



This is my couch.

An introduction in furniture (pg.1). An invitation to others into my space, a glimpse into the way I interact with my things and the suggestion to do the same. An object can put other people at ease, and introduce me.

I object
I am an object
I am objectified
I objectify

I object, I disagree.

I am an object, I am something that can be looked at *objectively* and studied

I am objectified; someone/thing makes me into or treats me like an object

I objectify; I make or treat someone like an object

Project 1: I Object.

I disagree with the telling of the past, and want to use an object to re-experience an event.

I am pale. I have always been pale. The sun, as it turns out is terrible for fair skin, and I wanted to swim outdoors, mid day, in it. I joined the Synchronized swimming team, a sort of elaborate water-dance hybrid not designed for ten year olds in the middle of the Midwest to take up as a summer hobby.

For my mom danger is not relative, it is immediate. A swim team-induced sunburn, a midnight-city-mugging, all avoidable risk if one is willing to protect herself. According to my mother, in a strange compromise, an oversized white t-shirt was the perfect solution to her fear of my pink shoulders, and my own embarrassment at having her pull me out of practice to reapply sun block. But t-shirts as it turns out, do not float.

I could write you a story underwater, holding my breath and feeling the weight of white cotton pulling against my shoulders. I could remember those things, but I already have the fuzzy image of what I must have looked like, the faint feelings of exhaling against a wall of chlorinated pool water.

But I want to feel that now. Not *feel* in an abstract or emotional sense, but feel physically, like a surface I could reach out and touch. I want to lay my hand on my history, and feel its slight grit.

I made a new t-shirt, properly sized for now and went swimming. Going through the motions of old syncro moves, revisiting an environment I was familiar with in a different body, and recreating an experience with a single object.

Martin Kersels uses his body too. He is large. At over 6' tall and 300 pounds, his series of falls and throws show a man interested in motion and understanding how he moves.

The resulting images catch Kersels the moment before he engages the ground, the reality of his environment, his physical constraints, and the limits of his form, not yet revealed to him. With a simple gesture he learns about his body and his environment in an action that forces the two to interact.

Falling is a thoughtful and direct way to start the conversation Kersels hopes to begin about the movement of his body. He does not paint a painting, or make a sculpture; he literally throws himself at the ground.

It is in part this impulse that pulled me into a swimming pool. When I began thinking about how to revisit a past experience, I realized I didn't just want to write about it, I didn't just want the idea to live in my mind. I needed to move my body, to experience for a second time that situation, so that I could again observe and capture it.

Project 2: I am an object.

I can make my body into an instrument of scientific experimentation and organization.

When I take a shower my belly turns bright red. It is not burned, just blushing, warming up and showing off.

I can be an instrument with which to tell temperature. I am a thermometer.

In a series of photographs I captured my stomach changing color from pale flesh to red, as I exposed it to increasingly warmer water, whose temperature I also recorded. I

then used the different colors my stomach changed to construct a gradient. The result was a fade from crimson to flesh, which represented my skin's response to each temperature of water. Based on the temperatures I recorded, I affixed this color gradient to a thermometer. Instead of reading the temperature in terms of °F, an object's temperature would now be represented in a color that was based on how my skin displays its response to that same temperature.

Temperature is just a function of energy exchange. So I took a look at other objects that I interact with, pocket change, bobby pins, shoes, a book, all things that I hold in my hand or wear on my body, all objects that I exchange energy with in the form of heat and subsequent change of temperature.

First I measured the temperature of the object before I touched it. Then I read for several hours, went for a walk in my shoes, pinned back my hair, and upon finishing the interaction with the thing, I took a photograph and its temperature again. Based on the change in temperature of each object, I arranged their images from greatest exchange of energy to least (there is a thin strip of gradient along the bottom of each photograph that shows exactly what color/temperature group it falls into). Literally charting how much energy I give my things.

People invest a lot of time and energy getting and using their things. In this investigation I literally looked at how much energy I put into my stuff.

Stephen Shore is a photographer who depicts American Suburbia in a boringly beautiful fashion. His ability to capture an environment most noted for its lack of character, in dynamically lit and compelling ways, elevates the clean cut lawns of suburbia into sublime expressions of American landscape.

I took a similar approach when I set out to document the objects that I put energy into. I chose to use directional golden light that creates a warm environment and suggests heat, the topic of the entire photo series.

In a broader sense though I agree with his philosophy. I hope to take the actions of daily life and examine them in a way that treats dull objects and average experiences as something interesting and worth studying. I hope to employ a mindset that treats daily actions as noteworthy instead of forgettable.

These experiments chart the clutter of the everyday. For me, IP has been an examination of the noise that is the background of our actions, looking the things we carry with us when we're not going anywhere in particular.

The everyday actions of individuals can be as interesting as the grandest gesture or mass movement of people, in fact it is the collected action of many individuals on a daily basis that determines much of how the world develops now.

Project 3: I objectify

I can treat myself as an object to study.

I got a concussion. And someone told me, "at least you didn't hurt a hair on your pretty little head." Did I? I wasn't sure, but as an entity to study, I could check. For two months post-concussion, I wore my hair in a ponytail. At the end of each day I removed the ponytail holder and drew it, counting the hairs lost, and making sure there weren't any abnormally hurt hairs from my head trauma. If I look at myself in the third person, and remove me from each picture, I make myself into an object, something to study, a

case to crack. Rebecca looking at Rebecca is obsessive; counting hairs to make sure the subject is ok. This third person narrative plays itself out over 64 sheets of graph paper and lead. The objects I drew make up the evidence for the story. I am an object and I use objects to tell others about me.

Sophie Calle captures her artistic actions on film. In the chromatic diet, she ate whole meals, each of a different color, for an entire week. She got a job as a maid and photographed hotel rooms and the contents of the suitcases of the people who inhabited them, constructing the identity of strangers out of their things. She hired a private detective to follow her around, document her actions, and report back to her. The way she watches herself and others and finds ways of representing that study, via photos, paperwork, emails, reports from private investigators, or letters are fascinating. Her actions are slight shifts of everyday events, with the final presentation of each piece incorporating story telling, beautiful imagery, and written word.

In my post-concussion study I also sought an alternative way of representing the self-examination that I was doing. Rather than write down, *today I am fine, my head is fine*, I chose an object to document that sentiment. Though each drawing can exist on its own, like Calle's work, when coupled with the accompanying images and text, they become evidence, not only of my post-event observation, but evidence of the event that inspired the investigation.

Project 4: I am objectified.

My things make me into an object.

I have been objectified. My watch presses itself into my arm. My socks rub up and down my calves. My jeans press against my hips. My clothing draws its image over me. My things make me into a surface to draw on, to rub against, an object they interact with. My objects objectify me.

In a series of 12 drawings I took a close look at the objects that I come into contact with on a daily basis. Then I looked at the way those objects were effecting me. I photographed the way a watch leaves its mark on my arm, my socks leave lines on my legs, how my things move into me. These objects used me as a surface, and my skin becomes the evidence of our interaction. These seemingly mundane movements of objects against my skin are indicators of the way I interacted with my things, but also suggest drawings of objects on the body, the movement of the free market over flesh.

Why objects: Are things really that important.

Let's be honest. I am the product of a suburban dream, the linear progression of the people of the United States from cities to outlying enclaves of cul-de-sacs and well-groomed front lawns.¹ Among perhaps the most over used clichés about suburban life, there exists some truth. I grew up surrounded by people who dressed in polo shirts and khaki pants, mowed their lawns on Saturday afternoon, and loaded their kids into a Plymouth voyager to take them to the neighborhood school.

But suburbia is important.

Suburbanites are a population that must define itself through consumption, or the ability to consume.ⁱⁱ Therefore what they choose to buy, the things they accrue, form the framework of many an individual in the suburbs. A minivan or an SUV, Abercrombie and Fitch jeans or Gap, every decision becomes an action of self-definition. My investigation of objects is grounded in a historical understanding of their importance.

Looking back to the prosperous post WWII economy, the necessity of home ownership and the realignment of the American Dream to specifically require this purchase, developed in part due to government policy. The GI Bill gave WWII vets and other (primarily white) men federally subsidized loans.ⁱⁱⁱ This enabled the newly formed middle class to own their own home. Through overt political action the suggestion was made that the American dream was inextricably linked to ownership, more specifically to owning a home. A person's status could be defined by the shape, size, and location of arguably the biggest object many people would ever purchase.

In the seventies, Nixon cited American's ability to buy shiny new dishwashers and color TV sets as one of the striking advantages of democracy. Speaking to Nikita Khrushchev in the kitchen debates, his statements helped to align the unique notion of American freedom with the freedom to consume.^{iv} To purchase and amass things was an effort to fight communism and ideology that ran counter to democracy.

In more recent times, the age of a war on terror, President Bush did not ask a post-September eleventh American people to sacrifice for war. Rather, he said Americans ought to venture out into the marketplace and exercise their purchasing power, end terrorism and buy a new couch.^v We live in an age where our government confirms what advertisers have always sought to express. We solve Problems, live better, and end the work of evildoers, all by buying things. Our greatest freedom exists in our ability to purchase objects.

I've been born into this system and much of my experience has been shaped by my interactions with things, *I object* is a series of investigations into my objects and the various ways I interact with them because I believe my interactions with objects begin to speak about the workings of larger systems that affect the way we live. In understanding the things I interact with, I can better understand my environment. People move and are moved by things. Objects are moved by the (allegedly) free market and the American economy is moved by governmental action or inaction. In looking at ones things, one begins to trace a line from consumer to congress, from watches to welfare.

Everything is inherently political.^{vi}

Artists and artisans are object makers. I am too. I can make myself and others into objects. I investigated what it means to be and use objects, and to be used by objects and others.

In acknowledging the historical and even political relevance of objects, my intention is not to suggest that every investigation I undertook directly comments upon the stated relationship between government and people, places and things, rather it is to suggest that there is no area of life left untouched by history, no fragment of daily activity not moved by politics. While my work may not explicitly draw lines between China's burgeoning economy and the t-shirt that presses itself into my chest, my reliance on

objects to move through my day, and to make art, is indicative of the larger system in which I am positioned.

We are what we eat, wear, purchase, and where we choose to live. In examining my objects and how I interact with them, I have a better understanding of myself and an increased knowledge of my environment.

ⁱ Jackson, Kenneth. Crabgrass Frontier (6-10).

ⁱⁱ “Rise of Mass Culture” (consulted Feb. 19, 2008).

ⁱⁱⁱ Jackson, Kenneth. Crabgrass Frontier (198-199).

^{iv} “Suburban Nation,” (consulted April 5, 2008).

^v “New World Order,” (consulted April 15, 2008).

^{vi} Rich, Adrienne. Poetry and Commitment.