

***CONSUMPTION, PASTICHE AND IDENTITY
IN POSTMODERN VISUAL CULTURE***

by

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SUMMARY

In this mini-dissertation the ongoing battle between the self and late-capitalist society is explored as a theoretical response to the notion of the fragmented subject in relation to postmodernism.

Frederic Jameson links the schizophrenic subject and postmodern culture explicitly to societal changes in Western economies: this author's tradition outlines a main part of my theoretical stance within this mini-dissertation. Jameson, decisive in his criticism of current popular culture that has formed as a result of postmodernism, conveys a key dystopic viewpoint in his association of schizophrenia with postmodernism and late-capitalism. This sentiment is echoed in this mini-dissertation, as it is my belief that capitalist consumption habits and pastiche are interrelated in current popular visual culture, simulating a schizoid experience which consumers in turn mirror when formulating a sense of self.

An essentially fragmented (postmodern) viewpoint with regard to postmodern visual culture is argued, and is aligned with Jameson's perspective on how subjects form identities within late capitalism, with pastiche and consumption labelled as the main causes of the contemporary societal problem of fragmentation.

The main contention of the study is thus that contemporary consumption practices, through the stylistic acceptance of pastiche, are the current causes of fragmentation within the self. This naturalisation of postmodern montage and pastiche, in my opinion, effectively disorients consumers, as similar techniques that are adopted in consumer culture are applied to identity formation, thus contributing to a sense of egolessness, a key characteristic of schizophrenia. Focus is placed on visual examples that highlight postmodern techniques of nostalgic image recycling, aligned to similar postmodern identity models, with parallels drawn between the fragmenting individual and the consuming individual.

As exceedingly discontinuous processes of change occur through capitalist consumption habits that are emblematic characteristics of the postmodern condition, it is thus my belief that current postmodern visual culture contributes to an overall fragmented experience of the individual, where consumer practices are negatively

affecting identity construction, and thus spurring on further cultural fragmentation and social disintegration.

Key Terms:

Pastiche, identity, fragmentation, Capitalism, postmodernism, society, Marxism, schizophrenia, random borrowings, saturation, dystopia, lifted imagery, appropriation art, mass media, popular culture

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant features or practices in postmodernism today is pastiche (Jameson 1998:130).

There is general consensus amongst visual culture theorists that confidence in the prior modern myths of totality, order and unity waned during the second half of the twentieth century. Postmodern dialogues developed as a consequence of this loss of faith and there now exists a cultural condition entrenched in fragmentation, pluralism, saturation and simulacra. This phase has abandoned the previously stable assumptions and constraints of modernism and embraced the more disillusioned contradictions and ironies related to postmodernism, the symptoms of which are evident and rife in current popular visual culture.

The research focus of this mini-dissertation relates to the impact of postmodernity on the human condition whilst exploring the connections between capitalism and identity formation. More specifically, attention is placed on the notion and use of pastiche in visual culture, and how its increasingly naturalised use throughout consumer society is impacting the processes of identity formation. Postmodernism's influential reach, in this mini-dissertation, is not only categorized for its theoretical implications, but for its repercussions on practical aspects of everyday life (such as identity formation) as well. Pastiche as a postmodern concept is investigated as a central catalyst for the fragmentation of identity, as it directly refers to the practice of sampling from existing cultural texts, and in doing so, propagates an endlessly recycled aesthetic, now no longer limited to the visual terrain.

1.1 Background to the study

Postmodernism encapsulates a certain *Zeitgeist* accessed by many eclectic cultural sectors including art, culture, science, and philosophy, and has assembled a phenomenological present influenced by ideas developed after the Second World War. Scholars first identified the many socio-cultural, literary and philosophical features of postmodernism after the post-war *malaise* that had successfully devastated European mentalities concerning unity, reason and progress. Further theoretical accounts detail postmodernism's rise from an array of historical transformations and events such as:

The proliferation of television; the rise of rock and roll and youth culture ... the expansion of finance capital and money markets; the attenuation of the distinction between high art and commercial popular culture; the development of sophisticated computer technology and the related nexus of information, power, and profit; the migration of the middle classes from cities to suburbs ... the shift in economically advanced regions away from heavy industrial manufacturing toward a service economy and consumer society ... the expansion of multinational corporations ... have all been deemed hallmarks or inaugural moments of postmodern times (Donahue 2002:[sp]).

The thinking of the time evolved into a radical revision of modern theories concerning key issues concerning culture, identity, history and language, and the tenet of postmodernism became more broadly accepted in America after the 1970s, with the discourse's equivocal attributes most expressively articulated during the 1980s.

The volatile nature of postmodernism has made it hard to define and, according to cultural theorist Andreas Huyssen (1998:58) the movement is "remarkably elusive and the definition of its boundaries exceedingly difficult, if not per se impossible". Hutcheon and Natoli (1993:viii) however describe postmodernism as a constant that usually connotes change and in contemporary Western popular culture it refers to a cultural advent that "presents an anarchical structure in which the deconstruction of society and its 'grand' narrative are paramount" (Smith 2007:1). Current theoretical approaches have shifted paradigms and challenged many classically inclined viewpoints, and postmodern influences can still be felt today in a diverse set of cultural expressions from architecture, literature and art to photography, cinema and music.

Where modernism defined itself through the "exclusion of mass culture and was driven, by its fear of contamination by the consumer culture burgeoning around it, into an elitist and exclusive view of aesthetic formalism and the autonomy of art" (Hutcheon 1989:28), postmodernism as a movement has been able to discuss "the different possible relations... between high and popular forms of culture" (Hutcheon 1989:28). Key scholars and theorists have identified many other cultural characteristics of postmodernism: major themes include pluralism, depthlessness, the use of pastiche¹,

¹ The parodying of existing texts, a key point of interest in this mini-dissertation.

relativism, fixation with identity, surface expressions, fragmentation and a rejection of grand narratives, in favour of what seminal French philosopher and theorist Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), terms *petits récits* or small narratives². Lyotard's answer of an “incredulity towards meta-narratives” (Lyotard 1992:138), simplifies definition even further.

These ideas are all recognised as critically defined symptoms associated with the postmodern condition, and the prevailing interpretation is that the movement offers an excessive buffet of purely decorative and nostalgic quotations, subject matter that forms part of and equally sustains a culture over-saturated with images, unable to separate itself from this artificial palette. This integral connection to current consumer trends is of central interest to an understanding of the context of this study, a context dominated by the logic of capitalism. The latter phrase is lifted from *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) by Frederic Jameson, American literary critic and Marxist political theorist. Jameson, known for his works that question contemporary cultural trends and texts, has become an identifiable author for his fervent analysis from within the Marxist theoretical perspectives as he links “postmodern culture explicitly to changes in the structure of capitalist political economy in the post-war era” (Donahue 2002:[sp]).

In *Postmodernism and Consumer Society* (1998), Jameson builds on his arguments featured in his earlier seminal work. When delineating postmodernism, Jameson (1998:128) mentions two key defining characteristics: firstly that the movement was an obvious reaction against the models of modernism, the “very modernism it seeks to replace”, and began as “a reaction against the institutionalisation of modernism in universities, museums and concert halls, against the canonization of a certain kind of architecture” (Stephanson 1987:29), detailing how the growth of capitalist influences successfully underscored an inevitable break from modernist traditions. Secondly, postmodernism propagated the differences between high and popular culture to erode, where the surrounding environment of degraded mass culture took centre stage and overruled the realm of high culture, with the distinctions between the two no longer visible. This erosion can be noted as a “disappearance of a certain depth” (Stephanson 1987:29), or a depthlessness as Jameson describes (1991:58), through the use of recycled images that “pander nostalgic sentimentalities rather than genuine historical understanding” (Kellner [sa]).

² Small narratives competing with each other, replacing master narratives, thus underlining a preference for plurality.

This loss of critical distance and acceptance of 'false appearances' (Norris 1990:129) through the use of pastiche reduces history to nostalgic repetitions, to clichéd images that rupture narratives into a schizophrenic repetition of orphaned fragments. Indeed, Jameson (1991:xii) claims that the global scale and effects of postmodern fragmentation highlights the movement not just as an aesthetic style but as a cultural logic of capitalism, and thus a cultural dominant.

Jameson, described by critical theorist Douglas Kellner (1998:[sp]), as "one of the foremost contemporary English-language Marxist literary and cultural critics", whose critical analysis of popular culture, architecture, theory and other texts is:

... part of the movement toward cultural studies as a replacement for canonical literary studies. Nothing cultural is alien to his synoptic grasp and his restless and wide-ranging studies continue to illuminate our contemporary culture and to map its future, while elaborating valuable methods for the study of culture and society (Kellner 1998:[sp])

Jameson offers an influential analysis of the postmodern condition, viewing its overarching influences in economic contexts with suspicion. Jameson is regarded as a representative, according to Docker (1994:115), who "intensely distrusts and dislikes" postmodernity and follows Marxist economist Ernest Mandel's view of the era as an extension of a late capitalist system³. Jameson takes a contentious stance, and additional theoretical views demonstrate current postmodern trends that aid in "the eradication of the centre" (Shirvani 1994:291) brought about by the cultural logic of late capitalism, as Jameson's modernist distaste of the postmodern era paints a dark *fin de siècle* era that is resultant of consumer commodification. Jameson understands late capitalism to be a pervasive symptom of current postmodern trends, where 'late' conveys:

the sense that something has changed, that things are different, that we have gone through a transformation of the life world which is somehow decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive (Jameson 1991:xxi).

Art critic Hal Foster (1998:xv) describes Jameson as "less sanguine" in his approach

³ The idea of 'late capitalism' originates from Karl Marx's ideological stance that the capitalist mode of production is a temporary phenomenon that will eventually demise, and critics of the system, such as Jameson, continually point to out the system's effects of decay and fragmentation on society, pointing to inevitable ruin.

concerning postmodern debates, as he scrutinises pastiche for its nostalgic properties, where it is a “refusal to engage the present or to think historically”. According to Jameson, the logic of capitalism, itself dispersive and disjunctive, “does not tend towards wholes of whatever kind” (1991:100), and these qualities, I maintain, have had a tremendous impact on identity construction, undermining many notions of self that have endured prior to the advent of postmodernism. Jameson (1991:72) highlights this fragmentation and describes it as the end “of the distinctive individual brush stroke... since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling”.

The fragmentary influence of postmodernity can thus be seen as all encompassing, as part of a broader dynamic depicting a phenomenon “that covers the face of the earth and actualizes both our subjective and objective conditions of existence, no matter who or where we are, whether we like it or not, and whether or not we like to believe it. There is no getting outside it” (Massumi 1993:140). Brian Massumi (1993:138), writer and political theorist, describes current culture as “incapable of rising to the challenge of disarming the final constraint of capitalism” essentially a tyrannical force supporting joyless consumption in a popular culture that has lost its way (Tomlinson 1990:15), statements that directly echo Jameson's outlook that the postmodern condition is “inseparable from, and unthinkable without the hypothesis of, some fundamental mutation of the sphere of culture in the world of late capitalism” (Jameson 2001:346).

Even though Jameson has been described as an unusual phenomenon, “an American Marxist”, (Docker 1994:115) his vision is significant, especially when concerned with postmodernism's aesthetic preference for pastiche and superficiality. Jameson (1998:130) views pastiche as “one of the most significant features or practices in postmodernism today”.

Generalised descriptions of pastiche detail the term within a literary or artistic genre, meaning either a hodge-podge⁴ or an imitation⁵. Pastiche is similar to parody, according to Jameson (1998:130), but without the latter's “satirical impulse”, making it a neutral and dead alternative. For Jameson (1998:131) pastiche is “without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated”. Pastiche marks an obsessive preoccupation with surface appearance, a stylish medley characterised not only

⁴ The Oxford English Dictionary describes pastiche as a medley of various ingredients, a hotchpotch, farrago, or jumble.

⁵ Wikipedia generalises pastiche as a light-hearted tongue-in-cheek imitation of another's style.

as “an expression of consumer culture, but as a normless or 'blank' form of parody” (Rose 1991:28). Appearances and images are intermixable, where pastiche plays “a crucial role in the postmodern aesthetic of difference and hybridity” (Hutcheon 2005:324). Pastiche allows for only reproductions in an era where “stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum” (Jameson 1998:132), thus highlighting the technique as an integral point of discussion when concerned with consumption and identity in postmodern visual culture.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the study

It is my belief that an identifiable connection exists between the postmodern practices of consumption, pastiche and fragmented identity construction, thus the methodology of this mini-dissertation forms part of a literature study and then continues with a basic visual analysis of visual texts that utilise pastiche as a technique. Therefore, in this study the specific aims of the study will be:

- To discuss Jameson's contributions concerning capitalism and schizophrenia in order to highlight clear patterns of fragmentation spurred on by postmodern capitalist society
- To introduce visual texts that utilise the technique of pastiche in order to highlight the naturalisation of pastiche in popular visual culture
- To further highlight pastiche as a technique utilised in identity formation, noticed in two contemporary identity models, namely the protean self and the pastiche personality
- To draw parallels between consumption and schizophrenia and highlight the use of pastiche as a defining characteristic that fragments the self within the context of postmodern visual culture, thereby illustrating the position that the postmodern consumption technique of pastiche negatively affects identity formation.

1.3 Theoretical approach and methodology of the study

This mini-dissertation is concerned with postmodernism sentiments of the fragmented self, primarily utilising contemporary theoretical frameworks in order to unpack key concepts that constructively address the issues interrelated with identity and mass consumption. The deconstructive agenda of postmodernism addresses the impermanent nature of many social constructions, namely the fragility of the self in relation to consumption. A particular

strategy in this mini-dissertation is to highlight current techniques in postmodern visual culture that utilise pastiche images and/or styles within various forms of visual texts ranging from the 1980s to present, and to reveal a key conceptual shift that has occurred with the global acceptance of free-floating, non-referential signifiers in postmodern visual culture, and thus similarly in identity formation.

Through an empirical approach, coupled with the methodological framework derived from postmodern theory, this mini-dissertation explores the expanding forms of communication brought about by the consequences of the postmodern era with the inclusion of visual texts as a means to visually explore how the construction of identity has become a consequence of consumption, highlighting a central concern relating to the dislocation of individuals through consumer practices. Prime focus has not been given with regards to a South African context, and the visual texts are mostly of international origin, in terms of Western capitalist systems and their cultural by-products. The generalisation is due to my belief that the trends noticed within this mini-dissertation are of a broader dynamic and felt on a global scale, and not purely related to one geographical placement.

1.4 Overview of literature and visual texts

Referred seminal sources who discuss consumption and its relation to broader cultural influences in postmodern society, and considered pertinent in understanding the postmodern phenomenon, include Jean François Lyotard's seminal *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Jean Baudrillard's *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1987), and Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). Additional theoretical contributions include works from psychologists Kenneth Gergen and Robert Lifton, sociologists Mike Featherstone, Zygmunt Bauman, Robert Bocoock and Anthony Giddens, social anthropologist Jonathan Friedman, literary professor Andreas Huyssen, literary theorist Linda Hutcheon, and literary critic Terry Eagleton, among others. All are major contributors and key in relation to postmodern theory, and have all in some way or another noted a shift in modern society, viewing postmodernity and consumerism as inextricably linked. They have been identified within this mini-dissertation as they all offer significant conceptual links between consumer capitalism and postmodern society.

The authors are situated in various academic fields, positioning this study as an interdisciplinary inquiry from within the disciplines of popular culture, social psychology, cultural criticism and postmodern identity theory. Additional *Leitmotifs* can be noted and

include emphasis on Marxism (based on Jameson's contributions), as well as the social sciences (based on Gergen's and Lifton's contributions). The investigation of visual texts immediately positions this mini-dissertation in the realm of visual culture and art history studies as examples are lifted from both fields.

The visual references that are utilised in this study have been characteristically observed and lifted from current Western trends within the fine arts, advertising, popular culture and design sectors. A range has been selected from such varied sources as a means to illustrate the underlying connections between the examples, and are used to highlight a global trend to embrace borrowed assemblages and incorporate them into ones existence, artwork or commission piece. Each visual text explores the idea of pastiche as a technique in one form or another within the work. The works portray lifted imagery, subconsciously mirroring the commercial disruptions producers of the works undergo daily, and symbolise the processes of fragmentation resonating within them and throughout Western society on a larger scale.

The works thus form part of a visual narrative on the current state of current postmodern visual culture, where the producers whether consciously or subconsciously, have created works that have become descriptors for similar processes used in postmodern identity construction. The works illustrate and underline the palette of personality possibilities that now are available in every Western communication channel and are used to visually highlight my central argument that the postmodern technique of pastiche that is currently being utilised more frequently on a social level is causing fragmentation to occur on a personal level as well.

1.5 Overview of chapters

Chapter One introduces the main aim of the study, against a theoretical background instigated by the postmodern narratives of Fredric Jameson, where the fragmented subject is described as a product of postmodern consumer culture, threatened by capitalist thinking.

Chapter Two articulates core societal concerns relating to consumerism, popular culture and its links to schizophrenia. This chapter also isolates examples of pastiche within popular culture, as well as the intrusion of commercial imagery into artistic subject matter, and concentrates on a basic visual analysis of these visual texts.

Chapter Three outlines categorises of postmodern identity models, namely of the protean self, and pastiche personality. Emphasis is placed on both the positive and negative aspects of malleable contemporary identity dynamics as described in the former, by Robert Lifton's categorisation of the protean self, and in the latter by Kenneth Gergen's notion of the pastiche personality.

The concluding chapter acts as a summary of the previous chapters. Both contributions and limitations of the mini-dissertation are discussed, and suggestions pertaining to further reading are also included.

CHAPTER TWO: SCHIZOPHRENIA AND SOCIETY

Decentred, allegorical, schizophrenic... however we choose to diagnose its symptoms, postmodernism is usually treated... as a crisis of cultural authority, specifically of the authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions (Owens 1998:65).

Anthropologist David Harvey's (1990:44) observes that "postmodernism swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is". According to Linda Hutcheon (1989:1), academic, literary theorist and feminist, key characteristics distinguishing postmodern society involves its "wholesale 'nudging' commitment to doubleness, or duplicity". This persistent and anarchic characteristic of the postmodernity has led to vast transitions, to the feeling of disjunction, and in turn the unearthing of key contemporary issues surrounding the problematic dynamism between self and society.

Jameson (1998:128) focuses on these societal concerns defined by the US post-war boom era, relating them to the emergence of a new socio-economically fuelled order, a new movement that "expresses the inner truth of that newly emergent social order of late capitalism" (Jameson 1998:128) due to the significant features of pastiche and schizophrenia. As a general trend, according to Boggs and Pollard (2001:178), postmodern society is highly antagonistic "toward the idea of fixed discourses, identities, and meanings", preferring schizophrenic experiences rather than complete ones. Jameson (1998:137) bases his thoughts on schizophrenia around Jacques Lacan's contributions in the subject, where grasping schizophrenia relates to understanding it as a "breakdown of the relationship between signifiers", and an experience of "isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence". Foster (1998:ix) details Jameson and Baudrillard as having similar notions of the postmodern as a "new, 'schizophrenic' mode of space and time", where the former asserts consumer society as an oppressive structure, and the latter periodizes the postmodern age wherein the death of the subject occurs, both relevant, interrelated and central to the arguments within this mini-dissertation. Jameson (1998:132) shares Baudrillard's perspective that the individual subject is "dead", but he believes that this notion is as a consequence of corporate capitalism, and that prior individual subjects no longer exist due to "the so-called organisation man, of bureaucracies in business as well as in the state, of demographic

explosion". This chapter thus analyses and focuses on these themes that highlight and propagate the experience of schizophrenia within postmodern commercially and technologically advanced Western societies.

2.1 Influence of new technologies

Postmodern society is marked, according to Berzonsky (2005:126) "by an ever-accelerating rate of social, technological, and economic change; instant media access; and global access to goods, people, and ideas". New media and technologies have created opportunities of interconnection, where a "new culture is in the making" (Gergen 1991:3). The accelerating expansion of new technologies allows for such collective realities, saturating individuals with varied communication forms, exposing viewers to a plethora of meanings and messages and placing a new superficial emphasis on style, trends, design and fashion. This advent points to a self that is continuously performing under shifting circumstances, presenting personae customised for each environment. This social behaviour is thus noted as a normative, accepted form of consciousness.

As Boggs and Pollard (2001:181) note, "in the highly splintered, discontinuous postmodern milieu, social bonds and feelings of community are profoundly weakened as the vital linkage between everyday personal life and the public sphere is increasingly severed". Such previously defined boundaries between public and private, real and imaginary have become indistinct and in Baudrillardian⁶ accordance "hyper-real spectacles by the mass media and culture industry, instinctively blurs the distinctions between fact and fiction, reality and perception, subject and object to a point where all conceptual boundaries seem to have disappeared" (Boggs & Pollard 2001:105). This cultural convergence can be noted in communication rich nations where emphasis is placed on the subject interacting with many varied messages, people, visuals and institutions in diverse ways, where the resultant identity form the emerges can be described here as a by-product bowing down to such forceful societal influences.

With the era of communication in mind, author Docker (1994:104) describes how it "invades our minds in a pornographic way, ejecting all interiority, injecting the exterior world of television and information. We succumb to a state of terror proper to schizophrenia". This language echoes Baudrillard's (1998:150) sentiments in his essay *The Ecstasy of*

⁶ For Jean Baudrillard, Disneyland is a good example where the imaginary becomes reality, where faked phantasms highlight a hyperreal simulation of reality.

Communication (1998) where he laments over a consumer society alienated, made obscene by communication, “where we are no longer part of the drama of alienation; we live in the ecstasy of communication. And this ecstasy is obscene. The obscene is what does away with every mirror, every look, every image”.

Baudrillard (1998:146) continues on his central theme of the nature of the self clouded by technological advancements and commerce when he discusses the current “narcissistic and protean era of connections, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface that goes with the universe of communication”. The growing emphasis on consumption, Levine (2005:175) notes, as well as the increasingly rapid pace of social structural and cultural change have combined “to create a social environment within which it becomes increasingly difficult to construct stable identities”. This highlights a shift away from “notions of substance and content and towards packaging, aesthetic form and ‘the look’” (Lee 1993:ix), and intimately related to this is the role mediated messages play in propagating a society solely preoccupied with surface quality. It is noticeably apparent how fluidly constructed consumer visuals and messages are experienced and are now widely accepted as constituents of the postmodern condition. Identity is imagined amongst all of this, by Munro, as “a prosthesis of disposables, pithily captured in the term ‘lifestlye shopping’ ” (1996:249).

2.2 Consumerism in visual culture

Current consumer society broadcasts a wide increment of socially saturating changes, giving birth to a distinctive feeling where ‘anything goes’ and deliberating a societal sense that unity is an unnecessary characteristic. Such forces of dislocation, caused in my opinion by the mass media revolution, are inseparable from postmodern society and are spurred on by the roles of communication and consumption. Bauman (1998:23) notes that “ours is a consumer society”, never before has a society been so saturated with diverse images and messages, engaging members purely on a consumption rather than production basis (Bauman 1998:90).

All cultural objects at present are consciously designed for maximum exposure and planned obsolescence, innately emphasising the impossibility of durable constructs, whether commercially or psychologically. Features hint at temporality, flexibility and most importantly, a reduced life-span. This consumer era in turn requires a sense of self that too is “malleable, sensitive to the power of the surface” (Ewen 1990:45), itself expendable and

replaceable as the cultural products on offer. Consumption and what is consumed, whether literally or figuratively, has its effects on how individuals contribute to and reflect a sense of identity. Semiotically loaded possessions are mall bought vehicles used to define one's sense of self. According to Tomlinson who feels “our choices have in fact been consciously constructed for us” (1991:13), all that exists is the illusion of choice, as an audience is created out of compliant subjects: “free agents who ultimately accept their 'place' in society, who 'fit in' and submit to bureaucratic and corporatist modes of authority and social control” (Werbner 1995:136). Consumption, Bocoock (1993:5) notes, now “affects the ways in which people build up, and maintain, a sense of who they are, of who they wish to be. It has become entwined with the processes surrounding the development of a sense of identity”.

As in the case of marketable goods, the act of consumption in identity formation stimulates the desire to replace and change identities, and sustains a metaphorical conveyor belt supply of new identities at a constant rate. The act of consumption never allows desires to be filled, and propagates an insatiable hunger: as the moment one desire is curbed, another one surfaces. Each visual fad has a volatile lifespan, infinitely inventive, erratic and short-lived, echoing the constant flexibility of current consumer culture trends. Purchasable identities are never long lasting and are merely replaceable tokens constantly available for retail purchase. Postmodern artists have realised this and many works now mirror, according to Metropole Galleries “the superficial and ephemeral nature of our relationship with mass-mediated popular culture” (The Dream of Putrefaction [sa]).

Consumption as a dynamic social process can thus be recognised as an integral process that defines how individuals currently relate to one another socially, and themselves personally. This model of fragmentation serves to validate “the idea of the consumerist self which lacks any real sense of unity, hungrily acquiring new commodities to which its identity becomes dispersed and configured” (Fox 2003:33). These acts of consumption thus describe processes of self-refashioning, where discarding one layer to replace it with another pastiche alternative is now commonplace and urged on .

2.3 Pastiche consumer imagery

2.3.1 Examples in art

British artist Antony Micallef references such contrived consumption techniques and messaging when citing popular culture icon, the Barbie doll, in his painting *Appearance*

is Everything (2008), dressed as the Virgin Mary, with a Chanel logo painted on her chest, holding a sash with the phrase “If only there were more good looking people in the world, the world would be a better place” written across it.

Micallef's works reveal a “saccharine seduction of colourful pop imagery and consumerism alongside its dark and troubling underbelly” (Antony Micallef 2008:[sp]), and as in this work, Micallef discloses a preoccupation with current pop imagery and consumer products, as a plethora of images such as a Chanel lipstick, Ferrari automobile, shopping bags, a hairdryer and television set, sunglasses, palm trees and most notably Barbie all appear in the composition. An artist he believes that “we are all alienated consumers” (De Barros [sa]) and his work voices a critical position on consumption, and emphasises a current cultural obsession with consumer goods that have somehow replaced former culturally loaded symbols, with Barbie physically replacing the Virgin Mary's position, where now, appearance, not substance, is of central importance.

Splash bombs 2 (2002) an artwork by Michel Majerus, can be seen as an example that furthermore exploits pop art influences as the work displays an obvious fascination with American advertising and product iconography. This can be seen in the work as it draws the viewer “into a vertiginous graphic swirl of washing powder packaging” (Michel Majerus [sa]). The artist's medium of expression extended to many aspects of popular culture, including “computer games, digital imagery, film, television, and pop music to trademarks and corporate logos” (Project space [sa]), and highlights the late artist's definitive preoccupation with readily available commercial imagery. This demonstrates a somewhat metonymic situation, where artists are unable to detour into a sense of peace as consumer messaging always seem to interrupt their creative thought processes, so too highlighting a larger situation where the ordinary consumer public are unable to escape from invasive consumer images themselves.



Figure 1: Antony Micallef, *Appearance is Everything*, 2008.
Oil on canvas, 140cm x 183cm.
Private collection.
(Micallef 2008:[sp]).



Figure 2: Michel Majerus, *Splash bombs 3*, 2002.
Acrylic on canvas, Dimensions unknown.
Nationalgalerie, Berlin.
(Splash bombs 2002:[sp])

Figure 3, where commercial imagery is also noticeably embraced, is entitled *Lips* (2000) by Jeff Koons and forms part of a series that features recognisable collaged images of food, fashion and women in the composition (Easyfun Ethereal 2002:[sp]). Koons foregrounds an array of culturally relevant advertising imagery, and as noted in the mentioned work title, include enormous lips, wind-swept hair, sweet corn kernels and fruit collaged together on a landscape photograph backdrop. The Guggenheim explains the artist's work process of splicing media and personal photographs together into realistic backgrounds, as the artist aims to combine "familiar yet sometimes unrelated images to create collage-like paintings rendered with photo-realist perfection" (Easyfun Ethereal 2002:[sp]).



Figure 3: Jeff Koons, *Lips*, 2000.
Oil on canvas, 120 x 172 inches.
Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin.
(Lips 2000:[sp])

Koons's works in general exude a sense of Western excess, as the artist visually alludes to advertising and billboard iconography, and has been described as “a sucker for the grand opera of the advertising illusion” (Heiser 2001:[sp]) whilst dabbling with obvious surrealist and pop art references. His work emphasises a feeling of fleeting consumer self-gratification, similar to advertisements where the imagery has been lifted from, and highlights a visual eclecticism evident in the composition, a current cultural advent where “one listens to reggae, watches a Western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and 'retro' clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games” (Lyotard 1979:76). The work highlights an obvious cultural fixation with surface quality, airbrushed perfection, the manipulated gloss of objects and the consumption patterns attached to such imagery, as the corn kernels seem to enter the sensually open mouth, with the interplay between food and women, both available for consumption, leaves little for debate.

French artist Mathieu Mercier also formidably highlights a consumerist presence in his works, and has been described as “a man who turns product placement into an art form” (Rappolt [sa]). Known to cite visual styles of the Bauhaus, De Stijl movement and Constructivism, in his *Rodchenko* (2007) sculpture series the artist visually pastiches and adapts the Russian constructivist's works but remodels the compositions by using American packaging as the sculptural material.

The work exudes a Pop Art combined with Soviet sentimentality of Andy Warhol's Brillo

boxes (Baudin-Reneau 2007:[sp]), whilst illustrating an innate fixation with consumer products, as the overwhelming presence of consumer pedagogy inherent in the artwork highlights how the artist shrugged off more conventional materials and used packaging as his new building blocks, as if more classical sculpture materials were of no use in postmodern times.



Figure 4: Mathieu Mercier, 'Glad' (after Rodchenko), 2003.
Mixed Media, Dimensions unknown.
Jack Hanley Gallery, San Francisco.
(Glad 2007:[sp]).

Figure 5, a sculpture by Trek Thunder Kelly further highlights a presence of consumerism, as the found object, a bust of David has a recognisable Louis Vuitton textile pattern painted onto the sculpture surface. The pattern of the fashion house is repeated and incorporated with the brand's logo, and invades the modern sculpture, as if plaguing it with some postmodern malady showing up as a symptom on the sculpture's surface. The work visually depicts the physical encroachment of consumer mentality on personal terrains and is an overriding example where postmodernist trends indeed have triumphed over modernist sensibilities. Both Figures 4 and 5 clearly degrade modernist methodologies, as each of the works intuitively succumb to the reality of invasive consumerist traditions within the sculptural format.



Figure 5: Trek Thunder Kelly, *Louis Vuitton David Bust*, 2005
Found object, gold leaf, acrylic, 28" x 13" x 13".
Private collection.
(Louis Vuitton David Bust:[sp])

2.3.2 Examples in design and advertising

In postmodern culture styles are borrowed and recycled for consumption, lacking any true referential depth, whilst cultural fashions gain in popularity only to grow obsolete in a short time frame, becoming invalid almost instantaneously. Postmodernist thinkers have, in fact,

... been fascinated precisely by this whole "degraded" landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Reader's Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature, with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery, and the science fiction or fantasy novel: materials they no longer simply "quote;" as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance (Jameson 1991:2).

Polish designer Kasia Kmita focuses on this global trend of constant borrowing and image appropriation as she marries consumer images with traditional polish embroidery techniques, as noted in her *Cutouts* (2007) series. Her works visually imitate highly recognisable Polish patterns inter-weaved with current, recognisable global symbols. The works have global icons embedded in the compositions, namely a Nokia handset, a Coca Cola logo and a silhouette of the Disney character Snow White, all brands and symbols prevalent in Western societies. The works visually illustrate a global advance

of Western brands as they infiltrate cultural compositions, the intrusion occurs at the expense of displacing previous visual traditions similar to what can be noted in Micalleff's substitution of the Virgin Mary for Barbie.



Figure 6: Kasia Kmita, *Cutouts*, 2007.
Paper cutouts, various sizes.
Galerie Zero, Berlin.
(Kmita 2007:[sp])

Due to the increased number of mediated experiences through ambiguous commercial imagery, as illustrated in Figure 6, individuals now thrive on incoherence, experiencing themselves as more multiple than unitary, today more than ever before (Ashmore & Jussim 1997:47) and illustrates the continuous and transforming nature of the postmodern self as it relates to consumption, and consumer culture.

In another example where widely recognisable consumer imagery is utilised, the *ipod series* (2004) by artist Trek Thunder Kelly combines photographs denoting scenes of Iraqi prison abuse with visual cues from iPod advertisements. The California based artist has utilised the popular brand's highly recognisable advertisement techniques as a means to illustrate the naturalisation of consumption and successfully captures “the spirit of our specific time and place, and comments on both the imaginative and tangible worlds of our incessant culture of consumption (and consumption of culture)” (Kelly 2008:[sp]). Trek's art has also harnessed Pop Art themes, intense in his subject choice, yet presents his concepts in a tangibly recognisable fashion in order to, perhaps, present a format wherein a commercially susceptible generation can approach the subject matter in a more visually familiar manner. Kelly clearly examines this powerful relationship consumers have with products, as the identifiable white iPod device is used as a means of torture, both humorous and disturbing when one recognises media imagery attached to the Iraqi war so brutally juxtaposed with American consumer messaging, both doubly imperialistic.



Figure 7: Trek Thunder Kelly, *Ipod Ghraib – Abuse*, 2004.
Digital images on canvas; 24" x 36".
Private collection.
(Kelly 2008:[sp]).



Figure 8: Trek Thunder Kelly, *Ipod Ghraib – Punishment*, 2004.
Digital images on canvas; 24" x 36".
Private collection.
(Kelly 2008:[sp]).



Figure 9: Ocean Basket television advert, *The Prince Prawns of Sea-Fare*, 2008.
Digital screen capture.
(Joe Public 2004:[sp])



Figure 10: Ocean Basket television advert, *The Prince Prawns of Sea-Fare*, 2008.
Digital screen capture.
(Joe Public 2004:[sp])

Figures 9 and 10, are from a recent South African television advertisement for Ocean Basket that pastiched the programme credits of popular television show from the 1990s, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. The advertisement follows similar, if not identical visual cues from the original programme and highlights a local example where the technique of pastiche is utilised. The advertisement follows a similar narrative to the original, with visual cues recreated almost identically to the original screen credits of the original programme, including title credits (as noted in Figure 9) and character costumes (as noted in Figure 10). One cannot ascertain any conceptual link between the seafood franchise restaurant and the 1990s television program, thereby further illustrating the naturalised use of pastiche in many creative fields, from advertising and music videos, to sculpture and television advertising.

2.5 Conclusion

There is some agreement that the older modernism functioned against its society in ways which are variously described as critical, negative, contestatory, subversive, oppositional and the like. Can anything of this sort be affirmed about post-modernism and its social moment? We have seen that there is a way in which postmodernism replicates or reproduces -reinforces- the logic of consumer capitalism; the more significant question is whether there is also a way in which it resists that logic (Jameson 1998:144).

As Edgell, Hetherington & Warde (1996:7) succinctly state, “the self exists in extension. It is constituted in the world of goods (and services) that are consumed”. Current consumer culture is seldom static and is noted for its “unlimited freedom of choice, in matters ranging from lifestyle to morals and to the formulation of one's identity” (Southgate 2003:25). It is equated, according to Massumi (1993:53), to a living cell organism, a rhizome of sorts, as it “depends on a constant folding, or contraction, of an aleatory outside that it can only partially control”. In the realm of mediated experiences, today's vision of contemporary society intrinsically illustrates how everyday culture is manufactured “at the whim of big business and social apparatus” (Lee 1993:98) and personal identity is assembled out of components “created by others and marketed aggressively and seductively” (Tomlinson 1990:13). Following this, Friedman (1990:327) recognises that consumable objects, images and ideas can be seen as “building blocks of life-worlds ... that they can be understood as constituents of selfhood”. The culture of consumption subtly renews trends season after season, and

within this paradigm the postmodern customer seeks to compose a sense of self from the prototypes on sale, thus constantly adapting “in an ever-shifting multiplicity of social contexts” (Gergen 1991:155).

A buffet of identities are offered up daily, as a repertoire to pick and choose from, to recombine and refashion as desired, and this process has been described as one that nurtures an integration of “separate elements into more or less regular stratified formations” (Massumi 1993:54). To currently abide to the social norm, to be a fashionable member of society, “one needs to respond promptly and efficiently to the temptations of the consumer market” (Bauman 1998:112). As Werbner (1996:135) mentions, “the current postmodernist stress on consumption as a semiotics of everyday life marks a major sociological shift” and illustrates the emergence of identity formation plagued and interrogated by acts of consumption and pastiche. The various techniques of pastiche that have been visibly noted in the discussed visual texts, abide to this postmodern shift and in my opinion visually document processes occurring on a psychological level among Western consumers. According to Bauman (1998:28), just like consumer goods identities “are to be appropriated and possessed, but only in order to be consumed, and so to disappear again”.

No longer are goods consumed rationally, as now consumers “make lifestyle a life project and display their clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle” (Featherstone 2000:95). Consumers pursue these noncommittal fragmented lifestyles “in which the production of self and culture through consumption is paramount” (Holt 2002:72), basing ones sense of self on what one can acquire commercially. This chapter has thus highlighted these shifting societal changes where commerce is key, with its trickling impact on identity, to be discussed further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: IDENTITY

The stylistic representation of self and society come together ... frozen images- in ads or style magazines become the models from which people design their living spaces or themselves (Ewen 1990:51).

It is evident that current societal ideals augment the multiple perspectives related to the inconsistency of identity, and as authors Martin and Barresi mention, “what one call 'the I' is constantly changing. The / as a persisting thing is a fiction” (2006:228). As Western civilisation propels further into an age of information and ideas, messages and signs have become easily exchangeable commodity forms, where the techniques of appropriation and pastiche are integral components that foreground the postmodern condition. It is my contention that such postmodern processes of appropriation not only occur in the disciplines of mass media and consumer messaging, but have trickled down to influence the processes associated with identity formation as well.

Consumer culture tends to invite consumers to identify with a wide variety of fashionable figures, messages and images (Kellner 1995:257), from Madonna to Michael Jackson whose indefinable, ever-changing facades are characteristically postmodern. This sentiment grooms the postmodern discussion that identities are no longer fixed but presently more complex and in a constant state of reformulation, as Lyotard (1984:15) explains that “a *self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before”. Something previously unshakeable has thus been displaced by doubt and fragmentation and described by Mercer (1990:43) as an experience symptomatic of the postmodern predicament.

3.1 The fragmented self

With modern society now fundamentally altered and fragmented, cultural life too has become disconnected with the arrival of postmodern consciousness, all the while subverting visions of the self. Identity is now systematically viewed as a dynamic and flexible process, open to societal changes. Within the contemporary societal pluralisms of Western and technologically dependant societies, the unified identity of modernist origins is no longer valid. This highlights the advent of the isolated individual, who, according to

Campbell (1995:101), is “juggling with assorted signs and symbols in a never-ending attempt to construct and maintain identity in a fragmented and ever-changing environment”, whose lack of unity ultimately culminates in a decisive lack of agency, “dispersed totally in the linguistic, semiotic and cultural codes that constitute and determine it” (Fox 2003:33). The context of decentred and fragmented subjects are of central concern in postmodernism, in many varied sectors from the social sciences to popular culture studies, and the process of identity construction has been altered by contemporary culture within the postmodern arena. Freed from modern commitments, there is no longer one privileged position, solid structure or unyielding foundation, postmodern individuals “prefer to keep their options open, finding the 'open-endedness of their situation attractive enough to outweigh the anguish of uncertainty” (Southgate 2003:8). Individuals now experience a variety of social roles, and identity formation and ideas of self are no longer confined incidents but prime examples that provide a paradigmatic view of the complex relationships occurring in modern society (Rodari 1988:67). Grodlin & Lindhof (1996:9) examine changing notions of selves in contemporary societies, and describe the sense of self shifting from “fixed and self contained” to “more fluid and relational”.

There can be little doubt that this sense of fragmentation is one of the topical features of postmodern society, and as Rattansi and Phoenix (2005:99) deduce, includes “the disembedding of hitherto settled identities, at a personal and social level, by the rapid changes wrought by what some have called a period of ‘late modernity’ and others have labelled ‘postmodernity’”. Trifonova (2003:[sp]) believes that in an attempt to overcome the anthropocentrism of prior centuries, contemporary thought has taken it upon itself to “dissolve subjectivity into something vague, unstable, indeterminate, unidentifiable, fragmented, amorphous, and always impersonal”, a statement that highlights the self as a dynamic and circumstantially specific phenomenon.

Daily life in the postmodern era “seems to be a movement from self to self” (Ashmore & Jussim 1997:170) and such destabilisation of the self leaves the subject multivocal and decentred, the portrait of an unsatisfied nomad. Emphasis is now placed, Bagnall, Longhurst and Savage (2005:1) believe on:

virtual communication, institutional deregulation, and the movement of capital, information, objects and people at great speed across large distances, social life cannot be seen as firmly located in particular places with clear boundaries. Identities are therefore diasporic, mobile and transient.

What this implies is the inevitable blending of previously traditional borders between culture, communication and self due to postmodern consciousness and the application of new technologies. What is similarly experienced when portraits of the self multiply, is that these previously precise lines “grow increasingly complex, and with this mounting complexity the boundaries grow fuzzy” (Gergen 1991:119), thus making it impossible to assume that the process of identity formation is unaffected by external forces, a sentiment of critical concern to this investigation. The true self of each individual is now only in effect “constructed and created through adherence to systems of exchanges” (Munro 1996:256), only through this exchange and purchase of consumer products does a basis for identity construction arise: “it is goods ... that help create and construct identity” (Munro 1996:250).

Identity, difference, diversity and fragmentation are pertinent keywords in the postmodern vocabulary, and are, in accordance with Mercer (1990:49), “saturated with groovy connotations”. I however do not echo such positive impressions with regards to the postmodern predicament, and concentrate in this chapter on identity models that highlight this evident psychological fragmentation. This chapter applies dual perspectives from the field of psychology where and Kenneth Gergen, author of *The saturated self: dilemmas of identity in contemporary life* (1991) and Robert Lifton, American psychiatrist and author of *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (1993), are introduced. Both authors discuss and classify the development of a fluid and many-sided personality, from within the realms of social psychology, as a noticeable trend in postmodern societies, and while the latter author assigns positive connotations to the trend, the former is not so optimistic.

3.2 Proteanism

3.2.1 The protean self as positive

In postmodernism, according to Docker (1994:xvii), there is interest in

... a plurality of forms, and genres, a pluralising of aesthetic criteria, where such forms and genres may have long and fascinating histories, not as static and separate but entwined, interacting, conflicting, contesting, playing off against each other, mixing in unpredictable combinations, protean in energy.

To understand identities in a positive light as fluid and fragmented, calls attention to the emergence of this new protean⁷ form of self baptised by Proteus, Greek sea god of changeable forms. Proteanism involves a form-seeking assertion of the self that is continuous and self-perpetuating (Pickering 1999:65), whose desire to be mobile, adaptive, dynamic, fluid, and variable describes this postmodern phenomenon from an optimistic avenue filled with a sense of possibility. This mutating self resonates cheerfully with interconnection, a pluralistic sense of being that playfully toys with uncertainty on the one hand and cohesion on the other.

The act of variation is thus the essence of the protean self, and as Bruner (2002:46) notes, in day to day situations often individuals are faced with accounts where “we constantly construct and reconstruct our selves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future”. This highlights a somewhat necessary characteristic of proteanism at one point or other, as this ability to manoeuvre through differing social situations is an essential characteristic to successfully cope with daily activities in postmodern life.

Central to proteanism's function is the additional capacity to bring together disparate elements of identity. Identity, according to cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1990:222), should not be seen in an obvious light: “perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation”, thus highlighting proteanism as a possible alternative for healthy identity construction. This process has an underlying positive connotation, as the disappearance of a true, grand-narrative form of self in this instance can be seen in an encouraging light as one surrenders to the possibility of expressing one's sense of self in a variety of ways, utilising each facet to communicate a different characteristic. The protean self in this instance can thus become “a bridge between the modern and the postmodern, a source of continuity that takes in radical discontinuity” (Lifton 1993:231).

3.2.2 The protean self and hybridity

The idea of proteanism also heavily echoes the experience of hybridity implicit to postmodern theory, a factor increasingly highlighted as an escalating global experience.

⁷ The term ‘protean’ describes versatility, mutability, and shape shifting

The basic components of hybridity include factors such as “intermingling, combining, fusion, mélange” (Tomlinson 1999b:142) and is portrayed as a phenomenon where disparate fragments conglomerate, thus making hybridity pertinent to the protean identity model. Defined by the ability to restructure itself at will, the protean personality can thus form various psychological responses to varying social situations, acting as a barometer for current societal ambiguities.

What is important to note, Martin and Barresi (2006:262) explain, is the ability to cultivate the “freedom to re-create the self by disassembling and reconstructing the habitual selves that we find ourselves to be”. This freedom can grant exciting constructive experiences, as these multiple aspects of selves do not lead to a state of incoherence, but rather provide the building blocks to construct different identities at will, allowing for a dynamic, productive and creative process. The fluctuating subject constructs new and exciting scenarios at any given moment, the act of invention is paramount as these involve “seizing upon the evolutionary human capacity to connect” (Lifton 1993:130). This innate behavioural versatility lends itself Lifton (1993:230) continues, to “propel the process toward ever greater inclusiveness”, thereby highlighting pluralism, an inherent trait that permits such creative social combinations to be explored. The protean self can thus be categorised as an adaptive and playful identity model that highlights the element of chance as an integral ingredient that leads to a near infinite degree of freedom through the process (Massumi 1993:117).

This enables the protean self to interchange between facades, socially lubricated and nimble, balanced between “responsive shape shifting, on the one hand, and efforts to consolidate and cohere, on the other” Lifton (1993:9). Where belief in modernist ideals has dissolved, awareness of a reformulating identity has conversely expanded, and postmodern thought does not seek “an overarching explanation for existence or who/what we are, it does allow for a construction of identity through fantasy and interplay with reality within an environment of urban decay” (Smith 2007:[sp]). What this postmodern sentiment has proven to provide is a framework for collective existence and expanded possibilities, and the protean self can be viewed as a symbol of this framework, flexible and fluid, a model for innovation and adaptation. What Lifton (1993:190) does additionally highlight, is the inevitable dark side of proteanism, where there is an

... ever-present danger of diffusion, to a point of rendering the self incoherent and immobile: a 'chaos of possibilities.'
The protean hunger for meaning can be fierce and ever

unsatisfied. Endless forays into possibility can become endlessly superficial, leaving the self with a sense of diminished, rather than enhanced, meaning. Negative proteanism ... is fluidity so lacking in moral content and sustainable inner form that it is likely to result in fragmentation.

3.3 Pastiche

3.3.1 Introduction to pastiche

In a world of pastiche the connection to historical accuracy is lost, past historical references are now only understood as a repository of genres, styles, and codes ready for commodification. The cultural dominance of postmodernism is marked by a smug play between varied historical references, a culture of pastiche. Pastiche, a “blank parody or empty copy” (Storey 2001:158), is a mere imitation, momentarily adopted and quickly discarded, where in previous centuries the tradition of pastiche was considered plagiaristic, the technique is now viewed as an accepted form of expression. Emphasised in current art, media and communication design examples, pastiche can be identified in many forms of expression, ranging from architecture, music videos, installations to product designs.

Many current artists such as Jeff Koons (as discussed in Chapter Two), Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Sherrie Levine, and Cindy Sherman are all renown for utilising methods of pastiche, but the postmodern practice was initially developed by notable cubists such as Braque and Picasso. Even prior to that appropriation was encouraged, and dates back to the Greek and Renaissance eras where the copying of famous artworks was commonplace (Lankford [sa]). More recently, Pop artists have also “examined and depicted the objects and images of their world with an intensity designed to make the viewer uniquely conscious of the reality of such objects and images” (Lerner & Bresler 2005:1157), and the movement remains a great source of inspiration for current artists, and was noted in visual texts in Chapter Two.

Van Dorston (1990:[sp]) mentions that the postmodernist practice of random borrowing is “a form of pastiche that could signify a lack of orienting boundaries”. Artists are now more often coaxed to utilise such borrowing practices and include existing imagery into their visual creations, illustrating a new generation of Pop artists continuing the exploration of pop themes first employed half a century ago. Appropriation art has been described as a technique where the artist or producer of the work

... borrows images from popular culture, advertising, the mass media, other artists and elsewhere, and incorporates them into new works of art. Often, the artist's technical skills are less important than his conceptual ability to place images in different settings and, thereby, change their meaning (Landes 2001:2).

Similar to Jameson, Duvall (2002:1) explains how postmodern narratives play with pastiche images and produce "a degraded historicism", and continues to debate Jameson's thoughts on postmodernist codes by mentioning that the movement is a result of previously articulated styles, resulting in pastiche (Duvall 2002:4). Pastiche is further described as an imitation of a style to a point where it becomes "a random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the random play of stylistic allusion" (Hutcheon 1988:26), thus creating a referential battleground for the "perpetual present to be interminably recycled" (Friedberg 1991:427).

3.3.2 Pastiche and schizophrenia

As individuals act in constantly changing situations, such varying roles and identities Southgate (2003:8) notes, "are in danger of losing their sustainability". Elaborated by Baudrillard (1998:153), this signals schizophrenic tendencies that in effect cause the "end of interiority and intimacy", as subjects are no longer able to "produce the limits of his own being". A schizophrenic experience relates to not knowing personal identity in a traditional sense, or rather, according to Jameson, having no personal identity at all (Jameson 1998:137). Terry Eagleton (1987:194), influential literary critic, aptly defines the postmodern artefact as:

... playful, self-ironising and even schizoid; and it reacts to the austere autonomy of high modernism by imprudently embracing the language of commerce and the commodity. Its stance towards cultural tradition is one of irreverent pastiche, and its contrived depthlessness undermines all metaphysical solemnities, sometimes by a brutal aesthetics of squalor and shock.

These qualities usher in the advent of a completely flexible identity where all prior cultural preconceptions of identity formation have been made redundant. Jameson believes that in the current era of late-capitalism, the transition from modernism to postmodernism has supplanted the alienated subject with a fragmented alternative. Echoing Lacan, Jameson (2004:194) describes "schizophrenia as a breakdown in the signifying chain" and believes that these somewhat schizophrenic tendencies are ideal descriptors for a fragmented postmodern state, where the subject is unable to organise

itself cohesively. This makes it hard to deny that when practices of random, heterogeneous and fragmentary processes are exercised upon on a daily rate, subjects experience this fragmentation on a personal level as well. Jameson (1991:119) associates this category of schizophrenia with postmodern aesthetics and writes that the:

schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence. The schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the "I" and the "me" over time.

Deleuze and Guattari⁸ (1987:129) are similar to Jameson as they associate attributes of schizophrenia with postmodernism and late capitalism. A schizophrenic lacks a solid personal identity, unable to differentiate between self and society, and many aspects of current media culture, I feel, aid, promote and simulate schizophrenic experiences on a broad scale. Hollow signifiers in popular culture are evident, aiding in temporal erosion, effectively disorientating the subject and thus contributing to an egolessness that can only be described as schizophrenic.

Contemporary capitalism has extended such schizophrenic symptoms to wide consuming audiences in the form of postmodern culture. What Jameson culturally describes as schizophrenic, is a culture that "is not fully human" (Peretti [sa]). This schizophrenic culture fails "to accede fully into the realm of speech and language" (Jameson 1991:118), thereupon formulating a rootless culture, separated from history, and outside of "human time" (Jameson 1991:119). Such postmodern experiences resonate throughout consumer culture and previous boundaries between fact and fiction, culture and kitsch, self and other have been blurred (Gergen 1991:138), where more specifically, "identities themselves ... take on a form more blurred" (Southgate 200:14). The discourse as a whole can be portrayed as an era of schizophrenic, disintegrated selves. The rate of socio-economic and technological change provides consumers with so many new options and lifestyle possibilities that, further supported

⁸ French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, in their influential work *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), argue that schizophrenia is a mental state that co-exists with capitalism, as the system continually enforces this form of fragmented neurosis as a normative process.

by Berzonsky “the legitimacy of traditional value systems has waned, the basis for self-definition and maintaining a sense of identity has become increasingly problematic” (2005:127). Adding to this, Lifton (1993:1) reveals that “we are becoming fluid and many-sided. Without quite realising it, we have been evolving a sense of self appropriate to the restlessness and flux of our time”.

Illustrating such problems of self-definition is *The Snow White Project* (2008), an ongoing installation launched by Catherine Baÿ in Paris that is a visual reference and pastiche of the Walt Disney cartoon character. The work is comprised of various actors from diverse backgrounds that physically interpret the fairy tale figure uniquely through performance art. Whilst wearing a recyclable costume and a wig made from pre-poured latex, “they enable Snow White to proliferate throughout the world as if mass-produced” (The Snow White Project [sa]), highlighting a somewhat distressing cultural phenomenon relating to American pop culture domination. Cultural and racial differences among the actors are all hidden by the rubber façade of the costume, their personalities in turn imprisoned and hindered by the animated character as all unique features are lost and covered by the costume as if they were of little consequence. The actors’ personal identities are thus overrun by the Western archetype’s features, quite literally highlighting my stance that as mass-produced consumer methodologies are accepted as normative processes for identity construction, one’s own unique identity is ultimately sacrificed in the process.

Obsessed with consumerism and commercial imagery, visual and commercial artists such as Catherine Baÿ understand the connection between consumers and contemporary culture, by using an existing palette of imagery available to them and incorporating them into their visual repertoires. There is a strong conviction that “pastiche plays a crucial role in the postmodern aesthetic of difference and hybridity” (Hutcheon 2005:324) and that inevitable associations with appropriation, assimilation and copying strongly adds to the continuing postmodern debate. These changing cultural contexts no longer allow meanings to remain fixed, thereby causing a dissolution of a unified sense of self what McGuigan (2006:76) refers to as “a cardinal tenet of poststructuralism”. Consequential to this, the overriding presence of postmodern culture has induced the loss of the identifiable and a downward spiral to schizophrenia, thereby highlighting the decentered subject, the pastiche personality.



Figure 11: Catherine Baÿ, *Snow White Project*, 2008.
Performance art. Various dimensions.
Various locations.
(*Snow White Project 2008:[sp]*)



Figure 12: Catherine Baÿ, *Snow White Project*, 2008.
Performance art. Various dimensions.
Various locations.
(*Snow White Project 2008:[sp]*)

Faile⁹ visibly samples from an eclectic range of visual iconography known as “layered and collaged paintings that find their source in pop culture and comic books” (From Brooklyn with Love [sa]). Described as “one of the most popular international producers of street-displayed artwork” (Lazarides [sa]), works by the group have been acknowledged as key examples of contemporary street art. From a television channel, newspaper, magazine or radio station, “we have at our disposal an enormous array of possible identity models” (Grodin & Lindlof 1996:141) and this is visually illustrated in *From Brooklyn with Love* (2007) as subject matter is found through the technique of pastiche, and the composition is a jumbled consolidation of disparate visual elements. The imagery within the composition has obvious visual references to prior contexts, as noted with the use of 1960's pulp cartoon novel iconography and newspaper clippings, and rely to a great extent on the concept of postmodern intertextuality. Pastiche, defined as “an amalgamating mode, an eclectic blending” according to Hutcheon (2005:324), can be identified in the

⁹ An international collective of artists and designers

work through the newspaper scraps of the Empire State building intermingled with cartoon imagery thus creating a cluttered, messy, torn poster aesthetic, where the lifted imagery battles for viewer attention, somewhat mirroring the chaotic experiences felt among consumers when media messages vie for attention.



Figure 13: Faile, *From Brooklyn with Love*, 2007.
Collage on wood. Dimensions unknown.
Laz. Inc, London.
(Faile 2007:[sp])

3.3.3 The pastiche personality

The postmodern condition has created a situation where unity is now considered antiquated, where selves are no longer comprised of only one facade but many and the age of the "saturated self" begins, tentatively coined by Kenneth Gergen¹⁰, in *The saturated self: dilemmas of identity in contemporary life* (1991). Where the protean self highlights a more positive picture of fluctuating identity construction, a self filled with optimism and freedom, the pastiche personality does not have such an optimistic description. In place of an enduring sense of self, there arrives a more dubious identity model that thrives on fragmentation and incoherence through pastiche.

Gergen (2002:[sp]), famous for his comment "I am linked therefore I am" as an answer to the Cartesian theorem, states that "as the boundaries of definition give way, so does the assumption of self-identity" (1991:145), a phenomenon that Gergen has termed the *pastiche personality*. This pastiche personality is "a social chameleon, constantly borrowing bits and pieces of identity from whatever sources are available and constructing them as useful or desirable in a given situation" (Gergen 1991:150).

¹⁰ Kenneth Gergen has formulated classifications on how the personal self relates to and adapts in social environments,

Gergen (1991:139) continues by emphasising that presently “one's identity is continuously emergent, re-formed, and redirected as one moves through the sea of ever-changing relationships”, summarising and highlighting postmodern experiences as fragmented, relative, and ephemeral as one navigates through, accumulates and discards various societal roles and perspectives. This quintessentially postmodern immersion Gergen (1991:48) contends, is formed by “the technologies of social saturation”. More theoretical orientations now surrender to the idea of the self as “decentered, relational, contingent, illusory, and lacking any core or essence” (Gercas & Burke 1995:57) where belief in the previously popular and secure notions of the self as stable, consistent and perpetually whole can now be deemed virtually irrelevant.

In contemporary life, social saturation seems inevitable when ceaseless media representations intertwine into daily consciousness, coaxing viewers to adopt what is on offer, whether visually, physically or psychologically. Such a sense of identity, according to Erik Erikson (1956:74), one of the earliest psychologists interested in identity, “is never gained nor maintained once and for all”, clearly highlighting a situation where the pastiche personality can be described as an easily manipulated, shaped and influenced form of identity, and in my opinion, additionally sensitive to the flow of commercial forces. *Untitled (Cowboy)* (1989), by American painter and photographer Richard Prince, underscores this fragmented consciousness where an inability to escape media representations is highlighted and a hollow presence haunts the composition. Prince has been labelled a “poster child for appropriation art” (Wehr 2007:[sp]) and in *Untitled (Cowboy)* one notices a key trait of the artist, initially developed in the 1980s, of re-photographing magazine adverts featuring the archetypal figure of Marlboro man, a key American archetype the artist often explores. All of Prince's images are extracted from his consumer surroundings, and are then re-contextualised within his artworks.

Prince's technique involves appropriation where “he pilfers freely from the vast image bank of popular culture to create works that simultaneously embrace and critique a quintessentially American sensibility: the Marlboro Man, muscle cars, biker chicks, off-color jokes, gag cartoons, and pulp fiction” (Spiritual America [sa]). This highlights an inevitable technique of pastiche where the process of choosing from existing subject matter and adapting it to formulate an individual response has become a normative process.

which include the *strategic manipulator*, the *relational self*, and the *pastiche personality* which is discussed here.

Prince's work can be described as a “copy (the photograph) of a copy (the advertisement) of a myth (the cowboy)” (Richard Prince [sa]). Although created in the late 1980's, Figure 14 remains a pertinent example of American culture fixated with materialism, with its message still relevant today at how *Untitled (Cowboy)* epitomises a Western fixation over spectacle rather than lived experience (*Untitled (cowboy)* [sa]). Artists such as Prince, who sample from media images available to them, reinforce the growing evidence that the naturalisation of pastiche is now not only a technique in postmodern visual culture, but in every aspect of creation, including identity formation as well.



Figure 14: Richard Prince, *Untitled (Cowboy)*, 1989.
Chromogenic print, 127 x 177.8 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
(*Untitled Cowboy* [sa]).



Figure 15: Art Rogers, *Puppies*, 1985.
Offset lithograph, 4 5/8 " x 5 3/4 "
Private collection.
(*Puppies* [sa]).



Figure 16: Jeff Koons, *String of Puppies*, 1988.
Polychrome on wood; 62" x 37".
Private collection.
(Puppies [sa])



Figure 17: Sherrie Levine, *After Walker Evans*, 1981.
Gelatin silver print, 20.9 x 14.4 cm.
Private collection.
(After Walker Evans [sa])

This recycling can also be clearly noted in *String of Puppies* (1988), where the artist Jeff Koons was sued by Art Rogers for copying his work from a 1985 photograph. Koons based his work on a postcard by the photographer and outsourced the manufacturing of the sculpture, playing no part in the actual construction of the work, only overseeing the subject matter, medium, size, materials and colours (Landes 2001:14). The use of garish colours applied to the banal original image highlights the artist's pop art sentimentality, whilst illustrating Koons' fixation with "generic kitsch" objects (Buskirk 2005:91), as he often features banal images lifted from popular culture contexts as subject matter, as noted in the previous chapter in Figure 3 as well. This blatant pastiche, however, isolates a slightly more critical response concerning originality, and highlights the artist's somewhat blatant surrender to the cultural trend of pastiche in its most obvious form.

Sherrie Levine's work can also be discussed as an obvious yielding to image appropriation. Part of an emergent group of conceptual artists in the 1980s that

included Jenny Holzer, Richard Prince, Louise Lawler, Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger (Levine biography [sa]), Levine is best known for work which consists of famous Walker Evans¹¹ photographs that have been re-photographed by Levine and then presented as her own. By appropriating these images, Levine can be said to raise questions about “class, identity, the political uses of imagery, the nature of creativity, and the ways in which context affects the viewing of photographs” (Levine biography [sa]). The work highlights pastiche at its most isolated extreme, as the artist fully submits to appropriating another artist’s work, by photographing it, with no changes made to the original at all. This work’s unrestrained submission to pastiche clearly communicates a somewhat overarching global acceptance of appropriation, its effects on the dwindling aspects of originality in societal contexts can only be described as startling.

An example of pastiche in music video format is *Wind it up*, by Gwen Stefani off the artist’s *The Sweet Escape* (2006) album. The video director Sophie Muller, features outfits and scenes lifted from the 1965 movie musical *The Sound of Music*. In a scene mimicking the movie classic, Stefani portrays Maria Von Trapp while her background dancers are dressed in pyjamas and portray her children and jump on her bed, as in the original. In another scene, Stefani uses curtains to create clothes, echoing a scene from the original screenplay. These two examples highlight how the musical has been adapted into a popular music category, and where Jameson’s blank parody is evident, as the inclusion of the movie classic into the pop culture video format adds nothing to the lyrical content of the song. These appropriated images merely highlight a hollow recycling aesthetic in the spirit of the time, a bubblegum response where appropriation occurs as if by second nature, as no true stylistic correlation exists between *Wind it up* and *The Sound of Music*.



Figure 18: Gwen Stefani, *Wind It Up*, 2006.
Music video. Album: Sweet escape.
(Wind it up [sa])

¹¹ The original Evans photographs are widely publicised as visual records of the American lower class most affected by the Great Depression.



Figure 19: Gwen Stefani, *Wind It Up*, 2006.
Music video. Album: *Sweet escape*.
(Wind it up [sa])

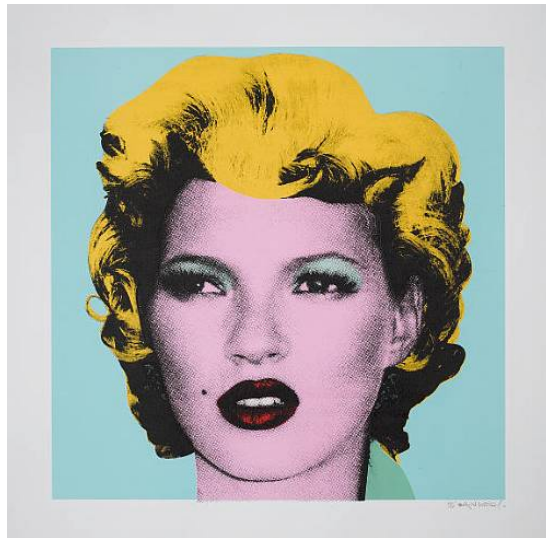


Figure 20: Banksy, *Kate Moss*, 2008.
Silk screen print. Various dimensions.
The Hospital Gallery, London.

British street artist Banksy, in his work *Kate Moss* (2008), reveals the use of pastiche as he visually mimics a Warholesque pop sentimentality and gusto. The work adheres to distinct and characteristic visual references to Andy Warhol's famous silk screens of actress Marilyn Monroe during the 1960s. The garish use of colour is mimicked, alongside the decade's inspired blond hairstyle, the mole and red lipstick all align Moss as a modern day reincarnation of the deceased actress. This work however, in my opinion, does not capture the initial feeling captured in the original, where Warhol's obvious referral to popular culture is felt more convincingly as his depiction of mass-produced images and products from Elvis Presley to Campbell's soup tins intermingle with artist commentary and not, as in Banksy's case, with empty, recycled famous stylistic trends.

From Jameson's perspective, the technique of pastiche in the discussed visual texts creates "an aestheticized space of image consumption" (Duvall 2002:5) ultimately

pointing to the conclusion that current postmodern visual culture is defined by its material production of pastiche and amidst these appropriation practices the pastiche personality feeds off these current cultural trends. Dilemmas including “fragmentation, powerlessness, uncertainty and a struggle against commodification” (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998:131) all come to the fore. These issues are highlighted in figures 21 and 22, spreads from the practical component of this study. The illustrated book, from which the spreads are lifted, details a pastiched Polish folktale of a witch whose insuppressibly voracious appetite drives her to eat her family members, until almost none remain. The witch’s desires are highlighted throughout the storyline as uncontrollable urges that are ultimately never subdued. The witch, as all consumers, is doomed never to feel fulfilled, constantly dissatisfied and seeking more, with the dark night sky acting as a constant reminder for the witch to gaze up at the stars and view all that she cannot have to fill her completely.



Figure 21: MJ Winczewski, *Apetyt*, 2008.
Illustrated book. 21cm x 21cm.
Private collection.
Self-published.



Figure 22: MJ Winczewski, *Apetyt*, 2008.
Illustrated book. 21cm x 21cm.
Private collection.
Self-published.

3.4 Conclusion

As authors Martin and Barresi (2006: 229) explain, “the self, which began the century looking unified – the master of its own house – ended it looking fragmented – a by-product of social and psychological conditions”. This Southgate (2003:99) notes is the reason why “we feel insecure, unstable, lacking in foundations”. Postmodern sentiments emphasise such feelings of insecurity through pluralism and multiplicity and individual experiences now mirror this growing complexity and fragmentation spurred on by modern day living, and not, in my opinion, the other way round. The chosen visual texts highlight this social trend and echo an obvious acceptance of consumer messaging and pastiche as a fundamental aesthetic, both in the terrain of postmodern visual culture and identity formation.

The invasive consumption trends that are evident in the discussed visual examples propagate, in my opinion, a concept of self that will always remain unsatisfied, a concept that postmodern visual culture tirelessly and conscientiously promotes, and as Rogers (1999:135) notes, “invites us, then, to seek a self in malls, medical offices, fitness centre, and other image-altering places”, making the self into a commodity available for purchase. Such consumer oriented trends, in my opinion, highlight an unhealthy image obsession at the hollow centre of commodity culture, where pervasive and influencing images, messages and voices all quarrel for brief consumer attention. Consumer messages in newspapers, magazines, television, billboard and radio advertisements all provide a steady stream of new self-evaluation techniques: “is one sufficiently adventurous, clean, well travelled, well read, low in cholesterol, slim, skills in cooking, friendly, odour-free, coiffed, frugal, burglar-proof, family-oriented?” (Gergen 1991:76).

This chapter has thus highlighted the distinctive traits of consumer culture, involving commodification, image and identity alike, and its influences on identity construction, and has focused on evidence, in the form of visual examples, relating to what impact consumption has had in framing the self as fundamentally fragmented, alongside two postmodern identity models that highlight these fragmentary trends.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

Each attempt manifests a desperate effort to escape from the ineluctable encirclement, the ever-increasing asphyxiation to which consumer society, with its industries of knowledge and sensation, condemns all true emotion, any truly authentic voice (Rodari 1988:160).

Reliance on a solid, substantial sense of identity seems to be short-lived, and at this current stage in Western consumer culture, the concept of a true modern self, no longer significant, has been replaced by a duplicitous postmodern self. Flexibility is now a prevalent term used today to describe identity formation where now nothing remains stable, as “the prospect of constructing a lifelong identity on the foundation of work is, for the great majority of people, dead and buried” (Bauman 1998:27). As critical theorist Douglas Kellner (1995: 247) writes:

Postmodern identity is an extension of the freely chosen and multiple identities of the modern self which accepts and affirms an unstable and rapidly mutating condition. Yet precisely this condition of a multiplicity of choices was a problem for the modern self, producing anxiety and identity crisis. For the postmodern self, however, anxiety allegedly disappears for immersion in euphoric fragments of experience and frequent change of image and identity.

As if pulled in a multitude of directions by the process of consumption, spurred on by the capitalist methodology, identity has been the central point of debate for sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and critics alike. Social saturation caused by consumption techniques have been proven by Gergen (1991:6) to provide multiple furnishings of “incoherent and unrelated languages of the self” and postmodernism as a process cannot be underestimated, due to its forceful vocabulary that has proven to throw doubtful shadows on the concept of personal unity and essence.

Postmodernism’s condition of fragmentation has been discussed as a legitimate means to illustrate how presently identity formation exists “in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction” (Gergen 1991:7). The movement’s additional connection with capitalism, as highlighted by Jameson’s contributions, plays a central role as “the roads to self-identity, to a place in society, to life lived in a form recognisable as that of meaningful living, all requires daily visits to the market place” (Bauman 1998:26).

4.1 Summary of aims and objectives

The aims of this mini-dissertation have been to present and discuss the ongoing debate concerning the overriding cultural influences consumerism and postmodernism have had on identity formation in terms of visual culture, to explore the relationship between the loss of self and this emerged acceptance of consumerism, and in so doing reveal pastiche as a frequently utilised technique in current cultural trends as well as in identity formation. The protean and pastiche personality types were categorised as evidence of current fragmented identity model types, where the former supplied a more positive outlook towards a healthy preoccupation with change, while the latter exuded a more dystopic, fragmented perspective.

What has been explored within this mini-dissertation is a personal perspective based on postmodern contributions surrounding the evolution of identity in order to reflect something of what Western consumer societies experience daily. Postmodern visual texts (identified in Chapters Two and Three) were included as evidence that such varied models of identity are available in the market place, through the act of consumption.

4.2 Summary of chapters

Chapter One primarily introduced the background and aims of the mini-dissertation, principally based on Jameson's theoretical contributions on pastiche, postmodernism and capitalist consumption, thereby establishing the overall influences concerning the fragmentation of the self, which were further discussed in the following chapter. Chapter Two highlighted the concepts of self within society, consumption and new technologies, and the impact they have had in formulating the notion of the fragmented self. Visual examples highlighting the intrusion of commercial imagery into artists' subject matter were included, discussion of works were on a superficial level and not critically analysed at great depth or length, as they included to merely highlight the profusion of commercial imagery into the realm of popular culture as a whole. The pastiched examples visually document the somewhat naturalised process pastiche as a postmodern technique has become in popular culture, with negative connotations no longer attached to this process of appropriation.

In Chapter Three, two key postmodern identity models were discussed, namely the protean and pastiche personalities. Emphasis was also placed on creative works that

utilise pastiche in one form or another, with specific works included into the chapter to highlight the normative and accepted use of utilising lifted imagery in the creative process, thereby illustrating the overall acceptance of the technique into popular culture. This chapter thus highlighted the obvious acceptance of pastiche in visual as well as psychological terrains, where it is now an accepted societal norm to readily utilise this technique for image as well as identity construction.

This final chapter acts as a conclusion and a summary of the previous chapters. Contributions and limitations of the mini-dissertation are discussed and suggestions pertaining to further reading of the concepts explored are also included, where sources that highlight a more positive outlook towards current societal trends are also included, for a more balanced perspective concerning consumer society, postmodernism and identity formation.

4.3 Contribution and limitations of the study

It should be mentioned, in light of the narrow focus within this mini-dissertation, that Jameson's various contributions to the ongoing postmodernism debate have already occasioned much review and critique from varied sources, among many others, including Terry Eagleton, Linda Hutcheon, as well as Margaret Rose's alternative viewpoints on pastiche.

Postmodern dialogues continue to dispute social structures and interpretations as safe and stable, as the 'anything goes' attitude disperses the self, "as if to delete it altogether", Munro notes (1996:270). This mini-dissertation's main concern has been to continue the debate highlighting the immersive, fragmentary and disillusioning effects the postmodern condition has had and continues to have on the self within consumer society. The techniques and characteristics of postmodern consumerism, such as pastiche, have become intertwined with the processes related to identity construction. Gergen (1991:xi) notes that "this massive increment in social stimulation- moving toward a state of saturation- sets the stage for radical changes in our daily experiences of self" and these changes remain the crucial means with which self definition now occurs. If anything, now more than ever are issues of identity at stake, where continuous innovations are developed in order for commercial messages to reach their audiences, where social saturation now more than ever, is clearly accelerating. As artist Thunder Kelly (Kelly 2008:[sp]) describes, "We are the most marketed-to generation the world has ever seen", making dialogue on

this subject more relevant and topical as postmodern culture clearly continues unabated.

4.4 Suggested further reading

Eagleton (Eagleton & Regan 1998:268) views postmodernism as a “grotesque caricature of the revolutionary aims of the modernist avant-garde”, and like Jameson, views postmodernism as an ally to late capitalism, thus making the author a good theoretical addition. Jonathan Friedman (1994:49) additionally focuses on the role consumption plays in the fragmentation of individuals, and how identity is “constantly rearranged by the winds of fashions”. Marxist theorists Guy Debord and Ken Knabb (1992:118) have also recognised consumer capitalism as a form of social control, as it effectively erases the

... dividing line between self and world, in that the self, under siege by the presence/absence of the world, is eventually overwhelmed; it likewise erases the dividing line between true and false, repressing all directly lived truth beneath the real presence of the falsehood maintained by the organisation of appearances.

Other Marxists such as Georg Lukács, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse have all revealed how, in present consumer society, “commodification processes have permeated new realms of experience and social life (Best & Kellner 1997:79). Authors such as Baudrillard and Jameson have furthered this Neo-Marxist tradition with their views embedded in modernist thinking, and they typify those thinkers who “belong to the rationalist public sphere find postmodern popular visual culture to be so confusing, so bewildering” (Docker 1985:149), and thus are both highly critical of current postmodern culture.

The ideas of discontinuity, consumption and society can be seen as contentious topics discussed by many postmodern thinkers but unlike Jameson or Eagleton, many authors have more positive views of the postulations of the time. Architectural theorist Charles Jencks (1989:67) holds such a view, and identifies postmodernism as part of “a great promise of the plural culture with its many freedoms”. American philosopher, John Fiske (1989:22), in *Understanding Popular Culture*, does appoint some disturbing links evident between consumption and popular culture, but does not believe that consumers merely passively consume, but do so actively, reworking meanings and images as they are consumed, and enjoy fluid positions as “nomadic subjectivities”. Docker (1994:165)

explains how Fiske's work "projects a happy world" where consumers are able to alternate between "various subjectivities and identities in an easy nomadic way, enjoying the various pleasures of resisting and opposing", thus illustrating a more positive outlook than what Jameson paints.

Additionally, British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991:84) believes that the influence of mass media need not necessarily lead to fragmentation, as such media offers many possible choices individuals would not have normally come into contact with, giving access to construct commonalities rather than differences. These contributors, among many, encompass a more optimistic view of the effects the postmodern consumer era has had on such social factors such as identity formation, and are thus handy additions for gaining an overall perspective on arguments from both camps of thought.

4.5 Final remarks

All of us become at some point, and for however little time, what we buy. The key question surely is this: how far are we able to recognise the aura that we buy our way into, and so retain the sense that this is not the only way, the natural state of things? And for how long will such a constructed consumer choice be acceptable as the major determinant of personal freedom? (Tomlinson 1990: 35).

A substantial characteristic to mention, upon conclusion, with such a multifaceted sense of self dominating this mini-dissertation's debate, is exactly how consumer culture has impacted on the fluctuating sense of self, and how it has acted on human sensibilities in a "total and ruthless manner" (Lifton 1993:18). It is important to note the imperative variation between fluidity and fragmentation, since the former denotes a more positive interactive form of identity development, while the latter is a negative shifting form of disarray within the self, with the latter, in my opinion, sadly more prevalent than the former.

Influential post-war retail analyst Victor Lebow (1955:7) intuitively foresaw this trend over 60 years ago, when he detailed how Western economies demand "that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption. We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate".

Perhaps, Boggs and Pollard (2001:181) most succinctly communicate my grim perspective when they explain that in a simulated society where “corporate pursuit of material self-interest, wealth, and power reproduces institutional domination at the same time that it generates a culture immersed in chaos, violence, decay, and dystopia”, it seems almost impossible to remain undiluted. Current Western consumer culture, in my opinion, characteristically denies healthy image construction that is free from corrupt corporate influences. Stable identity formation has, in this mini-dissertation, been illustrated as a displaced dream filled with materialistic and recycled aspects of excess, greed and cannibalisation, rather than the critical and creative aspects of originality, creation and fulfilment. With some awareness and critical distance, I believe, it is a dream well worth salvaging.

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