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THINGING:
POWERFUL OBJECTS

By

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M.A. Webster University, 2008

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in Studio Art and Design

Hite Art Institute, University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2019

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A Thesis Approved on

April 22, 2019

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents
Mr. William R. Burke and Mrs. Jennette A. Burke
who have given me a lifetime of love and support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my partner Jeffrey Guernsey for encouraging me to pursue this renewal in my life, for standing by me through the struggles and long days, and celebrating successes. Thank you to my dog Dahlia for making every day of life better by being a comfort and joy.

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Barbara Hanger	Ché Rhodes
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ABSTRACT

THINGING: POWERFUL OBJECTS

Tammy M. Burke

April 22, 2019

The works in "Thinging" are inspired by desire, the genuine and the false, systems of real and perceived values, the quest for immortality, the allure of things, our use of them to make ourselves, and imagining pasts and futures via objects. The following concepts are threaded through the work: cathexis, ritual as a value builder, collections, hoarding, display, object history, exchange, use, and sign values, and vibrant materiality.

At the heart of my investigation is the quest to examine the origins of object power, and by what measures it can be evaluated: value from belief, market value, and something perhaps intrinsic and still to be explored. The first takes place in the mind, the second in the marketplace, the third, upon engagement, and often, they intersect. This thesis explores these concepts from three points of view: sociological, phenomenological, and ideological.

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INTRODUCTION

Often going unnoticed, objects facilitate daily living and reflect individual and cultural identity. They are intertwined into living. Through use and time, objects become imbued with meaning and value. Collections of things project meaning and construct identities in society and in an individual's mind. Regarding this, Russell Belk summarized Sartre: "the only reason we want to have something is to enlarge our sense of self, and the only way we can know who we are is by observing what we have."¹ Identity is a territory which is expressed through objects and performance, and can be mapped in one's mind by associations of things.

Aside from one's personal collections of things, there are objects which have shared cultural meaning, whether it is a singular rare or important object, or a symbol. The loss to fire of Brazil's National Museum in 2018 is a case study for the intellectual and cultural devastation incurred after losing such a breadth and depth of rarities. Those objects held histories that benefitted everyone. When they were lost, they left a void of knowledge and experience. Victims of natural disasters sometimes lose every possession and memento of their past, of their

¹ Russell W. Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15 No. 2 (1988), (New York: Oxford University Press), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2489522>, 146.

loved ones. That loss has been found to be as deep a loss as that of losing a loved one.² The degree of loss attests to the power and meaning of objects, intrinsic or invested meaning bestowed by an individual or by culture.

Materials and objects embody beliefs and facilitate sacred acts. Rituals, among life's daily routines, are intentional simulations in which outcomes may not be certain, but desired and envisioned. The ritual process may be the totality of the experience, but through ritual simulation we manufacture transcendence. Simultaneously, for the faithful participant, objects and materials used to carry out, or that are produced through rituals become cathected. "Cathexis involves the charging of an object, or idea with emotional energy by the individual."³ They retain residues of the encounter in the participant's mind. The simulation hallows the materials as well as the faithful.

During the annual Catholic ceremony of La Madrugá in Seville, Spain, the faithful execute a highly choreographed and extravagant procession of La Esperanza Macarena, a lavishly appointed seventeenth century life-size statue of the Virgin Mary. Devotees carry the statue from inside the cathedral through the streets of the community as onlookers shower her with petals. Spectators and participants are moved to tears. The statue is also dressed in other garments for other occasions to meet the needs of the congregants. The object and its presentation encapsulate a message, and momentarily, they deliver something greater than their parts. For a moment they enable an emotional release.

² Belk, "*Possessions*," 142.

³ *Ibid.* 157.

Objects can overpower us. For people who have compulsive hoarding disorder, the mass of items overwhelms the owner, though individual objects retain their treasured qualities. The hoarding collector may see potential in debris, value in nonessential qualities, or feel compelled to steward the objects when no one else would. Some differences between a typical collector and hoarder pivot around discrimination of quality, the ability to discard, and display practices. Hoarding is object power at an extreme and can cause serious stress and even physical harm to the collector/collector.

The hoarder's value system differs greatly from society's systems of object value. Objects generally bear a market value, a use value, and a social one, (status as a sign). When the sign status is little to none, such as a common reusable grocery bag, market value is very limited, but a common object that is also a social signifier bears a higher exchange value, such as a Gucci grocery bag, (if such a thing would exist). The plain bag, for argument's sake, is as functional as the Gucci bag, therefore they share the same use value, but their exchange values would be skewed by the luxury brand as a signifier. This can go the other way, however. An item can have very high use value and low exchange or sign value. As described by Marsha Richins, objects that have little exchange value, such as "a tattered teddy bear or some chipped China plates" may still "have high (non-utilitarian) value in use to their possessors."⁴ If use value is similar, the object's sign value (which alters its exchange value) determines its marketplace, whether it is Barney's or Target, the pawn shop or Sotheby's.

⁴ Marsha L. Richins, "Valuing Things: The Public and Private Meanings of Possessions," *Journal of Consumer Research* 21, no. 3 (1994): 505.

Objects imbued with deep personal meaning are reduced to market value in secondary markets. These include the art market as well as the pawn shop or swap meet. When personally treasured objects enter these markets, it strips them to their commodity status. These secondary market examples are at extreme ends of the spectrum, however. Provenance is key in the art market and objects are presented singularly as prized objects. Items at pawn shops are purposefully anonymous and presented as sheer commodities in collections of similar objects. Items in pawn shops generally result from an unfortunate situation for the original owner, which could turn off a buyer by association. In low end secondary markets, the stripping of information increases value. In high end secondary markets, robust information is key to maximizing value. This attests to the relevance of object history in valuation.

Object history affirms or disproves authenticity. Forged objects attempt to hold the social power of valuable objects to therefore gain a similar market value. The stripping of authenticity begs the question, what is the actual difference between a painting by a renowned artist and the identical one by an unknown? In the 1930s, Hans van Meegeren successfully forged several Vermeer paintings, one of which was purchased in 1938 “for the equivalent of many millions today” by Dirk Hannema, the director of the Boymans Museum. The forgeries were discovered only because he sold a fake Vermeer painting to Nazi Hermann Göring. Van Meegeren admitted to making the forgeries to avoid the greater crime of selling a national treasure to the Nazis.⁵ Upon learning an object’s true

⁵ “Van Meegeren's Fake Vermeers,” Museum Boijmans van Beuningen,

origin, the object's status changes in the mind, and subsequently, in the market. This value is agreed upon to protect the interests of the market and the canon of art history or brand value.

Valued object histories include personal and social associations, origin, rarity, craft, or fineness. Objects with meaning attributed to these qualities, one could say *extraordinary objects*, but also mundane objects, can cause a listening, call attention, a marveling or wonder, a sense of having a place in time, of a future, and immortality. Walter Benjamin described an original work of art's aura as "the here-and-now of the work of art - its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence and nothing else that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject."⁶ He claimed that an aura was palpable, and sometimes evident in its appearance. This idea can extend to non-art-objects. Marketers and those who persuade through images and ceremonies mimic aesthetic qualities of powerful objects, and their presentation conventions, to generate more appeal for commodities, but they still lack aura.

Belonging to a culture means understanding its complex and innumerable signs, as Baudrillard discussed in *The Consumer Society*. These signs manifest as artifacts, gestures, and processes. They may be particular to the person, or to the community. In either case, these signs are imbued with meanings individually and collectively and form the basis of identity, individually and collectively.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnnkuOz08GQ>, published August 30, 2010.

⁶ Walter Benjamin, Michael William Jennings, Brigid Doherty, Thomas Y Levin, and E. F. N Jephcott, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 2008, 21.

Humans have adapted to use things (as signs) to project themselves. Staging, the conscious arrangement of environments to create a message, is paramount in contemporary society because objects can be communicators of what is appropriate and inappropriate. They project rights and wrongs. An environment full of *wrong* things, of discordant signs, can derail processes, halt relationships, stunt growth, kill joint ventures, and prevent partnerships. Our fluency in signs is most apparent when things are *not right*.

All of this object power must serve something. What is behind the code? Is there some unwritten script of object engagements and the ways in which people are to regard them? If so, to what end? Why does one desire one product over a similar one with equal use value? And what might be calling you from that display case? Our relationships with objects are between us and them, and culture at large. The trade of objects and food services in the U.S. generated \$507 billion in January of 2019, and globally, the U.S. exported \$2.1 trillion in goods in 2016, (the latest available data).⁷ Objects and consumptive experiences are major drivers of commerce and are often facilitators of false consciousness.

⁷ "Data," World Trade Organization, <http://data.wto.org/>, Retrieved April 4, 2019; Monthly Sales for Retail and Food Services, https://www.census.gov/retail/marts/www/marts_current.pdf, retrieved April 4, 2019.

SOCIOLOGY

The established way to discuss objects and possessions is through sociological points of view, specifically psychology and consumer research. As noted, we build ourselves through our things, which requires their selection and acquisition. Russell Belk, an academic in the field of consumer research, has written foundational work on the *extended self* and the role of possessions in projecting identity. Belk built upon Eugene Rochberg-Halton's research on the meaning of things, in which he declared that "valued material possessions...act as a sign of the self that are essential in their own right for its continued cultivation, and hence the world of meaning that we create for ourselves, and that creates ourselves, extends literally into the objective surroundings."⁸ In our minds, our belongings project our cultivated image into the world. Belk summarized what our extended network of self-things do for us: "Possessions help us manipulate our possibilities and present the self in a way that garners feedback from others who are reluctant to respond so openly to the unextended self."⁹ Our things allow us to communicate with each other by displaying familiar signs, reducing some risk by establishing a pathway of commonality. The

⁸ Belk, "Possessions," 140.

⁹ Ibid, 159.

extended self is not a new concept. In 1890, William James stated that, “a man's self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands, and yacht and bank account.”¹⁰

While this statement reflects antiquated points of view of ownership, it shows that the concept of the extended self is not a new one.

The motivations of studying possessions are manifold, but one is to promote commerce, to help marketers sell more product. Abraham Maslow's groundbreaking 1943 paper, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” in which he described the prepotent stages of need satisfaction from physiological, (food, water, shelter), safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization, is discussed today almost exclusively regarding marketing strategy. But the document only explained human needs and possible motivations, with no suggestion toward exploiting the concept for economic gain. This points to the pervasive drive toward marketing and consumption. We are constantly directed toward objects.

Marketing images are the most pervasive images today, even if they are not obvious, and continual acquisition is the pervasive message of marketers. Methods, or even the practice of discarding is not a priority, nor is the message to keep. Most commercial images promote uncluttered well-appointed environments of *new things*. The subtext is, *acquire these new things and be happier*, (by living in an environment that signals being in the know, with disposable income). The image of the the new object, and the broader image it

¹⁰ Belk, “Possessions,” 139.

helps craft, (staging) is the actual product. New products serve as backdrops and props for one's own future images, which will help communicate to peers the message that things are going well for the buyer. This speaks of status, and Maslow's "esteem" needs, and Baudrillard's concept of the code of signs.

Status objects convey social meaning as cultural signs that are recognizable by the peer group one hopes to impress, (or simply to convince oneself of possessing a status), whether it is a fashion item, a highly collectable antique, a work of art, or an experience, such as a vacation. A vacation is often a commodified experience, an engagement with a set of extraordinary things. These acquisitions also fit into Maslow's second highest level of fulfillment which is "esteem."¹¹ Most people continually acquire in this realm of fulfillment, hoping subconsciously that it will help them reach the highest satisfaction of need, that of self-actualization, hoping that projecting these *signs* will produce fulfillment and happiness.¹² Group affiliation is often reflected through possessions, status objects, and of course, relationships. They may be expressed through attire, lifestyles, and participation in rituals, formal or informal. Public meanings, to which people may aspire to emulate and share in, develop through many avenues such as "advertising, portrayals of consumer goods in media such as movies and television shows, and the association of specific goods with highly visible and distinct social subgroups."¹³ Desire can be groomed.

¹¹ A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 381-382.

¹² Maslow, "A Theory," 382.

¹³ Richins, "Valuing Things," 517.

From infancy, objects are presented and used as life facilitators. Parents and loved ones fill an expected baby's environment not just with necessities of clothes and care implements, but squeezable soft tactile stuffed toys, and they have faces. At the beginning of life in Western culture, objects are anthropomorphized. Babies take to clinging to what D.W. Winnicott termed the "transitional object", which is a tactile object not recognized as separate from the self, "the first possession." This object substitutes for the mother's breast, which is also not perceived as apart from the self. The usual pattern is that the child loses interest in the transitional object over time, as knowledge and other interests grow.¹⁴ Winnicott specified that the transition object is an experience of illusion. Interestingly, he commented that "I am therefore studying the substance of illusion, that which is allowed to the infant, and which in adult life is inherent in art and religion...."¹⁵ The human relationship with objects starts as a lively one, with external things being interconnected to the self. Only through *maturation* does that change to one of domination and control.

Over a lifetime, objects prove to be enduring and their meanings evolve. Younger people "tend to be attached to things that involve kinetic interaction, such as stereos, musical instruments, pets, sports equipment, vehicles...and stuffed animals."¹⁶ Older people value things that remind them of loved ones and the lives they have lived. Object immortality manifests in some people's desire to

¹⁴ D.W. Winnicott, "Transitional objects and transitional phenomena; a study of the first not-me possession," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 1953; 34 (2): <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a56f/ba056a21039574e5b2371f4ad01728b54366.pdf>, 90.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 89.

¹⁶ Eugene Rochberg-Halton, "Object Relations, Role Models, and Cultivation of the Self," *Environment and Behavior* 16, no. 3 (1984): 349.

construct something tangible that will outlast them, and in cherishing objects that belonged to deceased loved ones. Things are transferred or passed on from one owner to another to establish a legacy.¹⁷ Time can be grasped through objects. The realization of time inspired awe when standing before the collection of three-thousand-year-old rolls of Egyptian linen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the hundreds of pieces of jewelry and personal objects from the same collection. Worn items are ideal facilitators for spanning time, because they allow us to visualize the bodies of the individuals from so long ago. These items also touched their bodies.

“Contamination” is the concept that objects retain something from encounters with a person, or an event.¹⁸ Contamination, (or contagion), alters the value of items from a particular person, place or time, and contributes significantly to the success of historic sites. At Monticello in Virginia, for example, as of November 2018, ninety-five percent of the items in the house were original to Thomas Jefferson’s residency. Not all historic sites have such a wealth of original items. One walks on the same floors, looks at the same artifacts and artwork as the visitors to Monticello, its enslaved people, and its controversial builder, more than two hundred years later. A historic home filled with reproductions and antique items that are only similar to what was original lacks the aura of the original, which has been in contact with the significant persons. Contagion depends on physical contact, or even presence. It is an aspect that

¹⁷ J. W. Gentry, S. M Baker, and F. B Kraft, "The Role of Possessions in Creating, Maintaining, and Preserving One's Identity: Variation Over the Life Course." *Advances in Consumer Research* 22 (1995): 11.

¹⁸ Belk, "Possessions,"140.

can seem to animate a thing, but it depends on knowledge. Contagion explains part of, (in addition to object history and cathexis), La Esperanza Macarena's power for the specific group of faithful Catholics. This figure has been a tool of connection to the divine for centuries, by the faithful's ancestors, and countless others. How many eyes have beheld her? How many tears shed as she was carried through the streets? Each encounter builds her connective power for the faithful, as well as her exchange and sign values.

The "endowment effect" may also be tied to contagion. This is when a person prefers their own object to a similar or better one presented, because they already own it. "The endowment effect can be considered a reasoning bias, because objectively, value should be a reflection of the objects material and functional properties, but the endowment effect demonstrates that one's personal history with an object also contributes to its value."¹⁹ Even children exhibit the preference for their own things over identical, or better items presented in trade.²⁰ Perhaps we perceive our own personal investments into objects and that endears them more to us, that we feel our *extension* into them.

The tarp collection in *Indulge in Avoidance* (2018) is presented with videos of their enactment in order to explicitly manufacture an increase in their value through use, by creating a documented history, and possibly through contagion, (if the viewer values this particular artist, or *artists*). Time has been reversed in the videos to alter the appearance of their movements, to take them out of the

¹⁹ Susan A. Gelman, "Artifacts and Essentialism." *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 4, no. 3 (2013): 449-63. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3747004/>. doi:10.1007/s13164-013-0142-7, 7.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 8.

realm of actual movement into one of magical animation. Walter Benjamin described art's transition from magical ritual objects to political exhibition-focused objects as a result of mechanical reproduction, especially in film.²¹ The coupling of the original objects (the tarps) and their recorded performances touches on both. They are now artifacts as well as art objects. Dorothy's ruby slippers at the Smithsonian Museum of American History, from *The Wizard of Oz*, worn by Judy Garland, are an example of object power rooted in history, contagion, and the meaningful record of their use.²² Of course, the movie's impact is of utmost importance. If the movie had been lackluster, no one would care.



Figure 1. Tammy M. Burke. *Secondary Market Display*. Salt dough, imitation gold leaf, acrylic, minky fabric, mdf. 64 inches X 35 inches. 2018.

²¹ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 25.

²² "Fact Sheets: Dorothy's Ruby Slippers," Smithsonian Museum of American History, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/press/fact-sheets/ruby-slippers>, retrieved March 20, 2019.

Presentation can empower even mundane objects. Finishes, styles, and forms speak in phrases that allude to ideals of cultural periods. *Secondary Market Display* (2018) comments on how, in some secondary markets like pawn shops, an object's unfortunate history is undisclosed to new buyers based on how that information might decrease its value, assuming that information does not change the object's function or legitimacy (figure 1). The gilded wads are symbolic of marketable objects, different and the same, made and displayed individually among the mass, but amplified visually by the reflections in the black acrylic dividers. Baudrillard wrote of the "simulated intimacy" put forth in marketing, an implication that the seller shares some confidence with the buyer and the product.²³ The idea of a retail display relies on implied specialness, a preparation for an audience, prepared to be consumed visually.

Display Cabinet #1 and *Display Cabinet #2* are designed to evoke specific historical periods. The white triangular cabinet refers to early modernist architecture, the black gilded octagonal one suggests late Victorian furnishings. The intention of giving the cabinets specific framing through design takes priority over the specific periods here chosen, but the choices were not arbitrary. The modernist cabinet alludes to optimism through scientific innovation. The Victorian one points to solemnity, history, and preservation, but the manipulative framing takes precedent.

²³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, (Theory, Culture and Society, London: Sage Publications, 1998), 13.

The modernist *Display Cabinet #1* (2019) offers views of spectacular objects: a large faceted rutilated quartz, a faceted lab created white sapphire of unnatural proportions, and a piece of pyrite, also known as fool's gold (figure 2). Each one performs optically, regardless of its exchange value. The rutilated quartz, the *naturally created* one of the pair of gemstones, is less spectacular than the lab created sapphire, which cost 73% less than the former. It has lower exchange value but perhaps a higher use value. A mined white sapphire of similar size as presented here, is unattainable for most, if one exists at all. One can currently purchase a 15.98 carat mined white sapphire for nearly \$40,000 from the Natural Sapphire Company.²⁴ The pyrite specimen is nearly valueless, though through magnification, even when out of focus, it becomes marvelous, and gains use value (figure 3). Magnification is a tool employed here, as it is in natural history and science museums, to reveal, to teach, to build value through knowledge, imagination, and reframing.

²⁴ "White Sapphires," The Natural Sapphire Company, <https://www.thenaturalsapphirecompany.com/white-sapphires/?sortby=pricehigh>, accessed March 20, 2019.



Figure 2. Tammy M. Burke. Display Cabinets #1 and #2, installation view. 2019.

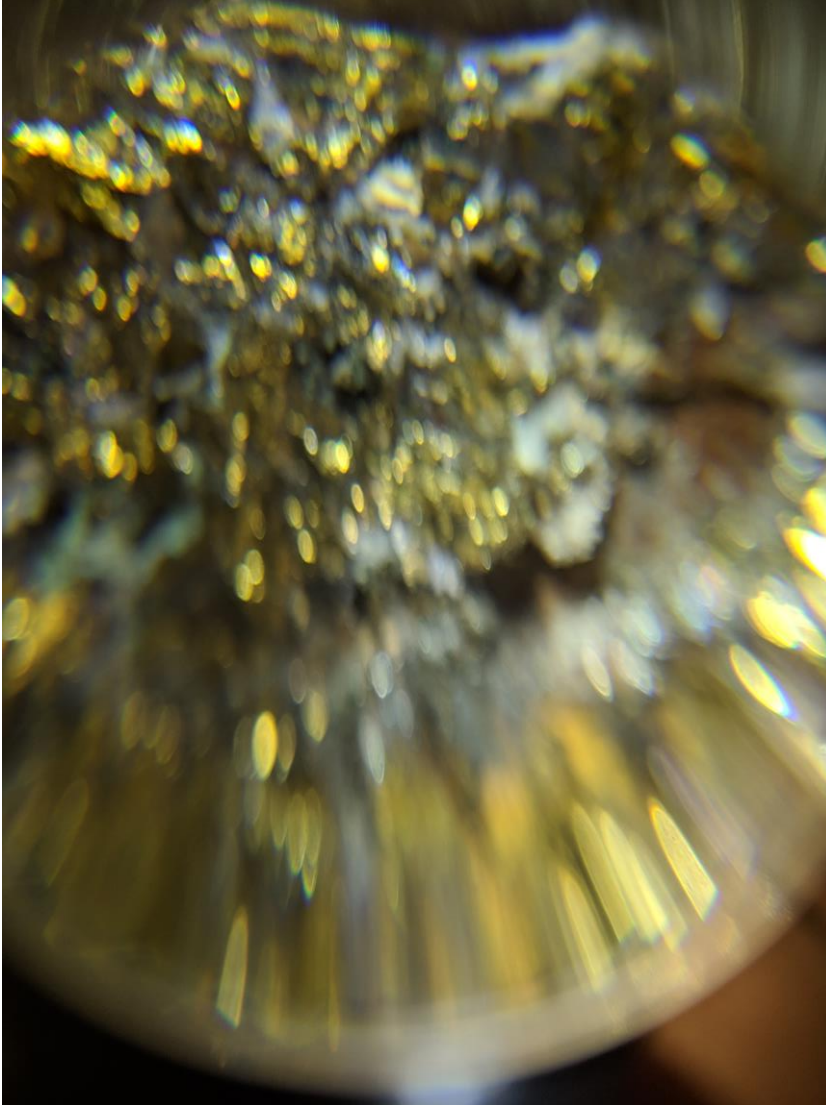


Figure 3 Display Cabinet #1 detail, pyrite. 2019.

Display Cabinet #2 (2019) offers magnified views of bronze and silver cast hair and fur balls, a reliquary for once object things which have been made more permanent and more valuable in use and exchange value through the lost wax casting process (figure 4). Hal Foster wrote about a trend among artists using forms of archiving in "An Archival Impulse." "These sources are familiar, drawn from the archives of mass culture, to ensure a legibility that can be distributed or détourné...in this regard archival art is as much pre-production as it is post-

production: concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces.”²⁵



Figure 4. Tammy M. Burke. Display Cabinet #2, detail. 2019.

Hair is a linear record, a witness, and a repository of data: DNA, identity, chemical history. It is extremely intimate, a constant companion, and becomes an abject material to some when detached from the body. Throughout history, people have kept hair of others. These hairballs are enmeshed, matted, made a thing from a material, then cast into metals that not only have a commodity value,

²⁵ Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 1, no. 110 (2004): 4-5.

but a symbolic one of the everlasting, of preciousness, of permanence, immortality. With current technology, the map of an organism can be decoded through hair. Hair now embodies the real concept of resurrection or replication. With the rise in popularity of consumer genealogical DNA tests, do people view bodily materials as less abject since they are repositories of data, hold the code to their essence, and are the gateway to finding countless unknown relatives? Do people view the body more as an object, (in this case, not as a sexual object), because of access to this new information through data?

At the opposite end of the spectrum from those who organize displays of items are those with hoarding problems. Hoarders amass things because they perceive some value in them, regardless of whether others do or not, and become overwhelmed by their hoard. Gail Steketee, a psychologist who researches hoarding issues, examined the differences and similarities between museum professionals and hoarders. Key differences were that compulsive hoarders do not edit their collections, nor are they displayed, but are unorganized and difficult to navigate. "Collecting is distinguished from accumulation by the deliberate supplication of specific items that constitute a cohesive set."²⁶ Collectors have a clear goal, deaccessioning items to better refine the collection. Those who hoard have broad criteria for collectability, discarding little to nothing to keep the undefined set complete. One might consider if those who hoard have *one* collection comprised of many collections.

²⁶ Gail Steketee, "Hoarding and Museum collections: conceptual similarities and differences," in *Active Collections*, Edited by Elizabeth Wood, Rainey Tisdale, and Trevor Jones, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group), 2018, 52.

Avoidance is a hallmark of hoarding behavior, which leads to massive accumulations, and affects all decision making. This "may partly stem from commonly found difficulty categorizing and sorting objects, as well as strong emotions that accompany efforts to avoid acquiring and to discard items."²⁷ "It is the avoidance of that pain, or of any negative experience at all...that is as fundamental to the development and maintenance of hoarding as acquiring things in the first place."²⁸ Hoarding habits tend to increase over a person's lifetime, and the hoarder may come to value relationships with objects more than with other people.²⁹

The hole in the floor (2019) presented in the exhibition and used in the videos represents a problem that will not be remedied by any of the enacted solutions and avoidance of dealing with the obvious chasm. Though the solutions, (each tarp), may be interestingly distracting, the impression of the hole is always present, central, and evolving (figure 5). Also, the shaped wooden accessory objects of *Indulge in Avoidance* (2018) were designed so that they could be attached to one or more tarps (figure 5). They are in coordinated sets, and their shapes refer to the many ways that people distract themselves from confronting problems: the heart is flesh and everything hedonistic, the phone is a tool of escape and masquerade, the teddy bears refer to transition objects and other physical surrogates.

²⁷ Randy O. Frost and Gail Steketee, *Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2010), 154.

²⁸ Frost and Steketee, *Stuff*, 154.

²⁹ Steketee, "Hoarding and Museum Collections," 52.



Figure 5. Tammy M. Burke. Still from Tarp video #1. Video projection. 8 ft. x 8 ft. 2019.



Figure 6. Tammy M. Burke. Indulge in Avoidance. Synthetic and natural fabrics, brass grommets and hardware, wood, melamine. Dimensions variable. 2018.

PHENOMENOLOGY

One experiences objects and may be affected by them, through the senses, as well as through social lenses. According to Jane Bennett, things, whether raw materials or manufactured items, produce effects which she illustrated by describing her halting encounter with a collection of debris which included a dead rat, rubber glove, and other detritus.³⁰ They allure, fascinate, repulse, offend, prove, index, and record. Our receptivity to object affects seems to evolve over a lifetime, being more sensitive in childhood, and less *distractible* in adulthood.

If, according James, Belk, and Rochberg-Halton, identity is formed, projected, and reflected in possessions, (broadly speaking, including relationships and associations), one could propose that D.W. Winnicott's transitional object, an object that is not yet perceived to be *apart* from the self, is replaced by the set of objects that comprise identity, and are objects not known to be *part of* the self. Belk described a progression of human-object relations:

If the early changes in person-object relationships may be described as moving from being one with the environment to having objects that aided the transition to a world where self is distinct from the environment, then

³⁰ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter : A Political Ecology of Things*. (Durham: Duke University Press 2010), 4.

the next changes may be characterized as moving from having transition objects to doing things with or to the environment.³¹

Belk cited other research which found that “many collectors who are inhibited and uncomfortable in social interaction, surround themselves with favorite objects upon which they project human-like qualities...in this sense, collections may be seen as transition objects or security blankets for adults,” which echoes the statements made previously about objects providing comfort and companionship for some people.³²

The points made so far have been very much centered around human perception, not on reception. However, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton recognized the receptive nature of encounters with things: “An aesthetic experience involves something more than the projection of meaning from the person to the environment or vice versa. It involves a realization of meaning through interaction with the inherent qualities of the object.”³³ In developing the ideas of new materiality, or vibrant materiality, Jane Bennett and Manuel DeLanda have built upon historical points of view by Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, and others. They make the case that this conveyance of meaning from things is perhaps not simply human perception, but that things are lively. This recalls Donna Haraway’s cyborg manifesto, a posthuman vision of a lively integration between things, technologies, and humans. Bennett coined the term “vibrant materiality,” and one way she described it is as “not quite human

³¹ Belk, “Possessions,” 146-147.

³² Ibid, 154.

³³ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton. *The Meaning of Things : Domestic Symbols and the Self*. (Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press), 1981, 179.

capaciousness.”³⁴ She proposed that *inanimate* things are on a spectrum of liveliness with humans and animals and other obviously living things, and are imperceptibly animate, but slower, that there is inorganic agency. She wrote that “things...[signal] when the subject experiences the object as uncanny and feels the need for what Foucault calls ‘a metaphysics of the object’, or, more exactly, a metaphysics of that never objectifiable depth from which objects rise up toward our superficial knowledge.”³⁵ At the core of the concept is that there is no binary of the living and the inanimate, that all have a degree of conatus. Spinoza defined conatus as a drive to live or persist. Belk also hinted at objects’ possible affective capability on identity: “besides control over objects, control by objects may also contribute to an item being viewed as part of the self. That is, we may impose our identities on possessions and possessions may impose their identities on us.”³⁶

When one encounters a powerful object, it can incite desire, disgust, or fear based on its capacities, what can be called its virtual nature, which may not be manifest. Products’ capacities are marketed. Manuel DeLanda described the perpetual virtuality of things:

Philosophically, there is an important distinction between properties and capacities. Properties are always actual, since at any given point in time the knife is either sharp or it is not. But the causal capacity to cut is not necessarily actual if the knife is not currently being used. This implies that capacities can be real without being actual.³⁷

³⁴ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 3.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

³⁶ Belk, “*Possessions*,” 141.

³⁷ Manuel DeLanda, “The New Materiality.” *Architectural Design* 85, no. 5 (2015): 16-21, doi:10.1002/ad.1948, 18.

Objects are always possibly enactable, and we perceive their capacities.

Capacities, (the virtual), inspire desire, among other sensations. Bennett also talked about capacities: “Emergent causality places the focus on the process as itself an actant, as itself in possession of degrees of agentic capacity.”³⁸

In a talk given at The New School in 2011, Bennett examined the motivations and statements of hoarders to explore what may lie at the root of their attractions to objects. She proposed that hoarders have a greater receptivity to the “call of things” because of the phrases they use to describe them, such as “they just speak out to me.” She supposed that those who hoard have “extreme perception...they notice too much about their things. They are struck too hard by them.”³⁹ As mentioned before, one of the sources of pain in discarding for the hoarder is the sense of responsibility for their objects.⁴⁰ If things are lively and affective, those who hoard avoid the pain of discarding because they fear disconnection from that liveliness and the fear for the objects’ futures. The amassed items form a new entity, what Bennett called “agentic assemblages.” “Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts.”⁴¹

If we make exceptional value assessments on objects that have been in the possession of loved ones, historic, famous, or infamous figures, are we

³⁸ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 33.

³⁹ Jane Bennett, “Powers of the Hoard: Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter,” Recorded September 13, 2011 at The Theresa Lang Community and Student Center, The Vera List Center for Art and Politics, The New School, NY, video, 1:14:44, <https://youtu.be/q607Ni23QjA>.

⁴⁰ Hélène Cherrier and Tresa Ponnor, “A Study of Hoarding Behavior and Attachment to Material Possessions,” *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 13, no. 1 (2010): 19.

⁴¹ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 23.

conditioned to do so, or is it an inherent speculation that something of the owner remains, a residue? Logic, and our tendency to view objects as vehicles of our projection, (the definition of cathexis places the making of meaning and power in the mind), points to it as a conditioned response, but in personal habits (keepsakes), and in expenditures, (paying premiums for provenance), we place high values on these connections. In her article “Artifacts and Essentialism,” Susan Gelman argued that essentialism depends on object history.

“Psychological essentialism is an intuitive belief that, for certain entities...there is a deep reality that extends beyond superficial features, and that there is some inner causal something...that is responsible for the item’s identity and underlying features.”⁴² Essentialism is what causes us to place a greater value on “authentic” items. It is also tied to contagion, which results from physical contact between objects and other living entities. She goes further:

Authenticity and ownership are pervasive and early-emerging concepts that apply readily to individual artifacts, and each deeply reflects an essence-like attention to non-obvious, hidden properties with potential causal consequences. Specifically both authenticity and ownership entail attention to object history.⁴³

Often these associations of objects with their former owners reflect a desire to resurrect, to hold onto something tangible from the mortal, or to draw from the item some quality from the former owner. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, in their foundational book *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*, express this connection to others through their possessions:

⁴² Gelman, *Artifacts*, 2.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 3.

When an object is imbued with qualities of the self, it expresses the being of that person, whether in written words or a chair that was crafted or a photograph. It becomes an objectified form of consciousness no less than words spoken into someone's ear, all forming part of the social self. Through these objects a part of the self comes to be embodied in the consciousness of others and will continue to exist long after the consciousness that molded them has ceased to exist.⁴⁴

If we do form ourselves with things, as has been described thus far, then our things are our extended bodies. In a recent New York Times article about clearing clutter, Dr. Joseph Ferrari, a professor of psychology at DePaul University, advised “don’t touch the item. Don’t pick it up...Once you touch the item, you are less likely to get rid of it.”⁴⁵ Is there a co-mingling? Are things depositing just as we deposit? There is something to touching, something to contamination.

In the current age in which images proliferate, are indeed substituting for real experience, or are used to entice people to pursue real experience, what of vibrant materiality when so much is experienced via images? An image is not a thing, but possibly a communication about things. The vehicle is a thing: paintings, drawings, photographic and the many methods of hand printing, the screen, or the surface on which light is cast. But representational images on screens are messages about interactions with things. The lack of tactility of

⁴⁴ Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*,” 190-191.

⁴⁵ Emilie Le Beau Lucchesi, “The Unbearable Heaviness of Clutter: A cluttered home can be a stressful home, researchers are learning,” *New York Times*, January 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/03/well/mind/clutter-stress-procrastination-psychology.html>, retrieved March 20, 2019.

screen images leaves the viewer to imagine sensation, either wanting more, or possibly relieved that an unsavory sight is not actually palpable.

Considering vibrant materiality, what are these artworks, comprised of so many materials, mostly manufactured? Bennett described agentic assemblages from small assemblies of things to the whole of the US electrical grid. Agentic assemblies do not even need to be obviously connected. These works, and one could argue installation works in general, (and maybe more beyond that), direct meaning using materials and signs. They are reliant on the system of signs and the liveliness of materials.

IDEOLOGY

Bennett alluded to Louis Althusser's concept of "hailing" when describing the affective "call of things."⁴⁶ She was referring to his concept of interpellation. Althusser built upon Karl Marx's critique of capitalism in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." He argued that, in the capitalist system, people live an existence of subjectivity, in which a smaller ruling class keeps order, with the goal of maintaining the existing order, which is that they continue their rule and lower classes fuel the system. "All ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject."⁴⁷ Individuals are cast as subjects from all directions: from all others, from all institutions, and from all regular actions of society, hence the "category" of the subject rather than the *instance* or *condition* of the subject.

According to Althusser, this system, the state, operates through Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses, (RSAs and ISAs). "The state is a machine of repression, which enables the ruling classes to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter

⁴⁶ Bennett, "Powers of the Hoard".

⁴⁷ Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation) (January - April 1969)." *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. Modern Reader, Pb-213. (New York: Monthly Review Press), 1972, 173.

to the process of surplus value extortion, i.e. to capitalist exploitation.”⁴⁸ RSAs account for the government and its agencies: the police, the military, prison, etc. ISAs include private, non-governmental systems, such as education, religion, family, politics, unions, communications, the ‘cultural’, etc..⁴⁹ All Ideological State Apparatuses, whatever they are, contribute to the same goal, all in the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation.⁵⁰

If “the ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production,” then the much targeted VALS (values and lifestyles) segments of status-oriented early career Achievers and Strivers and socially driven Experiencers of Generation Y are comprised of people who simply perform ideally and have many decades yet to consume.⁵¹ The more one aspires to possess or do, even if one desires independence, freedom, or control, the more capital one needs. The *need* grows, and need is the system ignition, at the heart of the conditions of production.

One cannot state emphatically enough that marketing is a function of ideology. It seems to engage us directly, more than ever now that advertisements are targeted using online data. Ruptures in the seamlessness of this function of ideology occur when inappropriate products are pitched to us. Or perhaps, interpellation becomes more obvious when products are marketed to us using

⁴⁸ Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” 137.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 150.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 154.

⁵¹ Dawn B. Valentine and Thomas L. Powers, “Generation Y Values and Lifestyle Segments,” *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 30, no. 7 (2013): 597-606, doi:10.1108/JCM-07-2013-0650, 599.

our demographic data, when one does not identify with the generalized characteristics of that group. One becomes aware of being in a *subset*. It is as if each person has a data twin, that may not exactly match, which is an objectification. Marketing is key to the reproduction of the conditions of production by expanding need, (of those who labor), which perpetuates the motivation to work. In capitalist society, buying and owning are presented as power, when they may be burdensome. *Secondary Market Display* (2018) and *Indulge in Avoidance* (2018) purposefully employ signs of marketing, such as the former's X base round table and acrylic dividers, and the latter's white melamine shelf and ordered presentation of multiples. They can be read as something out of retail scenes, as solicitous to the viewer.

Althusser argues that ideology manifests materially: "The ideas of a human subject exists in his actions...these practices are governed by the rituals in which these practices are inscribed, within the material existence of an ideological apparatus..."⁵² Certainly these are activities, social constructs, places, markets, but does ideology speak through the items with the most personal meaning? Our cherished objects have meaning associated with personal experiences, intimate experiences, that often arise through contagion from closeness with another, (tools, clothing, hair, jewelry, etc.). Could they also sound the call of ideology? In fact, they can. Grandmother's cookware, mother's jewelry, father's work tools, these reflect traditional roles. Do people choose these items subconsciously because they reflect the right message, because

⁵² Althusser, "Ideology," 168.

they echo those loved ones' cherished daily performances? According to Csikszentmihaly and Rochberg-Halton, our beloved items are not so arbitrary: "the pragmatic meaning of cherished possessions is that they serve to socialize and influence conduct towards certain ends or goals."⁵³ The attachment one feels to such objects should not be diminished by knowing this. Cherrier quoted McCracken on this point: "This transfer of meaning can be understood as processes of singularization; where the shift of meaning and emotion between the object and the individual replaces the commodity."⁵⁴ Contagion still endears these objects to us, but it should not be a surprise that ideology addresses us from every angle, in every place. This is not a claim that every object reverberates with ideology, but that it does work through unexpected places and things, like one's most valued family heirlooms and personal tokens.

In the world of marketed items, (this can also extend to politics and religion), appearance is likely a foremost consideration. Design, surface decoration, or surface quality are often purposeful communicators which refer to higher value things, such as antiques, precious metals and gems, or handcrafted items. Real patina is evidence of time, use, and acts. Manufacturers fake patinas on products to project the idea that an object has endured, or has some provenance that increases its value, to suggest an object history. This pretense of object history can lead to disappointment because of its fundamental denial of a transformational mental experience. In her study on hoarders, Cherrier documented the reasons people value old and handcrafted items: "In the process

⁵³ Csikszentmihaly and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, 188-189.

⁵⁴ Cherrier, *A Study of Hoarding Behavior*, 15.

of keeping handmade objects throughout time, a different world slips into the hands of a hoarder. The mutation from past to present brings life to the object.”⁵⁵

Object endurance is valued and can be read through surfaces.

Baudrillard called objects with falsified surfaces “kitsch.” “It can be best defined as a pseudo object or, in other words as a simulation, a copy, an imitation...as a dearth of real significations and a superabundance of signs, of allegorical references, disparate connotations, as a glorification of the detail and a saturation by details.”⁵⁶ Baudrillard also implicated the practice of evoking nostalgia in cultural products. “Cultural consumption may thus be defined as the time and place of the caricatural resurrection, the periodic evocation of what already no longer exists - of what is not so much consumed as consummated (completed, passed and gone).”⁵⁷ The use of finishes in the works of “Thinging” that evoke earlier times intends to still convey a current moment, but a less fresh one. In a sense, all aesthetic eras exist now, because they have existed. Just as some contemporary painters still make Impressionist style paintings, it no longer means the same thing, but is itself a contemporary frame.

Fakes are intersections of the ordinary and extraordinary, consciously presented as the latter using signs to create the illusion of stuff of greater value. Most common goods have a fake element, suggesting to be more than they are. Kitsch does a service for finery by providing contrast. “Kitsch obviously reaffirms the value of the rare, precious, unique object...Kitsch and the ‘authentic’ object

⁵⁵ Ibid. 14.

⁵⁶ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 110.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 100.

thus between them organize the world of consumption according to the logic of a distinctive material.”⁵⁸ But fakes and simulants can still produce some of the experiential value of an *authentic* thing, (like the lab created sapphire), and most of daily living is enacted with simulants of some kind. These items create the scenery and costumes for our lives and are what Baudrillard disparaged as simulations. We expect and accept simulations, even if one is knowingly buying a fake luxury good. But we do not expect to be fooled by forgeries.

Forgeries are a special category of fakes: objects presented surreptitiously as genuine to generate more revenue. Denis Dutton described the moral failing in forgeries in art: “every work of art...involves the element of performance” and as such “works of art represent the ways in which artists solve problems, overcome obstacles, make do with available materials,” and “what is wrong with forgeries...is that...because they misattribute origin, they misrepresent achievement.”⁵⁹ Regarding cherished or historical objects, their performative histories are part of what imbue them with meaning. Contagion is also a factor in *authentic* objects such as works of art, memorabilia, and artifacts. As published commentary on Bulot and Reber’s findings, George Newman added: “an original Picasso may be valuable because Picasso actually touched it, whereas the forgery has not been touched by Picasso and therefore it would not contain any of his personal essence.” He goes so far to say: “Evaluations of essence may therefore include evaluating artwork both as an extension of the artist's mind...as

⁵⁸ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 110.

⁵⁹ Denis Dutton, “Artistic Crimes: The Concept of Forgery in the Arts”, http://www.denisdutton.com/artistic_crimes.htm, originally published in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, No. 19 (1979): 302–14. DOI: 10.1093/bjaesthetics/19.4.302.

well as an extension of the artist's body."⁶⁰ This is another example of things comprising the extended self. In Amsterdam, Arthur Brand recently recovered a Picasso painting which was stolen twenty years ago. He stated, "You know it's a Picasso because there is some magic coming off it," but added that, "But a forger never knows how the back looks...When I saw the back of the painting, I knew it was the real one."⁶¹ The *magic* associated with originals of many kinds is a broadly shared belief, and is promoted, and exploited.

Damien Hirst's *For the Love of God* (2007), a platinum and diamond covered skull, embodies the idea of extension of selves, commodity materials, origin, and authenticity. It is an artwork that contains part of a human body, (though not part of the artist's body). This object is composed of an antique real human skull, so much platinum, and 8,601 diamonds.⁶² The skull has been dated to around 1720-1810, was that of a male of European or Mediterranean descent, who died at about 35 years of age.⁶³ The book published describing its making, *For the Love of God: The Making of the Diamond Skull*, includes the details of the research performed on the skull, has images of varying stages of its production, and illustrations of diamonds' chemical structure and faceting. (This book also served to add value to the art work through describing object history.)

⁶⁰ N.J. Bullot, and R. Reber, "The Artful Mind Meets Art History: Toward a Psycho-Historical Framework for the Science of Art Appreciation." *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 36, no. 2 (2013):, doi:10.1017/S0140525X12000489, 132.

⁶¹ Mike Corder, "Dutch art sleuth recovers Picasso stolen 20 years ago," *The Seattle Times*, March 26, 2019. <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/dutch-art-sleuth-recovers-picasso-stolen-20-years-ago/>.

⁶² Alan Riding, "Alas, Poor Art Market: A Multimillion-Dollar Head Case", *New York Times*, June 13, 2007, Retrieved January 23, 2019.

⁶³ Damien Hirst, Rudi Fuchs, Jason Beard, and Rudi Fuchs, *For the Love of God: The Making of the Diamond Skull*, (London: Other Criteria/White Cube, 2007), 17; *Ibid*, 41; *Ibid*, 45; *Ibid*, 63.

The diamonds are declared to be “conflict free, based on written guarantees provided by the suppliers...and by personal knowledge.” The book contains information about diamond faceting, but nothing about diamond mining. This could be because of the negative connotations about mining, but it is possible that most of the Hirst diamonds, the small ones covering the skull, are lab created diamonds, especially since they are all “VVS to flawless.”⁶⁴ Lab created diamonds are chemically diamonds but valued at 20 to 30% lower than mined diamonds, and they are, as a matter of course, conflict-free. The skull’s status as an artwork by an internationally prominent artist may displace the question of commodity value to a degree. But if they are synthesized diamonds, was that disclosed to the buyer and would it matter? Are synthesized diamonds viewed in the realm of diamond *signs*, like cubic zirconia or lab created white sapphires, even though they are composed of the same material?

Object history, as it applies to genuine artworks or authentic historical objects, applies here as well. Tiffany & Co. has declared that they will not sell lab created diamonds, that they are not luxury goods.⁶⁵ A stone’s object history as once being part of the earth’s crust adds value to the diamond material, apparently. The biggest player in the diamond industry, De Beers, devalues lab created diamonds while undercutting the competition with Lightbox, a casual brand owned by De Beers with no disclosed connection to De Beers on its

⁶⁴ “News,” Damien Hirst, <http://www.damienhirst.com/news/2015/ftlog-astrup>, retrieved March 25, 2019.

⁶⁵ Danziger, Pamela. “Tiffany’s New Mined Diamond Policy Ignores All That Luxury Customers Want: A Man-made Alternative,” *Forbes*, January 19, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pamdanziger/2019/01/16/tiffanys-new-mined-diamond-policy-ignores-all-that-luxury-customers-want-a-man-made-alternative/>, retrieved February 9, 2019.

website, thus keeping a veil between their marketing of traditionally mined and lab created diamonds while they execute a strategy to take control of the new market.⁶⁶ Choosing simulants or manufactured versions over more costly traditionally valued materials is a sort of rebellion against the order, of class domination, until the order consumes that production, as De Beers has pursued.

Has allure been hijacked into interpellation? Are we, subjects, being hailed by ideology through commodities? What if the item is not a commodity? Are we now wired through ideology to view all objects as potential possessions? Are we indoctrinated to desire objects or is it inherent? Living and being loved is often encountered through gifts or reinforced by gifts and the transition object is generally a gifted object. Maybe capitalism exploits an inherent attraction to objects, as evidenced by an infant's transition object, the first object not realized as apart from the self. Saleem H. Ali, an academic and environmental planner cites that "recent scholarship in new evolutionary theory reveals that the impulse to consume and seek out new materials, particularly beneath the surface of the earth, may have given us distinct advantages against the elements and other organisms."⁶⁷ Humans seek the elusive, beautiful, gleaming thing. *Sparkle vids* (2019) the small video projection of light refractions represent elusive fascination,

⁶⁶ Zack Guzman, "Lab-grown diamonds will survive Big Diamond's attempt to kill them, startup says," *Yahoo Finance*, January 14, 2019, https://finance.yahoo.com/news/lab-grown-diamonds-will-survive-debeers-attempt-to-kill-them-clean-origin-says-132836664.html?soc_src=community&soc_trk=ma, retrieved January 14, 2019.

⁶⁷ Saleem H. Ali, "The Ecology of Diamond Sourcing: From Mined to Synthetic Gems as a Sustainable Transition," *Journal of Bioeconomics* 19, no. 1 (2017): doi:<http://dx.doi.org.echo.louisville.edu/10.1007/s10818-016-9241-8>, <http://echo.louisville.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.echo.louisville.edu/docview/1876140248?accountid=14665>, 116.

not only with sparkling things, but any alluring thing, the thing that is pursued (figure 6).



Figure 6. Tammy M. Burke. Still from Sparkle vids. Video projection. 8 in. x 10 in. 2019.

The exhibition contains the components and images of the artwork *Exponential* (2018) (figure 7). It was used for the invitation, and the viewer sees video of its past installations and manipulations (its history) presented as a new iteration with its components. Its disassembly admits that the animation of the work is manufactured (as so many experiences are) and denies the viewer the pleasure of its dazzle or spares them from its declaration of power. The video

documentation evidences object history and hopefully enacts desires for sensations.



Figure 7. Tammy M. Burke. Exponential. Sequined fabric, cardboard boxes, vintage Fresnel lights. 12 feet X 16 feet X 8 feet. 2018.

While contemplating the meaning of things and the overwhelming amassment of them, there are countless people living outside who collect things in large amounts, pushing and pulling mounded and annexed carts wherever they go. One may wonder, are their possessions not a burden, or are they a fortification? The question is completely applicable to those privileged enough to live in a structure. The “homed” are burdened and fortified by their things. They just have a structure in which to hide them. If all of one’s things were gathered into one view, how much volume would there be? How much market value? How

much sentimental value? How much loss if one had to abandon it or it was taken away?

Looting and theft are ruptures of ideology. In the capitalist system, one cannot acquire without paying, or one will be punished, which includes a reduced opportunity to purchase. One must work to earn the privilege and freedom to acquire. Nor is possessing free. Ownership may mean storage, maintenance, or taxes. Imprisonment, a function of the “Repressive State Apparatus”, includes as punishment the denial of things, objects, possessions, and normal purchasing. Belk described the denial of possessions as part of a “deliberate lessening of the self brought about in such institutions as mental hospitals, homes for the aged, prisons, concentration camps, military training camps, boarding schools, and monasteries.”⁶⁸ Items available to the incarcerated for purchase are limited, with grossly inflated prices, and any possible wage is extremely low. As a punishment, this denial should further deepen the desire for possessions and the privilege to live life as a subject, doing the proper things in the proper order. In capitalism, earning a wage and buying is a privilege and an expectation. In prison, it is a dear privilege, and still an expectation.

⁶⁸ Belk, “*Possessions*,” 142.

CONCLUSION

Regarding *things*, the western outlook is one of control, of exercising will, either to preserve and promote, or exploit, waste, and deplete. But there are instances of failure, or of lapses in human action, where the objects exert power, otherwise this investigation would have never begun. Our failures and *things'* wins result in high personal debt, crowded homes, planned obsolescence, and growing landfills, but also the collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, basements and cedar chests full of heirlooms, expanding storage facilities, and conservation efforts. Jane Bennett called for anthropomorphism to reevaluate the distribution of vitality among the more and less obviously living. Stuffed animals and dolls are manifestations of anthropomorphism, which are appropriate for children, beloveds, and play-minded adults. It is reserved for pleasure and part of why anthropomorphism is not taken seriously. Our casual language permits anthropomorphism, in statements about objects such as *she's a beauty*, and *this paper is a bitch*. We attribute human essences to things that we care about or that seem to exert their own will.⁶⁹ Haraway wrote: "to be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled,

⁶⁹ "Language Report: Metaphorical Gender in English: Feminine Boats, Masculine Tools and Neuter Animals," *Druide*, October 2017, <https://www.druid.com/en/reports/metaphorical-gender-english-feminine-boats-masculine-tools-and-neuter-animals>, retrieved March 29, 2019.

exploited...⁷⁰ Our exploitative and feminized view of the natural world is reflected in the term Mother Nature, which also seems to exert its own will, (having a will at all is also an anthropomorphism). Nature's power lends itself to anthropomorphism, and humans' desire to exploit it casts it as feminine.

As a confirmation of what has been described so far, that lively objects become active participants in our minds, D.W. Winnicott described a continuous thread of object relations and imagination from birth throughout adulthood: "transitional objects and transitional phenomena belong to the realm of illusion which is at the basis of initiation of experience," and "...throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work."⁷¹ Perhaps anthropomorphism is not a fitting word because it acknowledges only human liveliness, just as cathexis attributes meaning creation and power to the human, (if things are vital). Is art creative scientific work? Is this body of work comprised of results?

Why even examine these concepts? It emerged from a desire to distinguish between the sacred and profane among human-object relations. Humans experience the material world. They are not simply in nature, but are nature. We too are animals, (and things), beneath our manners. We feel, though our sensors are dulled by over-stimulation, or perhaps refocused to decipher meaning only through codes. We use the code to speak to each other about sensations. Some signs may be based on natural phenomena, such as evening

⁷⁰ Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women : The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge, 1991, 166.

⁷¹ Winnicott, "Transitional Objects," 96.

light glimmering off the surface of water, prismatic light cast through morning frost, fresh blood, or the animation of fire. Somewhere in the history of thing making, those phenomena were mimicked in objects. That distillation has evolved into, among other things, distressed milk-painted accent tables that are available in three colors, vinyl siding that looks like cedar shakes, and lab created diamonds.

“Thinging” is a midpoint study in a lifelong exploration of and fascination with objects. On one hand it has provided some context to enable resistance to the allure of things. On the other, it has provided possible confirmation of personal suspicions about objects and has acknowledged humans’ utmost capacity for exploitation of the nonhuman. That exploitation echoes capitalist ideology, the reproduction of the conditions of production described above, that a smaller well advantaged class rules over a larger one to extract surplus value. Species have gone extinct from human action, and conditions on earth are changing. The environment, however, will endure in new manifestations because it has no (apparent) preferences, including a preference for the conditions that foster human life as we know it.

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CURRICULUM VITA

NAME: Tammy M. Burke
ADDRESS: tammyburke@gmail.com
tammyburke.com
DOB: September 9, 1974

EDUCATION & TRAINING:

B.F.A., Painting
Herron School of Art, Indiana University, Indianapolis, IN 1997
1992-1997

M.A., Media Communications
Webster University, Louisville, KY 2008
2006-2008

Awards and Scholarships

2019	Partial Scholarship for Metalsmithing Workshop, Penland School of Craft
2018-2019	Graduate Student Council Research Award, University of Louisville
2018-2019	Graduate Teaching Assistantship, (instructor of record), University of Louisville
2017-2018	Graduate Teaching Assistantship, (instructor of record), University of Louisville
2017	Tau Sigma National Honor Society
2016	Hite Scholarship, University of Louisville
1996	Top Award for Painting, Whitewater Annual Art Exhibition Evan F. Lilly Scholarship for Painting and Photography
1994	Marvin Bradley Scholarship for Drawing
1992	Herron-Lynn Scholarship, Van Sickle Scholarship

Exhibitions

- 2019 “2019 MFA Graduates Exhibition”, Cressman Center for Visual Arts, Louisville, KY, May 10 to Aug. 30
“Thinging” thesis exhibition, Hite Art Institute MFA Studio Gallery, Louisville, KY, April 22 to May 4
“Life Soundtracks” audio contributor, Indygo rapid transit Fountain Square station, Indianapolis, IN, spring launch
- 2018 “Paper Works”, MS Rezny Studio/Gallery, Lexington, KY July 24 to Aug. 31
“Michigan Fine Arts Competition”, Birmingham Bloomfield Arts Center, Birmingham, MI, June 22 to Aug. 23
Installation concurrent with the run of “Eurydice”, Thrust Theater, University of Louisville, Jan. 26-28, 2018, Feb. 1-4
"Artlink Regional Exhibition", Artlink Contemporary Gallery, Fort Wayne, IN, Jan. 6 to March 9
"UofL Masters", Open Community Gallery, Louisville, KY, Jan. 10 to Jan. 26
- 2017 “Powered by Creativity” utility box, Jeffersonville, IN, June 2017 - July 2018
"University of Louisville Writing Center Exhibition" - March 2017 to March 2018
"University of Louisville Student Exhibition", Schneider Hall Galleries, Hite Art Institute, Louisville, KY February 16 to March 17, 2017
- 2011 *Month of Makers*, Louisville Visual Art Center, Louisville, KY
- 2010 *Spring Into Art*, Howard Steamboat Museum, Jeffersonville, IN
- 2006 *Saturate*, The Ground Floor Gallery, Louisville, KY
Threadbare, Harrison Art Center, Indianapolis, IN
- 2005 *Celebrating Women*, curated by Maiza Hixson, Frazier History Museum, Louisville, KY (catalog)
DePauw Biennial: Contemporary Art in the Midwest, Peeler Art Center, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN (brochure)
M: Art After the Millennium, Swanson Reed Contemporary, Louisville, KY
Hexona, Adorno Studio, Louisville, KY
Solo show, *Taut*, Directions by Fusion Home, Louisville, KY
- 2004 *Empire Builder*, Zeitgeist Gallery and Ruby Green Contemporary Art Center, Nashville, TN
Recent Work – Casey Roberts, Tammy Burke, Jason Barr, Bodner Gallery, Indianapolis, IN
Spring Student Show, Schneider Hall, Gallery X and Covi Gallery, Hite Art Institute Louisville, KY
- 2003 *City and Self*, Urban Design Studio, Louisville, KY
Herron Alumni Show, Harrison Art Center, Indianapolis, IN
Shooting at 1st and Oak, Maiza Hixson Studio, Louisville, KY
New Work, Maiza Hixson Studio, Louisville, KY
- 2002 *Emerging Louisville Artists*, Actors Theater of Louisville, Louisville, KY
- 2001 *Self/Serving*, **Two-person show**, Aslan’s How Art Gallery, Louisville, KY, (with Joseph Dutkiewicz)

1997 *New work*, solo show, Carolyn Ard Studio, Indianapolis, IN

Performances

- 2018 “Waupee and the Star Maiden”, Jeffersonville, IN, Aug. 31 & Sept. 1,
Composer, sound designer, musician, and vocalist for an original
production written, directed, and produced by Kathryn Spivey
- 2017 “Waupee and the Star Maiden”, Louisville, KY, November 11, 2017;
Jeffersonville, IN,
December 7, 2017 – Composer, sound designer, musician, and vocalist for an
original
production written, directed, and produced by Kathryn Spivey
- 2016 “Pioneering Spirits”, September, Jeffersonville, IN, soundscape and music
- 2013 to present
Costumed Interpreter at Locust Grove Historic Home, portraying key figures
Sarah Dabney Strother Taylor and Lucy Croghan in 1816, ensemble cast:
interact in character with public dressed in period attire, perform period
appropriate musical pieces. Requires research of character and period,
performance, improvisation and sewing/crafting skills
- 2008 to 2015 Musical performer, Annual Spin a Yarn Storytelling Festival, Louisville, KY
- 2007 to present Musical performer, public and private events

Presentations and Workshops

- 2019 Suminagashi marbling demonstration, Hite Art Institute, Louisville, KY
- 2018 October, Marbling workshop for Carnegie Center for Art and History, New
Albany, IN
- 2017 Marbling workshop for paper, Portland Museum, Louisville, KY
Marbling workshop for paper and fabric, Hite Art Institute,
“Feminism(s)”, Hite Art Institute, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY
- 2005 Artist Lecture, 2D Design students, Watkins College of Art, Nashville, TN

Residency and Workshop Participation

- 2019 Traditional Japanese Techniques in Contemporary Metal Arts, August 11 to
August 23,
Penland School of Craft, Penland, North Carolina

Collections

21C Museum Hotel, Louisville, KY

Bibliography

- Featured local artist, October 2018, "Pulpit" on Instagram @pulpit.contemporary.art.
- "Vignette: Tammy Burke" Louisville Visual Art blog Artebella, May 22, 2018,
<https://www.louisvillevisualart.org/artebella/2018/5/22/vignette-tammy-burke>.
- "Great Day Live" appearance, WHAS television, Louisville, KY. August 30, 2016,
<http://www.whas11.com/entertainment/television/great-day-live/see-giant-puppets-and-more-at-the-jeffersonville-steamboat-days-festival/311290516>.
- Elizabeth Beilman. "Spirit Animal: Puppet performance with 10 foot tall characters." *Solo*,
News and Tribune (Jeffersonville) 28 July 2016.
http://www.newsandtribune.com/news/spirit-animal-puppet-performance-with-foot-tall-characters-narrated/article_541bdfa2-5459-11e6-93bf-d7ed5d4d61ac.html.
- Louisville Visual Art Association blog, "Month of Maker's", November 23, 2011,
<http://monthofmakers.blogspot.com/2011/11/tammy-burke.html>.
- Diane Heilenman. "Identity Swap." *Courier Journal* (Louisville) January 29, 2006.
- Maiza Hixson, *Celebrating Women*, exhibition catalog, 2005.
- Susan W. Knowles. "Empire Builders: Ruby Green Gallery and Zeitgeist Gallery, Nashville" (illus.). *Number: an independent journal of the arts*, no.50 (Fall 2004): 18-19.

Work Experience

- 2018 to present
Instructor, Northwood University,
SPC 2050 Introduction to Public Speaking
- 2017 to 2019
Graduate Teaching Assistant, teacher of record, University of Louisville
ART 105 Introduction to Two-Dimensional Design
ART 200 Studio Art and Visual Culture
- 2016 to present
Private guitar teacher
- 2015 to present
Owner/Operator, Delightful Goods, LLC, www.delightfulgoods.com
Design, produce, and sell various creative products
- 2016 to 2017
Representative, Webster University, Louisville, KY
College administrator processing registrations, financial aid, textbook orders,
social media, student advising, event planning, photography, and graphic design
- 2002 to 2016
Community Relations Coordinator, Webster University, Louisville, KY
Recruiter of graduate students; marketing, social media, advising, instruction,
admission procedures, event planning, press releases, photography, and graphic design

2006 to 2010

Operator of Webster University Visual Arts Center, Louisville, KY

Created show schedule, designed promotional materials, information placards and labels, installed shows, uninstalled and shipped artwork

1998 to 2006

Self-employed creative professional

Muralist, faux finisher, painted furniture, interior painting, custom window treatments, and commissioned paintings

1995 to 1998

Studio assistant for John Domont Studio and Gallery, and Carolyn Ard Studio, Indianapolis, IN

1996 to 1997

Seamstress, AvantGarb Custom Mascot Studio, Indianapolis, IN

1993 Painter, Louisville Stoneware, Louisville, KY