



Jonathan Chapman

Desire, Disappointment and Domestic Waste

Perhaps, due to the normalcy of innovation, material culture is adopting an increasingly expendable, sacrificial persona. Today, an edgy sense of instability surrounds the made world, nurtured by continual change to render its offspring transient and replaceable orphans of circumstance. In this oversaturated world of people and things, durable attachments to objects are seldom witnessed. Most products deliver a predictable diatribe of information, which quickly transforms wonder into drudgery; serial disappointments are delivered through nothing more than a product's failure to maintain currency with the evolving values and needs of its user. The volume of waste produced by this cycle of short-term desire and disappointment is a major problem, not just in terms of space and where to put it, but, perhaps more notably, for its toxic corruption of the biosphere.

Landfill sites are overloaded with fully functioning products; Hoovers that still suck and freezers that still chill; all of which still perform their tasks perfectly, in a *utilitarian* sense. In a more *emotive* sense however, waste of this nature could be seen as nothing more than a symptom of a failed relationship between the subject and the object; a failure that led to the dumping of the static one by the newly evolved other. As is so often witnessed in human pair-bonding relations, when adoration fades the original bond weakens. Fresh bonding urges are promptly motivated, resulting in the acquisition of another. Thus, the relationship is superseded and the original partner is rendered obsolete. At which point, it becomes clear that durability is just as much about emotion, love and attachment, as it is fractured polymers, worn gaskets or blown circuitry. Indeed, modern consumers are short-distance runners, promiscuous debauchees who only stay for the getting-to-know-you period, when all is fresh and new. Tonight, a TV-set lies face down, discarded like a spent cigarette, in the wet space between pavement and road; an abandoned refrigerator stands outcast in a dark suburban alleyway, while an Apple Macintosh from the beige era garnishes a skip filled with construction rubble.

In a sense we outgrow what was once great, feeling we no longer need these outdated objects, or perhaps, could now do better. We become familiar with their greatness and as a direct consequence, our expectation of *greatness itself* subsequently increases; adoration rapidly mutates into a resentment of a past that is now outdated and obsolete. This common phenomenon of individual evolution and the out-growing of a static product by its constantly changing user, yields intensely destructive implications for the sustainability of consumerism.

In the developed world, consumer desires relentlessly grow and flex, while material possessions remain hopelessly frozen in time. This incapacity for mutual evolution renders most products incapable of sustaining a durable relationship with users. The mountain of waste this single inconsistency generates is apocalyptic and just as in the case of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, we see the creature turn upon the creator with a world-breaking gaze.

So why do we chortle to ourselves at the fake walnut veneered TV-set lying face down in a ditch, or the recently ejected avocado bathroom suite, still standing earnestly to attention? Is it triumph perhaps causing this nervous laughter, serving to confirm our transcendence beyond such aesthetic

faux pas? The dismal taunts of seemingly accomplished consumers, sitting frigidly poised on the *style-islands* they fought so hard to construct, but which now sink beneath the smoggy swath of ecological decay brewed in the making. If you were to mine a landfill site, you would see thick, choked geological strata of style descend before you, punctuated by zeitgeist objects whose archaeological discovery would serve to punctuate a design era, more poignantly than any carbon-dating methodology ever could.

Resources – as we like to call matter for which have a commercial use – are being transformed at a speed far beyond the natural self-renewing rate of the biosphere. Consequently, reserves of useful matter are running low and many will soon have vanished. Doggedly pursuing the dream of a technologically enhanced and physically durable world has enabled us to fabricate a plateau of material immunity. Durable metals, polymers and composite materials have enabled us to construct this synthetic futurescape, immune to the glare of biological decay. These materials grossly outlive our desire for them and so the illusion of control bares its first predicament: waste. Yet, even in this anonymous world of mass-produced homogeneity, a select few succeed in transcending their assembly line cousins; a fridge freezer stands with its mouth taped shut by its former owner to enable quiet passage, while a sun-yellowed portable TV bears UV decay, like a scorched tourist. Signs of life, narrative and use elevate these items to an untouchable plateau; from products to things, and from things to *personal effects*.

Within a cynical, capitalist context, waste can be seen as an essential means for us to make way for the next multi-coloured must-have, which inevitably, in time, will be elbowed out of our constructed empire in a similar fashion. Domestic, everyday products that were promised the world, now sulk, huddled in groups as they once were, only now these lonely-hearts clubs await disassembly, recycling and disposal. Not to say that these are broken or dysfunctional items – at least not in a *utilitarian* sense. Rather, these orphans have been cast aside before their time to make way for younger models in the adulterous swing we call consumerism. With their umbilical severed, what function do these appliances now perform, other than to provide white enamelled monuments to our own brilliance, development and progress as a species? To the indoor product that until now has been permanently mainlined into the 3-pinned blood supply of the home, the dumping ground is an abstract, alien and volatile landscape of uneven damp floors, wind and darkness; the unseen shadow cast by the everyday act of *home improvement*.