

## HOLISTIC HALLUCINATIONS: Ways for Objects to become Subjects

I would like to begin my presentation by sharing my confusion on the use of the word object in the call of this conference. Even though, it is more close to greek where the 'subject of a study' is actually translated as the 'object of a study', to my understanding, it seemed that it substitutes the word 'subject'. Since English is not my mother tongue, I have been always a bit confused about the proper use of these words, and especially with the word 'subject' as I could not match its grammar and philosophical meaning with its other meanings (eg. as one under the rule of another: see: 'the dutch are subjects to their queen'). Now that I think about it, maybe this is one of the reasons why I have this fascination with objects.

Anyhow, far from making a linguistic analysis, I am interested in playing with this confusion and investigate the perception of objects as 'subjects', in terms of their capacity to say more than their materiality and object-ness, since they participate in the formulation of our world being interwoven with our fantasies, desires and aspirations.

Thus, through this paper I would like to share my research on how objects become things and subjects that 'do' and 'are' and on the ways they contribute to our reality and subjectivity through the economic, social, political, emotional, affective and other codes and value systems inscribed on them. I will present two projects. the first one refers to the communication potentials of these codes as well as their limitations while the other aspires to redefine our relationship with them.

'In the beginning was the thing, and one thing led to another' (Robbins) and I came up with the idea of *Palimpsest a game of 'reading' and 'writing'*.



It consists of a box that looks like a book and it has objects inside. Once someone gets it, he or she has to examine carefully the contents, try to figure out the story that they tell and continue it by adding something. At the end, the story must be written to a website and the box must be given away; to someone that would be interested to play the game.

A basic underlying premise of this game is that:

'human-made objects reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of the individuals who commissioned, fabricated, purchased, or used them and by extension the beliefs of the larger society to which these individuals belonged.' (Prown 1)

In this process of reading and writing of our beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions, the term Palimpsest is being introduced as a filter, a tool to approach the enigma of the objects and of the stories they tell.

In its most regular definition palimpsest is a manuscript that has been written on, more than once, with the earlier writing incompletely erased and often legible. Or it is an object, place, or area that reflects its history.

I would like to use the term to describe this process of adding things into the boxes and thus changing their context, exactly as a rewriting and erasing partly or just incompletely the previous writings of the story. I use it also to underline that these boxes are objects themselves but also places for other objects to be put in- and they reflect their history of changing hands.

In the context of the game what is even more interesting is how the term is used in some specific sciences, namely in forensic science, history, archaeology and architecture. It is used as 1. the sequence of events in a scene (Forensic Science) 2. as a layering of present experiences over faded pasts (History). 3. as the ruins, traces, marks of constructions speaking of their former wholeness, 4. as a record of material remains, where temporally discrete traces cannot be recognized as such (Arcaeology). [definitions based on Wikipedia].

These sciences acknowledge the fact that apart from the will and the beliefs of people, also events, actions and time are inscribed on things. They try to reconstruct these events, actions, the time passing, through the fragmented traces left in the present.

In the frames of the Palimpsest game, the player is invited to imagine the life-story of the objects even before they are placed in the box; and like a forensic scientist, to solve the enigma behind a scene of crime where miniscule details become enormously important. For example, how come there is a sesame seed stuck on a sock?

'Artifacts like other historical events, do not just happen; they are the results of causes. There are reasons why an object comes into existence in a particular configuration, is decorated with particular motifs, is made of particular materials, and has a particular color and texture.' (Prown 3)

By examining closely these characteristics of objects (size, color, texture, methods of construction) one realizes that this vocabulary of difference between materials (smooth-rough, industrially-handmade, stinky, sticky, etc) is not neutral or fixed. Rather, it takes its meaning and value in a specific social and temporal context. For example, in one context hand-made is evaluated as bad and industrially made as good, while in another one it could be the opposite.

To be familiar with this syntax of material-in-use gives the possibility to recognize *simultaneously* several differences between, say a plastic and a wooden bucket; differences that have economic, technological, ideological and even philosophical aspects.

This close examination of the objects themselves, instead of their image or their linguistic equivalent, establishes a situation where apart from vision, all the senses come together and collaborate to identify and understand each one of the objects, their journey in life and their relations. touch, taste, hearing, smell...

The objects presented here are extracted from the relentless tide of everydayness to become the protagonists of thrilling adventures or the assistants of heroic actions. By putting them in such a position, and such an exposition, there is a shift in their context, a change in their meaning and function and thus a rupture in the otherwise seamless flow of commodified things. This is a tactic known in other domains of things like art-objects or clothes for example. I want to introduce here this mechanism to the most insignificant but basic objects of everydayness.

This project is an invitation to people to become aware of the material vocabulary, to have a holistic understanding of material reality and empower their ability to construct meaning and communicate it through objects; an invitation to become the authors/producers of meaning and not just the consumers. Or if they already are such producers to just realize their participation to this process.

This practice of reading and writing should acknowledge, however, at the same time, its limitations. In most cases its conclusions are simply probable, not at all necessary. It is rather expected that the stories told through even the same objects will be different, according to whom creates them, where, when and for what reason. Jacques Maquet argues that:

'It is essential to know what objects mean for the people who make them and use them.'  
And for this, 'the reading of objects always has to be supplemented by what people say and write about them. Objects can illuminate worlds; they cannot replace them.' (Maquet 39)

Hence, the only possible knowledge of what a 'sign' stands for is through learning the conventional code in which its value and meaning is attributed. and, for this, one must resort to written or spoken sources.

Taking into consideration this argument, I use text and language before and at the end of the process of the game. Before, text is printed and written on the box, for implying somehow all these issues I've been talking about so far, but mostly for creating a setting, an atmosphere for the stories to unfold.

The text published/announced on the palimpsestbook blog at the end of the reading and writing a story through objects, is used to verify and enrich the knowledge acquired throughout the game. This publishing opens the discussion to all authors and readers of the stories and in this blog, anyone can comment, explain, even question the whole process, the issues derived, the stories created.

Summing up, I would say that this is a contradictory project, because although its main focus is on the material objects, it is not really about things in themselves, but about how people make sense of the world through physical objects. It is about the interplay between animate and inanimate worlds, the complex relationship between objects and subjects.

The second project I would like to present is called 'The Restoration of a Wall' and it has taken till now the form of an installation and of a publication. It starts with examining how notions of home are inscribed on our material environment and on objects in particular and then in turn how objects participate in the creation of home; in the creation of self, memory and time -either past, present or future. Using the processes described so far, it aspires to create a shift of the way we perceive our relations with objects and to discover different ways of dealing with them. It expresses my feeling that the capacity to alter our perception of the world is closely related to our capacity to alter the world itself.



In the frames of this project, a wall is constructed with boxes of a moving out or storing of home objects. This wall is then put under study towards its restoration. In order to understand the structure of such a wall a specific restoration technique of analysis is applied on it. According to this technique an area is designated to peel off one by one the layers of plaster till the very basic elements of the wall construction.

I would like to make a small parenthesis here in order to explain that a restoration has always two stages. It entails a study that always aspires to end up in an action. The study part begins with collection of information. It continues with the analysis and evaluation of these data, according to which some decisions of restoration have to be made. So, The restoration is used here as a metaphor exactly because it has these two aspects study+action. It is also used because it aspires to protect the object restored being at the same time a rather destructive action, at least for what is considered to be worthless or less valued.



If the cutting the boxes open for example and the taking photos refer to the collection of data, the publication is in the second stage of a restoration study that analyses these data and it tries to describe the goals, the methods, the presuppositions, as well as the doubts and failures of such a restoration. Thus, it is just a part of a process that has a past and a future to be completed.

Such a fragile wall participates in the construction of our sense of Home and it can be a refuge or a prison. Often buried under such an accumulation of things, we feel victims of consumerism and advertisement but we fail to recognize the trap we are into. The affective enchantment of things and of their promises. I am talking about a trap because although they promise to satisfy our needs, to fulfill our dreams and above all to keep safe and ever-lasting our past and our memories. they succeed only partly in doing so, leaving us with an unsatisfied feeling that makes the bond stronger.



The succession of images of open and closed boxes aspires to reveal the duality inherent on our accumulation of home objects. A duality of value systems. One of capitalism, mass production, industrialization, money, advertisement, consumption and consumerism. and the other more personal, cultural, social, emotional, sensational or affective. It tries to help us perceive them as the two faces of the same coin. The fact that, still elements of the one can be seen in the other and vice versa, reminds us the impossibility of such a division.

I decided to use the boxes of my moving out from a home going to another, because the objects hastily or carefully put in the boxes are in a state of transition. In this moving/storing situation, objects are out of their context of a place. In such a situation, their significance and their interrelations are partially destroyed. Hence, we have the possibility to re-configure them. Once on the move, objects and home have the potentiality to be re-organized. Their meanings, relations, classifications can be re-evaluated and recreated.

However, in order to rewrite the script of the objects narration of home and really act on such a wall we have to face at once all these layerings of different sets of linkages, both personal and to the wider world. We have to perceive this unique intersection of global, local and personal relations, movements and communication and to confront the contradictions and conflicts home entails. In this direction and in a personal level, this project strives to develop new ways of doing home aiming at the actual 'restoration' of the wall of my home objects.

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My effort to perceive at once all these different, contradictory ingredients of meaning and value inherent to objects, is like trying to see a 3d image through its printed 2d form.

I assert that inter-disciplinarity tries to achieve such a holistic perception of the world.

On an article concerning this subject, Koen Brams is very critical of the use of the word, arguing that the very fact that the term is per definition positive and it has no negation is highly problematic. I would add that all inter- terms are extremely popular these days and acquire these attributes, in an art context or not. It might be just a result of the post-modern condition that favors and produces the inter- terms next to all these post-, trans-, meta- ones. [See for example: interaction, interface, inter-media, intermediary, internet, interest, Interpol, internationalism, intercity, intergalactic, interplanetary, intercontinental, inter-communion, interstate, inter-personal, inter-sexual, inter-racial, intersection, interview, inter-reality]

Together with his appreciation of heterogeneity, I share the feeling of Brams that more often than not: 'interdisciplinarity is used to 'gloss over the "differences" rather than giving them due credit.'

Nevertheless, I would also argue that since the control systems are all made by disciplines with strictly calibrated access to other disciplines, the origin of any struggle in the fields of knowledge has to be outside this disciplinary hierarchy in order to contribute to social change (Holmes 14-15).

Inter-disciplinarity promises this transversality and transgression and a more clear overview of the world. It promises absolute freedom (Pültau qtd in Brams). That explains also its absolute positiveness and absence of negation. That explains why it starts having religious or godly characteristics.

I do not believe in any promises of absolute freedom or in the de facto transgression of any recipe. Although I strive for such a holistic overview, I am careful about hallucinations of apocalyptic visions. Thus, I resist the safety of a religious feeling but at the same time, I stay fascinated with the magic hidden in things.

The idea of objects having magic elements is appealing to me not only because magic recognizes the ability of human's intentions to have a tangible result on the world but also because magic is so closely related to self-conscious illusions and tricks.

Because magic:

'always involves a certain degree of scepticism, a hesitation between stating that the power involved is something mysterious and extraordinary and that it is simply a matter of "social effects," (This) in some cases means simply being aware that (magic) power is sort of a scam, but that this doesn't make it any less real or significant.'

'It is about humans actively shaping the world, conscious of what they are doing as they do so.' (Graeber 240)

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