

THE SYSTEM OF LIKE

by Andreas Angelidakis

Hidden away in a corner of the internet, there is a website called svpply.com. At first it looks like a regular shopping site, a sea of thumbnails mixing everything from pants to dog furniture. When you rollover each product, a pink button appears, presumably to assist your purchase. Instead, it invites you to “want” the product. Wanting is a new term in internet shopping, it means exactly what it says: by clicking it you register that at some point you wanted this product. Did you buy it? Do you still want it? Do you even remember? Nobody cares because you already consumed it. “Wanting” is a new form of internet consumption, a purchase that involves only the currency of “like”. You can put all your wants in a collection, or even open a “shop” to “sell” your wants to other wanters. A few clicks below the surface of the screen lies a button where you can actually purchase this product for real, receive it at your real home, having spent real money.

There are two problems with that last sentence. The time it takes for that product to arrive at your home and the money you will have spent. By the time it arrives, you most probably will have forgotten you even bought it, let alone, liked it. The time it takes for our attention span to forget objects we like lies closer to the screen than a logistics coordination and a courier service. We have so many objects to choose from on our screens that liking one means forgetting the one before. We consume faster than we think and the objects we consume are not even always for sale. Sometimes they are just puppies posted on a Facebook wall, a recent drama where our opinion counts next to a YouTube video parodying another YouTube parody video of a cat singing and dancing in the rain.

The other problem with the real purchase of a real object with real money is that money is not real anymore. Money has for years been replaced by adjusted capitalized costs, residual values calculated by complex Fibonacci Clusters. Somebody dies and the value of his company drops like a hot potato even though the object they produce has not shifted a bit. Money became a psychological value around the late 60's - early 70's when credit cards began replacing bank notes. And with the arrival of online social media, we were introduced to the purchaseless purchase, the “Economy of Like”. A priceless masterpiece of art sits next to a cat sitting on a toilet: who gets the most likes, the masterpiece or the cat? Meow.

As we float down the river of the internet, and by internet I mean real life, we bump into myriads of objects floating alongside us. Are they new objects or objects we have seen before?

Everything That's Interesting is New said Jenny Holtzer, and that became the title for the second phase of exhibitions organized by the DESTE Foundation with selections from the Dakis Joannou Collection. The first phase of DESTE had been a series of ground-breaking exhibitions based on revolutionary aesthetic concepts, mostly put together by the impresario of all that was new and revolutionary in art, Jeffrey Deitch. Four shows that I never saw but can never forget are *Post Human*, *Cultural Geometry*, *Psychological Abstraction* and *Artificial Nature*. Maybe it's their Dan Friedman designed catalogues, their perfect titles or the accompanying texts that made them so memorable. Those shows spoke about virtual reality when reality was not virtual like it is today. They spoke of cultural similarities in dissimilar cultures, the abstraction of psychology and of plasticized avatars passing for humans, just like we do.

After these conceptually ground-breaking shows, where often the same pieces reappeared in different conceptual contexts, came a moment when the Dakis Joannou Collection became so big that a show bigger than a concept was called for, and that brought us to *Everything That's Interesting is New*, again curated by Jeffrey Deitch. I can't help but think of all the exhibitions that followed *Everything* as smaller, perhaps more precise versions of that show, albeit with conceptual intervals like *Panic Room* and *Anathena*.

Going through the DESTE Foundation exhibition history along with the entire catalogue of objects collected by Joannou is a little bit like floating down that river of the internet. You bump into things you don't always recognize, but you click on them nonetheless. The pages of objects, sorted alphabetically or by location, begin to look like the pages of svpply.com or any other object-oriented web service. You want to want, you click to like, have them in your collection, make a shop for others to like too. Cypriot antiquities float alongside major installations by Maurizio Cattelan, paintings by Jeff Koons and worn-out red vinyl tights from American Apparel? A seminal Archizoom chair from 1968 floats next to a painting by a Cypriot artist given to Dakis ages ago? Really?

Just as we were tumbling through the PDF printouts of the collection, we also fast tracked through the history of the DESTE Foundation, both from personal memories and the catalogues. I remember seeing Allan McCollum's *Surrogates* (1985) at Dakis' house years ago, and it was installed close to the entrance, so we decided to put it close to the entrance for a reason nobody could ever understand unless they had been to the house during that period. More obviously, we placed a 1983 pencil drawing by Jeff Koons on the wall where his enormous *Moon* (1994-2000) was hanging during many of the later DESTE exhibitions. It is a reference that only somebody who has been to the shows will remember, but it became part of our narrative, it informed the position of other works too. As we tumbled through this public and private history of DESTE, we also built upon our own catalogue of ideas for exhibitions we had never used, and others we wanted to use again, to "reblog" as they say on the internet. The space for the show goes from weird industrial space to dark picture gallery to enormous storage facility to perfect little white cube, and so forth. There are ghost rooms and funereal chambers, there are scary staircases with Gino de Dominicis' *D'IO* (1971) sound piece, there is a sort of surrealist prison rooftop and a mountain of memories arranged like a manic search query on exhibition typologies.

Jean Baudrillard wrote *The System of Objects* (1968) as a Marxist critique, a consumer roadmap to guide us through the coming years of non-stop shopping. In the book he outlines the psychology of want, the reasons we choose one product over another, the way they make us feel. Baudrillard compares a knowledgeable collector shopping for an antique to a jungle man stumbling upon a technological device he doesn't know how to operate. Both want that object for mythological reasons, both elevate it to the status of a psychological transportation device, both use it to return and defy the idea of Mother or Father. The reason it is interesting to revisit *The System of Objects* today, is that our relationship with objects is shifting once more. Today it reads as a post-internet survival guide, a way to understand and maybe even intellectualize our likes and wants. We no longer need to buy things to have them, we are used to the free stuff provided by the internet in exchange for some of our attention span. We use email services from Google in exchange for just a single line of advertising text. When we write the word "island" on an email to a friend, an ad for vacation homes will appear. Google keeps track of every character we type, we subconsciously keep track of the ads it places on our screens. We have purchased a service by spending some brain.

But mostly I liked the title of the book, and the worn out copy of the English version I had carried to the beach numerous times. We decided to use it as the background for the exhibition and the exhibition catalogue, literally. First we scanned the book, but the result was too perfect, scanners have lost their charm. We found out that photographing the pages with an iPhone 5 and some southern afternoon sun gave the best result, one that could transport us psychologically to the land of browsing a philosophy book for random ideas. The book and a 3D modelling sequence of the space of the exhibition were superimposed and, over those, the works from the various collections of Dakis Joannou, more or less as where they will appear in the space. The book is not an art exhibition catalogue, but a book version of a show.

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