trying to prevent Siv and himself from being immersed by the store. In both cases, the store is made sense of as a place which affects consumers mentally. In Shanghai, Xu Mei Jing describes the nature of the store in the following way:

Xu Mei Jing: We have actually spent several thousand Yuan at IKEA. IKEA is by no means cheap. When you begin to shop, it quickly adds up. When you are there you always want to buy things, even if you do not really need them. Everything looks *so* nice. [...] This is the cleverness of IKEA. In the end, this becomes a lot of money.

In contrast to the heroic spaces, the cleverness of IKEA's is here narrated as being related to deception. IKEA is clever because the store is organised in way to make consumers buy more. While Xu Mei Jing knows about this trick, she does not seem able to defend herself against it. These stories could be read as being about losing one's agency in the store. While Xu Mei Jing admits that the store exhibits the kind of deception which makes her buy more than she needs, Olof and Siv point in the same direction by telling about their friends. As noted in Chapter 5, the IKEA store is a spatial manual of where and how to insert one's body into the sequence that structures the visit. The body of the consumer moves along the pathway, grabs things along the way, eats, test products, and so on. The effect of the inscription of the body in a place is that the body is transported to a different space, a here and now, where there is no room for past experiences or memories.

In her prose-novel about the factory, *L'excès-l'usine* (*Factory Excess*), the poet Leslie Kaplan (1982) describes the elimination of memory in factory work, and the reduction of the individual to a collective of workers. Throughout the novel, she uses the pronoun *one* to indicate that there is no room for embodied experiences, and that the self is reduced to an abstract representation. The lack of memory and history also leads to experiences of losing agency and the feeling that some higher force is controlling one's route through the store. The informants described this as though some higher power that they did not know how to deal with was at work in the store. Therefore, the store works almost like a kind of sorcery practiced by wizards and witches that make consumers lose themselves when being addressed en masse. Modern times contain superstitions such as those which, for instance, make sense of the market or environmental disasters by reference to certain higher powers beyond our control. "Let us wait and see if the market recovers," we say, as if present circumstances had nothing to do with us. We allocate current conditions, and our destinies to a realm beyond ourselves.

## The Herd and the Facade

In describing IKEA, Johan voices frustration connected to his being reduced to no more than a mass consumer. Johan works as a stockbroker at a large firm in Copenhagen, and describes himself as

value-conservative. When I meet him, he is about to move into a new apartment in a recently renovated old factory in central Malmö. Some of the photos, he shows me, are taken of the new apartment.



Photo 31. “Jante-law”

Johan: I have a real problem with the sort of “jante law” mentality we have in Sweden ... the sort of attitude that says that you should not stick out from the common herd and not think that you are any better than other people. I guess that this is my problem with IKEA. If you do not fit their blueprint – their ideas – then they cannot help you. Let me give you an example ... I tried to buy a cloth roll-blind from IKEA for the windows in the new apartment, but they said “No, sorry, we cannot help you, we do not have the size you want.” [...] They could not sew together two pieces of cloth so that they became wide enough! They just said “No! You have to go somewhere else.” (Silence. Johan looks at me with a surprised face) So, they lost a customer because I went somewhere where they could do it for me.

In the marketplace at the store, IKEA offers some degree of service in tailoring cloth and curtains. The windows in Johan’s new apartment, however, did not comply with any of IKEA’s standardised measures. To be addressed as standardised and included anonymously a larger group of consumers expected to have the same common needs and wants, in a standardised manner, seems to upset Johan. He sees IKEA as an example of the Law of Jante (*Jantelagen*), which he thinks characterises a general Swedish outlook. This mentality is described as being

characterised by treating everyone in exactly the same way, nothing more and nothing less. People are supposed to stick with the herd and not think too highly of themselves. The Swedish ethnologist Åke Daun describes the Law of Jante in the following way:

A Swede wants to be capable and industrious - and not only in the context of work, since the *duktighet* ideal encompasses the whole person. The situation is complicated by another notion, namely, that you are nothing by virtue of being an individual; on the contrary, you should not think “you are anything special.” This cultural trait, called the “law of Jante” (*Jantelagen*) is also a significant component in Norwegian and Danish culture. Personal worth is gained not least as a reward for being *duktig*, industrious, hardworking, but one is admonished not to forget that “pride goes before all”. Such is the Scandinavian attitude. (Daun 1996, p. 52)

The Swedish word *duktig* roughly means ability, industry, and sedulity. The word refers both to a skill and a moral expectation (ibid.). Against the background of the definition of the Law of Jante, we are able to understand how IKEA is embodied in Johan’s storytelling as reducing consumers to a common herd. Since this mentality is related to what it means to be Swedish, IKEA is constructed as an attitude that consumers can do little to change. Consumers’ homes need to correspond approximately to IKEA’s model; otherwise the furniture and products will not fit. Informants generally did not express overtly the Swedishness of IKEA, yet the association with the Swedish geography is evident in stories, especially among male informants in Malmö. My interview with Lars, for instance, coincided with the broadcasting of two documentaries on Swedish television about IKEA’s founder, Ingvar Kamprad, which led us to speak about him.

Lars: I cannot say that I associate IKEA with Kamprad, but since I recently saw the documentary, it is difficult not to think about him um, and he has really, or, I mean, he does everything to come forward as “smålandsk”.<sup>20</sup> It feels like a façade or perhaps he is really economical and all but I feel that, um, it’s about building the brand. I cannot

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<sup>20</sup>In Swedish *smålandsk* sometimes refers stereotypically to persons being economical or cheap; it is associated with people from the landscape Småland. In the IKEA store, the children’s play area is named Småland, which literally means “small land”.



believe that he is so damn cheap (Laughter) that his home is like that. It is just too much. I do not buy it. But he is very clever, that's for sure. He makes himself part of the brand. The documentary is all about "um, let's build the brand. Let's show everyone how cheap he is." (Laughter) Come on, agree with me here. Have you seen them? That's what they are about!

C: IKEA is cheap?

Lars: No, but they are price conscious and to an extent that is about being cheap. I don't know, they are careful about showing that they manufacture furniture in the most restrictive manner to maximise the utilisation of resources. The message of the documentary fits the blueprint of IKEA perfectly; sometimes it is just too much. He has been very good at building the company and that's probably why he act the way he does. He is careful about keeping the myth alive.

Lars elaborates on the image of IKEA by considering Ingvar Kamprad, whom he regards as a clever representative for the retailer. Kamprad becomes an illusion, a narrative character that is not real. Behind the invented façade, Kamprad is someone else. If the store was previously seen as casting a magical spell on those who entered, in Lars' tale we find the practitioner of sorcery, the figure of the sorcerer. The store summons spirits of enchantment and the Law of Jante, whereas Kamprad harnesses the spirits of the land in Småland. He embodies the values of the IKEA store narrative, being a model example of the hero who struggles to reduce costs by saving time and space. However, while being synonymous with the economic use of resources, Kamprad is simultaneously one of the richest men in the world. Kamprad is constructed as someone who enforces the facade of IKEA as cost-conscious, while hiding the wealth he accumulates in so doing. The way that geography becomes central to the way that IKEA's image is constructed is conveyed in Song Lei's narration. When I met Song Lei she was about to move from her studio apartment to a four bedroom apartment with her fiancée.



Photo 32. “Style not quality”

Song Lei: I am very fond of the children’s furniture at IKEA; like this drawer; it is cute. Um, for the new apartment, however, we plan to buy most of the furniture from *Mei Ke Mei Jia*. Do you know the store? It is located on *Huaihai* Street. They used to export their furniture overseas but due to customs regulations, they only sell furniture in Shanghai at the moment. I like IKEA’s style but for the new apartment I want furniture that can last for at least 5-10 years. In my view, the quality of IKEA’s products was lowered when they started to manufacture products in China. You know, furniture manufactured in China is of poor quality. It is because we have not had as much experience of furniture manufacturing as European or American companies.

Song Lei draws on geographies to explain to me why she will not bring IKEA’s furniture and products with her to the new apartment. The image of IKEA is constructed through an ambivalent unfolding. On the one hand, she enjoys the appearance of IKEA’s products; on the other she regards them as poor quality products. The ambivalence is linked to a belief that Chinese manufacturers are not as skilled as the European and American ones. Not unlike in Lars’ narration, IKEA is made sense of as having a façade, but no substance. Displaying one thing while hiding another, as this seems to suggest is the case, connects to the image of IKEA as sorcery. Yu further elaborates on this theme in the way she makes sense of why she only buys “small things” at IKEA.

Yu: When I go to IKEA, I seldom buy the big furniture. I only buy small things like towels, and small things for storage, etc. As regards the

furniture there ... I heard from some friends that it looks good but that the quality is not very reliable. I mean, the furniture does not last for very long. Maybe it is because you have to put them together by yourself. I have never tried, so I do not know, but I have heard from others that if you do not assemble it properly, they easily fall apart. That is why I have a perception of IKEA being not a furniture company but more um ... style and decoration.

In Yu Nan's storytelling, the myth of IKEA is created through a principle of displaying a facade without substance. IKEA is linked to style and decoration, rather to reliable, quality furniture. Her storytelling links itself to stories about sorcery in the sense that IKEA is described as a facade without very much under it. It creates an illusion, which falls apart when the furniture is assembled. The patterns in her storytelling resemble those about how Odysseus is torn between Athene and Poseidon who respectively aid him and makes things difficult for him. Analogously, IKEA is torn between facade and substance.

## Haunting

Monika needs a sofa, a small sofa that she has caught sight of in the Swedish national epic, the IKEA-catalogue. Shopping at IKEA is a drama in several acts. Monika spends two seconds test-sitting, it is lower and considerably "softer" than she expected. She disappears into the upholstery, and when she gets up the seat slides forward and the backrest falls down in the gap: approved. Are you not going to try that as well? Mum points at a model that seems more robust. That is not cool! The cover that Monika wanted is out of stock. The only one in stock is a green alternative that she absolutely does not want, but which she buys. (Flygt 2001, p. 219)

The well-established position of IKEA in Swedish society is depicted in Torbjorn Flygt's (2001) novel *Underdog*.<sup>21</sup> Flygt narrates the social transformation of the 1970s through the eyes of the boy Johan who grows up during this period in a suburb of Malmö. The title, *Underdog*, alludes to the perspective from below that Johan has of the world. It tells about a continuous struggle to prove oneself to others through

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<sup>21</sup>In 2001 *Underdog* received one of Sweden's most important literary prizes, The August Award.

hard work and thrift. *Underdog* describes a period in the history of Malmö when heavy industries were closed down, and people had to re-educate themselves to get new jobs in the new white collar sector. At the centre of the story is “mum”, who works at a sock factory, is fired, and then re-educates herself to become an administrator. Johan’s older sister Monika also eventually educates herself to be a doctor and makes the transition across classes that became possible for an increasing number of Swedes during this period. In an episode about buying an IKEA sofa, the depiction of IKEA becomes a means of describing the furnishing of an apartment and the conflicts involved in such circumstances. There is tension between Monika’s lifestyle and that of her mum, and between what Monika wants and what IKEA can offer. This is all embodied in the portrayal of the IKEA visit and the purchase of a sofa.

Mum belongs to a generation where hard work is most important and she has difficulties reconciling with Monika’s pleasure-seeking lifestyle. The IKEA sofa returns on two other occasions in the novel, until it finally breaks down and is replaced by the old sofa that Mum has had for twenty-seven years. In this sense, new and old tastes about furniture and decoration in Sweden during the 1970s follows the same pattern of narration as that about tensions between the old and new generations which is told in Shanghai. Among Malmö informants today, however, IKEA is haunting. Informants remember IKEA as part of their childhood. Lars works as an IT consultant at a telecom company. He gets to travel a lot, and his income is relatively high. He recently bought his two-room apartment in one of Malmö’s more expensive areas. The area in his apartment which Lars considers most complete is the kitchen where IKEA products have been removed

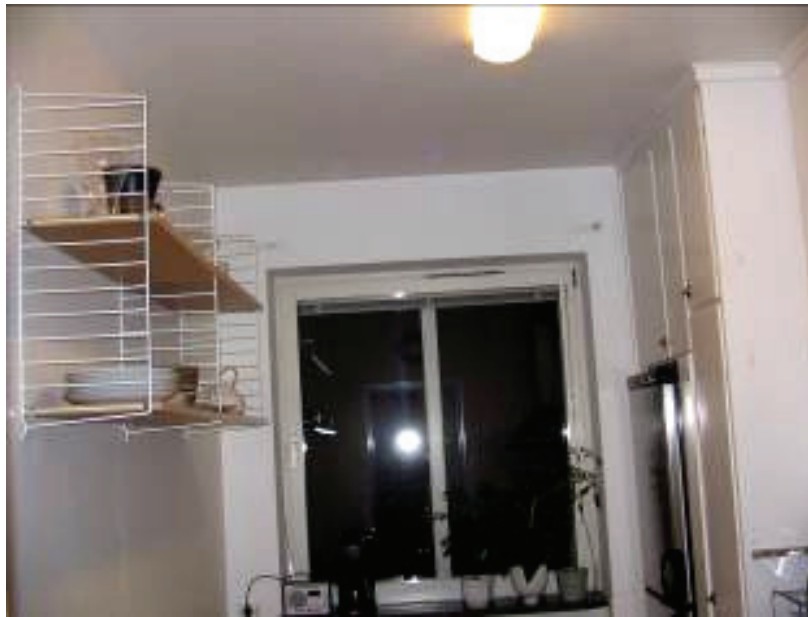


Photo 33. “Almost perfect”

Lars: um ... I guess it was after I came home after studying abroad that I began to think about what I buy. Before that, I did not have that much money and I did not see furniture as an investment. It was more like buying stuff from IKEA, that is to say, the cheapest. The thing is also that, um (silence), my family did not have that much money when I grew up. Not that we were poor, and had “soil floors” or anything, but since we did not have that much money, we bought most of the things at IKEA. So, I guess [...] now, when I have money, I want to buy other things. I am pretty satisfied with the kitchen, where I do not have one thing from IKEA ... well ... expect for a stool and, of course, some glasses, porcelain, and such things. The chairs were daring for me to buy since they are in plastic. I really like them.

C: Where did you buy them?

Lars: Olsson & Gerthel. They were super expensive, probably 2,500 crowns each, um perhaps a little less, but around these figures. I try to buy other things that just the cheapest, but my whole body shakes when I do it.

Using IKEA products brings to life certain memories of childhood, of what it was like growing up with IKEA furniture. Nowadays, Lars looks for furniture at the fashionable interior design store Olsson & Gerthel. Lars’ story connects to Flygt’s novel in its description of a transition from growing up with a single mum to rising in position on

his own. In this transition from one state to another, IKEA becomes involved as the marker of a past with which one wants to break.

In an essay, the sociologist Ann Game (2001, p. 233) considers the sacred qualities of everyday space using a reading of Bachelard (1958). Sacred spaces, for Game, are spaces where the image of the past resounds with echoes. The now and the then are experienced all at once; before and after depend on one another. An experience of newness and surprise is simultaneously an experience of the archaic, without which, Game argues, we cannot be fully alive. The images that persist within us are a blend of prehistory, memory, and legend. When we dream, we travel to the motionless childhood of primitive images. In this context, the dream of childhood should not be mistaken, Game reminds us, for the reality of actual childhood (p. 235). We are dealing with reliving childhood, heightened by the presence of a living past.

In archaic societies, history is continuously relived through religious rituals, such as sacrifices to the dead ancestors. Historical events are performed orally rather than reified in written texts; events are re-enacted each time they are retold. In contrast to the modern, the past does not hang over us, or influence our expectations of the future. Rather, the past circulates like restless spirits who cannot find the sleep of death.<sup>22</sup>

In referring to this past as childhood, we do not refer to the facts of childhood, but to something that is greater than reality. There is no casual connection between our childhood, adult life, and the archetypal child. As an illustration, Game provides the statement: “It is only now, as I grow old, that I feel young.” (p. 277) The youth experienced in the present, she argues, is in the realm of primitive knowledge and has little to do with how old one actually is. Chronological and irreversible times are here made to coexist, which means that feeling in the present is not a repetition of the past, but something more alive than that. The musician Nils grew up in a house in the university town of Lund,

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<sup>22</sup>A poem by the nineteenth century Chinese writer Gong Zizhen (1838) reads: “When our ancestors invented poetry, ghosts wept in the night. When people learned to read, their worries all arose. I’m not scared of ghosts, and I’m also worry-free. But at night as I amend this ancient text, my autumn lamp glows green. (Zeitlin 1993, p. xiv).

located near Malmö. When I ask him if he has any particular memories of assembling IKEA products, he starts to laugh.

Nils: Excuse me? (Laughter) What? Of course, I do. It is like ... like ...  
Yes, I do. Is that of interest to you or? (Laughter)

C: Yes. (Laughter)

Nils: I guess that it started when I lived with my parents, in a house (*villa*) that is. We had mostly IKEA furniture when I grew up, which meant that, if there was, for instance, a new bookcase, I had to help assemble it. It is actually a lot of fun, it is a bit of a puzzle and, um, well ... it is perhaps being something of a *medel-svensson*.<sup>23</sup> Sunday pastime assembling a bookcase from IKEA and all that. I definitely experience it as something positive. I think, or perhaps I am over-interpreting now, that the whole thing with putting together IKEA furniture reminds me of my childhood, when my brother and my father and I used to join forces in assembling. As I recall it, we had a lot of fun doing it. It was a project that we did together. The two or three of us put furniture together and it went fairly quickly and easy. It was just like, “Can you hand me this and that screw ...” and then it was done. Of course, some things can be tricky to assemble, but this is something that I have noticed in the most recent five or ten years. Particularly the big things are tough, and it can be both difficult and heavy to assemble everything by oneself. Back in the 80s, however, I thought everything from IKEA seemed great, but perhaps I was lucky.

C: ... and a child?

Nils: Yes, it is possible that my dad took care of that which did not work out. But, then again, um, no I still think that it was something positive.

Assembling is here told from the viewpoint of childhood, constructing IKEA as a pleasurable haunting memory. Childhood is important for the type of intimate spaces that we later construct at home. The feeling of that “I know this already” indicates an extra temporality of experience, Game argues. The feeling of belonging in this way, she calls sacred, since it ties us to a primitive mythological realm and connects us to the cosmos. She states that our memories of archaic childhood images, the intimate essence of memory, transcend all the memories of

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<sup>23</sup>Swedish term for the average Swede.

all later similar images. In Bachelard's (1994, p. 3) words, these images constitute a safe space for dreaming. They protect the dreamer, which in Game's reading means that we are located in a sacred space connected to the cosmos and the gods. It is in relation to the merging of the old and the new that I think the image of IKEA needs to be seen in these stories. Universal images of protected intimacy come to life in spaces where the old and new come together.

## Haunted

In Shanghai, a different kind of childhood memory about IKEA's products was often expressed. There, the image of IKEA was the direct opposite of the one in Malmö. Instead of a haunting memory, in Shanghai the image of IKEA was haunted by a living past. For example, it was common to set IKEA against the traditions of the past and to make it part of a story about the new and the old in Shanghai. Xu Mei Jing lives together with her husband and her mum in an apartment consisting of four rooms and a kitchen. Xu Mei Jing's husband has done all the interior decorating of the apartment.



Photo 34. "Green wall"



Xu Mei Jing: We bought this clock at IKEA. My husband's idea was to make the reading room darker with the green colour. My mum was strongly against it and they even quarrelled. "Are you mad? The room will look like a post office," she shouted. But my husband persisted and did it in his way. Now, I think that this room is most unique of all the rooms. In Western movies I have noticed that there are more colours on the walls at home. Here it is common to choose discrete colours like light yellow or white. Otherwise, my mum is the exception: an old person who likes IKEA. She has been with us to IKEA twice and she enjoyed it. If you want to buy something though, it is best to not bring her. She is, um, a more careful shopper than my husband and I. Usually, I think, older people feel that IKEA is too expensive. They also like heavier and darker furniture; we call it *hongmu* (mahogany). To me it looks stuffy but they think it represents real quality. I guess the value resides in the long-lasting quality. This type of furniture was often inherited from generation to generation. My grandmother, for example, has a cabinet that her grandmother once had, and so on. IKEA is simple, convenient, and a lot of good things, but it is not long-lasting. I am just guessing here because I haven't really talked to the old people about why they do not shop at IKEA (Laughter).

In Xu Mei Jing's home, there are mostly smaller products from IKEA, like clocks, cups, and pillows, while larger furniture is bought at a local competitor, which Xu describes as the Chinese version of the Danish firm Bo Concept. Her story demonstrates how IKEA is constructed by being set up against the antique furniture of her grandparents. A difference between informants in Sweden and China was that in Shanghai informants like Xu Mei Jing lived with their parents. The home therefore had a different role. The informants that I spoke to belonged to the growing upper middle-class in Shanghai, which is the first generation to buy apartments since the de-regulation of housing in the 1990s (Yin, 2008). They stated that their taste was very different from that of their parents, and IKEA was used to illustrate the differences between the old and the new ways. Yu Nan intertwines her present form of living with that of her childhood.

Yu: At the time when I grew up ... the whole country was going through a transition from being an underdeveloped country to a modern one. All the people I know grew up in homes with only the most basic facilities and furniture. From what I can remember, every home in the area I lived as a child was the same. The doors were always open so you could run around, as you wanted. When you are a child this is okay, I always had someone to play with. For my parents, I

imagine, it must have been hard not to have any privacy. People kept track of each other in different way than now. Perhaps that is why I never feel that it is an intrusion on my privacy when people come over and stay with us. Our door is always open, and I want it to be that way. I know that this is changing. People are more reluctant to invite and visit one another. I mean, when I grew up, all the children in the whole apartment building knew each other. Their parents knew each other, and had been to each other's homes. Now it is very different, people are lonelier. *But* I am inviting my next-door neighbours to our apartment this weekend (Laughter).

C: Are your parents living in the area you grew up in?

Yu: They are still there. They have their own preferences and style of decorating. They know that we have spent a lot of money, over 100,000 RMB to decorate the apartment, and they do not understand how we can do that. When my mum saw the apartment, she said that she could not see any decoration because to her it is only a couple of white walls and some furniture. She cannot see that it is decorated.

Yu's memories of the past are brought into and relived in the present. She relates the organisation of the apartment to her childhood. Her narration is informative of the tension between the new and the old in Shanghai. She touches upon things like the differences between generations, and the changing conceptions of public and private in China. Private housing is a relatively recent phenomenon in China. In the past referred to by Yu Nan, the home was not considered to be a private space, since it was often shared among relatives belonging to different generations. Therefore, the functionality of home decoration was given more importance than fashion (Yin, 2008). This also meant that until now, due to the isolated conditions of the retail sector, furniture was typically made by local craftsmen.

The kind of historical organisation of the home referred to by Yu Nan still exist in Shanghai. Usually, these apartments are located in the older neighbourhoods of the city, the alley houses or *longtang*s. In literary works, the *longtang*s represent a form of nostalgia for the loss of a street life in Shanghai; they are about to disappear with the reconstruction of the city and the spread of high-rises replacing its older parts. In her acclaimed novel of Shanghai, *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, the author Wang Anyi (2008) foregrounds the city as village life in the *longtang*s.

What moves you about the longtang of Shanghai stems from the most mundane scenes: not the surging rush of clouds and rain, but something steadily accumulated over time. It is the excitement of cooking smoke and human vitality. Something is flowing through the *longtang* that is unpredictable yet entirely rational, small, not large, and trivial – but then even a castle can be made out of sand. It has nothing to do with things like “history,” not even “unofficial” history: we can only call it gossip. (2008, p. 7)

In Wang’s Shanghai, history is the gossip that fills the streets; the pigeons that fill the roofs carrying secret messages across the city. Resembling the history of archaic societies, the story of Shanghai develops from the embodied experiences of its citizens and cannot be found in written documents. During my stay in Shanghai, I rented an apartment on the twenty-second floor of a high-rise located in the midst of an old neighbourhood under renovation. For some reason, the firm undertaking the renovation had ran out of money. At least this was the version told by the guards at the entrance to my building. They lived in the neighbourhood but were not worried about having to move. It was a rumour that they had heard for over ten years.

From the window in my living room, the contrast between the new and old Shanghai crystallised itself. From the window, I saw the narrow winding alleys and the miniature street vendors selling vegetables and cigarettes. At night the area surrounding my building became dark. Around it the neon signs of advertisements and retail stores that are part of the glittering shimmer of the new Shanghai became visible. One of the informants that I recruited outside the IKEA store lived with her parents in a similar type of area. I am including her story here as a different kind of storytelling in which IKEA is largely absent. When I first met Hong at a teahouse to talk about the photos, she showed me two photos of an old closet that had been in her family for a long time, and of a knife stand with five knives from IKEA. Her fiancée told her that nothing else in the home was worth showing to a foreigner. After the interview, I accompanied her to the apartment where she lived with her parents.



Photo 35. "Complicated"

Hong: In recent years, people like the type of furniture IKEA sells. IKEA's way of decorating is very modern, straightforward, and easy to maintain. Our home does not have these types of furniture, because IKEA was not established here when my parents bought the furniture. Most of the furniture in our home is made by carpenters or inherited. As you can see, we have lots of furniture in the living room right now. My parents will probably move to another place in the near future and they do not yet know what they need to bring along.

C: When do you plan to move away from your parents?

Hong: Soon. (Laughter) My boyfriend and I have bought a new apartment in Pudong. At the moment, we are in the midst of planning how to decorate it, that is why my mum and I had gone to IKEA, when we met you. [...] I want more natural and cleaner furniture than my parents. They like the heavy old ones. My taste in furniture definitely differs from that of my parents: they are traditional and I am modern (Laughter). The traditional is very much like this closet with engravings. (points at Photo 35) I prefer less complicated furniture.

Hong sleeps behind the wooden closet in the larger room. The area between the closet and the wall creates a sheltered space for her bed. Beside the chest of drawers is a lower white bookcase, covered by a pink quilt. Hong lifts the quilt and reveals that the bookcase is packed with books. At the other end of the window is a newer wardrobe in light brown. Next to it is a darker bookcase with sliding doors in glass. On

the shelves, behind the glass, are books, ceramic figurines, foodstuff, shampoo, tea, and a couple of cartoon figures.

What distinguishes the organisation of Hong's home from most of the homes that I visited is the absence of a predictable order. This is to say that there is an absence of an order that creates borders through calculation. In the bookcase, for instance, things like photos, lamps, shampoo, foodstuff, plastic dolls, souvenirs, herbal medicine, and books are placed together. There is no particular division between them, no regularity in the way that they are placed. Hence, they appear to have been placed there randomly, for no particular reason. These are things that belong to categories one would expect to find in other spaces in the household. Shampoo is usually found in the bathroom, food in the kitchen, and so on. The impression that things were put there without a purpose occurs because the purpose was not visible to me. For Hong, who lives there, it presents a familiar order. It would, however, be difficult to abstractly organise the things in the bookcase into a general category, since their commonality is uncertain. This demonstrates that what we call disorder is constituted by not being spatially organised according to a coherent principle.

Disorder is that which is undefined. Things that are not ordered seem awkward because it is more difficult to define what they are. This also reveals the purity of geometric spaces. By marking the spaces between things, objects, and humans are defined in relation to one another. They are made into independent subjects and objects, each with its own place. Another home from which IKEA products were largely absent was that of Xu Wei. Like Hong's home, his was not typical for home organisation among IKEA consumers.

A couple of years ago Xu Wei moved back to Shanghai from the US and into the house where he once grew up. The house is located in one of the old colonial neighbourhoods and has a long history. Around the area, high-rises have been built and the sun only reaches the house two hours a day.

Xu Wei: Most of the old buildings will be torn down in Shanghai. This area is kept because the people who live here can afford to renovate their houses. The house belonged to my grandparents and was appropriated by the state during the Cultural Revolution. My grandfather was a silk trader in his youth and was labelled a capitalist

during this period. When I grew up, six families lived here. Each family had one room. At the end of the 1980s, the house was given back to my mum. By that time we had already lived in the States, so we rented the house. My mum wanted to sell it but I convinced her not to. Later we completely renovated the place and then I moved here. Originally, the communal kitchen was here in the hallway. I relocated it upstairs.

Where the kitchen had once been there are now two brown closets with wooden blinds for clothes, and the floor is covered with tiles. He leads the way up the brown wooden stairs to the second floor where the kitchen is now located, together with a bedroom, living room, and an adjacent workroom. We pass the bedroom, simply decorated with a large bed with a wooden frame and a linen closet in dark, solid wood that Xu Wei inherited from his grandmother. It is the same type of closet that Hong took a picture of in her home.

Xu Wei: I have found most of the furniture at antique markets. For example, um that divan is bought at the market close to Jing'an temple. If you have some knowledge about antiques, you can find real bargains here. It is insane to buy at IKEA when the carpenters can tailor-make furniture and install them for half the price. Guess what I paid for these bookcases?

C: 1000 Yuan?

Xu Wei: No, 400 for both bookcases. I drew them and then they made them for me.

The storytelling of Hong and Xu Wei are both similar and different. They illustrate the large disparity between social groups in Shanghai. In both stories, IKEA is relatively absent, albeit for different reasons. Their stories form the boundaries of the typical stories about IKEA in Shanghai and, therefore, also of IKEA's image.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, spiritual spaces were considered which produce images of IKEA as sorcery, as a haunting past, and as being haunted by the past. Together, I suggest, they convey an image of the retailer as *mythical*. I modelled the character of the spirit on the ambivalent relationship between gods and humans in *The Odyssey*. The relationship

is illustrated in the episode where Odysseus is torn between his patron Athene and his antagonist Poseidon. Spiritual spaces are marked by a similar ambivalence towards IKEA. The ambivalence involves IKEA as a helper or as a kind of sorcery, IKEA as reliable or just a façade, IKEA as a haunting memory of the past or haunted by the past. Images of IKEA pull in different directions, and, therefore, differences in culture and history are brought into the picture and made relevant here. The way that IKEA is told transcends the order of the place. The stories convey feelings of IKEA as either rooted in an historical past or, as in the case of sorcery, the lack of a history. Spiritual spaces construct the image of IKEA as a modern form of superstition. In spiritual spaces, the rational organisation of the store is turned into a hidden fiction. Because the geometry of the store narrative does not embrace lived time, seeking instead to steer the consumer in a particular route through signs and layout, it is experienced as lying beyond the control of consumers. Hence, the store is told as supernatural, and even dangerous.

The second image is inferred from stories that historicise IKEA, making it part of a past situated in the social development of Shanghai and Malmö. I suggested that these stories are about sacred spaces, where one feels recognition or belonging. In these spaces, the past comes to life and is relived in the present. The memories that one has of childhood merge with the stories about IKEA. For this reason, given the different histories of the cities of Malmö and Shanghai, images of IKEA vary the most when considered in these stories. This is best illustrated in the tension between the haunting and the haunted, which constructs IKEA in opposite ways. There is a temporal aspect of the differences in understanding IKEA, linked to the length of time involved in the institutionalisation of retailing in the two cities and related to different forms of time. In these stories different forms of time are made to coexist. It is possible to trace the kinds of time connected to the linearity of heroic spaces and the circularity of woven spaces, and the irreversible time that was found in relation to the images of haunting and haunted.

# Chapter 9

## Retailing Retold

Odysseus with his sturdy hands drew his purple cloak over his head and hid his handsome face, as he was ashamed to be seen weeping by the Phaeacians. Whenever the glorious minstrel paused in his song, he wiped the tears away and, removing the cloak from his head, reached for his two-handled cup and made libations to the gods. But whenever Demodocus started singing again, encouraged by the Phaeacian lords, who were enjoying the tale, Odysseus once more hid his face and sobbed. (Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 8, lines 85-92)

The purpose I had in mind when I began this text was twofold. First, the aim was to outline a narrative approach to understand the unfolding of international retail image (henceforward IRI) in the lived culture that could rethink the dominant view on the formation of image in retail internationalisation as a transfer. Second, I wanted to demonstrate how the narrative approach could be applied in a study of how consumers' assign a major international retailer meaning in everyday practice. Through the pages of this book I have argued that IRI is constructed in the way that retailing is made meaningful to consumers in everyday practice. To be able to account for the impact of retail marketing strategies on consumers' image construction, I proposed that consumers' meaning making should be seen as a form of spatial storytelling which reorganises the structure of a retail place so as to give it new significance. What then does this theoretical, methodological and empirical exploration tell us about the construction of IRI that we did not know previously? This chapter constitutes an attempt to sum up and extend the findings of the study and to explain why I have found expeditions into the fields of cultural studies and narrative theory necessary. To guide the consideration of the narrative construction of IRI as the way retailing is retold by consumers, I once



again use one of Cavarero's (2000, p. 17ff) readings of an episode in *The Odyssey*.

In the scene presented in the opening quote, Odysseus is seated incognito at the court of the Phaeacians. Hidden in a purple cloak, he listens to the song of a blind minstrel. The minstrel narrates the story of our hero's adventure: from the bloodstained plains of the Trojan War to the painstaking journey back to Ithaca. Upon hearing the song, Odysseus veils himself in his robe and weeps for the first time in his life. Through the minstrel's narration, the significance of Odysseus' actions is revealed to him. Suddenly, it is clear to him who he is. While situated in the midst of the events that compose the minstrel's song, he was not able to see the relationships among them. Therefore, he did not understand their significance. Only through the retrospective telling does he understand his own story and the point of his actions.

The task of the ancient storyteller was not to invent stories anew, but to retell them in a way that pleased his or her audience. The minstrel mediates and hands down stories, he does not author them. Therefore, Odysseus is able to encounter and recognize himself in the song. What moves Odysseus to tears, Cavarero argues, is that he hears his own story being told, but by another person, and for the first time in his life he realises who he is. It is only after listening to the minstrel that Odysseus can recount his own story to the Phaeacians (p. 26.). The conclusion Cavarero draws from this episode is that in order to know the meaning of one's life so far, the course of that life needs to be retold by another human being. Although suggested for humans, this may well work metaphorically to understand a retailer's image. In order to discover the images given to a retailer, it needs to be considered from the viewpoint of how it is retold in consumers' storytelling.

In the following, I summarise the construction and characteristics of the three spaces identified, and the kinds of images they enable. Then I outline the tensions between the retail place and these spaces. The aim is not to offer a comprehensive theory or methodology of how IRI is constructed, but to outline an alternative way of understanding this process from a narrative perspective. Finally, I discuss the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of the present study.

## Three Dimensions of IRI

In the analysis of how consumers in one domestic market and one foreign market, located in Sweden and China, made sense of the furnishing retailer IKEA, I demonstrated how consumers' tactics gave rise to three spatial dimensions of IRI. These spaces were delineated by means of three different temporalities illustrated by three literary figures constructed on the basis of *The Odyssey* and traced in contemporary Swedish and Chinese fiction.

Three typical spaces of IKEA were identified in consumers' storytelling and presented by means of the three characters of the hero, the weaver, and the spirit. The heroic, woven, and spiritual spaces were used as comprehensive labels to denote three different plots or tensions in consumers' storytelling. Table 2 provides a summary of how the three spatial dimensions of IRI are constructed.

Table 2 Three dimensions of IRI

<b>Narrative dimension</b>	<b>Heroic</b>	<b>Woven</b>	<b>Spiritual</b>
<b>Plot</b>	Establishing place	Iterating place	Transcending place
<b>Temporality</b>	Linear	Circular	Parallel
<b>Spatiality</b>	Homogeneous	Fluid	Heterogeneous
<b>Nature of IRI</b>	Stable	Shifting	Arbitrary
<b>Typical images of the international retailer</b>	Reason	Routine	Mythical

The characters typify tensions involved between place and space in consumers' storytelling. The actions of a character in a story reveal

conflicts around which the plot revolves. The plots related to Odysseus' establishment of reason, Penelope's weaving routines, and the transcendental element in *The Odyssey* in the relationships between the gods and humans. In turn, these practices were found to organise three spaces in and through which images of IKEA emerged as novel, routine, and mythological.

The three spaces were often found to co-exist within the same storytelling, which is why they should be seen as dimensions of IRI, rather than as separate from one another. The analysis followed a cumulative logic, so as to be able to trace the overlapping of the spaces in consumers' storytelling. It begins with describing how the order of the retail place is established at home and moves towards how it is transcended. In order to situate the ways the retailer was retold in a time and place, I traced these plots to historical narratives in Sweden and China, such as, for instance, the reformation of the home, to works in the Swedish and Chinese literary traditions.

The heroic, woven, and spiritual spaces correspond roughly to the established concepts of space as homogenous, fluid, and heterogeneous. These concepts are, however, used to denote how meaning is constructed in a more general sense, which is why they need to be further specified. What I call here homogenous space resembles what Lefebvre (1991) calls abstract space (see Chapters 2 and 5), which signifies a space which is planned according to a geometry where time and space collapse into one another. Abstract space tends towards homogeneity and the elimination of difference. Yet, abstract space harbours contradictions which generate alternative spaces within it. In this way heterogeneous space is parallel to Lefebvre's category of differential space that attempts to resist the geometry of abstract spaces by means of different experiences of time, leading to the creation of alternative meanings. Fluid space corresponds to Mol and Law's (1994) depiction of a particular form of social space, the boundaries of which shift like those of a liquid. Fluid space generates meanings which are shifting and situationally contingent.

The three spatial dimensions of IRI identified in this study tell us something about how IRI evolves over time. McGoldrick (1998) argues that consumers learn the facets of an image and that image tends to develop in a positive direction when trust is established between a

retailer and its consumers. The three spatial dimensions, identified here, indicate the reorganisation of place in consumers' storytelling at different stages in the temporal development of image. Homogenous space was found more often in Shanghai, where the retailer was newly established in the market, while the construction of fluid space was more frequent in Malmö, where the retailer had been established for a longer period of time. Heterogeneous space was found in both of the cities and was often produced in tensions between the old and the new, or between the rationally planned and the imagination. In the following, each of the spatial dimensions is explained in more detail.

## Homogeneous Space

The organisation of heroic spaces was generated through the tension of reason and irrationality between strategy and tactics. The tension was presented by means of the episode in *The Odyssey* in which Odysseus encounters the Sirens and struggles to maintain his reason and keep his natural instincts and impulses in check. Consumers' stories that organised this type of space were identified as being centred on the organisation of meaning according to patterns well-established in the modern era. The linearity of the use of IKEA in these stories was found to resemble the way that modern science seeks to box in knowledge and reduce complexity to sets of manageable categories. Consumers' categorization, division, and generalisation of space led to an unambiguous space with clear coordinates and boundaries, exemplified in how consumers made sense of using IKEA's products in terms of privacy and functional units for particular types of activities, and certain spaces in which to keep particular things. In homogeneous spaces, there is no ambiguity regarding functions and utility. The narrative organisation of events creates unambiguous spaces where each thing has its own place.

In the heroic spaces, consumers' stories of IKEA's furniture and products were found to resemble the way that IKEA constructs the store visit for the consumer. The image of IKEA which emerges in homogeneous spaces is similar to IKEA's image as conveyed in retail marketing strategies. Homogenous spaces are sanctioned by IKEA's in-store message, which provides advice on how, for what purposes, when, and by whom the products should be used. In the store there are

various instructions about how to use the products and furniture, and how to combine them with one another. There are also various indications of whom the products are intended for. In promoting practices of how to create order according to the division and functionality of space, IKEA supports the re-production of homogeneous space at home. In a sense, then, there are affinities with Hall's (1980a) hypothetical position of dominant reading in an encoding/decoding model (see Chapter 2). Dominant reading is based on the assumption that there are certain preferred meanings encoded in the television programmes that Hall used as examples. The reader who agrees with these meanings, Hall argues, operates within the dominant code of the programme. Given the affinities of place and space in heroic spaces, there are resemblances between homogenous space and the hypothetical position of dominant reading.

In narrative theory, homogenous space is commonly termed empty space and is defined as a deep structure found universally in all narratives. Experienced time is generally not included in this conception of space; instead, the narrative follows a linear temporal sequence. It gives an impression of a smooth narrative progression without complexities and ambiguities. Linear time is related to history as a basis for the development of new discoveries and findings. Similarly to Odysseus' curious search for challenges in his progress towards Ithaca, the linear concept of time originates in a view of history that during the eighteenth century was conceived of as a linear progression towards the future (Sand 2008, p. 172). Time was divided into units such as days, months, and years (Frykman and Löfgren 1979, p. 26). The linear movement of history grew from this thinking and understood history not only as progressing forward in time, but also towards new and better techniques and forms of knowledge. In the same vein, homogeneous spaces are created by making sense of the use of IKEA's products as leading to an increasingly efficient organisation and improvement of life at home. Consumers return to IKEA in an ongoing search for newer and better solutions.

Homogenous space thus reflects the organisation of public space and history. The way that this place was assimilated at home was traced to values that we tend to associate with the public realm, such as the right to private space, individuality, and the values of balance and symmetry

introduced by the reformation of the home in the early decades of the 1900s. The organisation of these spaces mirrors the historical and political development of the home in a Swedish context and the norms of this culture. On the other hand, these norms stem from a larger movement based on a scientific manner of organisation in general. After all, the place on which the organisation of the home was modelled was the factory. Operations of the factory have affinities with the way self-service retail stores are set up. Benjamin's (1999a) project on the arcades illustrates his mourning for a spatial order that has been lost in the spread of homogenous space in the modern city.

In the homogenous order images become equivalent to, and substitutes for, each other. The images of IKEA that emerged in these spaces was, therefore, relatively stable and differed the least between stories from Shanghai and Malmö. The homogenous spaces were found mainly in the Chinese sample, even if the case is not entirely clear-cut. Swedish consumers, for example, referred to IKEA using the retailer's vocabulary, which is a probable consequence of the long experience that Swedish consumers had of the retailer. In both Malmö and Shanghai, homogenous spaces created images of rationality, harmony, and order. What separated the nature of IRI in the Chinese sample was, however, that the homogenous order gave rise to images as something novel and different from what consumers in Shanghai understood to be the old Chinese way of organising home space. In contrast to McGoldrick's (1998) suggestion that early impressions of the international retailer result in neutral images, because consumers have had little experience of the retailer, the findings of this study indicate that images produced of an international retailer at a relatively early stage may also lead to images of novelty and something different from what one is used to. This is particularly so when the retail products on offer are tied to a new lifestyle or way of life that has not previously existed in the market.

## Fluid Space

Fluid spaces are organised through stories about how an established place is iterated through the circular process of creation, destruction, and recreation at home over time. The tension at the centre of storytelling concerns routine and renewal. The organisation of fluid spaces was modelled on the fictional character of Penelope who

struggles to simultaneously adapt to and resist a traditional order by engaging in the repetitive activity of weaving and unweaving. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus belongs to the public world of history and science, whereas Penelope belongs to the domestic world of child rearing and household chores. In front of her loom, Penelope silently attempts to circumvent a new marriage by engaging in the familiar and routinised activity of weaving. Her work does not instrumentally produce cloth, but it prolongs her time in freedom.

While Odysseus' domain is one of action and conquest, Penelope belongs to the domain of waiting and preserving. Yet, by keeping the throne safe for Odysseus, her actions reach into the realm of history. By preventing change, she accomplishes change. In front of the loom she is beyond the reach of the suitors, and perhaps also of Odysseus, her husband (Cavarero 1995, p. 13). In a similar way, consumers' practices at home reach into place by transforming the meaning of the retail products found at home. The iteration of the proper structure of place produces images tied to routine.

The relationship between Odysseus and Penelope mirrors the relationship between the retail store and the home. In previous retailing literature on image, the home is regarded as a sphere for the pure consumption of goods, where nothing of value is produced. Nothing seems to happen; yet something does happen. In being a site where place is turned into space and space into place, the home reaches into the store. Through the story, the place is re-imagined and re-assimilated, which has consequences for how the consumer acts in the store on the next visit to the store, because meaning informs and frames actions. The store will appear different, because it has acquired a different meaning. Therefore it will be acted on in a different way.

The temporality of fluid space, it was argued, is circular. In pre-modern societies, circular time is linked to farming and cultivating the earth, the changing of the seasons, the alternation between night and day, and the cycle of birth and death, giving and taking life (Frykman and Löfgren 1979, pp. 23-24). In contrast to the linear view of history tied to innovation, technological invention, and productive changes, the temporality represented by Penelope, who stays at home, is associated with stagnation and unproductive repetition. Nonetheless, in *The Odyssey* it is Penelope who is able to change repetition and deal with

more than a single time frame simultaneously (Sand 2008, p. 285). Penelope intervenes in the order that threatens her freedom; she does not passively accept her destiny, as Odysseus does. She reaches into temporal linearity by means of a circular time frame.

While fluid spaces could be traced in stories told in both cities, woven spaces were more common in Malmö than in Shanghai. In Malmö, IKEA informants had a longer experience of contact with IKEA. They had also invented tactics for what to do with old IKEA products that had been with them for long periods of time. IKEA's products were, for example, told about as rebuilt, washed, reused, inherited, thrown away, found in containers and repainted. The remaking of IKEA items provisionally prolongs their time in the home. Fluid spaces are thus about exploiting the force that the storytelling of using and reusing activate, in order to create change (ibid.). In the iterative practice of maintaining the structure of homogenous spaces, alternative images are brought into being. In being told about as something made and unmade, the image of IKEA changes. Many of these practices were not as relevant for consumers in Shanghai, where, in 2005, IKEA had been established for a little less than seven years.

Fluid spaces are created through habitual practices of consumption. In this context, something that is relevant is how long a period of time a retailer has been established in a particular market. A longer period corresponds to McGoldrick's Stage 3 of image development, where a consumer has had a longer period of repeated experience with the retail goods on offer and has begun to trust the retailer. In this stage, image is thought to be the most favourable. While studying the development of trust was beyond the scope of this study, what is possible to say in relation to this stage is that among Swedish consumers IKEA led an almost invisible existence at home. IKEA had become so integrated into everyday life that it often went unnoticed.

Weaving together different things, however, is also about unweaving other things, in a jointly repetitive circular movement. Fluid space derives its name from the way space behaves like a fluid, moving back and forth between inertia and change. Mol and Law (1994) argue that in fluid space it is impossible to determine identity once and for all. Similarity and difference come and go together in these spaces. Furthermore, fluids are mixtures that can sometimes, though not



always, be separated. The objects that are generated within these spaces, and the objects that generate them, are not well defined. This was demonstrated in the analysis using examples of consumers who noted that IKEA's presence was invisible in their homes. IKEA disappeared into the habitual circular patterns of action.

In an essay about technology transfer, Mol and de Laet (2000) argue that successful implementation of technology across different geographies depends on allowing technological inventions to act as a fluid. The example they give is of how a bush pump was adapted to local environments by transformations in its symbolic significance and material functions. Material reworking was made possible because of the lack of a patent on the pump, which opened up possibilities of making it work in alternative ways without changing its identity. Despite the many functions, expressions, and meanings given to the bush pump in the various locations that Mol and de Laet consider, the technology of the pump persists. Allowing for similar fluid shifts in the way that IRI is constructed across markets would mean that retailers would have to let themselves be retold in ways that allow for shifting spatialities. This might be done through the acknowledgement of uncertainties in the construction process of IRI by attending particularly to images that emerge in fluid spaces.

Parallels can be found between fluid spaces and the third hypothetical position that Hall argues that a reader can take in decoding a television programme. This third hypothetical position is the negotiated reading. Hall describes this position as a mixture of "adaptive and oppositional elements" that "acknowledge the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions" while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to 'local conditions'" (Hall 1980, p. 137). Negotiation thus involves incorporating or adapting the dominant structure into one's own situational context. Putting the television programme to work in accordance with the concerns of daily life creates a space where the dominant interests are negotiated in relation to one's own. The negotiated position involves a mismatch in communication whereby the intended message is transformed. This is close to how the construction of fluid spaces was found to occur. In daily use, the proper order of a place was iterated so as to transform the place, while still acknowledging the initial establishment of that place at home.

## Heterogeneous Space

In spiritual spaces we encounter forces that consumers feel they have little control over. Throughout the epic poem, Odysseus is torn between the wrath of the sea god, Poseidon, who takes every opportunity to interrupt his journey, and the goddess, Athena, who aids him in his progress forward. Thus, while Poseidon pulls him backwards, Athena pushes him forward. In the last analytical chapter, this tension was used to illustrate the organisation of heterogeneous spaces characterized by the parallel existence of different temporalities in terms of past, present, and future. In heterogeneous spaces the structure of a place was transcended by being bracketed in consumers' stories. The order of the place is transcended as it is made part of other narratives and used to meet local interests. Local temporalities become more important than the place itself.

Heterogeneous spaces are often associated with non-Western geographies and spaces created for mixed purposes, where seemingly contradictory expressions exist alongside one another to create an indistinct impression. For example, Lefebvre (1991) developed the notion of differential space on the basis of observations carried out on slums and *favelas* in Brazil. In these environments, he studied spaces in which the creativity of the excluded could form an alternative to the system of homogenisation of meaning in abstract space (Shields 1999, p. 184). In contrast to homogenous space, differential space localises and particularises meaning. Differential space, therefore, offers possibilities for the formation of counter-spaces, such as the festival, and the carnivalesque inversion of social order and revolt against the normative order.<sup>24</sup> Ways of altering ways of life, Lefebvre believed, could be found in the interrogation of the construction of meaningful space among those who are making neither history nor homogenous space, but among groups in society which are intentionally creating spaces which allow for other ways of life.

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<sup>24</sup>Lefebvre's conception of differential spaces involves much more complex reasoning concerning the relationship between a libidinal political economy and the unleashing of libidinal intensities in moments of revolt (Shields 1999, p. 184), something not discussed here.

Heterogeneous space is produced through a mixed temporality. In heterogeneous space the past, the lived present, and the future are experienced via a kind of simultaneity. In these spaces, heterogeneities and ambiguities of meaning are created. In both cities, IKEA became involved in different kinds of pasts, which I argue made its image more arbitrary in these spaces than in the other two. The way the retailer was situated in relation to other times and places produced images of IKEA as belonging to a mythological realm. This is because IKEA was imagined as being tied to historical events of a particular cultural tradition in the present. The mythological need not have anything to do with how IKEA products are actually used, or the actual historical events.

Consumers in both cities used IKEA products as a means of distinguishing themselves from previous ways of living. Among the Shanghainese informants, IKEA was commonly used to denote a different way of living in contrast to how the old way of life was imagined in the present. In these stories, there was also a particular nostalgic feeling that the old ways were now definitely lost. The transcendence of place in heterogeneous space was found in stories told in Shanghai where IKEA's products were almost absent, but where the informants were familiar with IKEA and had made visits to the store. This was done to demonstrate the differences between homogenous space and heterogeneous space and to show how images generated by these spaces confirmed one another as novel and mythological.

Among the Malmö informants, by contrast, IKEA was employed as a mythological relic that one needed to get rid of in order to lead the life one imagined for oneself in the present. The mythological theme was further underscored by the way the store experience was retold as mystically reducing a consumer's agency to act on his or her own. I interpreted this as a form of modern superstition according to which forces beyond one's control take over one's actions, comparable to how many economic terms are reified, ending up beyond one's control, as is the case, for example, with the mechanisms of the market, and the rise and fall of the interest rates.

The temporal development of images in heterogeneous space relates to all three of McGoldrick's (1998) stages of international image development. Heterogeneous space was produced in the stories of

informants who have had the longest experience with IKEA; they sometimes referred to IKEA products as something they grew up with. IKEA was here made sense of as a childhood memory, which influenced the use of the products in the present. In Shanghai, on the other hand, IKEA was seen in relation to childhood memories of a different kind of home organisation. Therefore, heterogeneous space is likely to exist at both the early and the later stages of image development. Childhood memories are important resources for making sense of both the novel and the old. The diversity of images in this space relates in a greater sense than the other two spaces to IKEA as an imaginary construct that informants pieced together from what they had seen in films, had heard in rumours, or remembered from childhood. Therefore, the images generated in this space transcend the order of place.

The way that images of IKEA were constructed parallels Hall's (1980a) second hypothetical position in the decoding of a message as that of opposition. From this position, a reader deliberately decodes the message in a manner contrary to the sender's intended meaning. Readers are able to reflect over and become aware of the codes operating in marketing messages, which may empower them to resist these messages. Especially when a retailer has been established for a longer period of time in a market, I would argue that this is likely to occur. However, similar tendencies were also found in the Shanghai sample, which may indicate either a general heightened ability to reflect over marketing communication among the people I talked to in Shanghai, or that the length of experience with the retailer is not that salient for the production of heterogeneous spaces.

## The Narrative Construction of IRI

The relation between the three spaces and their relation to place is characterized by a set of tensions. These tensions were expressed in the empirical material through the way that the spaces co-existed within the same informant's storytelling. The tensions within and between the spatial dimensions suggest a particular dynamic in the construction process of IRI. The concepts of strategy and tactics are well suited to capture this dynamic, since they are contingent on one another. While strategy refers to the planned retailing of goods in the demarcated place

of the store, tactics take the form of consumers’ storytelling about the experience of place, which informs the way that meaningful spaces are created within that place. The employment of strategy and tactics here suggest that narrativity has a theoretical relevance in the study of the construction of IRI. Figure 5 is an attempt to visualize the dynamics of the narrative construction of IRI on the basis of the tensions between the retail place and consumers’ lived spaces.

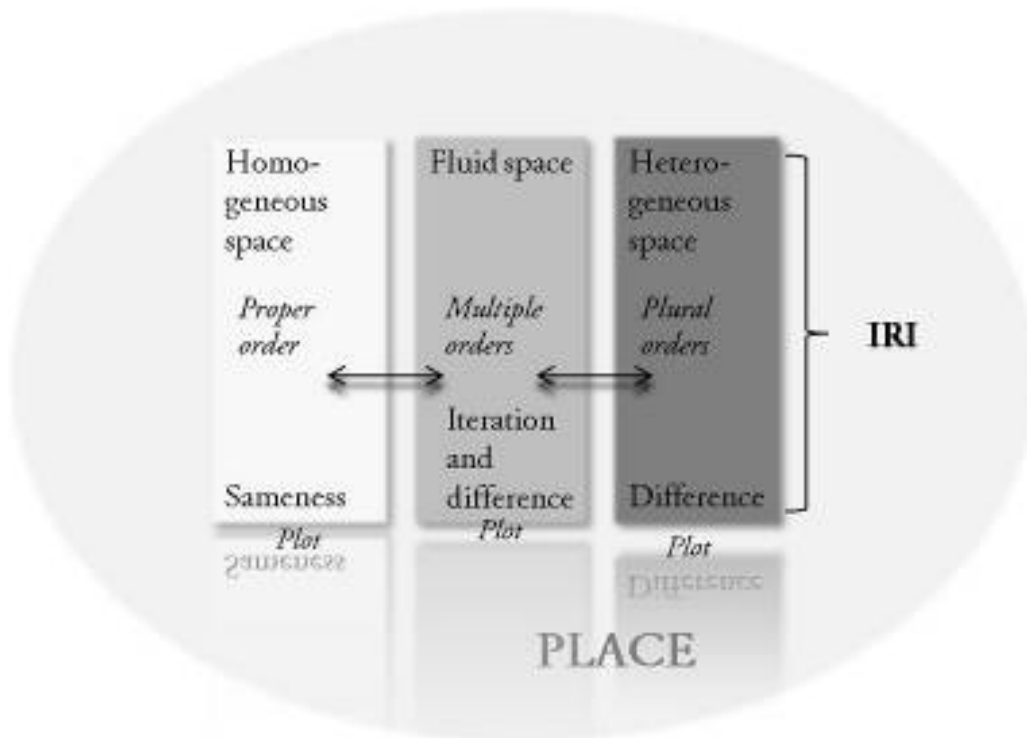


Figure 5 Tensions between the retail place and lived spaces

In the figure, the colours of the boxes indicate the three spaces. The distance between the coloured boxes and their reflection in place indicates the relationship between the retail place and the consumers’ spaces. Consumers’ tactics are constrained by the way strategies of retailing organise a place. The three spaces are therefore located within the order of the place and not outside it. The retail place involves a particular physical order, set up according to the law of the proper, understood in this thesis as a structural narrative, which was made sense of in consumers’ storytelling. The place is translated into these different spaces, which constructs images of the place in three different ways. In certain circumstances the meaning of the retailer is more stable than in others. Depending on the time frame, and the length of time that the

retailer had been established in the market, the construction of image varies.

Homogeneous space is the one whose order is most similar to the place and this is where images of the retailer are generated which are similar to the images encouraged in the place. In the fluid and heterogeneous spaces the sameness of image successively diminishes. There is an ongoing negotiation among these spaces, indicated by the reciprocal arrows binding them together. As demonstrated in the analysis of the empirical material, these spaces were found to co-exist within several of the informants' stories, indicating that they stand in reciprocal relationships to each other. The similarities in narrating IKEA across Malmö and Shanghai that characterize homogenous spaces presuppose the existence of the heterogeneous spaces. The differences in images of the retailer are the least and the greatest between these two spaces. Located between these spaces is fluid space, in which differences in images are created through the repetition of place, that is to say, by sameness.

In the construction of IRI, differences and similarities are reciprocal and contingent. This underscores de Certeau's (1984) observation that the planned places are involved in a relationship with the lived spaces in everyday life. The retail place, as exemplified in the case of IKEA, is set up according to a rational order that is well established in the modern era. Even though there are other orders that may occur more frequently in China, the order of the modern age is dominant because it pervades the modern sciences, the organising logic of capitalism, and the modern concept of history. In considering homogeneous spaces, it was argued that consumers' stories displayed a similar organisation as does this order. Because retailing is transported to other countries, this dimension of IRI could be expected to remain relatively stable, since it refers to a geometric logic that is not particular to IKEA, but finds its origins in most scientific and bureaucratic thinking. The logic is not only typical of the way the IKEA stores are set up, but also of the way that most retail stores are planned.

The purpose of Chapter 5 was to explore how to make sense of this order from a narrative perspective. Therefore, I traced the order to the ancient geometric shape of the labyrinth and to the hero's adventure as described in the monomyth. This was done in order to demonstrate the

universal and general narrative grammar of place. Place lacks emplotment. It is hence in the way it is retold by people that we are able to understand how it is made meaningful. In fluid space, the structure of place is maintained through the repetitive practices of everyday life.

Repetition was found not only to promote sameness, but also to create more variation in IRI. With time it seems as if the image of the place becomes diversified. Finally, it is in heterogeneous spaces that the greatest differences in consumers' images can be expected. By incorporating retailing into stories of the everyday, we integrate it with coincidence, randomness, and fragments of stories that we know from movies and novels, things which interrupt both the linear and circular temporality of the other spaces. In heterogeneous space, the past is brought into the present and made to conform to the expectations of the future. Therefore, heterogeneous space is likely to give rise to more differences in meanings (images) because different temporalities are at play.

## Plot as Mediator between Place and Space

In Figure 5 the plot is placed between spaces and their reflection in place to denote its intervening role between place and lived spaces. The plot can be understood as the mediating force in a dialectical movement from consumers' concrete reality to the abstract representations of a place and back to the conscious participation in reality. The plot produces a spatial order that mediates between the abstract mental realm and the concrete social/physical realm (cf. Lefebvre, 1991, p. 5). It constitutes a turning point at which a place is translated into consumers' experiences. The plot not only reveals to its audience the meaning of the puzzling events it recounts, but is also the narrative of the discovery of that meaning. Plot unites disparate narrative events of retailing and consumption into a single coherent story. Plot is therefore a useful device for capturing conflicts and tensions that may occur in planned environments.

In this study, following de Certeau (1984) I have placed an emphasis on storytelling as productive of spaces in which IRI emerges. By this I wished to reveal how the abstract order of the place is made concrete in the spaces that consumers' storytelling produce. In telling a story,

consumers draw upon directions and movement, which turns the story into a spatial trajectory through a place. Place is necessary for the construction of a space, since it is the experiences of place that is made sense of via consumers' storytelling. Spatial storytelling is therefore not only a textual production of words and linguistic structures, but also a spatial practice that makes the material world meaningful and guides the way consumers act upon it. Understood in a spatial sense, storytelling does not passively reflect the retailing, but assimilates retailing. Mediation always involves a transformation of some sort, which distorts the correspondence between the physical attributes of the retailer and the way it appears to us. In this sense, spatial stories offer a way by which to understand IRI in both symbolic and material terms. That is to say, IRI is not only a passive representation of the retailer in the consumer's mind, but also the enactment of the same.

## Silent Production

The construction of IRI is a silent tactic. Benjamin's (1999a) observation of the inability to exchange lived experiences amidst the rationalised temporal and spatial ordering of the modern world, was presented as a backdrop to begin to understand the otherness of this activity. Storytelling relies on memories of past experiences, which involves a displacement of events. In narrating what happened, events are added, neglected, or forgotten. This means that what happened is always retold. When an event is retold, selected pieces of the whole are incorporated into the new story. To a great extent, storytelling is an unintentional practice. We often remember and narrate events in everyday life without giving this activity much thought. Nowadays, retailing is an integral part of everyday life and hence is involved in ongoing sensemaking. In this, the stories and images that consumers' storytelling leave behind are transient in nature, since they are continuously subjected to new attempts at sensemaking.

In line with the contention that the meanings of actions are constructed after the event, through sensemaking, there is a necessary temporal lag involved in the way retailing is retold. Monitoring a story is impossible by definition because a story narrates things that have already happened. That is the reason why a retailer cannot be communicated as a story through marketing strategy, but can only be retold as one. There



may be tropes and sequences that resemble narratives in the retail place, but there are no plots, conflicts, or transformations of events. Stories that are conveyed in marketing communication, or stories that are not anchored in sensemaking, can be seen in terms of what Cavarero (2000, p. 132) calls invented stories, and what was previously referred to as accounts (see Chapter 4).

By invented stories she means those stories that have an author. Invented stories include jokes and tall tales that can be about everyone and anyone. Since everyone knows that they have not actually happened, they are about no one in particular. They are told just because they are not tied to experience. Therefore, the retail place is not made meaningful to a consumer until it is temporally and spatially situated in the consumer's everyday life. Whether in China or in Sweden, Malmö or Shanghai, it is by being made sense of and retold that retailing is adapted to the local culture. The story comes after the events, sometimes when least expected. The stories consumers tell unfold the retailer as a unique story with an unrepeatable destiny, in the sense that it becomes constitutively related to and intertwined with other destinies and events that have, in fact, taken place.

This type of silent everyday consumption can be contrasted to accounts of more clamorous forms of consumption. In an influential article in consumer research, Douglas Holt (2002) shows that marketing and consumer culture stand in a dialectical relationship to each other. Holt sets out to understand the reasons behind the conflicts between marketing and the anti-branding movement by outlining a dialectical model of branding and consumer culture. He argues that while the existing branding paradigm pushes branding principles to their extremes in order to compete with other firms, consumers are becoming increasingly skilled in assimilating the culture of consumption, which produces inflation in what is valued. The increasingly skilled consumers change the conditions according to which branding traditionally operates, turning the relationship between branding and consumers upside down. No longer able to provide an increasingly reflexive mass of consumers with ready-made meanings of brands, marketers now appropriate consumers' cultural expressions – predominately stories – which then feed the machinery of branding in its constant search for diversification.

The stories that are appropriated by marketing activities are the stories of the anti-branding movement; the stories that are heard. Therefore, in Holt's view, these anti-branding activities are not able to change marketing and branding strategies. What his study underscores, I think, is that in order to constitute a productive activity, consumption must remain silent. The productive capacity of consumers' storytelling resides in its invisible and clandestine nature, which complicates monitoring and incorporation into marketing activities.

Experiences and memories are difficult to capture and they cannot be accumulated. Therefore they escape attention and assume a ghost-like form (cf. de Certeau 1984). In the planned retail environments they are therefore a silent force, which is never heard. They constitute a tension within this place by producing alternative spaces within it that are never seen. This observation makes it difficult to model IRI on specified attributes of the retail store. In the storytelling I have considered here, the traditional measures of store image seldom came to the fore. This is also the reason why I have focused on retailing as the practice of organising the place for the selling of goods and services to the end consumer, rather than on the entity of the retail brand or the retail store. The things that consumers narrate in their stories refer to how they experience the practicing of the order of the place.

Consumers in the modern days resemble the ancient storytellers in so far as they perform the same activity in silence. Like minstrels and troubadours who travelled to different places, giving voice to a collective experience through retelling and repeating stories, consumers mediate and transport the retailer in the sense that it is retold in places located outside the retail store. While my ambition here is to understand how this consumption activity constructs IRI, it widens the perspective of what the everyday practice of consumption involves in a more general sense.

## Contributions to Retail Studies

In the last section of the book, I specify the implications of the current study in terms of theoretical, methodological and practical contributions to retail studies. The theoretical contribution concerns the outline of an alternative approach to *how* IRI is constructed in

spatial storytelling and *where* this construction process takes place. The methodological contribution relates to the use of literary fiction as a mode of analysing spatial storytelling and capture IRI as an outcome of lived culture. The practical contribution involves a situated account of retailing in everyday culture, as well as of the different roles retailing plays in a culture dependent on the tensions between lived spaces and the planned retail place.

## IRI Construction in Spatial Storytelling

Image is a concept with a long history in retail studies, and it continuously attracts new attention. Image (or personality) is commonly defined as the position of a retailer in a consumer's mind. In recent years, image has received more attention as central to creating and maintaining a successful market position when retailers internationalise (McGoldrick 2002). Even though the retail literature acknowledges the central role of culture in internationalisation, culture is often seen as an obstacle to be transcended by means of cultural measurements and models. While researchers generally agree that image is about what a retailer means to a consumer (see Chapter 2), the way image is treated in the retail internationalisation literature is as something that is handed over to the consumer. This view of meaning stems from (at any rate, that is my argument here) a simplified view of the communication of image as a transfer. Transfer is central to internationalisation, which builds on the assumption that retailers become international through the transfer of technology, operations and image. The notion of transfer, however, reduces image to an effect of transmission, and the consumer to a passive recipient whose perceptions can be monitored using retail marketing strategies. Furthermore, in its mode of application, the transfer view tends to reduce IRI to consumers' perceptions of a set of pre-defined store attributes, which, to varying degrees, it is assumed that it is possible to control by retailing.

The problem with this method is that it is difficult to know whether these store attributes are relevant to the consumers, or whether other things are more relevant for how they form images of a retailer. The transfer view obviously reduces the complexity of how IRI is created, as well as increasing the distance between the retailer and the lived culture

of which the image is an outcome. Previous research on IRI was also traced to what may be referred to as the cultural view of communication. In these studies, IRI creation is investigated as something related to time present in, and degrees of institutionalisation of, a market. Here, cultural factors are paid more attention, but often in the sense of conceptual models. Nevertheless, I argued that studies viewing image as meaning resort to a view of culture as representational meaning, and not to how meaning is actively constructed.

What is missing in both the transfer and the cultural views of communication, I argued, is an explicit consideration of IRI constructed in the lived everyday cultural practices where the retail place is located. What distinguishes the retailer from other types of companies is that a retailer has a physical location, from which goods are bought, sold, and transported to many other locations for final use. Therefore, the study of IRI construction needs to consider consumers' meaning making in relation to the planned retail place. In order to understand the workings of this construction process, I took some liberties with de Certeau's (1984) concepts of strategy and tactics, and their respective associations to place and space, in order to make them useful for the investigation of how IRI is constructed. I argued that consumption is a form of spatial storytelling anchored in the sensemaking of experiences of the retail place. I reasoned that if the lived spaces produced within place through consumers' storytelling are what makes place meaningful, then it is would be possible to understand IRI construction in everyday practice as a form of spatial storytelling.

Spatial storytelling was linked to a view on communication as the production of space in media and communications studies to display its difference vis-à-vis the transmission and cultural concepts of communication. With this approach there follows a different view of the construction of image in communication – as the production of space. Communication as spatial production refutes neither the transmission view nor the cultural view of communication, but instead brings them together. The production of space is understood as relying on both the instrumental transmission of messages and the sensemaking of these messages via culture.

Spatial storytelling, as it is employed in this study, refers to how consumers make sense of a retail place after purchases have been made. The focus on spatial storytelling enables the investigation of IRI construction as a process, which involves the transformation of place into space and space into place. The focus on spatial stories was also considered important to the investigation of IRI as an outcome of practices, rather than accounts or invented stories, since these would not have been able to capture consumers' lived spaces. Spatial storytelling helps us understand how IRI is constructed as the meanings consumers give to a retail place. Spatial storytelling was found to be particularly useful for investigating IRI, given the temporal and spatial dimensions of this construct, both in terms of the retail store as a physical place, its movement across national boundaries, and its development over time in the markets where the retailer is present. While the structure of a place operates according to the logic of transmission, the way it is assimilated by consumers at home make it part of a shared cultural communication.

The three spatial dimensions of IRI that I identified previously in the chapter testify to the varying ways by which consumers' storytelling produces images of retailing. Most of the time consumers unintentionally elaborate on images communicated by retailing, but sometimes they tend to accept and adopt these images, and sometimes they even refute them. Consumers invent new stories about retailing by combining narrative events from different sources into a coherent story. Consumers' storytelling is therefore about a retrospective retelling of retailing. In being retold in this way, the order of the retail place is reorganised; something which generates new images. Since stories are told for various audiences at various times and in various places, the construction of images of retailing is an ongoing process. What is more stable, however, is the construction process through which these images are generated. While IRI is thus subject to continuous change, the construction process of IRI is expected to be of a more stable nature. In view of previous research that has confirmed the existence of these three spaces elsewhere, they are likely to be part of any construction of IRI, even though this general typology could be extended to include additional spatialities.

The way that consumers' storytelling was emplotted around the tensions of strategy and tactics, and the kind of temporalities activated in the plots, can be expected to be valid for other furnishings retailers in similar stages of international image development as was IKEA in Malmö and Shanghai. It is important to note that the three spaces are international spaces, because they embrace the meaning-making activities of consumers in both cities. The variations in images in these spaces, however, construct a set of internal tensions within them and in their relationships with one another. Due to these tensions, IRI is an evolving construct in relation to time and place.

### Where Spatial Storytelling Takes Place

The theoretical contribution of the present study does not only concern *how* IRI construction occurs through spatial storytelling, but also *where* IRI construction takes place. Spatial storytelling was captured by encouraging consumers to talk about their IKEA products and furniture at home. I suggested that spatial stories are not told just anywhere; they need places where thoughts can be seen in hindsight and reflected upon. The home was identified as a place where spatial stories are told. At home goods gain their final meaning by being used in consumption. Storytelling is about making sense of something that has already happened. It occurs in relation to some form of uncertainty, or in relation to something that needs to be explained. For this reason, I conducted the interviews using photographs that informants had themselves taken of their homes. This was also done in order to allow the informants to define aspects of their homes that they considered important.

The home is a place of one's own making where, most of the time, one feels comfortable, and where the results of consumption are materialized in an organisation of the home that can be used as a prop for storytelling. Thus, talking to people at home is likely to generate spatial stories. In the store environment, by contrast, there is little time to reflect over what one has done. The organisation of the store environment, as demonstrated in heterogeneous spaces, seems to distance consumers from their own experiences. It would therefore be difficult to reflect over one's actions in such a place. The store is a place in which to move forward, not sit down or turn around and reflect on what we have done. Instead, the organisation of the store was made

meaningful in spatial storytelling when it was made sense of afterwards, at home. This underscores the limitations of previous measurements of IRI and their inability to capture IRI as a meaningful outcome based on consumers' experiences. When it comes to studying IRI construction, the home is an important place to capture spatial storytelling, but other places where one is able to reflect on experience, such as a local café, the office, or the rehearsal studio, could also possibly be places to capture IRI construction.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this reasoning is thus that IRI is not primarily created in the store at the moment of shopping, but afterwards, when experiences are made sense of. There is thus a temporal lag between the construction of IRI and a consumer's immediate experience of the store. This is because sensemaking is a practice, a retrospective reorganisation of that which is experienced.

## Capturing the Silent by Means of Fiction

The methodological contribution consists in demonstrating how lived culture can be grasped using literary fiction. Since the silent and lived culture follows a logic of its own and is not easy to pin down with scientific models or measures, I needed to find alternative ways of capturing what consumers' storytelling was about. Literature is the result of previous efforts at sensemaking. Hence it was regarded to be a suitable method for capturing consumers' storytelling.

I regard the use of literature particularly helpful for capturing the lived culture among Swedish and Chinese informants, as opposed to using conceptualisations of national culture depicted in marketing textbooks. Some of these concepts were developed long ago, and they reduce culture to abstract ideas, which may no longer necessarily be relevant for a retailer's consumers. Because literary works draw upon repertoires of cultural narratives, they are also able to tell us about specific cultures. Literature may not be able to provide information about culture in an operational manner, but it can tell us a great deal about the course of everyday life in that culture.

Literature also gave me the means to explore different ways of understanding what I saw in the material. In many ways the work with the analysis was exploratory; it was about testing new ways of making

sense of the material. Especially when it comes to conducting research in a country in which one's regular schemes of interpretation do not always work and may need reconsideration, literature can reveal alternative ways of seeing which are central to a culture. The kind of popular fiction that I engaged with was selected for the purpose of familiarising the strange in Shanghai and estranging the familiar in Malmö. For me, studying a retailer that I grew up with, in a city in which I had lived for many years, the fiction helped me discover new things about my own culture. On the other hand, in Shanghai, where my experiences were limited and where my usual ways of seeing did not always apply, fiction made the strange more familiar. Fiction helps us see new things where we thought nothing was to be seen, and tells us about our own culture and the culture of others in a way that scientific models of culture cannot.

In the analysis, the epic mode of emplotment was employed due to its incorporation of mixed temporalities and diverse stories resulting from different forms of actions. The literary characters from *The Odyssey* enriched the tensions I had identified between strategy and tactics in consumers' stories by adding to what I observed in the empirical material. The interpretations that I found concerning these fictional characters in other works expanded my horizons and helped me formulate questions about what taken-for-granted images, such as routine, an ordered home, and childhood, are about. The characters were crafted in a way so as to help me illuminate the emplotment of the consumers' stories and determine what they were about. The characters were thus used as analogies, rather than as archetypes existing in consumers' consciousness' (cf. Czarniawska 2008). This way of working with narrative devices was useful in this study to illuminate the organisation of spaces produced in consumers' storytelling.

Another way in which literature could be utilised in the study of IRI is from a management perspective, to monitor the role of a retailer in culture. Since literature is revelatory of culture, we could also find dominant values, views, and attitudes of a culture in contemporary literary works, which could be used to help grasp a retailer's role in culture. This would require a certain narrative competence with reference to which plots are salient and how the texts are emplotted.



## Disclosing the Retailer in Everyday Practice

This study has empirically demonstrated how the image of an international retailer is constructed in the way that retailing is retold among consumers in two cities, one located in its domestic market and the other in a market where the retailer had been established for seven years. The study illuminates the differences in assigning images to the retailer in these two cities in a situated account of how consumers make sense of their experiences of retailing. In addition the research reveals the centrality of the planned environment of the store for the sensemaking of goods at home, and illustrates how the store makes itself visible in the storytelling of its consumers. Rather than being an instrument for monitoring the effects of marketing communication on consumers perceptions of the retailer, this study demonstrated that the usefulness of IRI resides in its ability to capture the meaningfulness of retailing in the lived culture. In other words, rather than conceiving of image as the position of the retailer in a consumer's mind, this study has shown how it is possible to conceive of image as the position of the retailer in culture.

Understanding the role of the retailer in lived culture is important in order to ensure that the retailer is relevant to everyday life where it is used. The ways that retailing is retold occur all the time, and this may happen years after a consumer originally bought the products or visited the store. It is in the realm of the everyday, where nothing seems to happen, that there is time to reflect upon events and produce images in retrospect. Consumption, from this perspective, is silent; it is about making do, about struggling to lead a decent life and to fill everyday life with meaning. Making the bed, cooking, cleaning, decorating, reading, playing with the children, and so on are all practices that involve consumption. These activities often escape attention because they are so mundane that we rarely reflect over what they accomplish. And it is precisely due to its trivial and fleeting nature that everyday consumption is productive, because marketers do not as easily appropriate it as they do with more visible practices.

The title of this book, *Retailing Retold*, seeks to capture how IRI develops in response to how consumers' makes sense of what they do with retailing. Consequently, the image of the retailer is developed in retrospect when actions are given meaning. This suggestion

problematizes the idea that images can be transferred across markets and from retailer to consumers. If image is constructed on the basis of how consumers make sense of their experiences with the retailer, rather than on the basis of store attributes or the store's personality, then it implies that the study of image needs to focus on retailing rather than the retailer.

Cavarero's reading of the episode of Odysseus at the court of the Phaeacians, presented initially, recapitulates the approach to image construction adopted in this study. This approach suggests that retailing strategy is given an image when retold by consumers or other stakeholders. Similar to how Odysseus' actions on the battlefield and on his journey back to Ithaca is given a coherent story through the minstrel's song; consumers' storytelling affords retailing a coherent story. IRI is the meaningful outcome of these stories. While the retailer possesses substantial knowledge of what it is in terms of size, brand name, store operations, market share, and so on, Cavarero would say that in order to know who it is, the retailer needs the story work of those who stand at a distance from retailing and are able to afford its actions meaning from a posthumous perspective. The difference between action and narration is that while actions belong to the momentary present, narration preserves and stabilises actions. Consumers' narration anchors retailing in the story and conserves the image of the retailer over time. While the retailer cannot control the story that results from actions (i.e. retailing), it is the one producing their narratability.

Analogous to the silent production of consumer tactics, the blind minstrel narrates the events of Odysseus from the invisibility of memory. The value of the silent resides in that it belongs to the lived realm and thus escapes attempts to measure and monitor it. In drawing upon the ancient storytellers and a conception of storytelling as mediating collective experience, I have sought to demonstrate the value of lived culture for IRI construction. Spatial storytelling informs us of the way that a retailer is provided with function and meaning in everyday life. In this realm, retailers become the subject of storytelling and are thus assigned meaning and a unique and unrepeatable story of a life so far.

## Avenues for Further Research

A possible continuation of this study would involve developing the spatial dimensions of IRI identified here by applying these to international retailers in other sectors in order to examine the existence of other dimensions of IRI. The spatial dimensions could also be examined relative to the three stages of image development in retail internationalisation. While the present thesis has made a few initial steps in re-locating the construction of IRI from the murky processes of consumers' minds to consumers' spatial storytelling, this represents merely one among many ways of investigating IRI construction in everyday practice. Other ways of investigating the construction of IRI as the production of space could constitute a potentially interesting avenue for further research. For example, everyday practices need not necessarily be understood in a narrative sense, but could also be investigated as material practices.

Investigating image construction in everyday practices links to a recent discussion in marketing of how to value the labour of consumption (see, e.g., Arvidsson 2006). Image is considered to have financial value to a retail firm only insofar as it is a measure of the return on an investment in marketing. In view of the shift in perspective made in this study, from image as controlled by the firm to image as made in consumers' spatial storytelling, the consequences for how to value image as part of, for instance, brand equity, is a potentially interesting topic for further research.

The study of how image is constructed also relates to questions of how consumers appropriate planned commercial environments and goods in a spatial sense. This topic is relatively unexplored empirically in retail studies, but seems to be pressing, given the increased spread of themed retail environments set up for the purposes of "living" a retail brand. The construction of meaning in the tension between the lived and the rationally planned is not just an issue for retail studies; it can also be applied to understanding the relationship between humans and the structure of environments in a wider sense. Another avenue for further research therefore involves applying spatial storytelling to the investigation of images of other institutions that operate from a demarcated location and where visitors encounter a planned

environment. Examples include hospitals, workplaces, schools, universities, churches, police stations, and railway stations, all of which have recently begun to promote themselves according to marketing principles.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1: IKEA Store Guide

### **'A Day at the Store'**

✓ Get inspiration

Browse through your IKEA catalogue to get an idea of what you'll want to look for in the store.

✓ Be prepared

Make a list of anything you may need for your home. You'll be surprised how much variety there is at the IKEA stores. Take measurements of spaces you want to fill with furniture. And be sure there's room in your car. You'll need it.

✓ Enter here

IKEA stores have free parking and provide easy access for the disabled. Everything you need to shop is available at the entrance: pencils, paper, tape measures, store guides, catalogues, shopping carts, shopping bags and strollers.

✓ Make yourself at home

IKEA stores are huge home furnishings exhibitions. Stretch out on a bed, see how many people you can fit on a sofa, or let your children choose furniture for their rooms. Our room settings are built entirely from IKEA products, and will give you inspired ideas for furnishing, lighting and decorating your home.

✓ You shop, kids play

Drop the kids off at the IKEA supervised play area and ballroom, and shop in peace. This way, everyone's happy. Or if you want them to help make furnishing decisions, strollers are available at the entrance. The most important people in the world deserve furnishings made just for them. You'll find plenty of colourful, playful products for kids' rooms.

✓ Talk to our sales staff

Every area in the showroom has a sales desk where a specialist can answer your questions or offer you home furnishing advice. And if you're thinking about furnishing a whole room, or even your entire house, you can make an appointment with one of our home furnishing consultants.

✓ Look at the price tag

Everything at the store has a price tag. Our tags have important information about size, colour, craftsmanship, measurements, features and care. Tags on large items tell you where to pick them up in the self-serve furniture area. The market hall is just what it sounds like: many different speciality shops gathered together.

✓ Review the options

Review your options over a Swedish meal in the IKEA restaurant. At the IKEA restaurant you can take a break from the hard work of shopping. You can even start your day at IKEA with breakfast before the store opens. In the restaurant you'll find healthy Swedish and local daily dishes made from high quality fresh produce.

✓ Pick it up

On your way to the checkout; you'll pass through the self-serve area. This is where you pick up the flat-packed furnishing items you saw earlier in the room settings. Picking up your purchases is an important part of the IKEA's approach to customer involvement. Specifically, if you can do simple things like pick up your purchases and assemble them at home, we'll keep prices low. Do we have a deal? Of course, there is always someone available to give you a hand if you need it. There are plenty of carts available to help you bring your purchases to your car. Or you can bring your car to your purchases by pulling up to our customer loading dock.

✓ Acquire the goods

Almost any way you want to pay is fine with us. You can always pay with cash or a major credit card, but other payment methods are usually also available. They vary from store to store, so please check with your local IKEA store to find out more.

✓ Retrieve the purchase

If you change your mind after making a purchase, just bring the unused product, along with the receipt and the packaging, back to your IKEA store within 60 days. We'll exchange it or give you a refund.

✓ Assemble the goods at home

Source:

[http://www.ikea.com/ms/en\\_SV/about\\_ikea/store\\_experience/before\\_you\\_go.html](http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_SV/about_ikea/store_experience/before_you_go.html).

## Appendix 2: Informants

Informant(s)	Age	Profession	City
1. Ingrid	28	Customer service	Malmö
2. Johan	29	Ship broker	Malmö
3. Agnes	31	Social worker	Eslöv ( town located 30 min from Malmö)
4. Martin	31	IT-consultant	Malmö
5. Siv	23	Assistant nurse	Malmö
6. Anna	38	In between jobs	Malmö
7. Olof	33	Museum curator	Malmö
8. Lars	32	Project leader	Malmö
9. Nils	33	Musician	Lund (town located 15 min from Malmö)
10. Lina and Petter	29, 32	Physical therapist, criminal investigator	Malmö
11. Elsa	35	Librarian	Malmö
12. Mia and Sven	34, 32	Sales, accounting consultant	Malmö
14. Xie Sini	31	CEO (Family business)	Shanghai
16. Xu	30	Guard	Shanghai
17. Li Chun	31	Sales manager (MNC)	Shanghai
18. Yu Nan	30	Sales manager	Shanghai
19. Xu Wei	32	Photographer	Shanghai
20. Song Lei	30	Assistant sales manager (NC)	Shanghai
22. Lin	32	Official	Baoshan (town located 1 hour from shanghai)
23. Xu Mei Jing	27	Secretary (MNC)	Shanghai
25. Shi Wei	31	Sales manager (MNC)	Shanghai
26. Wang Yan	32	Boutique owner	Shanghai
27. Hong	29	Assistant real estate manager	Shanghai
28. Ji Xuejing	29	Real estate manager	Shanghai
29. Cai Yun	30	Freight forwarder (MNC)	Shanghai
30. Chen Qizhen	31	Freight forwarder (MNC)	Shanghai
31. Sun Yue	28	Sales executive	Shanghai



IKEA co-workers	Position	Location
Wendy	Assistant store manager	Shanghai, China
Anne	PR consultant	Shanghai, China
Anders	IKEA Communications	Älmhult, Sweden
Peter	Marketing	Shanghai, China
Gisela	Marketing	Delft, Netherlands
Jakob	Marketing	Shanghai, China
Per	Store manager	Malmö, Sweden
Katherine	Store manager	Shanghai, China

## Appendix 3: Introduction Letter

### Introduction letter

We are Cecilia Cassinger, a PhD student in Business Administration at Lund University, Sweden and Dr Zhi Lu at Fudan University. We are currently enrolled in an international project concerning interior decoration in private households. The project is supported by Lund University and Fudan University.

We would be grateful if you would like to participate in our study by taking photos of your home with a disposable camera that will be given to you. You are free to portray anything you like. When you are done taking pictures, we develop and bring you the pictures. We will take some time to talk about the photos you took. This is a *free* project and will not cost you anything. You can keep the photos afterwards.

Thank You,

Zhi Lu and Cecilia Cassinger

### 课题研究介绍

您好！我们是来自瑞典伦德大学商学院的博士研究生 Cecilia Cassinger 和复旦大学管理学院的教师鲁直博士。近期，我们正在进行关于家居装潢的国际课题研究。该项研究得到了双方学校的鼎力支持。

在此，衷心希望您能参与我们的研究并给予帮助与配合。请您用我们赠送的相机随意地在家中拍摄一些人物或静物照，主题不限。我们会负责照片的冲印，冲印完毕后，照片将归还给您，同时请您就照片上的内容与我们进行交流。整个过程中，您无需支付任何费用或承受任何经济负担。最终，照片也将由您本人保存。

您的支持和参与是该课题研究成功的关键。再次向您表示由衷的感谢！！





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