

This work is an attempt to group together and reflect upon artistic practices that share the use of obsolete objects. The concept came to me based on the book by Francesco Orlando, *Gli oggetti desueti nelle immagini della letteratura (Obsolete objects in the literary imagination)*. The book is a wide-ranging and precise collection of case studies that Orlando selected among many different texts. What is common across these texts is the presence of one or more obsolete objects (the kind of object differs from case to case). The location and role of the object in the text also varies: sometimes it's very marginal, and the details for each are more or less described. Orlando identifies recurrences and themes, finding a logic for determined writing styles and approaches towards the materiality. He uses the objects he finds to formulate a deeper understanding of the texts, as well as the oeuvres to which each text belongs.

I therefore used this book as an inspiration to pursue my own personal research in fields that I am interested in, such as visual art, cinema and jewelry. My decision to dive further into this topic is based on the fact that especially within the fields of visual art and jewelry, the interaction, or at least the coexistence of human-object is for the most part required. The scale of such a relation might be different, but I think it's possible to profit from the analysis of one thing in order to gain a wiser gaze on the other. The difference enriches the way we see things. I also thought it would be interesting to compare the 2 dimensional world with the 3 dimensional realm. If the objects we see on a screen are tangible for us in relation to our identification with the fictional characters, in jewelry that tangibility gets close to one's own physical body. I found in my research a constant desire to move between the abstract spaces of text and words, to a place of material fascination full of things and people. Orlando's research on the presence of objects in the literary world became a crucial and inspiring reference, and pushed me to pursue further research on obsolete objects in the realm of the image.

It's impossible to start this thesis with a list of what these objects are because it would be an infinite list. There aren't clear borders around this category, and I refuse to trace them as I believe they are, in every domain, restrainers more than tools for freedom. I hope for the reader to get closer to the topic while reading through the text; I hope for her to be at first dubious and start wondering, and then to tiptoe into it. In the first chapter I will talk about the concept of waste and usefulness in the oeuvre of Georges Bataille, as well as the theory behind Orlando's book which is closely influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxism. This will be followed by a more lightweight *intermezzo* about Calvino's *poubelle* (trash can) and the topic in relation to art, including trash art and the ready made. The last part of the thesis will see a few practical examples of the use of obsolete objects in jewelry and cinema.

ONE

“What is useless is considered vile, worthless; nevertheless, what is useful is nothing but means. Usefulness refers to acquisition, to the increase of products or of the means of production. Usefulness stands against unproductive expenses (*dépense*). We can say about the man who is only following the morals of usefulness, that heaven is shutting above him. That this man disowns poetry and glory, and the Sun, to his eyes, is nothing but a heat source.”¹

Georges Bataille (1897-1962) is a French writer whose oeuvre ranged over the spectrum of sociology, anthropology, economy and philosophy. In many of his papers about economics, he develops the concept of *excess economy*. The above quote, from his book *Le limite de l'utile*, is a critique of the economy of Bataille's lived milieu, the capitalistic economy, that he believed to be supported by a society that only praises what is useful. Under the banner of “useful,” therefore, production is justified and leads to accumulation.

This idea of the terms “usefulness” vs. “uselessness” is crucial for me as it's needed in order to understand how to position the obsolete objects I'm going to address later. Francesco Orlando (1934-2010), Italian literary critic and professor, whose work inspired my thesis, writes about an analogous concept, that of “non-functionality.” The objects he talks about share in common the state of “non functional corporealities”², as he describes them. They share the characteristics of being physical objects that have either lost, are in the process of losing their primary function, or that have this function has diminished. Orlando takes into consideration the historical variability of what functionality means, acknowledging that this may vary case by case.³ Therefore, among the objects he examines from literary material include: ruins, relics, dried flowers, threadbare carpets, tacky knick-knacks, deserted cities...

My aim in this current study is to see how the non-functional sneaks into a world seduced by usefulness. I am interested in the historical stratification of obsolete objects that share existence with new objects, and the reason, or the struggle, for their survival. The beauty of these images find redemption in literature and art, but I doubt that they would be as appealing in real life. When used for artistic purposes they add layers of meaning, not only creating sentimental or nostalgic moments.

Furthermore, Orlando hypothesized that the idea of functionality is strictly linked to the notion of the commodity, and in turn, of capitalism, and that in opposition to that, the non-functional object works as a form of resistance. This speculation is based on the Freudian theory of the return of the repressed. The return of the repressed is a state of being theorized by Freud, during which repressed memories, usually of a trauma, reappear from the unconscious. According to Orlando, literature functions as a collective imaginary space for the return of the repressed: it is the space where traumas and struggles of societies surface and impregnate the paper of books. Therefore, literature behaves like a mirror for the culture(s) from which it has been created, and there's no historical document that can be as accurate in embodying an archive of rebellions, frustrations or infractions of a certain society.⁴ Proceeding with this line of thought, Orlando studies the presence of what he calls “obsolete objects” in literature. In his analysis, he sees an increase of these objects particularly in the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century literature. This period of time coincides with the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, events that lay at the base of the ideology of Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment arose in Western Europe as a force that hoped for universalism and secular rationalism. The Enlightenment became the leading intellectual movement at the time, and set the ground for values such as

equality, justice, and private property. Furthermore “reason became the sole measure of everything”,⁵ from religion to natural science, politics and society; rationalism could justify these structures if they were fulfilling its demands or fulfilling these attributes. It’s in this environment that the bourgeois society was born, and its interests became its values. Rationalism calls for what’s practical, and introduces a utilitarian approach to life and business models (which here correspond to capitalism, the private ownership of means of production). Utilitarianism and rationalism set pressure on the bourgeois man,⁶ who found himself forced into a system that finds a good explanation in Marcuse’s⁷ “performance principle”.⁸ So the idealized society that had been wished for by the thinkers of the Enlightenment took shape in the bourgeois Western democracies that we know today.

The entire system rotates around the production of commodities and the creation of the need for the consumption of such commodities by whoever takes part in the system. Going back to what Orlando presumes, literature functions as a return of the repressed for societies and cultures, and he noticed that the increase of the use of obsolete objects in literature coincided with the rise of capitalism. If then, literature functions as a reverse mirror for reality, we can begin to imagine that the abundance of useless obsolete objects, in the literature of the above mentioned eras, is likely reflecting the accumulation of commodities in capitalism. Orlando defines the objects he identifies as *anti-commodities*. He talks about the capitalist system as one where there is a tendency towards hyper-functionality, where the abundance of tools is almost overwhelming.

In order to better understand what the term hyper-functional means, it is useful to refer back to Bataille’s theories on “excess energy”, or “excess economy”. In explicating his theory of excess, Bataille uses examples of different societies of the past in which the economical system was very different from that of the capitalist system. One important concept is “waste”, that in another signifier can also be related to our concept of “useless” and “non-functional”. Bataille theorizes that every society, after producing and gaining what’s needed for survival, has some “excess energy” that needs to be spent. For example, in the Aztec culture, the excess was particularly meaningful for the collective whole. The excess strengthened the bond within the community and contributed to the creation of a sense of cohesion and meaning within the community. Therefore the community could recognize itself and develop an idea of glory. In a monetary sense, we could say that this excess is a collective expense without any gain in return. Organized by the elite for the collective whole, it was a glorious act that coincided with the possibility, or the power, to waste. As opposed to mere accumulation of objects, the peak of wealth was expressed by giving away goods, and in some cases destroying them or the life of people or animals.⁹ Sacrifices belong to the category of these excesses: the destruction itself not as a damaging act but that of of a revitalizing action. The occasions for which these excesses were performed were mainly feasts or religious events. In the case of the *potlatch*, performed by some Native American tribes, precious gifts were donated to another tribe in order to humiliate it; the second tribe then had to organize a larger donation. This was a performance to show off wealth, that coincided with the potentiality of getting rid of something- rather than keeping something. Sometimes these “gifts” were destroyed as a part of the ceremony. Some examples of unproductive expenses, made solely to represent the glory of God, are also the early examples of Christian churches, financed by donations. Here the aim is to be able to concretely experience the transcendental and the feeling of belonging. Seemingly useless, unproductive actions held the foundation of communities that were represented by these actions and to which they contributed.

The capitalist society is, in contrast, built on individuality, or on the

myth of the individual.¹⁰ The individual is the target of capitalism, the subject that is being told s/he needs capitalism in order to express one's own originality, but ultimately results in meaningless choices (and accumulation) of goods that have nothing to do with identity. The myth of affluence lays at the base of such system, together with the idea that the accumulation of goods is what we *need* in order to feel fulfilled; therefore they are functional for us to live an easier, more comfortable, happier life. Feelings and experiences are sold as collateral promises with all sorts of gadgets. Necessity is also the excuse with which accumulation becomes justifiable, as it's then a rational consequence to it. The fulfillment of one's duties is rewarded with the possibility to do recreational activities, and eventually to waste one's own time. But this is always estimated to vary, according to the possibility of the single individual, so equal "reward" is not due to everyone in equal shares. Merit is the perceived litmus test of happiness and worth.

To return to Orlando's objects, those are examples of a hyper-functionality that becomes a non-functionality, a commodity that becomes an *anti-commodity* in the mirrored analysis offered by literature's return of the repressed. These objects represent the hidden trash of the world and bring us closer to a space reserved for demons and feces. These objects as *anti-commodities* are symbolic references spread over through these texts. Each case must be analyzed individually to get to the meaning of such images; Orlando provides us with a schema of many possible interpretations. Each example serves a different function for each text: that of warning, of nostalgia, of criticism, of the unknown, of the exemplary...

It is my argument that, if literature contradicts reality, and with this particular analysis, it reveals the non-functional return of the repressed, then we can find the same "language," in other forms of art. I believe that artists unconsciously bring a relevant resistance to the surface of society, even when the goal of the maker was not one of open criticism. This conjecture could of course have quite a broad range of applicability, but it is worth reading each case under the specific light of the *anti-commodity* theory. Perhaps with further analysis, artists themselves will start to see their work differently, as part of a wider collection of works that share a common language but have different meanings.

TWO

Nel rito del buttar via vorremmo, io e lo spazzino, ritrovare la promessa del compimento del ciclo propria del processo agricolo, in cui – si racconta – nulla era perduto: ciò che era sepolto nella terra rinasceva. [...] Inutilmente rovesciamo, io e lo spazzino, la nostra oscura cornucopia, il riciclaggio dei residui può essere solo una pratica accessoria, che non modifica la sostanza del processo. Il piacere di far rinascere le cose periture (le merci) resta privilegio del dio Capitale che monetizza l'anima delle cose e nel migliore dei casi ce ne lascia in uso e consumo la spoglia mortale.¹¹

The obligatory moment of throwing away is, in the experience of Italo Calvino in the text *La poubelle agrée*, a necessity that he started to adapt as a daily ritual. As a husband and father he contributes to the household with the fulfillment of this duty. From this duty, derives a ritual that purifies. However, for Calvino, the act of throwing away is controversial because it doesn't only embody purification. The act of freeing oneself from drosses is relief on the one hand, and on the other, there is the knowledge of the absence of an actual choice. The trash represents the proof of the goods Calvino was able to enjoy as a consumer; they complete and confirm the appropriation. The garbage collector instead, acquires the notion of the amount of goods he doesn't have access to, and that he can reach only as trash. Both he (Calvino) and the garbage collector are trapped in the same system whose ambition is to be among those who produce trash.

The power correlated with waste that was present in Bataille's research of Native American societies is not that different from the circumstances within contemporary society outlined by Calvino in the link between the display of wealth and the power to waste. The essential difference however is in the *choice*. What was being destroyed during the *potlatch* was not yet deprived of value: rather, it was during the moment of destruction that those objects reached the peak of their value. On the other hand, the contemporary "commodity actually loses its money value at the moment of payment, and as soon as it's purchased it's on its way to becoming waste."¹² Therefore, we come to realize that most objects are made to be temporary items with an 'expiration date', which time we'll have no choice but to throw them away. However, even when you throw something away, you will be able to get the same, or a better, item at anytime and anywhere. This happens for most objects, with the exception of art. Though it's actually not that straightforward: not all art automatically acquires value over time, and there are many factors that determine its growth. This brings me to my next point to reflect upon, and that is all of the non-functional corporealities that this research is based on. These objects belong neither to the field of functional goods nor to actual trash; their role and their life span is blurry. Their primary function has ceased to exist, but as they are translated into art they acquire a secondary "recovery" function.¹³ These objects look like trash but unlike trash they don't belong to the afterworld yet. They live in limbo of non-definability, of the not anymore, but not yet.

Even though some pieces I will address touch on the field of trash art and share some similarities with it, I believe they aren't exactly the same thing. The artists show an awareness of the history of art and its declination in the field of trash. Nevertheless, the objects used in these art pieces are not chosen because they are trash, and they're not considered to be.

From the beginning of the 20th century, the art movement has seen the development of a movement called trash art. In the 1910s, artists such as Marcel Duchamp introduced the concept of the 'ready-made'. The ready-made is an object of common use that changes context and becomes art, and in so doing loses the function of the good (or commodity). This "technique" led to the use of found objects in art, and with this, the idea that not only the creative act of fabrication, so close to craftsmanship, was relevant for the creation of the work. Any object encountered in various environments had the

potential of becoming art, and the artist could act almost as a curator.

Therefore “trash” materials enter the art world as a tool to express current needs. Apart from Dadaism, the ready-made was used by Surrealism in the 1930s as well. For example, Meret Oppenheim used “found objects” and combined them into unusual new creations. In the 1950s, Jean Dubuffet coined the term *assemblage* to describe sculptures made of waste material and papier maché. At the same time, Alberto Burri used jute sacks in his paintings. In the late 1950s, movements such as *New Dada* and *Nouveau Realisme* made broad use of trash materials. Richard Stankiewicz, in particular, stated that for an artist of New York, using trash was as normal as shells would be for an artist from the South Seas.¹⁴ In general, the use of trash increased after WWII as a sort of rebellion against abstractionism and abstract expressionism. With the development of minimalism and the dematerialization of the work of art of the 1960s, another type of movement arose. It was called *Process Art*, as a response to Minimalism and Pop Art and aimed to position itself against consumerism. *Arte povera* is part of *Process Art*: the material used by *Arte Povera* artists was mostly organic and perishable materials, that would transform over time and eventually become waste.

In the field of jewelry something similar began to happen during the 1960s. The branch of “author jewelry” or “contemporary jewelry” was born around that time; a movement that valued the concept behind the piece much more than the material value. It useful too for us to remember that at an earlier time, the material value of the piece’s components along with labor to produce it were the only criterion used to price jewelry.

Still focusing on art, we see in the 1980s that the actual trash art movement is born. Instead of the whole object, which was the *ready made*, a group of artists made more and more use of trash as the primary material for their work. They developed a growing awareness of pollution and the scale of waste, but some were also interested in the materiality of the trash, inherently contemporary. In the next chapter I will use this thinking around trash, recyclables, uselessness, non-commodities, and readymades to examine how some objects have been used in several artworks.

THREE

Chapter three will consider two examples of the visual use of objects in two different movies. In one case the objects are tools that are functional to the plot, in the other they're more subtly creating a setting and a feeling.

Il deserto rosso is set in newly industrialized Italy and its photographic approach can be described as pictorial. The framing of buildings or objects becomes for director Antonioni a tool to depict reality in an abstract way.¹⁵ He argued that through this approach we get to know the main character through the objects that surround her, rather than through her life.

Quite differently, *Last Tango in Paris* is set in Paris in the 1970s, shortly after the social revolution that followed the events of May 1968. The two protagonists live a parallel life in an empty apartment, in opposition to the conventions of the workaday life that awaits outside.

Objects as actions and attitudes

Last Tango in Paris

The objects I'm going to talk about in this film are not specific to one exact episode, but serve to fortify, throughout the movie, the feelings and the atmosphere of the settings. Therefore, through the analysis of the choices of scenography it's possible to decipher what these spaces mean in the context of Paul and Jeanne's relationship.

In *Last Tango in Paris*, not only the presence, but also the absence of objects is crucial. The indoor space where the actions take place are few: the empty apartment where Jeanne and Paul meet, the hotel where Paul lives but also where his ex-wife committed suicide, and the houses that belong to Jeanne's family.

In Jeanne's family house, which is located just outside Paris, Jeanne is filmed by her boyfriend while she talks about her childhood. She shows pictures of her relatives, a tool which allows her to go back in time, immersing herself in the embedded memories within the house that seem to somehow claim to define her. It's the house, and what it contains, that her boyfriend wants to use in order to understand her through the movie he's shooting. The objects she's surrounded by in the house are generic, and could belong to anyone. Lamps, carpets, knick-knacks, vases with dried flowers, paintings, pictures, and books. Everything appears to have been there for a long time. It seems like those objects are never used, never moved, but religiously preserved from being thrown away. As Jeanne will say later in the movie to her mother, "she's creating a family museum". There is no empty space in the house; the walls are filled with things creating a dusty suffocation as the home atmosphere. This is then the "traditional" portrayal of the environment of a family. The objects are there to frame a certain group of people that reinforce their appurtenance to that group. In this case, this group is a family who are unwilling to forget their ancestry nor their social class. The concept of family is then tied to private property that, through inheritance, is passed on and creates its own history.

On the other hand, we have Jeanne and Paul's empty apartment. It contains only the essentials—a table, a bed and random objects that are lacking any historical or sentimental value. These objects are absolutely superfluous, but they convey an idea of negligence that is antithetical to the organization required by the accumulation of family history. As with the first group of objects, they are unquestionably banal: doors, random furniture under sheets, a shade. They represent nothing and that's their purpose. From the beginning of their relationship Paul's request to Jeanne is to keep the outside world outside of the apartment. No truth, no personal facts, no memories: which somehow also means no memories carried or created by objects. Theirs is a never ending first encounter that is uncontaminated by

burdens or duties. The personalization of a space through objects would require each to gain understanding of the taste each other acquired in the life of the outside world. On the contrary, they reserve each other only for their bare primeval taste — sex.

Later in the movie, we see objects that are presented with more specificity: the gun and the uniform of Jeanne's father who died in Algeria.

We encounter these objects in Jeanne's mother Parisian home, where we hear her wish to send these things to the countryside where they will be preserved. She expresses the wish to keep two items only: the boots, as they give her shivers when she touches them, and the gun, for safety reasons. While they talk, Jeanne puts on part of the uniform (a hat and a jacket) and starts playing with the gun. Again she starts recalling her father and his teachings. The father, the gun, the uniform: are all masculine symbols of safety and violence, order and stability. It's no accident that there is no male presence in the family, that the male characters, who both orbit around Jeanne, are polar opposites but neither can match up in comparison with the figure of the Father. The uniform and the gun are the only objects in the movie that carry such specific personal memories and are therefore vehicles of the imbalance of Jeanne and Paul's relationship. When Paul puts on the hat, sweetly, but slightly mocking the uniform, Jeanne silently rages and it's almost as if the gun, companion of the uniform, realizes how repellent Paul is and therefore rejects him.

Towards the end of the movie, the two male characters, Paul and Tom, the second of whom is by now Jeanne's fiancé, intrude the domestic spaces that are counterposed since the beginning of the movie. Tom belongs to one space and Paul to the other. Jeanne's boyfriend Tom dreams of becoming a filmmaker. He worships Jeanne and, unlike Paul, wants to know everything about her to the point that she becomes the subject for one of his movies.

Desperate because Paul left, Jeanne agrees to marry him and decides to show him the apartment she used to share with Paul, suggesting that they could make it theirs. Tom enters the empty apartment and is initially thrilled, however he starts feeling uneasy there and leaves. To him, the apartment seems inappropriate for their life as husband and wife. He senses the stillness that has inhabited the apartment, its character of atemporality, and realizes the contradiction between this space and his desire for a married life. It's here then, that Paul follows Jeanne into her house after a desperate but pathetic attempt of getting her back. As he mockingly puts on her father's hat, ready to start a life with her, she fires the gun.

Objects as metaphysical abstraction

Il deserto rosso

In "*Il deserto rosso*" by Michelangelo Antonioni, made in 1964, the landscape and the objects express the crisis of the main character Giuliana. It is set on the periphery of the city of Ravenna, which is violently industrialized -- it appears silent and deserted at the same time. What remains of the traces of nature is intoxicated by the fumes and the brutal dumping of industrial waste. "The eels taste like petrol", says one character in the movie. Giuliana, the wife of an engineer who works in one of those factories, suffers from neurosis and depression. We learn how she tried to commit suicide and was later committed to a clinic for some time. The abstract qualities of the landscape, which is constantly foggy and grey, constellated by massive but incomprehensible structures, are not the causes for her depression, but certainly contribute to its burst. Giuliana is unable to adapt to this newly industrialized world, its new morals and habits, and her fragility and inadequacy result in an illness. The story of Giuliana is the story of a struggle to fit in. Antonioni stated in an interview with Godard that it's too simplistic to restrain his intentions to a critique of the new Italian industrialized society of the 1960s. To him, factories are beautiful, and their beauty comes from their

novelty and unusualness, unlike a line of trees that the human eye knows so well.¹⁶

What is interesting in this movie are the materials and the aesthetic predominantly used. They aren't a symbol, but mirror Giuliana's anxiety and at the same time exile her from their world. The materials in the movie are either cold, such as metal and cables, or are rusty and discolored. The attendance of industrial trash is ever present; it is with the viewer from the beginning to the end, when Giuliana wanders into a hangar full of wreckage. Early in the film, the characters visit the former house of a fisherman, which is now falling apart. The home is made from rotting wood that the characters themselves will later destroy in order to feed the fire. The house of the fisherman appears to be out of place compared to the other constructions of the movie. It's clearly a ruin of a recently bygone era. The rest of the city is modern and the language used at times is quite technical. Even Giuliana's son's toys seem like miniature machines that function perfectly. All the while Giuliana is malfunctioning, even though she genuinely wishes to fit in. She feels that "there's something terrible about reality, I don't know what it is, but nobody tells me." Giuliana is unable to read the signs that would allow her to live a regular life; her disease makes everything nonsensical and terrifying. The dialogues are rarefied, and the acting is intentionally quite impersonal. In a sense then, the narrative unfolds through the images of the landscape.

Antonioni chose this movie to be in color and not in the black and white more easily available at that time. To do so, the film had to be painted in post production. Antonioni undertook extreme care in the choice of the colors, to better complete the atmosphere and the feelings created by the spaces of the movie. The colors of the various materials are crucial and the choice seems to come from a pictorial theory that recalls the aesthetic of Alberto Burri. Giuliana and Corrado talk about warm and cold colors when inside the room that will become Giuliana's shop; clearly Giuliana is aware of the function colors have. Antonioni also stated that many dialogues are linked to the use of colors. For example, when the characters gather and talk about sex in the red ambiance of the fisherman's house, the public is more willing to accept it.¹⁷ Because the scene is set in a red environment, it therefore becomes almost synesthetic.

JEWELRY

This section will address several jewelry pieces that to me relate to this thesis topic in various ways. Before allowing myself to analyze the works through the lens of the obsolete object, I decided to interview three artists in order to better understand their conceptual starting point. The artists are Manon van Kouswijk, who graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in 1995; Fabrizio Tridenti, a former traditional goldsmith who graduated in 1982 from the Istituto Statale d'Arte in Metals and Jewelry Design, and Jiro Kamata, who graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich in 2006. The three makers come from different backgrounds, different countries and different educations. Moreover, their approach to jewelry is very personal and explores different themes. The chosen works were also made in different years, at different stages of their careers. What is common in these pieces is that among the materials they're made from, each contain pieces of pre-existing objects which had a previous function. In the case of Manon van Kouswijk, the material in question are pearls. She took worn out pearls, unusable in the context of traditional jewelry, and then rearranged them as a necklace. The material is translated horizontally if we believe that time proceeds in that angle. Pearls that used to belong to other, older necklaces, were chosen by Manon to form a necklace again. Each pearl carries the memory of a different function or owner; the layers accumulate, merging into a unique piece. The identity of the necklace is reconstructed, giving the pearls a "second chance" of being what they once were. What it was *is* again, however not fully.

In the necklace, *Momentopia*, Jiro Kamata makes use of old material from second hand camera lenses. In this work the material wasn't related to jewelry at all. The lens rather opens a window that sneaks into the field of photography, thus enriching the piece with imaginative potential. Carrying something into another context: vision—the eye, the optical instrument—and the bodily ornament become the same thing, and the wearer bears the lens proudly, almost like a divinatory talisman that allow visions from another world.

As far as Fabrizio Tridenti's work is concerned, we should distinguish between the work he fabricated himself and the work he displayed in the exhibition *Misuse*,¹⁸ which is nothing but a selection of objects that don't belong to the field of jewelry but, according to Mr. Tridenti, could. The works differ in form but are related and entangled with one another. Meanwhile, Tridenti's fabricated work (whose material is also recycled most of the time) echoes forms that could be jewelry, but aren't until he gives them shape, like an alchemist looking for the secrets of matter. The new shapes come from detailed observations of his surroundings, but the process of selection of the ready-made requires the same amount of attention for what *must* also be something else. I wish I could learn how to juggle in my mind with whatever I see; never just agree to arrangements when I see them, but spare an open gaze and *have faith* in the potential beauty of everything. When he uses ready-made objects, we could say he feels a necessity for these objects to be displaced from one environment to another: as if they could communicate with him, and he is just a translator or a messenger on their behalf.

Objects as necessitiesInterview with Fabrizio Tridenti

Me: Thank you Fabrizio for your time. When I first saw your pieces in Munich, I was fascinated by the industrial aesthetic they have. Do you actually get inspired by a city, or by architectures in particular? They made me think of *Il deserto rosso*, by Michelangelo Antonioni.

Fabrizio: That's a nice reference, but no, I don't have a city or a particular urban space that inspires me. Actually I never take notes for my work, and I base my studio work on visions. They come back to me through my memory, and I avoid any copy or technical references to what already exists. I'm inspired by constructivism and what I long for is a new shape, an impossible (but well thought of) shape. This shape usually develops without a 2D sketch, through material experimentation and almost by its own necessity, to my own surprise.

Me: Has your way of working always been like this?

Fabrizio: I used to be a traditional goldsmith and at one point I felt the need to experiment with less precious materials. But you need to know my previous fascination to actually understand my way of working now. I've been really into experimental archeology, and now I'm slowly going back to it, maybe.

Me: What's experimental archeology?

Fabrizio: It's the research of ancient techniques through the analysis of archeological artifacts. You look at an artifact and you try to guess how this could be made with such poor tools they had. It's about cultures and knowledge and being able to fend for oneself with simpler and smarter techniques. Understanding what the necessities of one era were...

Me: So did you make works with these archeological techniques?

Fabrizio: Yes, I've used many of these techniques in the past that I've figured out myself.

Me: But you've also used very modern objects, some ready-mades.

Fabrizio: Yes, that was for the *Misuse* exhibition I had at the gallery Louise Smith in 2012, it was meant as a provocation. All around us exist objects that, potentially, could be considered as jewelry. I made an

extensive research on shapes and materials and collected many objects, mostly mechanical parts, that I then exhibited. Some I slightly modified, but many others I left at their original state. The gallery manager was worried that no one would buy such things that you can find at a hardware store, but that was exactly my point: why make it if it already exists? I wanted to show the beauty of these objects. Sometimes it's harder not to make than to make. You can renounce to make, but at the same time you need to take full responsibility for exhibiting something you didn't make.

Me: Could you say you owe a lot to Duchamp?

Fabrizio: I've for sure studied him a lot once I decided to make this kind of work. But I also took in consideration the fact that men have always used what's there, what is available. I also thought of manufacturing some parts of a ready-made with precious materials, so that it looks the same but it's more appealing commercially. Then I decided not to do it: if you decide not to be there, choosing and showing is the maximum you can do as an artist, within the absence of the artist. After all this is contemporary jewelry: to show that objects (like jewels) have deeper meanings.

Me: Do you consider your jewelry more connected to art now that you feel you can express yourself freely through it?

Fabrizio: For sure. Now I think of it as statements, and I don't care so much if the jewel will actually be worn. Ideally I would like to see my work as part of an installation, in a well chosen context, for example a factory, with the right light and even the right music, I would love to compose it. I think context is very important, and in the right one jewelry doesn't need anything else, it has its own soul already.

Me: Even though you say you don't get inspired from places, spaces come back in our conversation as the context for it. Do you also mean galleries?

Fabrizio: The only thing that stops me from making a big installation is the budget and the availability of the space. I think a galleries are a good context to put your work into if you know how to use it. But you would be surprised how a work becomes different if worn by two different people, or when it's in two different contexts. The outcome is completely different.

Objects as a tool for infiltration
Interview with Manon van Kouswijk

Me: Manon, your graduation work at the Rietveld Academy in 1995 is a study on the pearl necklace as a very traditional piece of jewelry. You conceptually dissect the pearl necklace both to analyze it and as a trampoline for new findings. I am specifically interested in one piece, the pearl necklaces formed by old worn out pearls. Can you talk about it?

Manon: Yes, my project was about the pearl necklace in a series of iterations. In this early work I was looking for a space between the general and the personal, between me as a maker and the jewel as an object that has a history and significance of its own, and that offers a space for someone to identify with it and wear it as an extension of their personality. Instead of being a very present author I was trying to operate more like a kind of translator of an existing object into another language, or a different state, by slightly shifting some of the ingredients of the piece, rearranging them, transforming them to take on another materiality. In a way I was trying to do as little as possible; I worked with the basic elements that a classical pearl chain consists of; the thread, the beads, the knots and the repetitive arrangement. In these two necklaces I worked with very old, worn-out pearls from a jewelry shop's repair box. They are quite the opposite of what the ideal pearl chain is supposed to look like; a symbol of material wealth and perfection. The spaces I left open in no.1 I filled with gold in no. 2. Through this intervention the aloof material comes alive and talks about time and wear, about the way that jewelry is passed on over generations. I viewed the making process as a way of infiltrating the objects in order to visualize aspects of its value and meaning without fundamentally changing its standard format.

Me: Were the worn out pearls hard to find?

Manon: I got the pearls at a traditional jewelry shop in Amsterdam. They had a box that contained these pearls in all sizes and colors, so that when a client came with a broken chain and pearls missing they could replace the pearls. Some of the ones that I chose from that box were really so worn out they would never use them anymore.

Me: From the perspective of waste, how would you read your necklace? Is it made of

waste, or is it not?

Manon: I don't see the pearls as trash, I see them as a material that is in a way alive. I find the way they were quite interesting and beautiful. They're an organic material, just like teeth or bone (as opposed to metal for example, which I find a much less "human" material.) As I said, the jewelry shop wouldn't have used them, and I think if I didn't buy them they would have been trash. But they still asked money for the pearls, when they realized I was interested in them.

Me: Once material becomes trash there's no hierarchy anymore, and the value is zero. Probably they still kept the pearls because it's hard not to see them as pearls, even if unusable.

Manon: Yes, I guess you're right, pearls are still pearls...

Me: Is it important for your work that the pearls will keep on aging and eventually will be destroyed by the passing of time?

Manon: ...

Objects as dreams of memory
Interview with Jiro Kamata

Me: Jiro, in your *Momentopia* series you worked with second hand camera lenses and turned them into jewelry. You're very interested in reflections and optics, but besides that, how was it to use a material that was loaded with a previous history? What made you choose for that particular one?

Jiro: Maybe I could start by telling you how the project started. It was 10 years ago, and I had seen an etching of the city of Hanau: it reminded me of a fish eye, so the connection to a camera lens was very spontaneous. The next day I went to a second hand shop to buy lenses, and I painted the back black and white. The result was a deep black that I had never seen before. I grew so fascinated into it that it became emotional. I really fell in love with it.

Me: Could this happen with every material, let's say a stone, or was this a special thing?

Jiro: It could happen, but I would need to be really crazy into it! I really need to want to make something with this material. For me the fascination always comes first, it's the most important point. It's important that the feeling I have for the material is pure, and that's what happened with the lenses. It became a necessity to communicate something with it.

Me: What led you to second hand lenses?

Jiro: At first it was just a practical thing because the new ones are very expensive. When I finished the work I wanted to know the reason for my fascination, and I realized how camera lenses fit what had been my interest before. I come from a family of traditional jewelers and I've wanted to find another value for jewelry, see how I could find another value. Camera lenses have a lot of memory in them. Some people, I don't know who, took pictures... I don't know what kind of moment it was, maybe it was fantastic, maybe it was very boring... but you know, it triggers your imagination. For humans memory is very valuable, and this is a material that has his own story. When I realized it I understood how connected this material was to the concepts of jewelry, value and memory.

Me: You told me that the first work you did with found objects was actually a work in

which you used sunglasses. I find it very poetic that something can contain value because of its history. Was it the same for the sunglasses?

Jiro: No, that work was about color and reflection and light.

Me: Would you like to work again with a material that has a story or was it just the necessity of the moment?

Jiro: The camera lenses were such a special material. It's not easy to always find such a great material. Now I'm working with diachronic mirror, and it's a new material. It doesn't have a story in itself, there's no personal story. Though, it has to do with my personal experience, so in the end, somehow, my own story is in the piece.

CONCLUSION

Through this research I've learned how it's possible to gain entrance to artistic pieces starting from the material, and from the material extrapolate information that concurs into the creation of the concept. It can therefore add precious information about the piece itself.

If we think about art, or literature, as a space where collective memories reappear and reach a catharsis, then all of these objects are connected to our unconscious as well as to our memories. Every object, even the most personal, belongs to the collectivity for the imaginative potential it possesses. Maybe I can dare to say that everyone can relate to almost everything, because everything will unlock categories of the mind that will enable a judgment. And that's why art (even the most personal piece of art) communicates to a wide audience; what we see has already been seeded in of us by our life in history. I chose to focus on obsolete objects, as they might mirror one aspect of society. I came to understand while writing this thesis that at the core of this interest is not objects per se, but people themselves and their psychology.

The interviews with the jewelers made me realize that I could not find what I was expecting them to tell me, but they enriched me with a new awareness. Authorship is relevant because with the similarities between the materials they chose to use, what made the difference in output was the way these materials have been treated. The material may speak to our unconscious, but the maker speaks to our mind.

I've also realized that this research is important to me in a more resonant way. I've often felt overwhelmed by my own possessions, by the accumulation of the sediments of past lives that my parent's garage has become. I often felt suffocated and at the same time irresistibly attracted by the objects we decided to keep locked away there. Every year we perform the purifying ritual of throwing away a selected amount of goods, only to find ourselves with more stuff than before. I used to have a secret diary where I would keep crusts and scabs which had fallen off my body and other sorts of medical or weird things related to myself: a piece of cloth I found in a shoe, a drawing of my hand's x-ray, a used plaster. I can't explain why I did this, but only lately I've started thinking about it as the very first item in a collection of things that is still growing, but that is determining who I am and what I'm interested in. I for sure have a morbid interest into what decays, in bodies and their full corporality, and in objects that somehow have similarities with living things, sharing a destiny of life and death. Preservation of these things then seems like a logical piece of such a fascination.

My aim with this thesis was to understand at a deeper level the relationship we have with objects as humans, acknowledging our interdependence with them, and acknowledging that they might know and tell us many things if we are able to read them. In other words, there is a secret language that has grown between us and them without us noticing, and that we can learn about ourselves if we are willing to observe our environment.





Image stills from Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il deserto rosso*, 1964.







NOTES

1 Georges Bataille, *Il limite dell'utile*, Adelphi 2000, p.26. Translation by the author. (First edition: Gallimard, Paris 1976.)

2 Francesco Orlando, *Gli oggetti desueti nelle immagini della letteratura*, Einaudi, Torino 1993, p. 74.

3 Orlando, *op. cit.* p. 4.

4 Orlando, *op. cit.* p. 8.

5 Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 1878, accessed online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/introduction.htm>

6 I'm talking about men only here as I'm not mentioning the fact that women have been living and still live in a condition of oppression and subjectivity, distinct from the role of men within the bourgeoisie.

7 Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) was a German philosopher.

8 Elaborated in *One-dimensional man* (1964), it's a principle that follows Freud's "pleasure principle" and "reality principle". As a principle that oppresses the modern man, it is the expectations of the performance one needs to fulfill. It means to keep one's place, assigned, in society, and perform that role. It is linked to social stratification, division of work, patriarchal family structures, and unidirectional views of sexuality for procreational purposes.

9 Georges Bataille, *La parte maledetta*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2015, p. 45. (First edition: Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1949).

10 There are much significance to this phrase; here I don't dive deeper into these concerns. For further reference : <http://fetzer.org/resources/parker-palmer-myth-individual>

11 In the ritual of throwing away we would like—the garbage collector and I—to find the promise of the completeness of the agricultural cycle. In that cycle, they say, nothing went to waste: what was buried in the ground would be born again. Uselessly the garbage collector and I tip out our dark cornucopia. The act of recycling the residue is nothing but an incidental practice; it doesn't modify the essence of the process. The pleasure of the rebirth of fleeting things (goods) is a privilege of Capital: it monetizes the substance of things and, in the best case, leaves us the corpses to be used.

From Italo Calvino's *La poubelle agréé*, accessed online.

12 Joshua Simon, *Neo-Materialism, part one: the commodity and the exhibition*, on e-flux journal #20, November 2010, p.5.

13 Orlando, *op.cit.* p.12.

14 Accessed online at: <http://dspace.unive.it/bit-stream/handle/10579/4153/835620-1165493.pdf?sequence=2> p.20.

15 Jean Luc Godard, "Interview avec Michelangelo

Antonioni", dans *Cahier du Cinéma n.160*, November 1964.

16 J. L. Godard, *op.cit.*

17 J. L. Godard, *op.cit.*

18 <http://klimt02.net/events/exhibitions/fabrizio-tridenti-misuse-galerie-louise-smit>

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