

If the pots by Italian architect Aldo Rossi (1932-1993) – the coffee pot *La Conica* and the tea kettle *Il Conico* designed for Alessi in 1983 and 1986 respectively – had been part of the inventory of Patrick Bateman's apartment in *American Psycho* (1991), we would have known. The narrator and main character in Bret Easton Ellis's novel happily and consistently lists everything he surrounds himself with, owns and uses, sometimes repeatedly. For example, we are told on both pages 62 and 64 that the shoes he is wearing are crocodile skin loafers made by A. Testoni. Bateman appears to be an influencer before social media existed: he gives tips and advertises exclusive brands as he goes about his morning routine – not to earn money from sponsors, but to 'show the money', as it manifests on his body, in his home and around the people he associates with.

American Psycho is a catalogue of the brands and designs anyone who would want to venture into the yuppie milieu of 1980's New York should know. But the book is also a reflection of its protagonists' materialism- obsessed as they are with flashing their style and their knowledge of it, painting a picture of "the ennui of morally bankrupt extreme privilege."¹ In the conversations between Bateman and his colleagues, women are also reduced to brands that denote where they come from and what type of value they reflect: *Vassar / Camden / Queens* ... Among the book's protagonists, there is a constant exchange of objects, locations and people (for Bateman there are always new clothing brands to desire, a new place to eat, a new woman to date or kill, movies to rent and clothes to pick up or drop off). Desire lies in the pursuit of the next and newest item – a version of an accelerated consumer culture on coke.

It's no surprise that the book and film became huge, albeit controversial, successes. The book, with its narrative style and detailed descriptions of characters' appearances, details of the different spaces in which action takes place, and not least Bateman's violent behaviour, already has a strong cinematic quality. Patrick Bateman tells his story as if it were a movie with "smash cuts," "jump zooms," and "pans" and detailed descriptions of his emotional reactions to the action that is unfolding around him – jealousy, clenched fists, and other physiological reactions. As readers, we are invited to see the world through Bateman's eyes, but he himself is not there. He is pure projection, imagination, mirroring:

...there is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: *I simply am not there*. (*American Psycho*, s. 794)

Therefore, it seems only fair to introduce Rossi's stainless steel pots, so shiny that you can see your own reflection in them, in the middle of Bateman's universe. Through a series of digitally rendered images that Jonas Handskemager has animated for the exhibition '*I simply am not there*', we are confronted with this imaginary encounter. Here, the two design icons are placed in the middle of the glass table in Bateman's living room. There might be a slight hesitation here before realising that the image is not a still from the film or a photograph of the film's scenography. In the animations, the apartment reflects itself; the surfaces of the pots reflect spots on the ceiling and the glass tabletop mirrors the pots. The apartment is an empty place, an open place, a place that exists only in the space of the animation, fantasy or the imagination. The intervention in the narrative and its visual world continues Bateman's preoccupation with smooth, shiny surfaces of steel, glass, marble and silver, such as the kitchen, in which "large glass-front cabinets ... make up most of an entire wall ... complete with stainless-steel shelves and sandblasted wire glass, it is framed in a metallic dark gray-blue." (*American Psycho*, p. 61). The reflecting surfaces of the animated objects reflect the self-absorption of the narcissist, where everything revolves around the individual in question. In Bateman's own words: "Since it's impossible in the world we live in to empathise with others, we can always empathise with ourselves." (*American Psycho*, p. 539).

Just as Bateman surrounds himself with design icons, through the reception of the book and the film, he himself has become a condensed image of a superficial, materialistic, narcissistic culture. At its most extreme this culture has manifested Bateman – a beautiful, articulate and lean psychopath who hides his murderous tendencies beneath a charismatic facade. If Aldo Rossi's kettle and coffee pot had been part of Bateman's household, they may have been the focal point of a breakfast or murder scene, depending on the main character's mood: "Patricia will stay alive, and this victory requires no skill, no leaps of the imagination, no ingenuity on anyone's part. This is simply how the world, my world, moves." (*American Psycho*, p. 165). This reinterpretation of the objects' function both resonates and contrasts with Rossi's position as a designer.

1 Irvine Welsh, "American Psycho is a modern classic", The Guardian, 10. jan. 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jan/10/american-psycho-bret-easton-ellis-irvine-welsh>

Rossi was preoccupied with accumulating forms and employing them in new contexts and with new functions, just as he was interested in the meeting between architecture and design and the individual and collective memories associated with them. Rossi's postmodernism is characterised by the use of quotations, reinterpretations and repetition: "in my projects, repetition, collage, the displacement of an element from one design to another, always places me before another potential project which I would like to do but which is also a memory of some other thing." (Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, p. 20)

In Handskemager's exhibition, the displacement of both objects and cinematic space, which takes place through digitally rendered images, gives occasion to consider the glossy and smooth as characteristic of *American Psycho* and it's main character. The subtle displacement and amplification of the book's style clarifies a point about consumer fetishism: to attach a promise of satisfaction to a fetishised object, one fixates its qualities so that it cannot move, shift, or respond; it becomes an object which does not exist outside the subject's imagination.

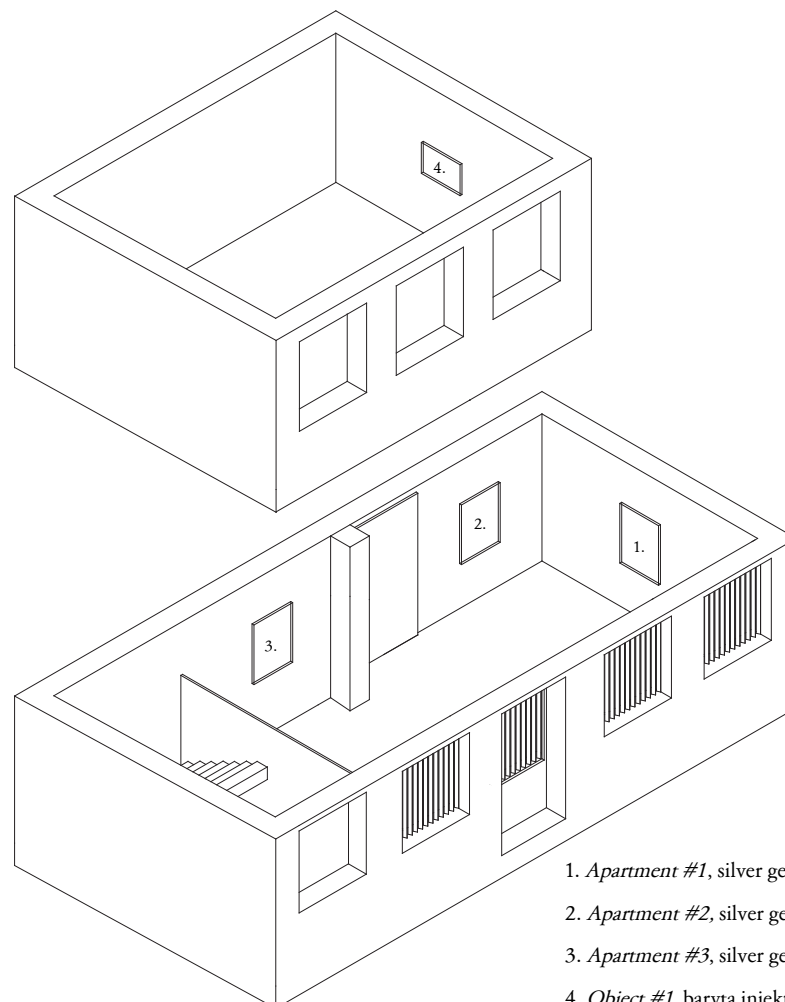
At the same time, the use of quotation in Handskemager's works punctuates this fixing fetishism and serves rather as an example of the possibility of reinterpreting objects and environments alike. This artistic strategy points to a shift in meaning of objects and environments depending on the context they are placed in. In Rossi's own words – "(t)he emergence of relations among things, more than the things themselves, always gives rise to new meanings." (Aldo Rossi, p. 19). The presence of Rossi's pots in Bateman's apartment echoes another image from Handskemager's exhibition which is a photograph from Rossi's personal archive – a snapshot of his coffee pot *La Copula*, which he himself is reflected in as he photographed it. There is a tendency to read Bateman's psychopathology as a result of the consumer culture he is a part of, but if we turn the fiction on it's head once more and imagine Aldo Rossi lived in Bateman's apartment, surrounded by his belongings, what would have happened? We can imagine that things were sent into circulation – not to kill, but to create new objects and forms. Rossi would probably have turned the apartment into an inhabited place; with freshly brewed coffee.

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Thanks to: warren81, Sidse Thorup Poulsen, Ebbe Stub Wittrup



1. Apartment #1, silver geletin print, 24x30cm, 2024

2. Apartment #2, silver geletin print, 24x30cm, 2024

3. Apartment #3, silver geletin print, 24x30cm, 2024

4. Object #1, baryta injekt 40x60cm, 2023

Hvis kanderne af den italienske arkitekt Aldo Rossi (1932-1993) – kaffekanden *La Conica* og tekedlen *Il Conico* designet for Alessi i hhv. år 1983 og 1986 - havde været en del af inventaret i Patrick Batemans lejlighed i *American Psycho* (1991), ville vi have vidst det. Fortælleren og hovedpersonen i Bret Easton Ellis' roman remser gladeligt og konstant op af alt, hvad han omgiver sig med, ejer og bruger, også gerne flere gange. Fx får vi både på side 62 og 64 at vide, at de sko han har på er hyttesko af krokodilleskind fra A. Testoni. Bateman minder om en influencer før der fandtes sociale medier; han giver tips og reklamerer for eksklusive brands, mens han gennemgår sin morgenrutine – ikke for at tjene penge på affiliate links, men for at *vise* pengene, kunne man måske sige, som de manifesterer sig i hans krop, hans hjem og de mennesker han omgås.

American Psycho er et katalog over de mærker og designs, enhver der vil begå sig i yuppie-miljøet i 1980ernes New York må kende. Men bogen er også et spejl på sine hovedpersoner og deres materialisme, besatte som de er af at flashe deres stil og viden om den, idet den tegner et billede af "the ennui of morally bankrupt extreme privilege."¹ Også kvinderne bliver i samtalerne mellem Bateman og hans kolleger reduceret til et brand, der betegner hvor de kommer fra og hvilken kapital, de afspejler: *Vassar / Camden / Queens ...* Blandt bogens hovedpersoner finder der en konstant udskiftning af genstande, lokationer og personer sted (for Bateman er der hele tiden nye tøjmærker at begære, et nyt sted at spise, en ny kvinde at date eller dræbe, lejefilm og tøj, der skal hentes eller afleveres). Begæret ligger i jagten efter det næste og nyeste; en accelereret forbrugskultur på coke.

Det overrasker ikke, at bogen og filmen blev en kæmpe, omend kontroversiel, succes. Bogen er med sin fortællestil og indgående beskrivelser af personernes udseende, de skiftende rum, scenerne udspiller sig i, og ikke mindst Batemans overgreb og mord, allerede filmisk. Patrick Bateman fortæller sin historie, som var den en film med "smash cuts", "pans" og detaljerede beskrivelser af hans reaktioner på det, der udspiller sig omkring ham – jalousiens varme, knyttede næver, forsøg på at virke tilforladelig. Som læsere bliver vi inviteret til at se verden med Batemans blik, men selv er han der ikke. Han er ren projektion, forestilling, spejling:

...there is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: *I simply am not there*. (*American Psycho*, s. 794)

Derfor er det også nærliggende at introducere Rossis kander i rustfrit stål så blankt, at man kan spejle sig i dem, midt i Batemans univers. Gennem den serie af digitalt renderede billeder, som Jonas Handskemager har animeret til udstillingen '*I simply am not there*', bliver vi konfronteret med dette forestillede møde. Her står de to designikoner midt på glasbordet i Batemans stue. Der indfinder sig måske en lille tøven her, før man indser, at billedet ikke er et still fra filmen eller et fotografi af filmens scenografi. I animationerne spejler lejligheden sig i sig selv; kanderne overflader reflekterer spots i loftet og bordets glasplade spejler kanderne. Lejligheden er et tomt sted. Et åbent sted. Et sted der kun findes i animationens, fantasiens eller forestillingens rum. Interventionen i fortællingen og dens visuelle verden forstærker Batemans verden af glatte, blanke overflader i stål, glas, marmor og sølv, som fx køkkenet, der består af "large glass-front cabinets that make up most of an entire wall in the kitchen; complete with stainless-steel shelves and sandblasted wire glass, it is framed in a metallic dark gray-blue." (*American Psycho*, s. 61). Genspejlingen i de animerede genstande reflekterer narcissistens selvoptagethed, hvor alt drejer sig om ham. Med Batemans egne ord: "Since it's impossible in the world we live in to empathize with others, we can always empathize with ourselves." (*American Psycho*, s. 539).

Ligesom Bateman omgiver sig med design-ikoner, er han gennem receptionen af bogen og filmen selv blevet et kondenseret billede på en overfladisk, materialistisk og narcissistisk kultur, der i sin ekstrem har fostret denne smukke, velformulerede og veltrænede psykopat, der skjuler sine morderiske tendenser under en indtalende overflade. Hvis Aldo Rossis kedel og kaffekande havde befundet sig i Batemans lejlighed kunne de have været omdrejningspunktet for en morgenmadscene eller en mordscene, alt efter hovedpersonens humør: "Patricia will stay alive, and this victory requires no skill, no leaps of the imagination, no ingenuity on anyone's part. This is simply how the world, my world, moves." (*American Psycho*, s. 165). Denne genfortolkning af genstandenes funktion både korresponderer med og kontrasterer med Rossis position.

1 Irvine Welsh, "American Psycho is a modern classic", The Guardian, 10. jan. 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jan/10/american-psycho-bret-easton-ellis-irvine-welsh>

Rossi var optaget af at ophobe former og bruge dem i nye sammenhænge og med nye funktioner, ligesom han interesserede sig for mødet mellem arkitektur og design og de individuelle og kollektive erindringer, der knytter sig til dem. Rossis postmodernisme er kendetegnet ved brug af citater, genfortolkninger og gentagelser: “in my projects, repetition, collage, the displacement of an element from one design to another, always places me before another potential project which I would like to do but which is also a memory of some other thing.” (Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, s. 20)

I Handskemagers udstilling giver den forskydning af både genstande og filmisk rum, som finder sted gennem de digitale billeder, anledning til at overveje det blanke og glatte som kendetegnende for *American Psycho* og dens hovedperson. Den subtile forskydning og forstærkning af bogens stil tydeliggør feticheringens pointe: at knytte et løfte om tilfredsstillelse til det feticherede objekt, hvis kvaliteter fikseres, så det ikke kan bevæge sig, forskyde sig eller svare igen, men som til gengæld heller ikke findes uden for subjektets forestilling.

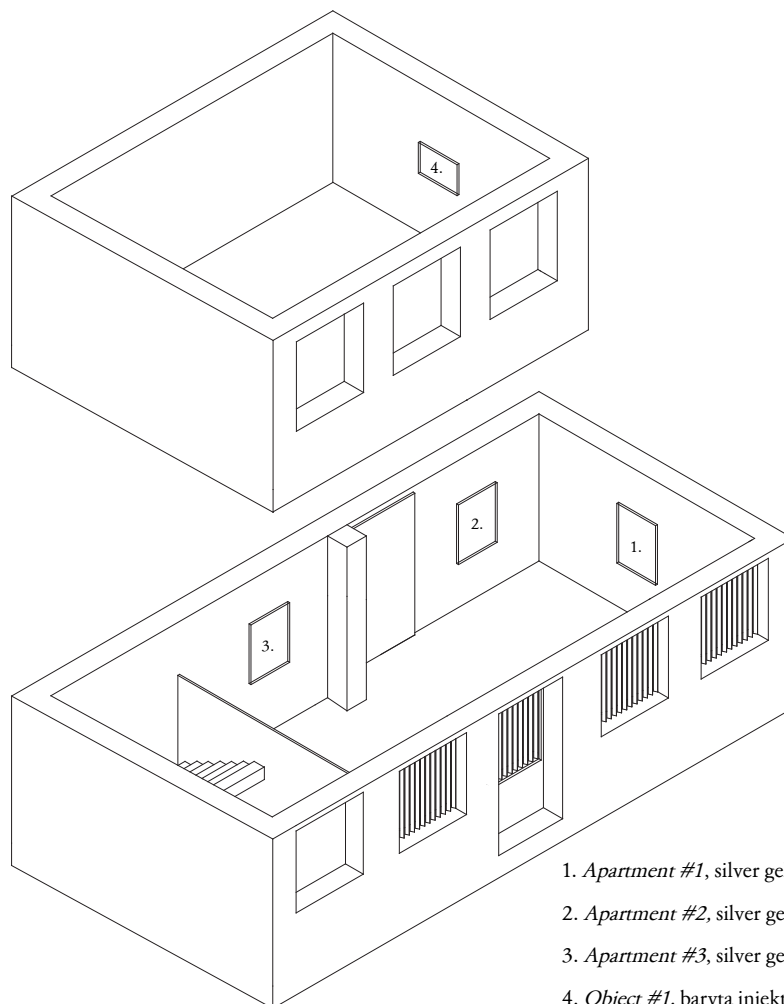
Samtidig bliver værkernes karakter af citat en punktering af denne fikserende fetichering og tjener snarere som et eksempel på muligheden for at genfortolke såvel genstandene som rummet, hvis betydning skifter med de forskellige sammenhænge, de indgår i. Med Rossis ord, hvordan “(t)he emergence of relations among things, more than the things themselves, always gives rise to new meanings.” (Aldo Rossi, s. 19). Tilstedeværelsen af Rossis kander i Batemans lejlighed mimer et andet billede, som også er præsenteret på udstillingen i form af en affotografering. Fotografiet stammer fra Rossis arkiv og er et snapshot af hans kaffekande *La Copula*, men også af ham selv, der spejler sig i kanden, mens han fotograferer. Der er en tendens til at læse Batemans psykopati som et resultat af den forbrugskultur, han er del af. Men hvis vi drejer fiktionen endnu en omgang og forestiller os, at Aldo Rossi havde boet i Batemans lejlighed omgivet med hans ting, hvad var der så sket? Kan man forestille sig, at tingene var sendt i cirkulation, ikke for at dræbe, men for at skabe nye genstande og former og lege med deres funktioner. Rossi havde sandsynligvis gjort lejligheden til et beboet sted. Med friskbrygget kaffe.

Tekst Anne Kølbæk Iversen

Korrekturlæsning Sam Derounian

Udstillingen generøst støtte af Statens Kunstfond og Københavns Kommune Rådet for Visuel Kunst

Et særligt tak til warrenn81, Sidse Thorup Poulsen og Ebbe Stub Wittrup



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