

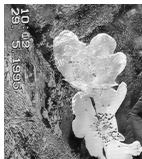
INTRODUCTION

During the past years of my education I explored fashion design in different ways but I was always influenced by the daily. Recently my fascination has been triggered for one specific subject.

It occurred to me after watching a short movie by Jane Campion called “Passionless moments”



and some records from my grandfather video diary



where I was struck by the idea of banality. As a Design student, I often found myself being challenged or invited to find the most suitable solution by emerging my observations and the things that inspire me naturally such as collective or personal experiences. Lately I have been questioning myself about the way of defining banality and its role in our lives, the perception we

have of it and which relation does the banality keep with the design world, especially with fashion... The fashion industry tends to hinge on a disregard for banality. I immediately thought that it would be interesting to reflect on fashion by exploring it through the prism of banality.

In the first chapter I will explore the industry history in the past century to contextualise the current economical system, in order to understand the way we tend to consume today. In the next chapter I will draw a parallel to the notion of banal by exploring the notion of desire. In the last chapter I will enquire the way we perceive what is banal and what is not, it's all about perception.



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The everyday life tends to be trivialized. It discreetly whizzes along which makes it sometimes dull or imperceptible. Banalities of life are not always

what you expect them to be. between the manageable and out of control, the expected and unpredictable... As every subjective thing, it is always a moment on the edge. it causes unique situations where life becomes a sensitive and fragile moment, a moment where nothing is insignificant, a moment where the senses' clumsiness doesn't trivializes everything anymore.

CONTEXTUALIZATION AND HISTORY OF THE (FASHION) INDUSTRY

The market society in which we live has its origins in the fundamental principles of the industrial revival of the fifties in the United States. One of these principles being “planned obsolescence”.

Obsolescence comes from the Latin *obsolescens* (the past participle of “*obsolescere*” which means “falling into disuse”) and it is one of the main principles of the capitalist system that consists of deciding the lifetime of an object before its commercialization. This idea of planned obsolescence is very controversial, even (and especially) today, it is being taught as well as being fought.

As a matter of fact we find ourselves more than fifty years after the industrial revival and the issue of planned obsolescence is still a theme of public importance. Our current economic system, the way we consume today is more than ever linked to this principle. Yet it would be contemptuous, I think, to address this issue in a Manichean manner as in 1920, at a time

when more than a quarter of Americans were unemployed, a real estate broker called Bernard London



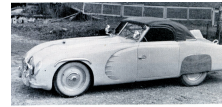
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offers the idea of planned obsolescence as a solution for the unemployment. It was in 1950 that Brooks Stevens



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speaks of design seducing consumers. He proposed to regularly produce innovative products



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also sponsored with body by Spada again and (Italy) LeSalle from a chromed shell and lots of little knickknacks to catch the eye.

in order to seduce the public to consume unnecessary goods, and instill in the consumers mind the thought of need.

In opposition to the way of approaching a product for its durability and quality of the Europeans, that were more likely to buy a nice suit in which they could be married and buried, the American approach aims to make the consumer dissatisfied of the product that he just purchased by instantly proposing him new design items. Brooks Stevens.

We are forced to see that today consumption is particularly frenetic yet the unemployment rate is growing. It is common sense to ask ourselves why the formalization of planned obsolescence never managed to raise more questions. I found it interesting to be able to link this matter with the fashion industry, because it is a field where everything is particularly ephemeral, where the desire to possess is stronger than the desire to relieve a real need. The economical and industrial foundations of the American system of the fifties have changed very little up until today but rather have been exported and installed internationally: a mode of consumption without ethical limits.

On the other hand, we are living together in a world that tends to have difficulty to revive a real growth even though a parallel market like fashion (generally equated with the luxury market for about 20 years) has never been as successful.

There is in the love of luxury a reference to time. Gilles Lipovetsky.

By combining the concepts of time and luxury Gilles Lipovetsky emits the assumption

that luxury is a solid alternative to inexhaustible growth. The act of purchase is still today a quest for well-being that has been on since the fifties,



but it is still not a proven nor an approved fact for everyone. This topic is quite complex because it conditions our lives and forces us to consume more and more, even without us noticing. And that is all due to publicity and communication workers, who create the appropriate seduction system through a certain imagery. The subtlety of this is that we cannot claim that we are forced into consumption; everyone has a free choice to consume from the range of products offered. The planned obsolescence is a method of judicious cyclic sale, which brings the industry to constantly produce objects, as well as needs and desires for the consumers locked to-

gether in a perpetual search for innovation. It is because of the creation of desire, that there is frustration. Those two principles are nourishing each other. By organizing some promotional event, some companies overwhelm their stores with discount offers. The use of promotional offers attract a lot of consumers that come with one goal; buying items that are commonly far away from their basic needs, though they thoughtfully pick up what they consider as bargains.



8 The luxury consumerism is considered as a long-term alternative to mass consumption. In fact the mass production is a ephemeral satisfaction built with short lives time, but luxury is presented as a stable investment. Although it is pretty usual to see luxury brands using their name on mass production items in order to make as much benefit as possible. We should be able to visualize that frustration of discipline in the way consumers collect always more products. Loving ba-

nality is also a way of being introspective, resisting to a world that always goes for the infinite growth.

We have a direct dependency on objects to forge an identity for us, to give us confidence. This is surely because things that previously shaped our identity as cultural groups, the earthbound and all of the other social ties, have been suddenly replaced by consumerism. Serge Latouche.

DESIRE

Banality is what most people seem to want to escape from. In the Middle Ages, ‘the banality’ referred to those infrastructures put to the lower classes’ disposal by every seigneur such as mills, wells, ovens etc. It was the place where everyone would meet over daily commodities.

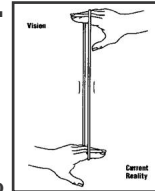


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This feudal term brings to us to the idea of a meeting point, of a communal living situation, of a common sensation of reality; nothing extraordinary really.

Banality is the non-event, the ordinary part of daily life. This ordinary daily life is considered the nest, a base; there's a constant notion of blandness. Banality exists after a setback in our everyday life, this desired life of splendour, fantasizing and passion. It is social pressure that triggers our awareness of the possibility of having this life of utopia, of having in consid-

eration a reproduction of what we are expected to be as social beings. Giving value to banality is also rejecting frustrations and desires. Experiencing the every day is experiencing time. As long as there is a desire, there is a lack. We never really appreciate the moment when it is lived and at the same time the accomplished tends to be disappointing. The lack of the desired is always fantasized, what makes the daily seem rather sad. It is about imagination. Freud considered that experiencing a pleasure in the satisfaction of a desire, never generates a constant feeling, neither in intensity, nor in durability. Freud considers the desire as a tension, it is something that tends to excite to subsequently relax itself.



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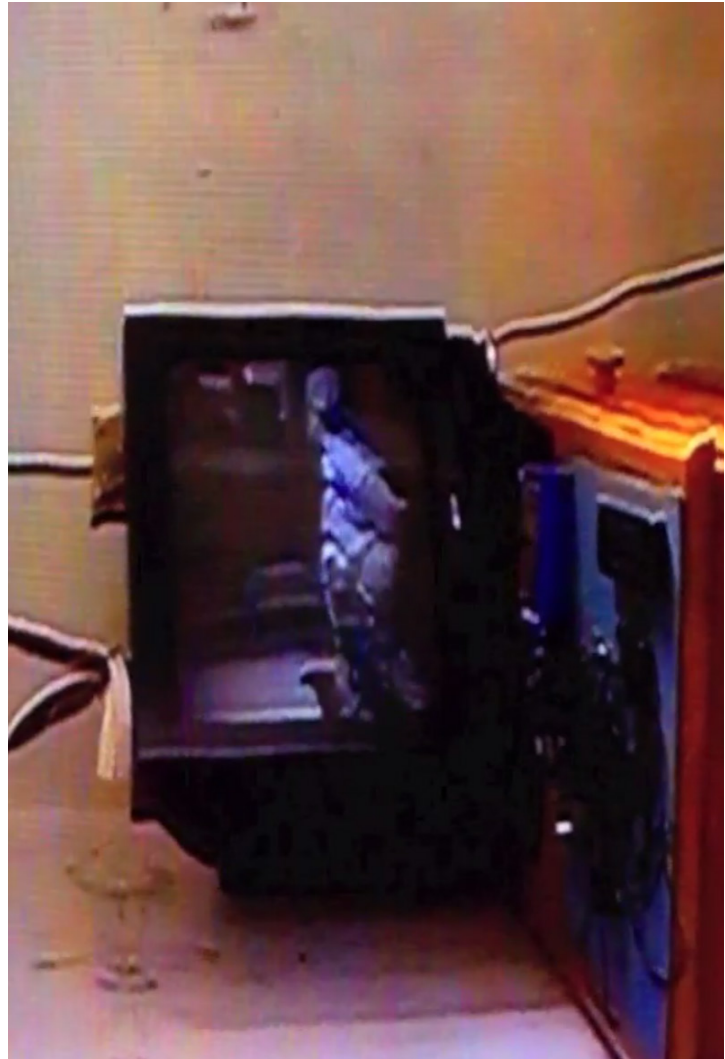
Events of

the daily are always perceived as unique even though they are tightly similar (giving birth, having the flu, celebrating a birthday or new years eve...) but we tend to create

landmarks. Being in the event, creating an event in the every day is sometimes too unsettling to be part of the daily comfort zone. In situations unidentified neither as known or as renowned, the research of familiarity is a way to reject anxiety and unknown fields. Actions rooted in the daily sometimes weigh us, which gives the feeling of a daily fatality. Platon said that “to satisfy a lack is heading back to neutrality”, this is a way to say that giving satisfaction to any desire always brings you to the banal, it is being back in the blandness of the everyday life.

We all tend to reject banality and it leads us to realize our desires as soon as possible, the children’s whim facing an advertisement, the act of buying a car with a loan instead of waiting a bit longer...

Waiting is actually an important part of our desires’ realization process, it is the idea of pending and this is also linked to lacking. The question would be: Is it possible to get some kind of amazement out of the daily? As a landscape, a laugh, a first sip of beer... Those moments are sometimes “Epiphanies”. Epiphanies are snap-shots



11:29
26.11.1995

15:17
4.10.1997





14:15
10. 5. 2000









12:04
31. 3. 1996

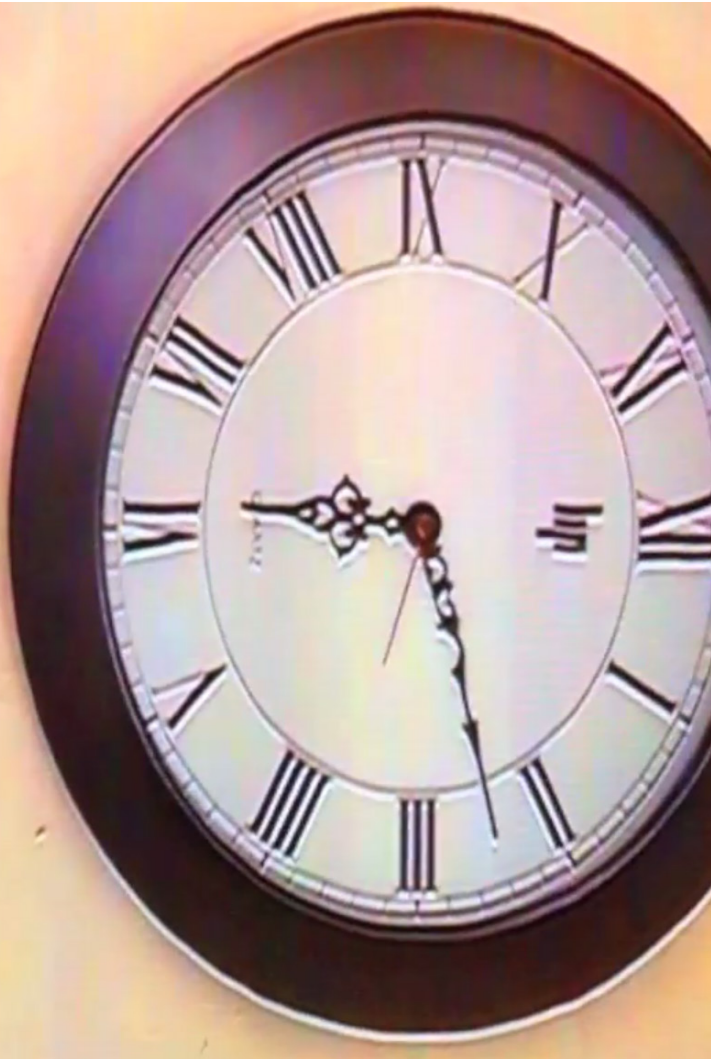




17:16 5-1995

7:33 27-7-1995







of real life, mini-dramas that encapsulate banality and vulgarity; elevated thoughts or perceptions occur in banal surroundings, and are so powerful and so indicative of some higher reality that they take on the character of a mystical vision.



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Some epiphanies are less spectacular, revelatory and significant, but they are harmoniously beautiful. The use of the term secular may owe some of its popularity to James Joyce



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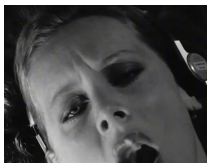
who expounded on its meaning in the novel "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man".

By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these

epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they are the most delicate and evanescent of moments. The delight in epiphanies consists on them constantly surprising us, and catching us when we are not paying attention. We are trapped and arrested by them; they strike us in unexpected moments. The material comes to us from the outside.

There are one million passionless moments in your neighborhood; each has a fragile presence which fades as it forms. Jane Campion.

The short movie that initiated my researches about perception of banalities and daily moments highlights is “Passionless Moments” by Jane Campion, in which she gathers about ten moments, each experienced by different people. That people could be part of your surroundings (colleagues, neighbors, your family), they are simple and “true” people, imperfect and vulnerable.



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This short movie is a celebration of the micro absurdity

of suburban life. All the moments in “Passionless moments”, personal as they may be, are deeply universal; in fact everyone can recognize himself in this moments of selfconsideration. The Jane Campion’s title choice aroused different interpretations, especially regarding the term “passionless”. I firstly considered that something passionless could not be considered as such since it belongs to a personal interpretation, to perception. It’s been during my researches about the matter of desire, causes and consequences, desire confronted with the banality, that I got to use this specific term. All those moments are not desire-driven but they are a series of daily experiences, which make them unexpected and captivating.

The pure present is an ungraspable advance of the past devouring the future. In truth, all sensation is already memory. Henri Bergson.

TRACES OF ABSENCE

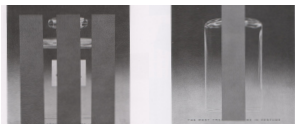
Memory is the process in which information is encoded, stored, and retrieved; through memory, each moment from the present is related to the past. The brain constantly produces images related to personal experiences.



Those images are the result of perception



and can create imperceptible and poetic moments based on sensorial and psychic information.



It seemed interesting to me to think about the ways in which the past manifests itself in the present; specifically, how each element of representation maintains a link with the past. Every

moment is related to a context, a location, a movement, an action... Every moment is related to the idea of traceability.

A poet must leave traces of his passage, not proofs. Only traces bring about dreams. René Char

According to Rene Char, poetry is a suggestive way to highlight an idea, a vision without imposing a point of view. Poetry leads and conveys visions but leaves an important margin for interpretation and comprehension to the receiver.

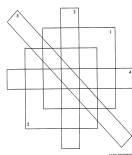


It is of major importance not to inspect the receiver's mind; the poet is a mediator between the "images" and the way they are perceived.



Poetry is the art of using words, their sounds and rhythms to express ideas and emotions in a subtle or obvious way, transfigured by the poet or in a still blank ownership. After my grandfather passed away, I discovered countless hours of videos that he

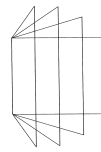
had been recoding for decades. Each footage shows a chosen moment, the testimony of an experience. This video-diary is dated but still has no other information such as location, intention or information about the purpose of each recording. In my grandfather recordings, there is little or no contextualization at all; all videos are put together without clear coherence, the content seems raw and there is no narrative. It seemed to me like a deliberate unorganized compilation. Some of his family members saw these series of technical tests of the camera equipment; some others saw an intentional postmortem testimony. Regarding people that didn't know my grandfather, I acknowledged different reactions about it, such as its possibility to consider his artistic approach. I liked this idea of a ghostly presence, it went through my research as a perfect example of perception,



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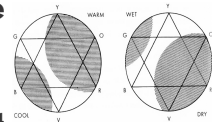
who would like to see in these films a timeless manifesta-

tion, and who would like to see a series of records owned by the past.



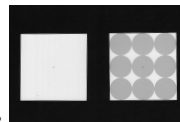
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In fact, it all depends on the receiver's background; we will never know what were my grandfather's intentions and that is to me the trigger point into the memory process, that is all about a selection of souvenirs and personal memories. This is actually the relation between the person who receives the image



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and the image itself, that caught my attention and directed my research. The content of these videos leaves much room for interpretation, because it is related to the ways of sensing them that define their status.



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Memory is not a device that would serve to make or even prepare

representations. The image does not exist outside of us. Our own perception is making things exist.

The eye always comes ancient to its work, obsessed by its own past and by old as an instrument self empowered and alone, but as a dutiful member of a complex and capricious organism. Not only how but what it sees it is inflated by need and prejudice. It selects, rejects, organizes, discriminates, associates, classifies, analyzes, and constructs. It does not so much mirror as take and make ; and what it takes and makes it does stars, as weapons. Nothing is seen nakedly or naked. The myths of the innocent eye and of the absolute given are unholy accomplices. Bots derive from and foster the idea of knowing as a processing of raw material received from the sense, and of his raw material as being discoverable either through purification rites or by methodical misinterpretation. But reception and interpretation are not separable operations; they are thoroughly interdependent. Nelson Goodman.

CONCLUSION

For many decades the industry, especially the fashion industry has been developed and adapted on the idea of an insatiable desire. The idea of using desire as a genius merchandise tenet has been the leit-motive in the process of conceiving products. As a human weakness, the desire has brought to us a loss of awareness regarding the way we consume.

After i have been inquiring about the banality, It immediately made sense to me to confront banality with desire. In fact, these topics led me to unconsciously consider the two video contents that initiated my researches. The perception thus the definition of banality lies in all of us. Tribute to the banality was for me a real statement to contest the excessive and reckless way we have to approach the consumerism. The work on the thesis helped me to develop and think about several different aspects of my practice. The writing gave me an insight in the different topics and offered me an infinite amount of materials to work with. As a designer it seems

to me essential to take ownership of the world i live in to be able to give better proposals, matching my ethic. At the moment my practical work relies on this research but it also has been a real statement for my personal developpement.

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IMAGES INSERT

André Poulet. Screenshots from *Video Diary*. 1995-1996.

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Graphic design, Julie Héneault
Gerrit Rietveld Academie 2014

TRIBUTE TO BANALITY

The purpose of this study is to approach fashion through the prism of banality. Through this work I'm seeking to analyse and to understand the social and economical reasons behind the fashion system's tendency to reject the ordinary. The aim of this research is to define what kind of relationship we maintain with banality and its reasons. My goal is to offer an alternative, a junction between these two entities 'fashion' and 'the banal', which are often considered incompatible. It occurs to me that this association I'm about to propose is of great contemporary relevance.

Perception, banality, suggestion, ephemeral, memory, interaction, waiting, motion, traces, desire, subjectivity, time.