

The nonsensical relationship of objects and people in 21 century.

by Gabriel Colón-Amador

Scholars and archeologists have studied artifacts and objects for many centuries to understand the human activity of the past. Many of these historic objects describe how we survive through time, organize as species and describe our conditions. The object itself defines ideas, events and time in relation to a particular situation. For example, the “Olduvai Stone Chopping Tool” is approximately 1.8 to 2 million years old and was discovered in Africa in modern Tanzania. This object is one of the earliest items humans ever made. Based on the geometry and physical characteristics, scholars can determinate what it is and how it was used. Archeologists not only can discover the objectives and functions of the items, but they can identify as well the condition and behavior of people as individuals and as a group or civilization.

Objects trough time can explain a lot of our history in terms of values, culture and society. For good or for bad, objects in general have information codified that reveals who we are as a singular persona as well as part of a collective. Time keeps passing and we keep evolving and still this conduct is a pattern noticeable in modern society.



Figure 01: “Olduvai Stone Chopping tool”. Source: www.thehollins.com

This behavior is so strong that as result many other factors like economic development, mass production and globalization in our era are transformed into an era of consumerism and materialization. Objects start taking on roles not only as method to describe us through history, but now are involved in our lives as a form of “needs”, identification and classification. Objects in our modern time transform to be not only matter, but they are symbols and sings in which society reads and interprets to seek understanding. This conduct is important to understand because it is a way for society to record and retain information.

In ¹ “The Will to Power” Nietzsche addresses this idea of interpretation as a way of introduction of meaning not “explanation”. This idea is essential to objects because it gives you an understanding of why a product or object relates to external information like myths and connotations. To take this thought further, we can take into consideration the Freudian Psychoanalytic Approach.

What Freud stated is that people tend to resist knowing the unconscious as well other



Figure 02: “Friedrich Nietzsche”. Source: www.stephenhicks.org

factors like sexuality and the famous Oedipus complex. When we apply this idea into objects and artifacts we find that this material thing has so much information attached beyond what is visual that some information is never released from our preconscious and an unconscious state. To be specific, an object as well as other information passes through our mind in different phases like the consciousness, preconscious and the unconscious state. Those three categories describe some specific aspects in our relationship and behavior with products and objects.

If we keep disintegrating objects in a way of understanding their meaning in relation to our modern society, we need to address one of the ideas of Chris Caple. He said, ² “We are in society and society is in us, and it is

¹ 604. (1885-1886) Friedrich Nietzsche, The will of power. (Trans. W. Kaufmann) 1698. New York: Random House.

² 29. (1915-1965) Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.

simplistic to neglect either of these two sides to our nature. In artifacts: they are in society and society is reflected in them. That is way artifacts are not only reluctant witnesses to the past but also valuable witnesses to the present.”

With this in mind, we can have a better understanding of how objects not only described something of the past or an action in real time, But how in modern society they represent entire areas of discussion of subjects, interpretations, connotations, myths, behaviors, values, personalities, desire, needs and other information that is beyond of our control.

We live inside a world in which objects have infested our life as result of the easy production and reproduction of manufacturing. This conduct starts generating around the 1900 with the industrial revolution in America as well in Europe. Also another factor that is involved is how our economy is organized which is a free market economy or capitalism. These two factors affect now how we see objects and our relationship with them. Because we are so loaded with possessions, they have started to lose their real needs and become something that just lives normally among us. This behavior is the result of a society that

accepts and commemorates the values of consumerism. What this means is that objects now don't have the same value than for example 200 years ago. Everything in these days is accessible and disposable with almost any margin of time. This is very important because we can state firmly that now the relationship with objects changed to be in a certain way new and different. The problem with this is the actual relationship that society in general had created with products, possessions and values.

In a certain extent this new bond with objects is not so stable, but stable in the sense that people shift their values and perceptions depending on the situation that they are involved in. For instance, what we are shopping or looking for something to buy for a specific propose, in a form of needs, we are looking for an idea of a product that completes a task that we are demanding.



Figure 03: "Plastic bag". Source: coloradopeakpolitics.com

Figure 04: "Chanel bag". Source: frillr.com

This means that we are looking for something that resolves or simplifies our “problem” to our specific situation. When we encounter a product in a store or a place that is exhibited for sale, we encounter it with a sense of simplicity. What I mean is that we see the product with the consciousness that the product itself was produced with the intention of some consumer to buy it. But when the product is removed from the rack or display area and leaves the store in a shopping bag, that bag becomes our possession and the product our property. The interesting situation of this case is that the product no longer will remain as a product that was designed for a consumer. For instance, what happens is that the consumer will adapt an aptitude of superiority and dominion as result of the exchange of money for the product. And this action is what leads the change in perception of objects. The consumer no longer sees the product as simply as a product, but sees it as something that belongs to him or her as while he or she belongs to the product.

A good example that deals with this idea of identification is a cellphones. Cellphones have evolved in a way that is not only a system for communication but in our society is more than that. It represents now a space, which contains all our social information,

cyber information and “personal” information. Cellphones these days represent what before in the times where mainly journals. People now use cellphones to retain information as well to record data like pictures and videos, which in the end this information is translated to a kind of type of timeline for the users. The problem with this type of device is that one can discern a person in their social and personal aspect by accessing their information, which is recorded on it. And as result, what happens is that this conduct leads to the problematic relationship and false sense of the user belonging to the technology as well the technology belonging to the user on a personal level.



Figure 05: "Iphone". Source: thetechnologygeek.org

As you can see there is a big problem of ideology existing now between us, products and the way they are presented towards society, mainly because we adapt this conduct only for certain situations and with

specific objects. It's not always the case that people adapt this symbiotic relationship and the aspect of identification with objects.

This behavior is the result of the vulnerability of making a product in a sense "personalized".

On the other hand, there are other kinds of products that experience other kind of treatment. For example, the people who approach a product such as sun block are very different and for my opinion more realistic. When people decide to buy those kinds of items, their intentions stay very critical. People buy the product to help prevent getting burned from the sun in whatever scene they will be involved. This preconsciousness and the conscious of the product will stay the same for the rest of the lifetime of the product. Before and after getting the product, the product itself will remain neutral with out any type of personal relationship.

The problem is that this situation is not always the case. When we move to other types of objects and products that involve our sexuality or intimacy, things again change completely. For example, when people buy condoms or other related sexual items like vibrators or even underwear, people take a different approach with these

types of products. On the preconsciousness state people know that these items are just simply products as the norm inside a material culture. And also, we can say that they have almost the same experience when they exit the store with the items in a bag; the object changes from being a product and becomes their possession. But what changes is when the product leaves the store, exits the shopping bag and remains silent in your house, room, and apartment or anyplace that identifies your space, like cars, backpacks, wallets, etc.... As you can imagine, the circumstances change and the perspective of these types of products is not longer the same as encountered in the store. Why is this? Why do we change the values and perception of objects, which have any sign of life, opinion or power?



Figure 07: "Vibrator". Source: www.health.com

Figure 08: "Condoms". Source: www.printmatic.net

Is difficult to see products and objects and don't react. Is a natural law that everything has a cause and has an effect. But sometimes

these effects are not natural or right or even valid. This means that the affects are almost a type of fiction that we crating just to make meaning to the situations. This exactly is what Nietzsche proposes in the book ³ “Will of Power” “ interpretation is just a matter to introduce meaning not explanation”.

Also we need to understand that different product will bring different relationship as consequence of the different purpose and actions that are involved. But the ideal situation related to this era and products is to acknowledge the idea that product are just simply product inside and outside a store. And of course, with out any options we need to live under the effects of objects in relation of our personal and social life. But the actions of acknowledging that products are just simply products is what will neutralized the fiction and stories that products have in the 21 fist century.

As a person who lives inside a material culture and has an education in a field that is related to that matter, I decided to discuss some problematic issues related towards society and artifacts. In conclusion this is just one step to put our behavior and values into perspective. I would like to give thanks to Prof. Jonathan Field, Prof. Owen Foster

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Until next time.

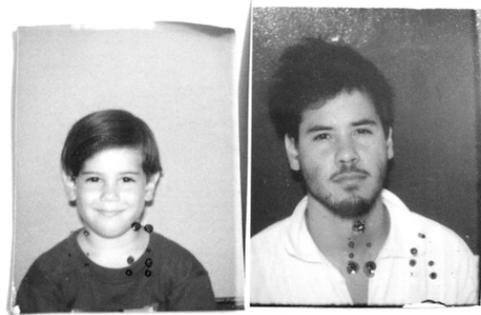


Figure 09: “Gabriel Colón-Amador”. Source: www.gabrielcolonamador.com

³ 604. (1885-1886) Friedrich Nietzsche, The will of power. (Trans. W. Kaufmann) 1698. New York: Random House.