

Authenticity in the age of its technological reproducibility

- Through mass-production,
deconstructing perception and increasing detail of sensation

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Introduction

In contemporary capitalist society, matters are replaced with symbols while reality is substituted by the copy or images of the reality, simulacra¹). Now the relationship between reality and reproduction is reversed and simulacra which have lost the subject or the original to take after by now will produce hyper-reality which seems to be more of reality. Now there is no original copy and in a sense, there is no differentiation between the original and the copy.

These simulacra lead and guide order based on increase of information and media. What rules the perception of contemporary men in capitalist production where one 'code' would make numerous copies is the information and media surrounding a certain object. While all kinds of information and media are absorbed, those sponges or black holes that are cold to the inherent meaning of these objects are the contemporary mass.

Can the qualitative aspects of objects that violence of the identity of capitalism has killed break the 'code (meaning uniformity)' and bring out their ideal beauty again? Ideal beauty may be felt when we give up uniform outlines and identical contours of the world and look at the world as if we face it for the first time. The world should not be confirmed just as it already existed and we just opened our eyes. Rather, it exists through myself when I open my eyes and appreciate it. Objects that can be recognized are not just being recognized again and again. Rather, the moments when we were just born and experienced the world for the first time would be restructured within objects. However, are we capable of pure recognition when we are accustomed to looking at objects through conventional cognizance in the world where everything has become uniform?

1) Simulacra is a concept developed by Plato. Plato's simulacra refers to a copy of various copies imitating an idea. There is an order of rank where the authority of a copy that is close to the idea is more acknowledged. However, there is no order of rank with simulacra in our contemporary society. Development of media has changed simulacra to a copy which is not differentiated from the original, or sometimes to a copy which is more real than the original, or even a copy without the original. The thoughts inherited by Walter Benjamin and Gunther Anders have been established based on Simulacra et simulation of Jean Baudrillard

I. The Pre-Industrial object

1. The one and only object

In the 18th century, there was no relation between a table of 'Louis XV' and that of a farmer. The disconnection between Louis XV and a farmer divides two dimensions of an object just like the two social classes. The mode of production of objects was always manual and they were less specialized than in their own functions while the cultural scope held by their forms was less extensive. Objects dealt by people in the past were unique (original). Tools made in a smithy, a suit made in a tailor shop, and clothes with manual embroidery used to be the one and only objects in the world. Also their views upon the world were based on what they directly saw, heard, and experienced.



2. Aura

An original copy would have 'continuity'. One line connects between the birth and the present. When the line is broken in the middle, its genuineness would be doubted. The original is 'one-time' characteristic. There are numerous copies of 'Mona Lisa' but there is only one original copy. That is how the original maintains its own atmosphere. That is why they seem so far away when we are right beside them. In this sense, the atmosphere of the original, that is the 'aura', may be the feeling we have when faced with the one and only original copy, the atmosphere created by the presence of 'right here and right now', and 'one-time appearance in which we feel far away even when we are near them.



looking into the past by Jason E. Powell

II. The Object in Modern System ---

1. Brand Object

The utility of articles valued for their beauty depends closely upon the expensiveness of the articles. A hand wrought silver spoon of a commercial value of some ten to twenty dollars is not ordinarily more serviceable than a machine-made spoon of the same material. It may not even be more serviceable than a machine-made spoon of some base metal, such as aluminium, the value of which may be no more than ten cents. If a close inspection should show that the supposed hand-wrought spoon were in reality only very clever imitation of hand-wrought goods but an imitation so cleverly wrought as to give the same impression of line and service to any but a minute examination by trained eye, the utility of the article including the gratification which the user derives from its contemplation as an object of would immediately decline by some eighty or ninety per cent, or even more. The superior gratification derived from the use and contemplation of costly and supposedly beautiful products is commonly in great measure a gratification of our sense of costliness, masquerading under the name of beauty. The requirement of conspicuous wastefulness is not commonly present, consciously, in our canons of taste, but it is none the less present as a constraining norm, selectively shaping and sustaining our sense of what is beautiful, and guiding our discrimination with respect to what may legitimately be approved as beautiful and what may not.

- Thorsten Veblen's book *The theory of the Leisure Class* (1899)

Generally, luxurious goods would remind us of high prices, good quality, and the spirit of artisanship. In fact, the beginning of many luxurious goods has originated from individuals deserving to be called as 'master artisans' such as Louis Vuitton or Coco Chanel. They had their values recognized based on excellent quality and innovative design at their time and the values have come down to the present and established themselves as brands. However, as time went by to go through industrialization and the obvious 'popular society' by now, luxurious goods are controlled by capital. What is more important by now is not the value provided by the brand goods as luxurious goods but how much profit they generate. In addition, it is now very hard to find the spirit of artisanship. James B. Twitchell, in his book 'Living in up', pointed out that many brands under LVMH were being produced from the same plant and the same production line. This also implies that prices differ based on images felt by consumers based on advertisement and marketing strategies while the production plants may be same.

2. Craft and The Limited Edition

The relationship between luxury and handcraft - always a complicated one – has shifted since the time of Veblen. Craftsmanship has come to be associated with the idea of taking care, while industry suggests standardization. Traditionally luxury was signified by conspicuous or elaborate workmanship, and costly materials. Something that was difficult implied scarcity, and an investment of time and effort.

We used to know what mass produced looked like, and what was handmade. This allowed certain forms or materials to come to mean luxury. But industrial production makes objects that handcraft cannot: the difficult has become easy. And if luxury is based on scarcity or difficulty then, once the effort has been stripped away, so is the luxury. Also, by any objective criteria, machines can make most things better than people can, and our eyes, and our hands, have become habituated to the standards of finish that machines can provide. The type of perfection that craftsmen used to aspire to in making luxury objects has given way to another image of luxury.

- Deyan Sudjic <The Language of Things>

Cultural (artistic) characteristics depending on handicraft skills traditionally used by craftsmen are gradually being assimilated by characteristics of civilisation (science and technology). The wide gap between two areas which used to be as different as the deep conflicts between industrial products producers and handicraftsmen in the early 19th century when the Industrial Revolution was taking place is now hardly differentiated simply based on fast developed technologies. The past qualitative (forms) beauty directly appreciated by us and made by craftsmen using sophisticated materials to apply complex decorative handicraft now needs detailed explanation just like contemporary art which cannot be confirmed without certification of handicraft.

The lecture, <Craft and the Culture of the Copy> given by Glenn Adamson showed similar examples to explain his perspectives on today's craft. Works of Susan Collis may be well-made hand replica using sophisticated materials but the objects created tend to be trivial ones that we often see in our daily life. So people would see her works not as aesthetic objects of detailed crafts. Without explanation of her works, they would just look like ordinary broomsticks, nails, or working clothes. There is one more example. '100' of Gord Peteran established a mass-production line of a plan just to make two tables. Tables thus created may be stationed somewhere between craft objects and mass-produced objects. These two examples well express the status of today's crafts and mass production.



Picture this by Susan Collis



100 by Gord Peteran

III. The 'Faceless' Object

1. Marginal Differences

The most insignificant object must be marked off by some distinguishing feature – a colour, an accessory, a detail of one sort or another. Such a detail is always presented as specific:

'This dustbin is absolutely original – Gilac Décor has decked it with flowers for you!'

'A revolution in refrigeration – complete with brand-new freezer compartment and butter softener!'

'An electric razor on the cutting edge of progress – hexagonal, antimagnetic!'

These are what David Riesman calls marginal differences; perhaps it would be more exact to call them inessential differences. The fact is that at the level of industrial object and its technological coherence the demand for personalization can be met only in inessentials.

Having an individually and uniquely personified object is still an ideal goal of possession. However, the unique values and quality of an object within mass-produced goods copied as just one 'code' are non-existent. That is how this object meets their consumers under additionally provided attractive modifiers of advertisement. Advertisement of mass media appealing the great mass is translated into codes understood by the mass and contains individuals within a conventional framework.

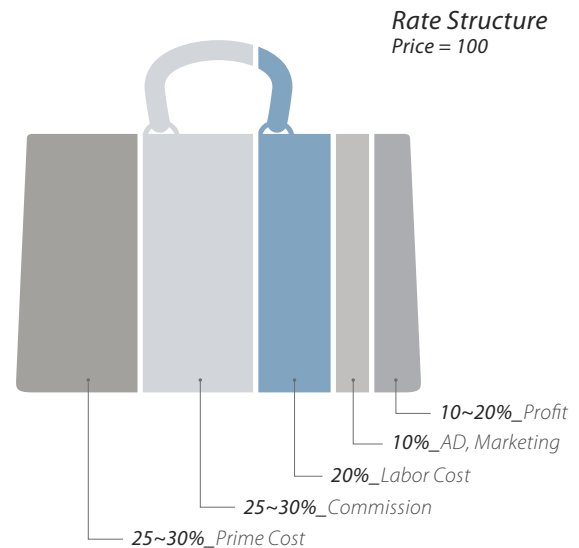
2. The Logic of Santa (Fabrication of product aesthetics)

Without 'believing' in the product, therefore, we believe in the advertising that tries to get us to believe in it. We are for all the world like children in their attitude towards Father Christmas. Children hardly ever wonder whether Father Christmas exists or not, and they certainly never look upon getting presents as an effect of which that existence is the cause.

- Jean Baudrillard <The System of Objects>

Despite the fact that there are no consumers completely relying on what is provided by advertisements, what most influences the choice of consumers is advertisement. Under the established mass production system, people would change old to new products before they find any defects in old ones. When a consumer discards an automobile with a lifespan of 10 years just after 3 years of use, he would not pay just 30% of the price. They would have to pay 100% of it and consume only 30%.

Mass-produced goods under capitalism realises values through consumption. The remains of an object whose values have been realized would soon become wastes. It is silently insinuated that the newness, cleanliness, and sophistication that used to attract us based on reasons for us to select them by mobilizing clever modifiers under diverse brands are now revealed to have been only the creation of a copywriter. People would consume signs, not qualitative values of an object, through mass media, which means that they consume objects stimulating desires and are governed by the rule of exchange values.



IV. The 'Personalized' Object

1. Attachment

What is possessed is always an object abstracted from its function and thus brought into relationship with the subject. (The possession of an object is the possession of an abstract object corresponding to its own functions and there is a close connection with the agent who owns the object.) All objects possessed in this sense come to have abstract properties.

Individuals have a large amount of freedom in choosing the meaning they seek from their goods in their quest for self-creation and self-completion, although their choice is limited to a set of culturally and socially constructed possible meanings, as well as objects. Still, within these boundaries the consumer has the power to make personal possessions meaningful: any anonymous mass-produced item can be charged with personal values. For instance, virtually anything can be perceived as a memento.

A memento or a souvenir may illustrate different conceptions of value and attachment, and the way in which tangible objects are employed in preserving the past, in grasping hold of fleeting time. The memories associated with an object can give it a strong individual meaning. A souvenir, a remembrance, a memento is attached to a bygone encounter.

-Eternally yours, visions on product endurance, Ed van Hinte



2. Choice



No object is proposed to the consumer as a single variety. We may not be granted the material means to buy it, but what our industrial society always offers us 'a priori', as a kind of collective grace and as the mark of a formal freedom, is choice. This availability of the object is the foundation of 'personalization': only if the buyer is offered a whole range of choices can transcend the strict necessity of his purchase and commit himself personally to something beyond it.

The scope of diverse choices is related to helping many people of difference tastes to establish their own personal identity.

V. Conclusion

1. Shift from perceptions to senses

Grenouille sat on the logs, his legs outstretched and his back leaned against the wall of the shed. He had closed his eyes and did not stir. He saw nothing, he heard nothing, he felt nothing. He only smelt the aroma of the wood rising up around him to be captured under the bonnet of the eaves. He drank in the aroma, he downed in it, impregnating himself through his innermost pores, until he became wood himself; he lay on the cord of wood like a wooden puppet, like Pinocchio, as if dead, until after a long while, perhaps a half-hour or more, he gagged up the word 'wood'.

<Perfume>, Patrick Suskind

Let us take <Perfume>, a novel by Patrick Suskind (1949~). Grenouille the boy learns the meaning of 'a tree'. 'A tree' is just a language of Babel, an empty universal concept. But the boy's is different from ours. His 'tree' is filled with sensual quality of scent. In order to learn what 'a tree' can be in truth, in the end, the boy performs 'to become a tree' and changes the flesh of protein into a state of a tree like Pinocchio.

When light is expressed in 'lux', its shine will fade away. When sound is measured in 'hertz', its resonance will be gone. When weight is calculated in 'kilogram', its touch of heaviness will disappear. The inherent aspects of the nature can never be identified by the mind.

The term, aesthetics contains a Greek word 'aesthesis' meaning 'a sense'. Rationalists like Descartes classified senses as sources of errors and corruption and excluded them from the realm of philosophy. Aesthetics came back to life in the process of which the abandoned senses were reinstated to philosophy. However, what were reinstated were the senses tamed by the mind, senses only in terms of having relations with the mind, that is to say, 'perceptions'.

Senses and perceptions are different. When a material accepted by sensory organs comes to the mind and becomes a material of awareness, we call it 'perception'. Black color, tasty smell, or something hot. When a material is placed like these, the mind will judge based on them. 'This is coffee.' On the other hand, when these materials go to the body and become physiological phenomena, they become 'sensations'. What takes them is the body, not the mind. Taste of hot liquid, the touch and warmth. The quality of sensations felt by a body pertains to a feeling of instincts that cannot be replaced with words.

2. The feast of differences with out ranks of order

Today, the value of the original has disappeared and its authority has grown faint in this new era. It was Claude Monet who penetrated into this kind of era for the first time. The colors of objects would always change based on moments of light in the eye of the impressionist school. The series of <the Rouen Cathedral> by Monet come from the same cathedral based on different times of light. What is the true color of the cathedral among these 6 pictures? Which is the real Rouen Cathedral?

There were colors of the original copies in classicism and works were made of solid colors and forms of objects. Based on continued drawing practices of an object, the picture with the most similar and closest look of the object (the original) was recognized. However, who can say which of 6 colors of the Rouen Cathedral is genuine?

Among the pictures (copies) of the Rouen Cathedral, there is no rank of order as to which is closer to the original. Transcription based on similitude would liberate our eyes from conventionality and enable us to see what we used to miss among ordinary objects.



Rouen Cathedral, Portal in front view, harmonie in brown, 1892



"Rouen Cathedral at the End of the Day, Sunlight Effect, 1892



The portal and the tower of the saint-romain at brilliant sun, Harmony in Blue and Gold, 1893



Rouen Cathedral, The Portal and the Tour d Albane, Morning Effect, 1893

VI. Design Proposal

I aim to reinvent the encounter of an object and my glances, reality existing in the clash between seeing and being seen, or touching and being touched, the moments the objects relentlessly coming into my sight when I look at the world for the first time, explosion of the existence of objects wishing to come into my sight, objects I am looking at, myself looked at by objects, and the point where my senses and objects come across by rearranging codes meaning uniformity and breaking the single outline of mass-produced objects.

Epilogue

A night on the border

*Somewhere at the end of time of boredom that sweeps away all my senses,
the deeply embedded senses come out suddenly.*

The warm spring breeze touching cheeks frozen all through the long winter

Raindrops gently falling upon the window pane on a scorching day

Smell of damp earth and trees carried away after the rain

A night to encounter differences

As if born just now and facing the world for the first time,

Waiting for a morning to come with full flutters.

Bibliography

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- James B. Twitchell <Living in up>