



Ritual Objects

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Diplom Nebenthema 2

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Carolyn Louise Smith
Köln, 9. März 2011

The French Press

I first encountered the French press in Nairobi, where each morning a Maasai warrior would emerge from a colonial-styled bed and breakfast into an English garden, with this peculiar contraption in one hand, and an empty cup in the other. I grew up in a family of non-coffee-drinkers, and was correspondingly inexperienced with the myriad ways coffee could be made, and with the French press. I timidly observed others to learn its technique, and then pressed down the plunger feeling the pressure of thick coffee against my hand. This bizarre situation began a small fascination with the machine that led to me owning one.

Since then, I have been known to philosophize on the ritual qualities of my French press. And I have grown a taste for a cup of thick black coffee, looking down my nose at Senseos¹, and lattes.

¹ A coffee-maker with automated single-cup coffee production. Product of Douwe Egberts (www.douweegberts.de), Sara Lee (www.saralee.de), and Philips (www.philips.de). Product website: www.senseo.com

In using a French press, each step has its own inherent sound: water boiling, a scoop digging into the earthy ground coffee to pull out a heap, the gurgle of water being forced through the filter. These are different from the mechanical sounds that we are usually surrounded with, natural and inherent to the materials. Pressing the plunger, I ruminate on the power of human hands, and regain some of the corporeal sensitivity I have lost from button pushing. Here, creating coffee is logical and clear to me. Each one of my movements comes together to fill my cup with the dark liquid. It is a ritual.

The French press initiated the train of thought that inspired me to write about Ritual. I began thinking about the power of corporeality, and a physical connection between tasks and bodies. About the dynamism on ritual, the momentum it can incite, and the magical aura that surrounds ritual objects. And then about the influence this ritualistic interaction had on me, turning me from a shy to an avid coffee drinker.



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Reiterated Action

Rituals are reiterated actions. This statement seems tremendously obvious, even banal, but at the same time shines a harsher light on the ritual than before. Rituals are actions, and actions are normal. (GRIMES, 2010, P.52, 55) This information clears away our predisposition that ritual only exists within the spiritual realm. Without sacredness blinding our vision, we are able to see the vigor that a simple action can involve. As actions, rituals are anchored in space and time. Concrete and flowing, they are of this moment, but relate to all other moments one has experienced. The motion, and dynamism of life are present in them, giving momentum to the ebb and flow of beliefs. (p.52)

Calling rituals actions endows them with personal intimacy. I carry out actions. I participate in actions. They become possible, and in this, lose their constructed formality and institutionalism.

The gesture of drawing circles reveals some of the nature of ritual as an action. The first circle looks conscious and forced, stemming from the unnatural gesture of a careful hand. Its curves are angular, and lines are jagged. As the radius continues upon itself in a second rotation, the lines are discordant. Precise replication proves impossible. Each subsequent repetition is a variation of the last – forms intersect, some bulge, others jump. At best the drawing could be called a scribble. But with every revolution the pen gains momentum, becomes surer and lets go of stringent control. (p.55) The timid, chaotic drawing transforms into a smooth, and uniform shape. A new whole

emerges, its interwoven lines making it richer, more robust. The drawing gains composure, more closely resembling one's intentions than any single sketch from before. The beginning and end of the gesture are lost, uniting timelessness with the isolated moment of existence. (GRIMES, 2010, P.60)

Similarly, ritual gains its force through repetitive momentum. Each repetition may be minute and fragile, but they build up into a meaningful experience. Through reiterative actions rituals develop dynamism and stability concurrently. (P.55) Each repetition reinforces and strengthens the whole, making it more robust and complete. Through action, rituals drop their predisposition toward pretension, instead gaining accessibility.

Corporeal

In writing, thoughts become visceral interactions. The author's words swell throughout his whole body, overflowing through his fingertips onto the page. The gesture of pressing each key or drawing each letter is no longer conscious, only the thoughts being transformed into written words. Authors continued to use manual typewriters long after the technology was made obsolete, first by electric typewriters, and then by word processing programs. I can sympathize with their reluctance. The direct connection between the word in their brain, and the hard swing of a letter, striking paper and squeezing out blackness onto it, makes ideas concrete and permanent. Their attachment to the technology was not about speed or practicality, much more the corporeal connection between body

and words. In writing, a visceral experience becomes thought. Through typewriters thought becomes material again, closing the circle. In this way, bodies become a chain of impacts and feedbacks on the world, one's interface with reality.

Human actions involve corporeal movements, and require becoming physically involved in the moment, and in the material world. In action, and in ritual one's body is one's interface to the world. (COMPARE: BELL, 1997, P.139) Through action individuals come into contact with it, can manipulate it, and become one with it.

Ritual recognizes the material reality of our form. The molecules that compose the human body were once pieces of trees, and bits of water from foreign lands, "for out of [the ground] wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 2:19). Through matter and chemistry humans are integrated into the world, the elements of the earth are the elements of the body. It is contained within us. Through the touch, and movement of ritual one comes into contact with the world, recognize one's self in it.

Corporeal interaction with physical objects incites learning, and understanding.¹ When overcome by a painting, one yearns to reach out and touch it. To understand a concept is to grasp it. To have control over a situation is to have a hold on it. (AICHER, 1991, P.9) Neuroscience tells that touch is method of understanding. "The neural network of eye-brain hand allows touching, gripping, and seeing to work in concert. Stored information about holding a ball, for instance, helps the brain

1 AICHER, 1991, P.146: "The use is the truth."

to make sense of a two-dimensional photograph of the ball: the curve of the hand, and the hand's sense of the ball's weight help the brain think in three dimensions, seeing a flat object on paper in the round." (SENNET, 2008, P.153) If a form is not comprehensible through sight, it is inspected with the fingertips, feeling its contours. In this way, somatic interaction is learning, confirmation and understanding.

Touch cannot be abstracted the way vision and language can. Words can be twisted, images can be skewed, but touch can rarely be falsified, it is honest. We come to understand the visceral qualities of thought when falling in love, or become illogically skeptical – getting butterflies in the stomach, or a gut feeling. These sensations make logic corporeal; one feels the truth rather than thinking it. Here physical matter is a truth unto itself. Through corporeality, rituals make us receptive to truth, helping us take it in, perceive it, and make it personal. (BELL, 1997, P.137)

Deliberate

In the motion of a potter's wheel, repetition allows for pliability. Its steady revolutions put all surfaces of the clay at the disposal of the potter. Grasping the surface, the potter's hands push and stretch it, giving it form. In formation, the clay gives in to the potter's verdict, transforms into an expression of his choices, and his sensibility. His personal impressions become impressions on the clay. Within this act we see the natural progression from repetitive action, and corporeality into deliberate formation.

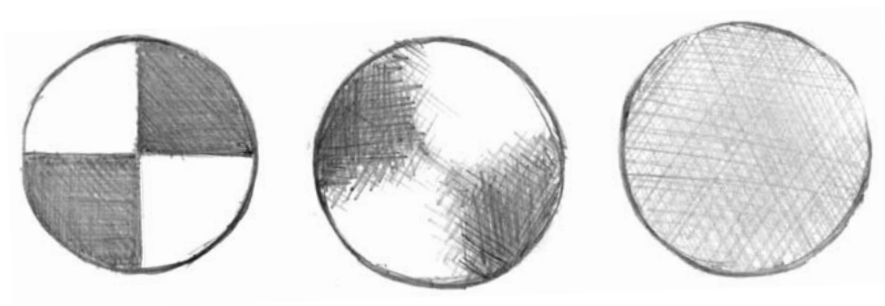
Deliberateness implies choice. To be chosen is to be distinguished as appropriate, fitting, and superior. (COMPARE: AICHER 1991, P.162, AND BELL, 1997, P.160) In turn, choice necessitates thoughts and preferences. To have been chosen is to have been endowed with importance, uniqueness, and meaning. Deliberateness distinguishes ritual from every day action. (BELL, 1997, P.157) By imbuing meaning into an activity, or distinguishing an event as extraordinary, the mundane is transformed into a ritual. Through deliberateness, rituals lose their normalcy and gain significance and even transcendence. (P.156-157)

Deliberateness is woven into the fabric of ritual, stiffening it, and giving it structure, and form. It underlines all of the qualities of ritual that we instinctively feel. (P.91) Deliberateness dictates that a pace must be taken; a chronology must be adhered to. (P.167) It requires that each individual aspect is carefully composed, rules be made, and formal structures be erected. (P.151) Having been distinguished as ritual, each component must also be deliberately chosen to protect its purity, with each endowing meaning and importance on the whole.

Ritual Qualities

Activeness, corporeality, and deliberateness are the common threads running through rituals, and tying them together as a category. From them, a plethora of configurations have emerged ranging from solemn burial rites to the chaos and disarray of carnival. Ritual comes to describe human life. Their fiber is embedded within our activities, our bodies, and our choices. Through these qualities ritual becomes normal, gain-

ing accessibility. This perspective wipes away preconceptions that ritual is other. The dynamic stability of ritual can be made our own.



Function

Debate over Function

The question of whether ritual is functional is widely debated among ritual scholars. (BELL, 1997, PP.23-59) Correspondingly, the field of ritual studies is split about the functionality or pure magicity of ritual. From the more traditional, magical viewpoint, the inherent functionality of an activity as the differentiating factor between ritual and routine. "Traditionally, ritual has been distinguished from other modes of action by virtue of its supposed non-utilitarian and irrational qualities. Due to this distinction, shaking hands is a ritual, but planting potatoes for food is not. Like non-utilitarian, irrational denotes the lack of any practical relationship between the means one choose to achieve certain ends." (BELL, 1997, P.46)

Is planting potatoes always non-ritualistic? If the potatoes were planted as a form of worship, and then subsequently eaten as sustenance, their functionality would be undermined, giving space for rituality to emerge. Alternatively, is it not possible that planting potatoes, as described here, lacks rituality because it has not been chosen as such? Because it has not been invested with deliberateness.

Coffee making and drinking, an activity with clear cause and effect has become an almost universal modern ritual. My last commercial mailing from Nespresso¹ began with the line: "Ziel der Nespresso Maschinen und Grand Crus ist es, Ihr tägliches

¹ Brand of an automated coffee system. Company website: www.nespresso.com

Kaffeeritual in einzigartige Genussmomente zu verwandeln.”² The author does not talk about how Nespresso makes coffee into ritual, but implies that coffee is already ritualistic. We understand the process of creating coffee, and that its caffeine will give us an extra kick of energy. There is no technical mystery involved, no detachment from function, but it is still a ritual.

I believe that the theories of ritual as magic are assuming too direct a connection between cause and effect. Looking at modern industrial function, and the apparent rationality of machines and factories, the significance, even spirituality that functionality can incorporate is left out. This perspective sees function as hard, cold action and reaction. Not as a wider sphere of actors, beliefs, and their respective interactions. Additionally, to assume that a ritual actor sees no clear cause and effect between their actions and the reactions they expect is to undercut their intelligence, and beliefs. (BELL, 1997, P.12) Who are we (outsiders) to say that worshipping idols, or ritual sacrifice do not have the expected function, even if the function does not follow the logical pathways we might envision. (JAMES, 2009, P.26 AND RADIOLAB, 2007B) “The spectator’s judgment is sure to miss the root of the matter, and to possess no truth. The subject judged knows a part of the world of reality which the judging spectator fails to see, knows more while the spectator knows less; and, wherever there is conflict of opinion and difference of vision, we are bound to believe that the

2 Translation by author: The goal of Nespresso Machines and Grand Crus is to transform your daily coffee ritual into distinctive moments to savor.

truer side is the side that feels the more, and not the side that feels the less.” (JAMES, 2009, P.2)

In contrast, functionalists recognize that ritual activities, such as shaking hands, have use value despite the intangible and illogical nature of these functions. However, functionalist theories are spread across many different and conflicting branches, each believing in their own version of ritual function. In some groups these are broken down to a single concept, in others their functions are extensively diverse. Additionally, function is contrastingly viewed from a logical, social and a spiritual perspective. These variations are confusing and disarrayed; they seem to prefer differentiation rather than agreement.

Considering both viewpoints, I believe that ritual is functional in itself. Whether or not it is attached to a functional activity. We can see this with hand shaking. Although the original choice to greet people by shaking hands may have been arbitrary, it has gained the cultural function of easing transitions and introductions in new social settings. Based upon their fragmented studies, I have come to believe that ritual has the function of easing people into things, helping them to conform to new situations, and to be comfortable in their self.

Planting Tomatoes

I have a small rooftop garden that I diligently plant and care for. These vegetables and herbs are functional in the most basic sense of the term: they will become food on my table. But the process of caring for them, and the fact that I choose to

do this rather than going to the grocery store makes it a ritual for me. Each morning I go out into the crisp air, water my ‘crops’, and observe their growth. I inspect each green bulb that sprouts from my tomato plants, and survey their growth overtime. Inspecting their progress as they expand from hard green globules and transform into ripe, vermillion colored fruits. At this point, the tomatoes land on my cutting board – another functional action – where they are sliced and peeled, and cooked into my next meal. In eating and digesting, their nutrients spread through my body. Fortifying and nourishing me, their material becomes a part of my body’s matter.

Beyond the physical function of nutrition, tomatoes become a part of my understanding of myself, a muse for pondering my position in the natural world. Accompanying them from seedling to my tabletop, I come to a closer understanding of and respect for the natural cycles of growth and decay. Each step of the process becomes an instrument for rumination on my personal connection to the sun, and the beings that transform it into energy for me. The energy that I invest in them becomes internal to me again.

Mediate Relationships Toward Equilibrium

Through ritual, we negotiate our identities. We seek out our place in the world, and look for the nature of our existence in relationship to people, creatures, and objects around us. We use ritual to gain understanding, and share our knowledge with others, to alleviate anxiety and illness, and to maintain balance in society and our self. (COMPARE: BELL, 1997, PP.48, 54-

55, 115, 117, 120, AND KNOTTERNUS, 2006) Ritual is a give and take, by which we push toward commensuration of our own understanding with our senses and memories, and those of others. Although ritual scholars rarely explain ritual function this simply, I see mediation as a key component of ritual, driving the way it is composed and the effects it has on its participants. It is the mediation of relationships toward equilibrium.

All of the rituals I have inspected can be attributed to this function in one way or another. Rites of passage mediate the relationship between the old state and the new state. State ceremonies mediate transitions between powers, providing peaceful transitions. Tea ceremonies mediate the relationship between the participant and their bodies, helping them gain control of their movements, and thereby moving toward further understanding of Zen. My vegetable garden mediates the relationship between nature and myself. Through carrying out rituals we seek equilibrium and peace.

Mediating the Old and New Self

Rites of passage, likely the most broadly recognized form of ritual, focus on the mediation of transitions. These rites can signify the passage of individuals from one life stage to the other, the incorporation of individuals into societies, or families from which they were previously excluded, or simply the physical passage from familiar to unfamiliar territory. As explained by Van Gennep, their “essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined.” (VAN GENNEP, p.3). Such rituals help to smoothen transitions.

Coming of age rites, such as Bar Mitzvahs in Jewish culture enable their actors to understand their old self as different and unique from their new identity, while recognizing that they are one and the same. Here, they recognize their newfound adulthood, and learn what it means to be an adult in this culture. The incorporation of society members, friends, family and schoolmates into the ritual, ensures that the adolescent's position as an adult will not be undermined or misunderstood in the external world. Overall they allow the actor to leave his old identity behind, removing temptation to return to it, and creating equilibrium

The transition from smoker to non-smoker also includes such rites: in the washing of clothes, cleaning and airing out homes from the smell, throwing away ashtrays, and sharing their intentions, and experiences with colleagues and friends. These activities reinforce the person's new non-smoker identity, helping them to maintain it, and come to terms with its differentness.

In short, rites of passage, act as mediators of the relationship between the old self, and the new. They help actors cope with stages of unfamiliarity, toward the equilibrium of personal or societal acceptance.

Centrifugal Force and Centeredness

A background of weighted chanting sets a tone of reverence for the Sama ceremony of the Sufi people. The dancer's movements are entrancing. Watching them, one feels the rhythmic pulsation as the black of a vest; the white of a tunic passes by.

Black, white, black, white, black, white, black, white. Heavy round skirts billowing with momentum. The pace is slow and steady, and the differences between front and back, arm and hat are still distinguishable. From the pivotal perspective, the stringy pulp of life is smeared before one's eyes. Centrifugal force throws the arms outward, and one feels the pull on their poised hands. One's body is in balance; it cannot be toppled, and the momentum is natural and unending. The rotations bring physical balance, while also putting one's soul in balance with the universe. Here the participant is open to the teaching of god, able to find and reconnect with their center.

This ceremony, most often recognized from western culture as the whirling dervishes, mediates the possibility that one could lose their anchoring in god, and his will. Mediation occurs through a very physical trancelike state, centrifugal force creates physical balance, and encourages realignment with god, and withdrawal from the pressures and temptations of the physical world – equilibrium.

Relationships and Conflict

Life creates conflict. In its most basic natural form, life is the struggle for survival among species. As lucid creatures, we are situated within space and time, but cannot roam freely there. Our cognition allow us to recognize the vastness of the universe, yet our physical capabilities restrain us from leaving even this small splice of the biosphere. We can understand the expanses of time, and long to experience it, but we have only a limited number of moments. Our lives are finite and con-

stricted. Yet, in order to live them we must accept our finiteness within infinite. (COMPARE: BELL, 1997, P.12)

As a form of mediation, ritual arises where conflicts occur. (COMPARE: BELL, 1997, P.37 & 54, AND VAN GANNEP, 1960, PP.1-14) These conflicts develop from our knowledge of our self, the essence of our being, and the recognition that we are other and separate from the rest of the world. (COMPARE: BELL, 1997, P.32) They transpire when we begin to critically assess ourselves against the rest of the world. In this separation, we build two entities that exist in relation to each other.

In this way, ritual practice is rooted in the self, and all personal forms of it. Rituals mediate the relationships between *me* compared against *my*. (P.141) *Me* put in relation to *us*. (P.24-27) *Me, us* as they relate to *my* and *ours*. *Me, my, us, ours*, as they relate to *you, yours, them, that* (P.29) and *theirs*. From this perspective, relationships abound, each of which create their own conflicts to be mediated.

Mediation

Realizing we are separate from the world, we long to be a part of it. Not just in relation to it, but with a clearly defined relationship. We search out our position among the rocks and trees, among gods, men and creatures. Looking to find the role we play in the world, and the way that we fit within it – something we can anchor our actions, and interactions to. Rituals help us to negotiate this journey and find our position.

So long as the goal remains to resolve the conflict at hand, ritual is ambiguous about the methods taken in mediation. This

choice is put under our authority. Bonding, meaning making, and communication are all possible methods ritual uses to mediate, but these words are quite ambiguous themselves. They each incorporate a wide array of other verbs into their respective spectrums. Communication could be through interpretive dance, music, body language, words or grunts. The meanings that ritual makes could range from vegetarianism to the nature of capitalism, or any other -ism. Likewise, meaning can be made by means of marching, chanting, fighting, or jumping. Here, we see the constraints we put on rituals (through identifying and categorizing them) loosening, or vanishing completely. Any mediative action could be a ritual.

A single methodology of mediation, however, is not ambiguous: repetition. Reinforcement through repetitive action is a core technique of ritual, and oddly enough, seems somehow unfitting to the goal of mediation. Repetition is staid, while mediation requires dynamic reactions to each unique situation. But repetition, does not work to create a new equilibrium, rather it works to maintain the balanced status quo, develop a renewed equilibrium. (COMPARE: BELL, 1997, P.39, EXAMPLE: HARA, 2010, P.43) Therefore, repetition becomes most advantageous when conflict is not present, but only potential. Reinforcement reminds us of the equilibrium we already fit within, and helps us to maintain its balance.

Equilibrium

The shape of a spinning top at rest is unbalanced and instable. Its movements on a surface are unpredictable. Set into motion, the top first wobbles insecurely, and then gains equilibrium. The painted surface, which was distinctively split into black and white before melts into a single gray. The top stands upright, now with only a slight hint of vibrato. The instability that characterized the top at rest has now turned into effective stability, and harmony within motion. The equilibrium achieved by ritual is like that of a spinning top. The conflicting sides set into the motion of ritual arrive at balance with each other.

In ritual, equilibrium is a state of acceptance and understanding between both sides. It does not always mean the complete resolution of the conflict, hence the repetitive nature of ritual. It is an improved reflection of the conflict that set off the ritual, a balance that ritual actors can agree upon.

Through reinforcement rituals – where the cause is not a real conflict, but a potential one – equilibrium goes beyond the peaceful status quo, pushing the conflict further away, to achieve a renewed and stronger sense of balance. (BELL, 1997, P.39)

Equilibrium does not always indicate utopian harmony between two conflicting sides. It often means acquiescence, or compliance. (COMPARE: BELL, 1997, P.137, 139-140) Here, one side reluctantly gives in to other. This situation partly results from the ineluctability of conflict, for example when a person is conflicted about their finite nature. Or when one side has more power over the other, such as in societal rituals that are

initiated by the state, and not the people. Here, players come to either an 'agree to disagree' situation, or one in which the powerless gives in to the powerful.

Ritual is Emancipated

Ritual, as we imagine it (other from us, and dictated by the powers that be) has been emancipated.

Nearly every power structure has been put into the hands of the individual. (COMPARE JAMES, 2009, P.58) Religion has been removed from books, and institutions. It is created in the heads and hearts of individuals. We decide if there is a God, and if he is to be believed or ignored, and if he is worthy of worship. (COMPARE: JAMES, 2009, P.45) Government has been passed down from the hands of queens and kings and is now dictated by the voices of the people. Social structures are no longer (explicitly) decided by genealogy and birth, but are decided by one's own motivation. We are relatively free to move between classes at will. Education has become an inalienable human right. Reading, thinking, and sharing are open to every individual. The internet and the media it has brought with it are providing increasing space for the curious mind to gather information, and express itself.

Social norms are less normative than ever before.

These forces were the dictators of the structure and generation of rituals. They were the voices that proclaimed what should be ritual, and how rituals should be carried out. With the loss of their strength it seems that rituals no longer exist. Sacrament and communion are being lost with the decline of

Christianity. Formalistic language, greeting and dining rituals of the elite class are dissolving as elitism loses its potency. Rituals as we knew them are being broken down, forfeited and forgotten. (BELL, 1997, P.31) We increasingly sense that ritual no longer exists.

But as we see here, ritual is open. The monopoly that religions and societies formerly had in ritual, has dissolved. It has been freed from their bonds. Anyone can choose the structure, and rhythm by which ritual functions. In this way, everything can be ritual. (BELL, 1997, P.91) Every object can be a ritual object. It is up to the individual to decide.

Absorbant Ritual

To dismiss function as a component of ritual is to almost completely exile design from its confines. The logical, functional mindset of designers is discordant with the fluffy, magical quality that non-functionalists prescribe to ritual. In their non-functional perception of the ritual world, ritual cannot be calculated or created, it emerges, grows naturally from its actors. Ritual seems like a carefully protected castle on a high hill, which cannot be penetrated by reasoning and logic or everyday action.

By looking at ritual as functional – the mediation of relationships toward equilibrium – the spectrum of ritual swells to illuminate areas of life that we have never considered to be ritualistic. In this light, ritual becomes spacious and permeable, almost actively absorbent. Drawing in the most banal activities among the ethereal.

The phrase 'mediation of conflict toward equilibrium' brings an absurdly mundane memory to my mind: sitting in the elementary school principle's office, after a schoolmate had stolen my shoe during recess and tried to flush it down the toilet. They were my *church* shoes, my mother had strictly instructed me to take them off when I was outdoors. And having reluctantly left them alone in the coatroom, I returned to find one was missing. I was in tears. There I sat, face to face with the offender. The principle negotiated the terms of a punishment with us, settled our argument, and we left, both of us lightly wounded, but smiling friends again.

This is one repetition of ritual. This is how banal it can be. The mediation of conflict: sitting tearfully in the principle's office. Toward equilibrium: leaving slightly wounded, but happy.

The form of ritual may be banal, but the outcome is nothing of the sort. Conflict is mundane, so ubiquitous that it barely necessitates recognition. It is quintessential to the human experience as other and separate from the world, and permeates all areas of life, from questioning the existence of gods, down to a squabble between second graders. Mediation is equally commonplace. It emerges from conflict and is inseparable from it. But equilibrium is transcendence. It incorporates balance, and peace among individuals and their environment. Ritual, through its goal to achieve equilibrium, is the universal peacemaker.

In this light, we begin to comprehend the potential effects ritual, and ritual objects can have. Ritual becomes spacious and absorbent, one's own activities can be rituals and one's own creations can participate in rituals. Through this one can achieve tranquility for oneself, and encourage serenity in others.

Myth & Ritual

Designing Ritual

The form of rituals is based on the conglomeration of our understanding of the world: what constitutes a conflict, what is regarded as equilibrium, and the possibilities to pass from one to the other. (COMPARE: BELL, 1997, P.91) These postulations are the foundation for the deliberate choices that form ritual: its pace, chronology, composition and outcomes – whether the ritual revolves around the sun, the moon, or our cell phones.

These choices hardly seem to be choices at all. They are innate, and natural. (P.137) After initiation a ritual loses its beginning and end in time – it just is. It seems to have stretched as far back as we can remember, and we imagine that it will continue unchanged throughout future centuries. Having sprouted from our understanding of the world, rituals are organic: they are innate to us. (P.51-52)

To imagine that design could play a role in the eternal immobility of rituals is almost a heresy. (P.167, 169) It clashes with their significance. It breaks their eternal flow. Yet rituals are premeditated and chosen, coming from one's unique cognition of the environment. Even the most familiar and innate rituals must have been chosen and developed. Eating broken bread, and drinking a sip of wine – these symbolic acts, although they seem to be eternal, have their beginning at earliest in Jesus' last supper, at latest, in the hands of a catholic church looking for the best analogy for Jesus' flesh and blood.

While the form of ritual is pliable, the hands that shape it are driven and deliberate. The potential for conflict is ubiquitous, but whether or not we recognize it as such is based on what we

view as important and unimportant – our mythologies. Myths are ritual's backbone: they are the principles that rituals are built upon. But in the hands of myth, the deliberateness of ritual turns subtle and intuitive. We can believe that things have always been this way, and that they will never change.

Mythology

We do not, and cannot, comprehend the intricacies of the universe we live in, nor the planet we are living on. Here, the variables and the interactions and feedbacks among them are so proliferate, that each step toward knowledge opens up multiple pathways towards more information, and more questions. There is just too much information hidden from us – sometimes actively hidden, sometimes waiting in the furthest corners to be revealed, sometimes out in the open, simply hindered by the fallibility of our own senses – to be able to objectively understand our surroundings. We yearn to know and comprehend, but our knowledge is at best piecemeal.

Myth fills the gaps in our knowledge. (COMPARE: BELL, 1997, p.136) Like the aspic that holds together pieces of meat and vegetables, myth is the binding component of knowledge. Through them we are able to reconcile inconsistencies in the knowledge we have, toward solidified understanding. (p.12, 21) Although myths have a reputation for being magical and nonsensical, they are nothing of the sort. Myths are sensible combinations of our current knowledge. Of course, in filling in the gaps, myths always maintain an element of non-reality. They are not what is known, but what is imagined between

facts. In this way, they are free to roam between truth, and imagination.

In their essence, myths are stories that have become truths. (BARTHES, 1957, P.131) The differentiating factor between myths and other types of stories is that myths are generally understood to be true from within the societies in which they are embedded. Greek mythology was not understood as a series of tall tales, but as the history of the world, and of the Greek people. They were assumed as truth, and acted as the foundation of all knowledge and actions there.

History and Myth

In mythology stories become histories – our assumed understanding of our past and how they relate to our current being. But from this perspective, we also come to understand history as myth, the two become interchangeable.

In its essence, history is the record of the changes of time. It stems from the fallibility of our own memories. We cannot remember the exact details of life 10 years ago, and to compensate for this we create records, develop a historical archive of the events. Alternatively, history stems from our desire to share that which we have learned, or a culture's accumulated knowledge with future generations.¹ These stories are assumed to be records of the truth, but in their essence, cannot be more than the record of a single person's perspective on past events.

¹ Based on author's notes from lecture by Prof. Dr. Michael Erloff at the Köln International School of Design, 21 Oct 2009

Even with the incorporation of multiple viewpoints, history gains only a little more objectivity.

In this way, history is mythological. We make history innocent, take away its partiality, and assume it to be true. (BARTHES, 1957, P.129) As myth, history is used as the irrefutable justification of ritual. It has always been done this way. (BELL, 1997, P.167) Whether or not this is true.

Modern Myth

Although we rarely use the word myth to describe our own understanding of truth, mythologies still abound in modern society. Roland Barthes essays in *Mythologies* (1957) illuminate the myths that were present in France in the 1950s. While they are rooted in a different culture and time period than our own, his explanations shed a new light on the beliefs that we have. We begin to see the influence of nationality on our own choices to drink wine, or eat French Fries. (BARTHES, 1957) The overall influence of myth on our actions becomes clearer. In German society, the separation of different types of trash could count as a myth driving ritual. Here, the plastics, papers, organic material, and normal trash are each carefully sorted into their own bins, and collected by individual trucks on different days of the week. For many people their participation is a symbol of their contribution to recycling, and the protection of our natural environment. And becomes justification for producing more trash, rather than reducing their waste altogether. What happens to the discarded material after its out of sight is of no concern. This myth is more important than reason.

“Myth does not deny things,... simply it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.” (BARTHES, 1957, P.143) Although Barthes paints myth as the extortion of truth, his distaste for them likely comes from his zeal for looking behind culture, and inspecting what is driving it, rather than their factual negative influence on us. His understanding of myth is quite succinct, only his interpretation is negative. Myth does naturalize our assumptions. It takes history – a fallible account of times past – and turns it into the innocent, honest truth. Feigning as statements of facts makes them no more harmful than simple explanations. After all, to explain is to profess the truth of what is being explained. Myths can be manipulative, but most often they are harmless simplifications. As children, we are told myths about the growth-stimulating qualities of vegetables. This is not exactly true, but it is a more simple explanation of why they should be eaten than the fact that they nourish our bodies by giving them components vital to our bodily functions.

As filler for the gaps in our knowledge, mythology’s original intention is to simplify and clarify. They help us to remember the nature of our being, and reconcile the inconsistencies in our knowledge. Being attached to ritual, myths make them seem natural and innate. As our assumed understanding of the world, myths are innocent and unquestionable. When taken as the foundational understanding handled in a ritual, myth endows them with its own innocence and indisputability.

Ritual Objects

The potential energy for objects in ritual can be compared to the life-giving potential of eggs. As such, their form is simple and inconspicuous, but concealed within them they carry the potential for life. Genetic information is written and stored within their brittle shells. Awaiting fertilization, they are prepared and fitting to grow, gain form, and come to life. Their viscous contents are charged with potential energy.

In a similar way, objects carry the potential energy to become ritualistic within their innate objectness. They gain this energy from their nature as self-contained compositions of matter, the fact that they are separated from the rest of the world, and from us. Their formedness, expressiveness, invariability, and longevity, are inherent to their nature as objects, and each quality hints at their potential roles in ritual. If fertilized with myth, with a role in mediation or with deliberateness, they will inevitably come to life in ritual.

Gegenstand

The German word for object – *Gegenstand* – economically expresses a great deal of the potential that objects have to be incorporated into the ritual. As in English, *-stand* is the active component of the word. It indicates having a position, being somewhere. *Gegen-* translates to mean against or away. Under the label *Gegenstand*, objects are prepositional to humans. They are separate from us, and compared against us. (BELL, 1997, p.24) In their otherness, objects stand in relation to man, they can also have a *relationship* with us, carrying the potential to be mediated through ritual. (p.156)

This mediation occurs in our handling of objects. Treating them with respect or reverence. Fearing their power, or their fragility. The way we hold them in our hands, with gentle strokes, tight grasps or violent thrashes. By displaying them proudly on shelves, or concealing them in boxes in the attic. By taking true ownership and stewardship of them – integrating them into our daily lives, recognizing their importance and value. Or by merely having them and using them, making them servile. By cleaning them and preserving them, having them repaired and growing a connection with them over time. Or by tossing them in the trash when they go out of style, becoming dull, battered or unfitting.

The possession of firearms includes careful rituals that dictate their handling and storage. Our fear of their power, and the possibility that it could be misused induces a reverent relationship with them. We respect their power and treat it with care. Similarly, religious objects, such as the Qur'an, dictate mindful transactions. The Qur'an is displayed on a unique pedestal, and only handled after ritual cleansing. It is meditated upon in peace and humility. These interactions stem from the reverence for the object.

Like with ritual, our choice how to handle specific objects stems from our myths and understanding of objects as a category, or individual objects in our possession. From a religious perspective, “beliefs are representations that express the nature of sacred things, while rituals are ‘rules of conduct’ governing how people should act in the presence of sacred objects.” (Bell, 1997, p.24) To see objects as replaceable and finitely relevant, or

to respect them as unique, powerful, or important will influence our ritual handling of an object.

Through our handling we create relationships to objects, bonding with them, and connecting to them. We take in their function and the meanings they portray to our self. Alternatively we only stand in relation to objects. They are out there beyond the fleshy boundaries of our bodies, and are otherwise ignored and forgotten. Separate from us, objects have a relationship to us that can be mediated by ritual. Our handling of them physically, and conceptually become ritualized actions, by which we come to equilibrium with them.

Cleaning and Repair

Ritual objects can be found in repair shops, atop workbenches and desks.

They are clamped into place, put under the force of sanding paper and hammers. Or

carefully deconstructed under a loupe, each piece carefully lain out and inspected. They are found in buckets of soapy water, under the pressure of a polishing cloth or a washcloth, or having their minute crevasses probed by cotton swabs. They are found in protective covers, and archival boxes, or carefully positioned as the centerpiece of a room. This care indicates the objects' importance. It emphasizes their role in individual lives, and one's intimate relationship to them.



Here, having a pair of scissors sharpened is an act of respect for their objectness: the services they have provided, and will continue to honor us with. It indicates a give and take between human and object, which takes on the mythology of mutual courtesy. The myths that incite such handling can have a myriad of origins, being family heirlooms, or faithful companions.

Choosing not to repair a camera, or piece of equipment because the cost of repair is higher than the price of a replacement, indicates that the only relationship between human and object is its monetary value. The fact that it took in one's life through its lens, and housed it within its body is ignored. The only mythology lies within its price.

Here, we see cleaning, repair, and protection as a manifestation of the ritual nature of objects. These acts indicate the presence of a human-object relationship – that the object's presence in one's life is meaningful and fulfilling. They show a relationship, which is often mediated through ritual. These acts can also take on ritualistic qualities themselves. Where one's use of the object – be it emotional use such as fulfillment, connection to history, or reminder of a certain truth or physical use – is reimbursed with special handling. Here, each gesture of use and repayment becomes a ritual mediation between one's self and the object.

Formed

Unlike air, water, movements and ideas, objects have specific material form. They are concrete compositions of physical matter. Within their formedness lies the potential for their incorporation into ritual.

Having natural form, objects whisper to us about the intentions of the creator. We see His vision for the world in the form that flowers have been given. It is manifested in jagged mountainsides, and rolling hills. Alternatively, we learn about the power, and qualities of natural forces. Formation in the hands of humans expresses deliberateness. An object's exact composition, the choice of materials, the placement of bulges and intents were used to portray an exact idea. They were significant enough that they needed to be externalized and shared.

Objects are also containers for our thoughts, giving us space to store them. In this way, a piece of gold becomes the storage facility for our feelings about the sun, its illumination, and life-giving powers. The kola-nut becomes a vessel to contain the Igbo ideas about the constitution of the universe. (ABANI, 2004, PP.3, 60, 70) Tucked within objects, our thoughts receive tangible form allowing us to take them out of our minds, externalize them. Outside of us, we are able to think about them in new ways. We can also manipulate them, move them, juxtapose them with the physical world, and interact with them. Additionally, we can share them with others without the use of words, which may be fallible, or insufficient. In palpable form, our beliefs can be incorporated into our corporeal movements.

Having been loaded with feelings and perceptions, these objects become placeholders for concepts within rituals.

Family Heirlooms

Family heirlooms embody the actions, thoughts and aspirations of the generations that came before. Pedigrees are embedded within their constitution. The family's bloodlines run through wood's grain. The dust of familiar ties is tucked within pleats. Whatever the object may be, it is vested with genealogy, and carries one's forefathers within its form.

Using such heirlooms is to connect with one's own heritage and family, and to invite their presence in one's mind. Within ritualistic activities, heirlooms take the place of family members. Using a great-great-aunt's fine china at Christmas dinner is to have her, and all the other generations that possessed the object in between, sitting at the table with oneself. Sitting on great-grandpa's couch is sitting next to him. Here, family heirlooms become the placeholder for myths of heroic events, and devastating losses. They mediate between the contemporary self, one's own personal history, and the history that led to one's existence.

Expressive

Having form, objects are expressive. Objects are taken in through our touch and our glances and then translated, categorized, and given meaning in our minds. We perceive them, and gain meaning from their contour and texture. (JAMES,

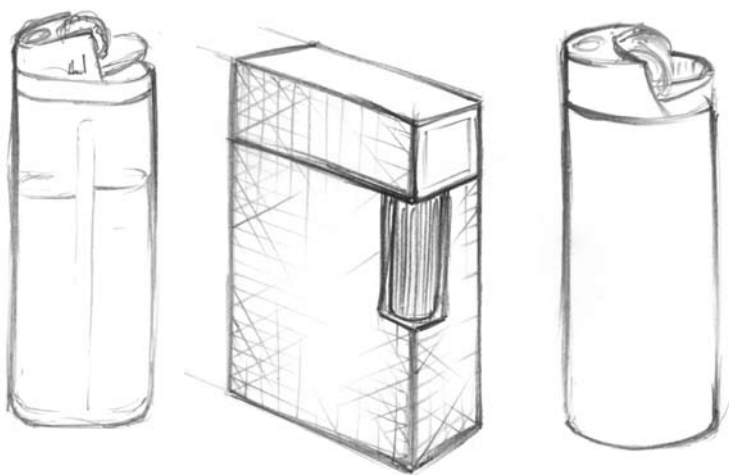
2009, p.11) The jagged shape of a boulder expresses qualities of the difficulty of life to us, it sympathizes with our sorrow and anguish. It is not formed by human hands but through the pressure of being pushed upward, and outward against its will. The smooth weathered surface of a river stone shares a completely different story. The tranquil flow of time and water has rounded its corners, made it soft and comfortable in our hands, and our sight. It sympathizes with the process of our lives, where the flow of moment after moment smoothens our own jagged edges, rounding us.

Objects formed by human activities express their creators' points of view, or those of society. Locomotives express the speed and force of society. While Japanese tea bowls express somber meditation, and mindfulness.

In either case – through innate or imposed expression – objects become a medium of communication and mediation between relating parties. Our impressions and interpretations of them help us to make sense of our relationship to our environment. Natural objects may become a means of understanding our relationship to the natural world, or to the gods who created them. Authored objects can additionally incite a dialogue where the creator's intentions exchange with the innate expressiveness of materials and lines, and the user's unique interpretation thereof. Their expression becomes mediation between the author and consumer, both trying to place their self in the world.

Through expression, objects also lend themselves to incorporation into myths, and thereby incorporation into all components of ritual. They can become instigators, by propagating

a myth that requires either reconciliation or reinforcement of the user. Their role can be meditative, where they belong to the players' understanding of how a conflict should be resolved. As, for example, is the case when objects are used in healing rituals. And they can constitute the resolution, embodying the qualities of equilibrium, or playing a role in a balanced state of being. Through incorporation into myth, the possible effects and roles of objects in ritual are manifold.



Fire and Cigarettes

With the flick of a thumb, man makes fire. Rotation of a rough metal wheel, friction against flint, and then there is “fire held in a man’s hand. Fire, dangerous force, tamed at his fingertips.” (RAND, 1996, P.64) Smoking represents man’s conquering of the forces of nature, having tamed its unwieldy force and learned to use it for his own pleasure at the tip of a cigarette. Lighters

carry the Promethean myth within their forms, and express unique myths of their own. Each of these myths gives way to differentiated rituals.

BIC¹ lighters carry the myth of transformation and modernity. Their form expresses the new portability of smoking. The stoops of buildings, and barbeques in the park become the setting for a ritual expression of freedom and modernity. They make smoking bourgeois and available to every man, happening on the streets, on the go. BIC's heavy plastic housing is robust, expressing respect for the ritual, and the fire contained within (in contrast to its ultra-disposable, thin-clear plastic counterparts). But it is also disposable and compact carrying the myth of mobility, and imparting the user with freedom of movement. With it, smoking is a ritual of the contemporary urban nomad.

Baudrillard describes the pebble lighter as carrying a mythology of nature, and man's manipulation of it. "The sea has polished it to fit the form of the human hand," he explains, "though it is an industrial product, the lighter is supposed to have retrieved one of the qualities of the craft object in that its form is an extension of the human gesture and human body; meanwhile the allusion to the sea takes us into the realm of a mythical nature itself culturalized as a function of man and perfectly adapted to man's every last desire." (2005, p.62) Here, the ritual of smoking becomes a ritual connection to nature.

1 French plastic products company. Company website: www.bicworld.com

Dupont² lighters express respect for fire and for the intoxicating power of a cigarette clenched between lips. The object is valuable, and a high price has been paid for it. As expressed in its form, smoking belongs to the elite. It occurs indoors with by smoking jackets, crystal ashtrays, surrounded by intellectual debates and whiskey glasses. It is retrieved from a coat pocket, with a cigarette case. Under the pressure of a thumb, the case springs open and a single cigarette is slid from its nested position under the clip. The muffled metallic ping ignites the simple gesture with energy. The gestural interaction with such a lighter is elegant, composed, and formally ritualistic. Each movement is careful and staid – perfectly orchestrated.

In the ultra-disposable lighter, with its brittle transparent body, we see a stopgap, lost at the bottom of purses and pockets, scavenged out of their cavernous depths in desperation for the next cigarette. They are a signal of addiction, and the Freudian compulsiveness³ of ritual. Candle lighters, fully impractical for lighting cigarettes, hint at the contemporary non-smoking home. In lighters, as with a great deal of other products, the form narrates a myth that leads into a specific ritual handling.

2 A product of S.T. Dupont Paris. Company website: www.st-dupont.com

3 BELL, 1997, p.14 Freud's interpretation of ritual: "...it is an obsessive mechanism that attempts to appease repressed and tabooed desires by trying to solve the internal psychic conflicts that these desires cause."

Corporeal

Our most meaningful interaction with objects is corporeal. The gestures that compose our use of objects include visceral interaction with them. We come into contact with their surface, take it in haptically and come to understand them. We transform and manipulate them in order to fulfill our needs. And alter our environment by moving and mutating them. Through our contact with objects, we come into contact with the world around us. This corporeal interaction can become ritual itself, or meld into a ritual activity.

Corporeality in ritual helps us to understand ourselves. (COMPARE: BELL, 1997, P.151) We gain an understanding for the capabilities and fragility of our own flesh. The Japanese tea ceremony is a method of learning the limits of the human body and mind. Each movement is choreographed; the handling of each individual object must be precise and correct. Here, the player learns to respect the objects they are using, but more importantly to gain mastery of their own body. Each gesture requires a solid understanding of the positioning, and movement of arms, and fingers. (COMPARE: SENNETT, 2009, P.166–168, HARA, 2010, PP.150–153, AICHER, 1991, P.51) Here, the objects mediate our relationship to our own body.

Craftsmen's interaction with tools is one example of this relationship. A chisel becomes an extension of their hand; they forget its otherness, maneuvering it as if it were part of their own body. The object becomes part of us, intrinsic to our being. (AICHER, 1991, P.26) Here, we mediate our relationship to the objects through our gestures. Physical contact with objects

helps us to understand them and mediate our relationship with the world.

Corporeality has the power to convince us, and teach us. In performing an action we learn its intricacies and details. We acquire a subtle controlled sense of touch, and sense for the action. Objects can teach us these formalities: their fragility can teach us to caress and protect their surface, they ask for reverence in their presence, or their solidity impresses on us the robustness of the ritual.

In these ways, our corporeal interaction with objects flows into the corporeality of ritual. Helping to mediate our relationships, and to develop and learn ritual actions.

Holding Yesterday

Reading a newspaper, we take it into our hands, manipulate and transform its configuration and fit it to our interests. Crinkling, folding, snapping, bending, refolding. In juggling the broadsheets we are also juggling the news of the day. We come into physical contact with the current events it contains, even if it is only through a sheet of paper. Each gesture is a moment of refocusing, and choosing, a transition between thoughts. We manipulate



the paper – fold it into stacks to concentrate our attention on a specific article. In disinterest or curiosity for the breadth of information we spread the sheets wide before our faces, attentively scanning the headlines. Its ink transfers to our fingers as a proof that we are informed and have delved into yesterday, reflected on its significance or banality.

Ink printed on pages gives instances and opinions a physical form, allowing for visceral reactions. Frustrated at yesterday's events we can forcefully throw the pages together and slam them on the bench next to us. Tearing articles from their pages, we can steal a thought to share with our colleagues in the coming day. Particularly striking articles are carefully cut from their pages and preserved for future reference, or as a totem for nostalgia. We can stack them in our garages, or hold on to individual editions to archive or our lives. Here, we interact with the information they hold in a physical way, through this imbuing the information with emotion.

Reading and holding the pages of the newspaper is a cultural ritual by which we mediate our relationship to our immediate and distant surroundings. It never takes exactly the same form: each day there is new headlines, and a new layout. But the schema remains the same: concentrating on yesterday's events, reflecting back as an initiation to the coming day. Our corporeal contact plays an important role here (which since the proliferation of e-readers and smart-phones has been widely forgotten). In holding the papers in our hands we bump into the news, put ourselves in corporeal relationship to it, we hold the previous day in our hands.

Invariable

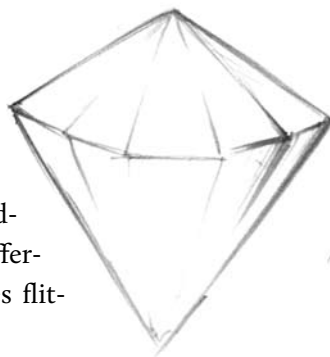
As solid conglomerations of matter, objects articulate concreteness and invariability. Their forms appear unchanging and stable to us. Although we understand that objects are formed, and that they came into being by change (implying that their being is malleable), we don't feel that. Our intuition sees them as static. Perhaps this is only in comparison to our own fragile flesh: objects do not degenerate the way that our bodies do. Or perhaps as an act of magical thinking: objects, once given form out of formless materials then remain unchanged.

The mythology of their invariability corresponds closely with the purported invariability of rituals. (BELL, 1997, P.150-153) The myths that drive rituals seem eternal, and perfectly preserved, as do objects.

In their ostensible invariability, objects carry these myths, and preserve them throughout the cyclical repetition of rituals. As participants change, and social contexts transform, objects and the myths they carry remain unchanged. They become symbols of universality – the infinite among finiteness.

Diamonds

Poised atop a ring, and slipped onto a finger, diamonds are the beginning of eternity. Under their facets, the myth of invariable love is hidden. Their sparkle is loaded with the effervescence of first kisses, and butterflies flit-



ting around in stomachs. Through their resilience and clarity they have come to symbolize the resilience and clarity of love.

As the tagline of DeBeers,⁴ the phrase “A Diamond is Forever” laid the groundwork for this communal ritual (GARFIELD, N.D.), but also simply pointed out the obvious: a diamond is unchanging and permanent. Its molecular construction prevents breaks or scratches to its structure, and its value prevents re-cutting. Atop a lover’s finger the diamond accompanies every choice, and action – forever in attendance. Each glance at the ring, the feel of its weight on one’s finger is a reminder of eternity. The wearer projects a facet of their relationship onto each of the diamond’s facets. Each time the ring is removed, it is carefully watched over, and returns to the finger as quickly as possible.

In this handling, diamonds become ritualistic; they mediate the relationship within a partnership, preserving the myth of eternal love within their form.

Rooted in the Past

The existence of an object now is predicated by creation, and existence in the past. Over time they have gathered stories about their formation, and the experiences they have been involved in through the course of their lives. The hands they have passed through, and the forces that gave them being. With natural objects these might be the stories of sunlight, and energy flow through ecosystems, or of being broken, and pressured, worked on by wind and water. In

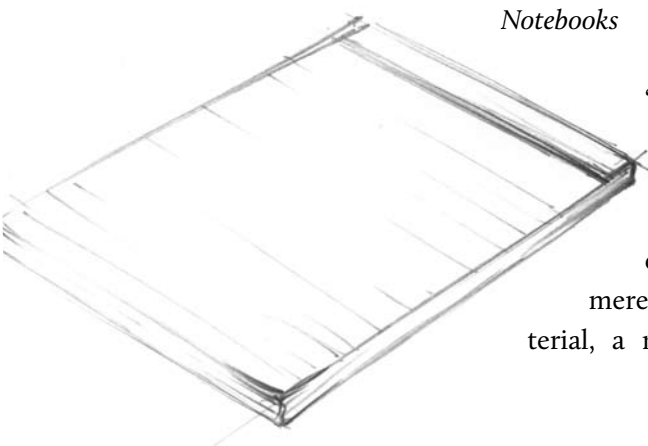
4 Diamond company. Company website: www.debeers.com

their contact with humans, they tell of factories, or workshops. The transactions they have been involved in, as gifts, bartered articles, or products on a shelf, and the hands they have passed through. These histories have the propensity to become myths.

The historicalness of objects helps us to mediate our position in the world. Through them, we can see our relation to the others who have touched and influenced the object. Our connection to the materials they are made of. Through them we can relate our being now to the way we were, or the way things were in the past.

The durability of objects, and the longevity of their history also become a muse for our dreams of immortality. With our investment in objects through attachment or creation, we are able to carry our selves into the distant future. We become historical ourselves. Alternatively, they become the muse for meditation on our finiteness in comparison to them. Their historicalness evokes and mediates our relationship to the past and future. (BERGER, 2008, P.4)

Notebooks



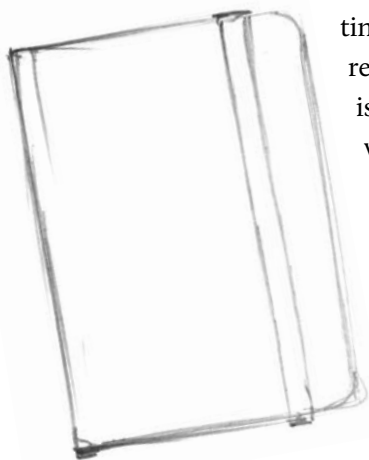
“The whiteness and resilience of paper... have stimulated human desire. Paper is not merely an inorganic material, a neutral surface used

for printing letters and pictures. Rather, the qualities of paper have drawn people into extended dialogue, which has enriched their capacity to express themselves.” (HARA, 2010, P.18) Stacks of white paper, carry the potential for thought and expression, sketches, lines, words, maps, all imaginations find a home in white pages. Notebooks are compilations of *cartes blanche*, stuffed with opportunity in their emptiness. The whiteness of these blank pages is open to one’s opinions, they listen attentively, and allow themselves to be transformed into expressions of the self, as receptive to our scattered doodles, as they are to our earnest schematics

Although each blank sheet is new and open to the future, paper is a historical material. Each sheet relates to all sheets

that came before it. The feeling of sitting before a blank page is a widely recognized human truth. The page is laden with potential energy; the writer is timid before the possibility of spoiling its pristine surface.

Since 1996, the Moleskine⁵ brand has profited from, and intensified the myth of blank pages. Proclaiming itself to be the “legendary notebook of Hemingway, Picasso and Chatwin,” (HOROWITZ, 2004) it has grown a following of would-be artists, writers,



5 A paperwares company. Company website: www.moleskine.com

thinkers, philosophers and designers. Each of these people believing (sometimes with a bit of magical thinking) that the notebook they hold in their hands is the exact same notebook that these intellectuals held. The company is actually built on the myth of the nomadic empty page, waiting to be filled with individual's thoughts, preserved and protected through time – a myth contained in the pages of every notebook.

Individuals become historical in the pages of a notebook. Pouring one's self into it, in the form of thoughts, quips, stories, sketches, scribbles, and art, one's opinions become sacred. Ritualistic handling of a notebooks – keeping them in coat pockets and purses so they are always at hand, or on the bedside table in case of emergency bouts of thought – is a ritual act. Each thought preserved has the propensity to become history, and mediates one's relationship to the future. And each page they are written on has emerged from a long history of blank slates, mediating one's relationship to the past.

Social Objects in Ritual

As humans, we manipulate the world through our thoughts and with our hands. We never experience objects in their purity, for what they are, "Denn immer mischen sich in die Wahrnehmung zusätzliche Motive: Erinnerungsspuren, Beschwörungen, Wünsche oder Sublimationen. ... Diese Vorstellung, die zusätzlich mit physischen Faktoren etwa symphathetischer oder antipathetischer Dimensionen aufgeladen wird, prädisponiert den Gegenstand oder zumindest dessen Betrachtung."¹ (ERLHOFF, 1988, P.12)

In their social capacity, as components of the human world, objects are loaded with specific roles and meanings. These qualities are rarely new, rather they come from the way that humans (as thinking, manipulating beings) have come into contact with them, and have begun to interpret them, and use them. (BURKHARDT, 1995, P.26) Through the development of these qualities over time, they have become innate to the interactions between humans and objects. Within these roles, formed by these interactions, we have loaded objects with additional ritualistic potential.

Activeness

Function is, in our culture, the highest manifestation of objectness. Objects that just are, are thrown out of the high kingdom of objectness. "For the real object is the functional object." (BAU-

¹ Author's translation: Because additional motifs are always mixed in with our perception: Memories, conjurations, wishes and sublimations. ... These associations, which are loaded with physical factors of the pleasant or unpleasant dimensions, predispose the objects or at least their contemplation.

DRILLARD, 2005, P.50) Having existence unattached to function – they are hardly considered as objects. A rock, though object-like, is a non-object until it becomes a rock countertop, a rock pathway, or a rock sculpture. Without function, it is unworthy of our consideration, unworthy to be considered as an object. Only when the possibility for function is attached can things like rocks move from materiality into objectness. The meaning of the word object has moved from passivity – a closed form – to activity – something that can be used.

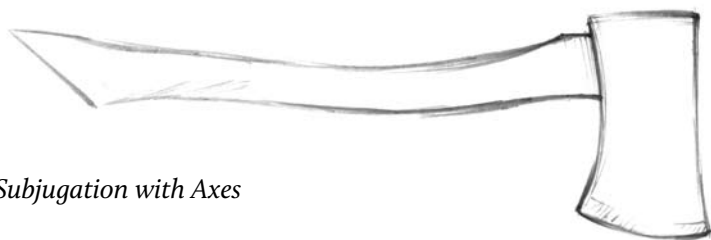
Without function, objects are clutter, and simply matter. Non-function is grounds for dismissal from our homes. They are not considered or cared for, rather ignored and pushed away. Non-function is non-existence.

The necessity of function has transformed the modern realm of objects into a realm of tools. (AICHER, 1991, P.153, BURKHARDT, 1995, P.22) In this, even the most superficially useless objects become functional. Art and sculpture are tools for contemplation and expression. Knick-knacks and kitsch are tools for remembering. Their function is specialized, and focused to the smallest niche of the object ecosystem. Non-descript containers have turned into cups, flower pots, bowls, boxes, Tupperware, freezer bags, buckets, baskets, and tubs, each with their own prescribed contents. Through specialization of each object's function, we find an excuse to own more objects. These 'species' also exemplify our constant drive for function.

As static constructions, objects are not innately active. They have been activated. Through our prescription of functionality, objectness now describes activeness.

As active entities with static compositions, objects prescribe specific chronology of activities. They meticulously spell out how their action is to be carried out. A hammer hints at swinging and hitting. Our hand finding its home at the end of the handle with the weight positioned at the other, an axis is created and it must be swung. The flat heaviness of the hammer's head calls for collision, forceful impact. French presses dictate the chronological cooking of water, filling in coffee grinds, combination of the two, and then separation with the plunger. In reference to the object's form, these actions are inevitable, and proper.

Owning active objects means that we subscribe to their beliefs about how the world is to be handled and manipulated. Our deliberate choice of the object, and the deliberate chronology and rhythm that they endorse come together to become ritualistic actions.



Subjugation with Axes

Swinging an axe against the trunk of a tree, man is transforming his environment and mediating his relationship to it. Its wedge-shaped head forces material asunder. Pulling away pieces bit by bit, it breaks the bonds between individual molecules. Axes as tradition tools, “belong to a field of practical mediation between the material to be transformed

and the person doing the transforming.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2005, p.53) Using axes, man transformed forests into farms, and trees into raw building materials. Together with axes, he created his surrounding as he pleased.

Humanity began with the sharpening of rocks to form axes. Axes are primeval machines, their blades separating pieces of tree, and separating mankind from nature permanently. Transforming solid materials into a shape that can do our bidding is part of our being. And tool making is widely recognized as the differentiating factor between man and animal. Tools separate us from nature, and put us in relationship to it.

Since then, the axe has maintained almost the same form. “It is hard for us today to imagine how a single tool and its uses could remain basically unchanged for thousands of generations. Still, when we pick up such an object and feel its weight, hardness and texture, we can instinctively understand the driving force behind its creation.” (HARA, 2010, PP.16–17)

Using an axe constitutes the subjugation of nature. With the form of a sharpened, weighted blade affixed to a long wooden handle, axes conform to the shape of the hand, and become extensions of the human arm. In each swing of the blade we are reconnecting to our humanness. The momentum the tool gains from our arm, and the solid contact with a tree’s trunk puts us in corporeal contact with the tool, and with the world. Here, we gain understanding of our own bodies, and the stubborn force of nature. Each piece of wood seems as if it were chipped away with the sheer power of our fingers. An axe is not innately precise, but in the hands of a practiced woodsman its movement is staid and exact. Through repetition of

the movement, the strokes gain surety. Our arms learn the subtleties of the movement. The repetitive action, and corporeality of this coarse gesture is loaded with the mythology of human power, (BAUDRILLARD, 2005, P.50) making the use of an axe into a ritual.

Choice

“The average American supermarket now stocks 48,750 items, according to the Food Marketing Institute, more than five times the number in 1975.” (ECONOMIST, 2010) Choice has become an inalienable right of our society. Choice is our maxim.

The proliferation of options loads every choice with intensified meaning. “Die Relevanz des jeweils einzelnen Gegenstands verdeutlicht sich dabei vielleicht nur in seiner modellhaften Nicht-Austauschbarkeit, darin also, daß er nicht beliebig ist.”² (ERLHOFF, 1988, P.15) *This* object wasn’t chosen as the lesser of two evils. It was chosen from 1000 other options, it is *exactly* what I need, want or have been looking for. Additionally, considering that objects are now serial, produced in huge quantities, with no unique differentiation, their uniqueness should be undermined, but instead, it is emphasized. “The corollary fact that every object reaches us by way of a choice is the fact that fundamentally no ob-

2 Author’s translation: The relevance of respectively individual objects is perhaps only clarified by its model-like non-exchangeability, thus, that it isn’t arbitrary.

ject is offered as a serial object, that every single object claims model status.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2005, P.152)

The differentiation between rituals, and mundane routines is the fact that rituals have been selected as such. Likewise, the distinction between everyday objects, and ritual objects is their appointment as such. The increasing exactitude of our choices loads objects with increasing potential for rituality. At the moment of appropriation, after the careful consideration and comparison, the object is conferred with deliberateness. Its myth has been consumed into our personal myth, and its activeness has already been integrated into our own, before it even reaches our front door.

Drinking Glasses



Standing before our cupboard, surveying the glasses that could contain our next drink, we are not just choosing a glass, rather we are deciding on a ritual. Our choices are extensive: water glasses, juice glasses, wine glasses (for red and white wine) coffee cups, tea cups, espresso cups, latte glasses, mugs, shot glasses, beer steins, Kölschstangen, tumblers, high balls, low balls, each form is distinctly related to the drink that they will

contain, and each form hints at a specific ritual. (BELL, 1997, P.142-143)

Wine glasses stand poised on the table, while the bottle is presented, and the cork subsequently removed from it with a tinny thud. With a short splash the first taste is poured in one glass, is swished around its bowl, in an elegant gesture of the forearm, and tested. The other glasses stand composed and patient until approval is given, and they too are filled. Their stem is carefully tipped enough to deposit a single swallow on the tongue, where the wine becomes the cynosure of all taste buds. The form of the glass hints at this elegant composure, thin walled, and thin stemmed. The glass' posture sets the tone for this ritual to unfold.

Other styles of wine glasses set different tones. Thick glasses remove the carefulness from the ritual. Wine tumblers, with their stub straight lines, make wine into an everyday phenomenon rather than a special occasion. Those without stems are slightly rebellious; they don't completely ignore the norm, but find their own twist to it. Glasses with wide gaping bowls hint at long nights of drinking in which everyone goes home slightly tipsy. Each of these forms carries their own indication for how wine should be drunk. (COMPARE: BARTHES, 1957, P.58-61)

The size, and volume of a Kölschstange dictates a speedy pace. Each glass should be consumed quickly, and the next should appear on the table even quicker. Here, the ritual is unending repetition: Drink, refill, drink, and refill throughout the night.

Embodying properness, teacups are dainty and fragile. Grasping them by the handle, one's fingers are strained to balance their boiling contents. Lifting it with steady and careful

movement, and sipping only lightly from the surface, one's actions conform to their delicateness. One lightly arches the back, and shares witty quips in their presence. Their poise keeps the user poised.

In the store, choosing glasses for our homes, each of these connotations comes into play: what kind of wine drinker we are, which drinks, and which rituals we prefer. In choosing our glasses – in the store, and from our cupboard – we are vesting the objects with deliberateness, (if we didn't care we would just drink from one glass) and making the decision to take part in a communal ritual, or design a ritual for ourselves.

Personal

Passing over the threshold of a person's home, one can immediately peer into the inhabitant's personality by means of the objects that they surround themselves with. Relics from travels and personal experiences stand on their shelves. Silverware and dishes hint at their dining preferences. Their furniture, and wall-colors explain their minimalism or elaborateness, formality or casualness. The artifacts stowed in their shelves, the sheets that envelope their beds. Each clue can be constructed into a complete impression of the person, before we have ever come into personal contact with them.³

The objects we choose reflect our self. (COMPARE: TURKLE, 2007, HARRISON, 1996, P.432) But the choice of objects has also grown into a method of constructing our self. We interpret who

3 Compare: AICHER, 1991, P.30 "wir sind in unseren objekten, und unsere objekte sind wir."

we are by means of a self-story. (RADIOLAB, 2007A) This story is composed in our heads, and draws connections between who we have been, who we are, and who we wish to become, making them into a clear and logical composition (whether or not we are clear, logical compositions). (RATEY, 2001, P.193, SMITH, 2008) We are increasingly constructing our self-story by means of collecting and displaying objects. (COMPARE: BBC, N.D.) Every object is a communication medium for portraying who we are to the outside world, and reminding us of the story of our self. Beyond being a passive display of our conglomerate consumption choices, objects have become active communication about our self.

In constructing our self through the acquisition of objects, we are reinforcing our self-stories by means of them. Each brand, and product we choose to buy, to keep, or to love helps us to construct a piece of our self. While shopping, the personal connotations, and their relation to who we believe ourselves to be come into play: “ ‘Das Niveau der Elite’, ‘das Neue Maß des Möglichen’, ‘Leica’ oder ‘Nikon’, beide hatten ihre Image, dann entschied die Tradition. Dazu kamen der ‘Walkman’ und die ‘Kraft der Innovation’ (BASF). Und ich dachte insgeheim ‘good morning future’ (BRAUN) und packte den Rasierer ein.”⁴ (BACHINGER, 1988, P. 28) Each of these choices helps us to reconcile our self-story with who we really are – to mediate the relationship between *me* and *my*.

4 Author's translation: 'The niveau of the elite', 'the new measurement of the possible', 'Leica' or 'Nikon', both had their own image, then tradition decided. Then came the 'Walkman' and the 'Power of Innovation' (BASF) and I secretly thought 'good morning future' (Braun) and packed my electric razor.

In the external world, objects act as our ambassadors. We don't need to explain that we value simplicity, and trends; we can simply pull out our laptops to communicate this. We don't have to show our bank statements, our income is disclosed through the logo on the coffee cup in our hand. Our extensive pool of friends is communicated by the ringing of our cell phones. Our key chains show fragments of our trips to Hawaii and our favorite soccer team, perhaps the last convention we attended. In this way, objects act as mediators of our interpersonal relationships, becoming consequently ritualistic.

Mirrors and Mornings

The wide spectrum of individual identity is enclosed behind a closet's doors, reds, greens and pinks, short and long, translucent and weightily textured, or monotone and staid, a spectrum of browns, blacks and grays. To inspect the contents of one's closet is to survey the possibilities of one's own identity. And each morning, the composite shield for the day's activities is again surveyed before the mirror. It is here that the self in its bodily and contemporary form can be reflected on.



The mirror is the central object of the morning, but rather than being focused on as a thing, it is a tool for building and inspecting the self. Teeth brushing, combing, and coiffing take place before the mirror. Makeup is applied – masking an impure identity – with the mirror’s guidance. Each step of composing the self is reflected upon through its surface.

Mirrors are non-objects. Their own materiality is unimportant, rather the objects and beings positioned before the mirror’s surface become the focus. The mirror takes on these things and transforms them into a flattened image of reality, providing the possibility for observation, perspective, replication and reflection. In its surface an individual splits into two, concurrently object and subject of observation. Transforming reality on their surface, mirrors present new and different perspectives on the world. Flipped backward, they are ostensibly factual representations of reality, but also open to interpretation. Here, one sees the reality that one wants to see. In their non-objectness, mirrors become embodiments, and mediators of the self, and the world’s perspective.

Cyclical

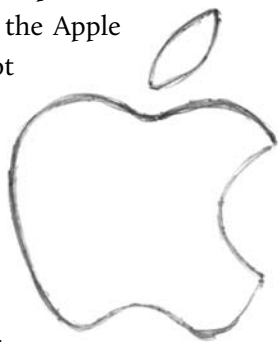
Objects in modern society have a deliberately shortened lifespan. This cycle was first initiated with what is called consumer engineering. In a prophetic book on the topic, Ernst Elmo Calkins wrote, we must “see to it that we use *up* the kind of goods we currently merely use.” (1932, p.13) What began as a way to emerge unscathed from the Great Depression in the 1930’s has become the universal truth of retail. Consumer engi-

neering ushered in the cyclical reappearance of durable goods, each repetition coming with new model numbers and slightly modified, gradually improved designs. Each repetition brings change and innovation, and a new reason to consume.

This cyclicity cannot help but be compared with the cyclical nature of ritual. Here, the reappearance of new models becomes a new opportunity to reinforce our attachment to the brand through consumption, making the acquisition of these goods potentially ritualistic.

Of course, consumer engineering receives a great deal of critical attention. But this critical attention has not correlated with the active negation of such products (at least not to the degree that the practice has become obsolete). As consumers, we understand that we are being engineered, perhaps even manipulated, but we continue to purchase each new edition. It is beneficial to us. Each repetitive purchase is a reinforcement of our values. We strengthen our belief that we are Mercedes people: that we belong to the luxury class the car represents. Each new acquisition bolsters, and reactivates the positive feeling that was experienced in the first purchase. One's self – as it is consumed through products – is sustained. Remaining consistent, while moving forward with time. Re-consumption is a method of reconciling who we are now, with our personal past.

Each revolution of Apple Inc.'s⁵ hardware products incites a renewed communal Mecca to the Apple Store. Lines build up in anticipation – not of the product, but of the possibility that they will be sold out by the time we get there to buy one. Even if we don't go on the first day, the process of the purchase is a renewal of our beliefs. It comes with a distinct chronology. First, of course, the trip to the most beautiful Apple retailer we know of – the electronics guy around the corner is not good enough for the purchase of an Apple product. The ritual inspection of all the new goodies in the display model, selling ourselves on its superiority above the old model, and all other brands. The first contact with the sale's clerk, waiting while the product is gathered from the stockroom. The elegant swipe of our card, a signature or a pin number, and the product is perfectly packed and placed in our hands. This is followed by the triumphant walk out of the store, our big, branded bag, displayed to the world, explaining to all passersby what we hold in our hands.



This trip is repeated in similar structure with the rhythmic change of fashion seasons, the introduction of new models of any consumer product and the cyclical appearance of our

5 American computer and electronics company. Company website: www.apple.com

paychecks in our bank statements. Here, product releases and spending propensity come together to become ritual.

Time-Savers and Disposables

Our typical morning ritual is strewn with mechanical buzzes, hums and dings. Alarm clocks sing us into life, before dawn. We roll out of bed straight to the coffee machine, raising its lid, inserting a capsule, and locking it in place with a click. Pressing a single button we first hear the gurgle of water reaching the boiling point, and then the deep, throaty nasal whirr of water pushing through a pad of coffee grinds. Our breakfast bread is put into the toaster; its glow corresponds with the buzz of electricity through wires, and then a ping and a clack as the toast rises to peak out at us. Placing our breakfast on a paper towel, we gather all the crumbs for the trashcan before they can hit the table. Any coffee we spill on the tabletop is clean with the same disposable towel. Our coffee cup lands in the dishwasher, a washing powder tablet inserted, and with the press of a button the hum and whish of pumping water begins. Into the bathroom, the mechanical buzz of our toothbrush's micro-vibrations, and our razor's oscillations fill the air. After showering, comes the whine of our blow dryer. Reading the morning paper from our smart phones, or e-readers, the refrigerator emits a soothing whirr in the background, before we leave the house, flipping out the lights with a dull clack. The mechanical din that surrounds us is the sound of speed and practicality.

A routine morning in a typical household, each process has been optimized, mechanized, and deferred from our own bodily actions. We rarely do things personally anymore; we merely press buttons to orchestrate the movements around us. The cleanliness of our dishes is no longer directly related to the movement of our hands. Making coffee is hardly an act of genesis, instead it happens with the press of a button. With certain machines, we are not even required to pour the liquid. We have no visceral understanding of its fluidity. Through the loss of corporeality, these gadgets have ushered in the loss of ritual.

Through disposable objects we can live free from all attachments. There is no need for a relationship to the objects that surround us, we don't have to care for them or relate to them in any specific way. If we are unhappy with them, they land in the trashcan, and if we are happy with them, they still land in the trashcan. With these objects, our relationship no longer needs to be mediated through ritual.

But time-savers and disposables have also imbibed our choices with increased deliberateness. By choosing to have a mop rather than a Swiffer,⁶ we are choosing to have a relationship with our possession. The choice to read off of paper rather than a screen is choosing to have a corporeal interaction with the information we are absorbing. Without other options, the chore of cleaning the floor is and stays as a chore. But in comparison to faster, or simpler alternatives, choosing more

6 Floor cleaning system characterized by it's disposable wet and dry cloths for sweeping and mopping. A product of Procter and Gamble. Product website: www.swiffer.com

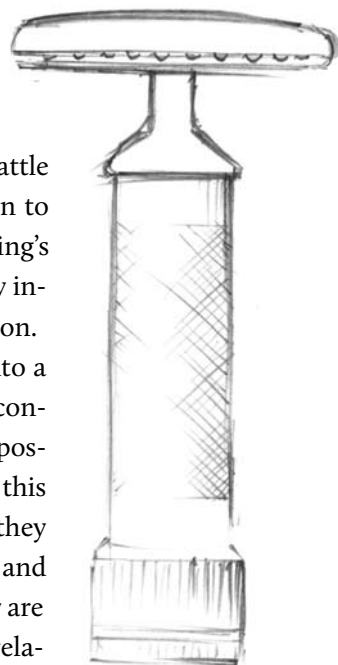
physical, more permanent objects is deliberate, and gives way to ritualism.

Razors

Shaving fluctuates between chore and ritual. It exists somewhere between the incessant battle against hair growth, and the campaign to reinforce masculinity. Plotting shaving's position between these poles is greatly influenced by the tools employed in action.

Disposable razors make shaving into a futile battle, detached from history, context, and personal investment. Disposable razors don't exist in time, only in this moment. Such razors aren't owned, they are used, their capabilities exploited, and then tossed aside. Not even tools, they are slaves. We are incapable of building relationships to them, and the object never feigns to want one. Here, repetition of the action is detached from the object, and from any meaningful context, it is a chore.

Through modern razors, men are made to be obtuse. Their intelligence is insulted by marketing ploys professing that another blade added on top makes them necessarily better, more modern, and more advanced. Their capability to rub their hands together and build lather is undermined. Slipperiness



now comes from a can. The ritual becomes a chore, reinforcing their gullibility or resentment.

Electric razors are disembodied from the gestural interaction with stubble and skin. Here, the object's cutting faculty is detached from corporeal movements. The flick of a switch makes the object sharp; another flick makes it dull and inanimate. Pruning hairs is reduced to single swipes over the face, rather than choreographed cooperation of hand, and blade.

Before these technologies, fathers and sons stood together in their undershirts, before their own reflection. Shaving was a rite of passage, the techniques passed down through patriarchal lineage. This experience was the boy's first taste of what he would become, a way to understand and come to terms with it.

Shaving with a straight or double-edged razor, certainly involves this nostalgia, but beyond this, it incorporates the corporeality, and object-owner relationship that newer technologies have eliminated in the name of practicality. Here, the chronology of the activity is clearly embodied within the tools and elixirs. Lather is composed of simple ingredients: soap, water and friction. Brushed over the stubble, it has time to sink it, permeate the follicles, and soften their resistance. The razor's weight and texture in the palm, signals its capability. Slowly sliding the blade over skin, we are in corporeal contact with the action of removal. Each repetition reinforces awareness for the contours of the face, and the vulnerability of skin. Through cleaning, and caring for each tool, the owner builds a relationship with them. The energy that they invest in the tools is used in turn to care for the owner – a symbiotic relationship. Here,

shaving is not forced – it is ritual reinforcement of masculinity and self-awareness.⁷ (BELL, 1997, P.150)

Meaning

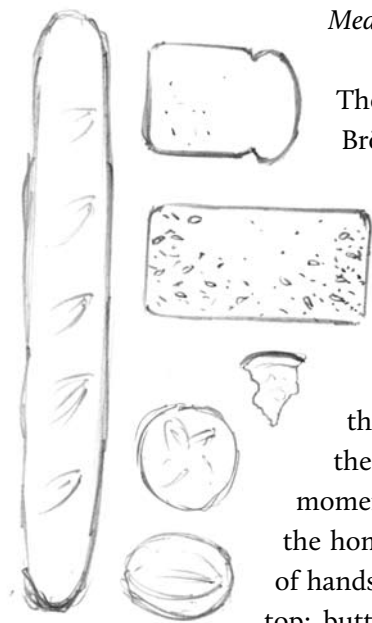
Meaning has been emancipated from traditional power structures in our culture. (AICHER, 1991, P.183) No longer being left to the decisions of religious or cultural leaders, each individual is free to bestow meaning on what they want. They are free to decide what is meaningful and what is not. Even if the perspectives of religions, governments, and brands are being shouted at us from every direction, we are free to choose whom to believe, which perspective to assume, or whether to take a perspective at all.

Correspondingly, objects are increasingly being implanted with meaning. We think increasingly symbolically about the world (AICHER, 1991, P.20), and objects are becoming more symbolic. (BAUDRILLARD, 2005, P.51) They align themselves with myths and generate myths of their own. The extreme range of variations, even within a single product range, dictates that objects must carry a meaning. (ECONOMIST, 2010) Among the masses of other voices, objects have to speak up, have a voice that draws in the consumer and the user. And they do.

In their meaning, objects attach themselves to myths. Objects and their corresponding use, realize our “...imaginierte und meist nachvollzogene Weltbilder: Man protzt, schmeichelt sich, verschafft sich vermeintlich neue Identitäten, erhofft sich

7 Compare Barthes' inspection of the mythology of beards: BARTHES, 1957, P.47-48

den Gewinn von Stärke und Freundschaften und Unsterblichkeit. Die Dinge werden zu Repräsentanten und geraten in einen ritualisierten Gebrauch.”⁸ (ERLHOFF, 1988, P.13) Each object’s meaning evolves into a fetish or a taboo, charged with mystical power. Then becoming idols that require specialized ritualistic handling.



Meaning at the Bakery

The simplest German bread – Brötchen⁹ – carries with it the mythology of family gatherings, fellowship and bonding. The breakfast table is carefully set and every conceivable topping is pulled from the corners of the kitchen, and gathered on the table. Here they lie in wait for the Brötchen’s hailed arrival, for the moment they cross the threshold into the home. Upon their entrance, a flurry of hands and jars begins above the table-top: butter passes hands, jams travel up

8 Author’s translation: Objects and their corresponding use, realize our imagined and mostly reconstructed worldviews: one splurges, spoils one’s self, supplies one’s self with supposedly new identities, hopes for the acquisition of strength, friendships, and immortality. Things become ambassadors and fall into a ritualized use.

9 Hard-crust white bread rolls

and down the length of the table, slices of meat, meticulously arranged are picked from platters with the deft movement of thumb and fork. Stories are exchanged, and day is begun together, in harmony.

Bakeries carry many such myths between their four walls. (COMPARE: POLLAN, 2006, P.4) Baguettes arranged like bouquets, recount stories about a close but foreign land. Romantic meals enjoyed over the rooftops of Paris, or elegantly simple meals, enjoyed course by course on the patio of a farmer's chateau, surrounded by the peaceful chirping countryside. The coarse, seed studded texture of whole-wheat loaves carry myths of health and vitality, and ritual snacks before a trip to the health club.

Host bread transmits the flesh of the savior onto tongues, where it disintegrates and melds into one's own flesh. Through it one takes his teaching as part of them, integrates them into the fullness of their being.

Matzo relates stories of never-ending exile, and differentiation. To eat it is to understand one's history, to sympathize with it, and be swallowed up in it. It reminisces on the feeling of strangeness, the feeling of externality. In sharing these accounts, it builds identity, brings together rather than separates.

American-style white bread carries with it the myth of productivity and industrialization – a technological wonder. Its square shape perfectly fitting for transportation, and presentation – no space is wasted. Its slices correspond with the slots of a toaster, and the slots of toasters now correspond to the shape of the bread. It tells tales of perfect housewives. Cutting off the

crusts for her children. Methodically smearing a perfectly even layer of peanut butter across one slice, and grape jelly across the other. Laid together and sliced diagonally, the creation reveals a geological cross section of American family rituals.

The elementary recipe of grounded wheat and water is combined in an endless variety of proportions and variations to tell all of mankind's stories. Bread's universal materiality unites humans together; (BARTHES, 1957, p.30) the same ingredients give each individual and group space to express themselves and their own history. These meanings have become the myths that underlie rituals across the world. Bread sustains us, attaches us to history, and to the future. Bread is the material of life.¹⁰

¹⁰ Note: This composition is based on group work conducted at the Köln International School of Design with Jana Liebler, Michael Jürisch, and Dominik Mies for the academic seminar "Die Seele der Dinge" (The Soul of Things) instructed by Prof. Günter Horntrich. Our work there was centered on the fetish of bread, and the various meanings it carries, here I add to it the dimension of ritual.

Designing Rituals

Rituals abound in modern life. Normal actions – reading the newspaper, drinking a glass of wine and shaving – take on the momentum and stability of ritual through incorporation of corporeal interaction, and deliberate decisions. These actions become interactions with the world, negotiations of the self within the context of families, societies, time, and space. They carry human mythologies about life, nature, and civilization, becoming expressions of our understanding of conflict, and the path toward balance.

In their innate and cultural nature, objects carry these qualities within them. They remind us of our convictions, and carry stories tucked within their forms. Coming into contact with objects, we listen to and interpret the soliloquies they transmit through their surfaces, hold them in our hands, carry them with us and manipulate them, incorporating them into our own rituals. Here objects gain the power of mediation, influencing and improving human experiences. They become ritual objects.

In design, these are sought after qualities. The ability to improve lives and the chance to make a difference on an individual or societal scale is a foundation component of creation. Beginning with the blade of an axe, humans transformed their surroundings, cutting down forests, building homes and farms. Since then, each transformation has been toward the goal of betterment of mankind's situation: an attempt to reduce conflict, and create equilibrium. In this, we see that the focus of ritual is also the focus of design.

Innate Mythology

Rituals begin and end with mythology. But rather than being imposed on ritual – carefully constructed by one individual and projected onto an action – these myths emerge organically from the cultural or individual understanding of the world. In this organic growth, myths and rituals seem to be permanent and natural. Although they are constructed by human thoughts, rituals are not fabrications or manipulations because they emerge from myth.

The quality of emergence is important capability of ritual. It induces widespread compliance and alignment. The stories are not questioned, and the actions are not questioned, because they are already one's own.

The objects that I discussed within this work are rarely singular brands, individual designers, or specific designs. They are generic and common. Yet without this imposed information, each object still carries its own myth. Lighters carry the myth of Prometheus; diamonds carry the myth of permanence. These myths are already contained within them, and do not need to be applied through advertising campaigns, or proper nouns.

Designers need not project myths onto the surface of their creations. Rather, they are better served in investigating the myths that abound in society, and drawing from them. The most popular form of myth making – advertisements – although effective in selling, leads to disappointment in ownership. (COMPARE: BARTHES, 1957, P.36, 42, BACHINGER, 1988, P.27-30) The advertised myth is not innate to the object; it has been plastered on it with words and beautiful images. In using the

object, people feel betrayed at the disconnection between expressions and feelings. Likewise, the myths that are transmitted through overly zealous forms and dominant brand names do not lead to equilibrium, but create conflict.

A ritual object's myth is transmitted by osmosis as it comes into contact with the skin. Understanding is built through the process of use, and interaction. And is innately attractive as it coincides with the understanding of the user. Mythical, and ritual objects rarely need to be pushed through sales, instead, consumers feel understood by the objects. They are innate expressions of one's own perception. Ritual objects become confidants, their magnetic force drawing us in and bonding with us.

Innate Corporeality

Rituals are corporeal. In ritual, player's bodies are pulled into action and interaction with their surroundings. In this, the body's interaction becomes a transformation of our thoughts. As Bell pointed out, "in ritual-like behavior 'not only seeing is believing, doing is believing.'" (1997, p.160) We come to understand our surroundings by physically interacting with it. We grow a closer realization of our own body by coming into contact with its boundaries. Ritual objects incorporate gesture and corporeal interaction within their interface.

In using a razor, one learns a somatic understanding of the contours of the face. In reading a newspaper, we physically connect with recent history. Books incite a tangible understanding of the author's perspective. In these ways, corporeal

interaction becomes a closer understanding and personal investment in an action.

Yet, design is moving toward buttons, concealing complex processes underneath smooth sleek surfaces. “Buttons, levers, handles, pedals (even nothing at all – as when one passes in front of a photo-electric cell) have thus replaced pressure, percussion, impact or balance achieved by means of the body, the intensity and distribution of force, and the abilities of the hand,” (BAUDRILLARD, 2005, p.58) in this way, our physical capability is abstracted into theoretical capacity. Interaction has become abstract.

The power of corporeal interaction – the close connection one builds with objects, and the understanding that can be gained through it – is being forgotten. As Baudrillard explained, “the modern order disappoints us because it stymies any profound involvement, any visceral perception of our own body; because we can now recognize therein scarcely any aspect of our bodily organs, of our somatic organization.” (2005, p.58) In my French press, the simple pressure of my hand pushing a mesh filter through soupy coffee, imparts innate understanding of its essence. Pouring it into a cup I feel its weight and mass, and learn to control its liquid movements.

Like myth, corporeality cannot be imposed on objects in design, but must come logically as a physical interaction with the task at hand. Closing the lid of a Senseo, while corporeal, has no direct relation to the materiality of the coffee in my cup. Imposing extraneous gestures transforms an object’s use in to chore rather than a ritual. Flipping through the newspaper on my iPhone, flicks and taps of the finger are physical interac-

tions with the screen, but through them, individuals do not invest themselves in the information, they are detached from its reality. Tangible, somatic interactions with objects should come innately from an object's being and function, enhancing comprehension and personal investment.

In this way, design becomes a task of observing and investing one's self in human action. Designers inspect the myths that abound in society and bring them into objects, intensifying their potency. Allowing their transmission through touch, and interaction. Creating ritual objects becomes a process of learning the innate nature of things, and subtly amplifying their conciliatory influence.

Watches¹

On the face of a watch, the time is cut into pieces. Like the slices of a pie, each minute is perfectly prepared for our consumption. Its hands rigidly tick around the surface, pointing out each passing minute, and breaking the fluidity of time into a rigid march forward. With their assistance time is under our control, we can plan our days and minutes, and sensibly consume it piece by piece. (BAUDRILLARD, 2005, P.22-23)

But time is not solid and sliceable. As Nooteboom succinctly described, "Perhaps it would be better to leave out the article

¹ Note: This composition is based on my project work including original research on the experience of wearing a personal timepiece. Conducted at the Köln International School of Design for the mid-term project "Design for Life" instructed by Ian Coxon, and Prof. Dr. Michael Erlhoff.

here and say *time*, so as to give it all the tough syrupyness to which it is entitled.” (1996, p.21) Time is goopy and inconsistent, getting stuck in certain moments and slipping quickly past others. (AICHER, 1991, p.147) We carry a myth on our wrists.

Watches embody myths of society and a shared understanding of time. They are built on the social construct of standardized time that emerged with the speed of the railroad. (RADIOLAB, 2007C) Back then, time was marked strictly by the movements of the sun, and with each town laying at a different longitude, each town had its own unique time. Trains made the nation-wide coordination of time into a necessity, using it to plan arrivals and departures in different towns. Here we see the myth of coordination, and internationality that our structural time has taken on. Bound to our wrists, their weight reminds us that we are part of a pack of humans, that we can coordinate ourselves with them, and their movements.

Passed along through generations, from fathers to sons, watches carry stories of passing time. Carefully protected, any damages are immediately repaired, their batteries immediately replaced. They are gifts for special events, often signifying a rite of passage. And learning to read a watch’s hands is a right of passage from innocent child to a thinking and independent society member.

In such an object, these myths seem obvious and natural; its intervention is completely forgotten. The ritual is innate to our everyday handling. Yet the simple gesture of lifting the arm to checking one’s watch, and feeling its gravitational pull on the wrist is ritual mediation between the self and society, family, one’s social roles, and the finiteness of human existence.

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