# *The Sum of Things*

An exegesis presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the postgraduate degree of

Master of Fine Arts

at Massey University, Wellington,
New Zealand

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2012

*Abstract*

Consumption as witnessed under advanced capitalism is seemingly insatiable. Consumer desire, coupled with a burgeoning world population and increasing demands on ever scarcer resources heralds dark days ahead. What compels us to consume at such a tireless rate? This thesis seeks to unpack contemporary consumer culture, citing key thinkers and artists on the subject in order to shed light on the phenomenon. Referencing Guy Debord's incendiary critique of the *Spectacle*, and its ongoing influence over public conciousness, photography is discussed as a potential tool for consumption related critique. However, photographs are entrenched in the consumer realm, illustrating commodities and perpetuating spectacular culture. This thesis explores the ramifications of this convoluted relationship, examining various strategies for overcoming the baggage of the spectacle, including: detournement, ambiguity, banality, and the poetic.

*Acknowledgements*

I would like to acknowledge the Massey University School of Fine Arts faculty, in particular my supervisors Jenny Gillam and Anne Noble for their insight and encouragement. I extend a special thanks to Jane Wilcox, Shaun Waugh and Peter Miles for their tireless and invaluable support across the project. My fellow MFA students have provided candid advice and light relief during the year, for this I thank you. Finally, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to Holly, Theodore, Marjorie and for your unwavering patience and charity over the onerous end of the project.
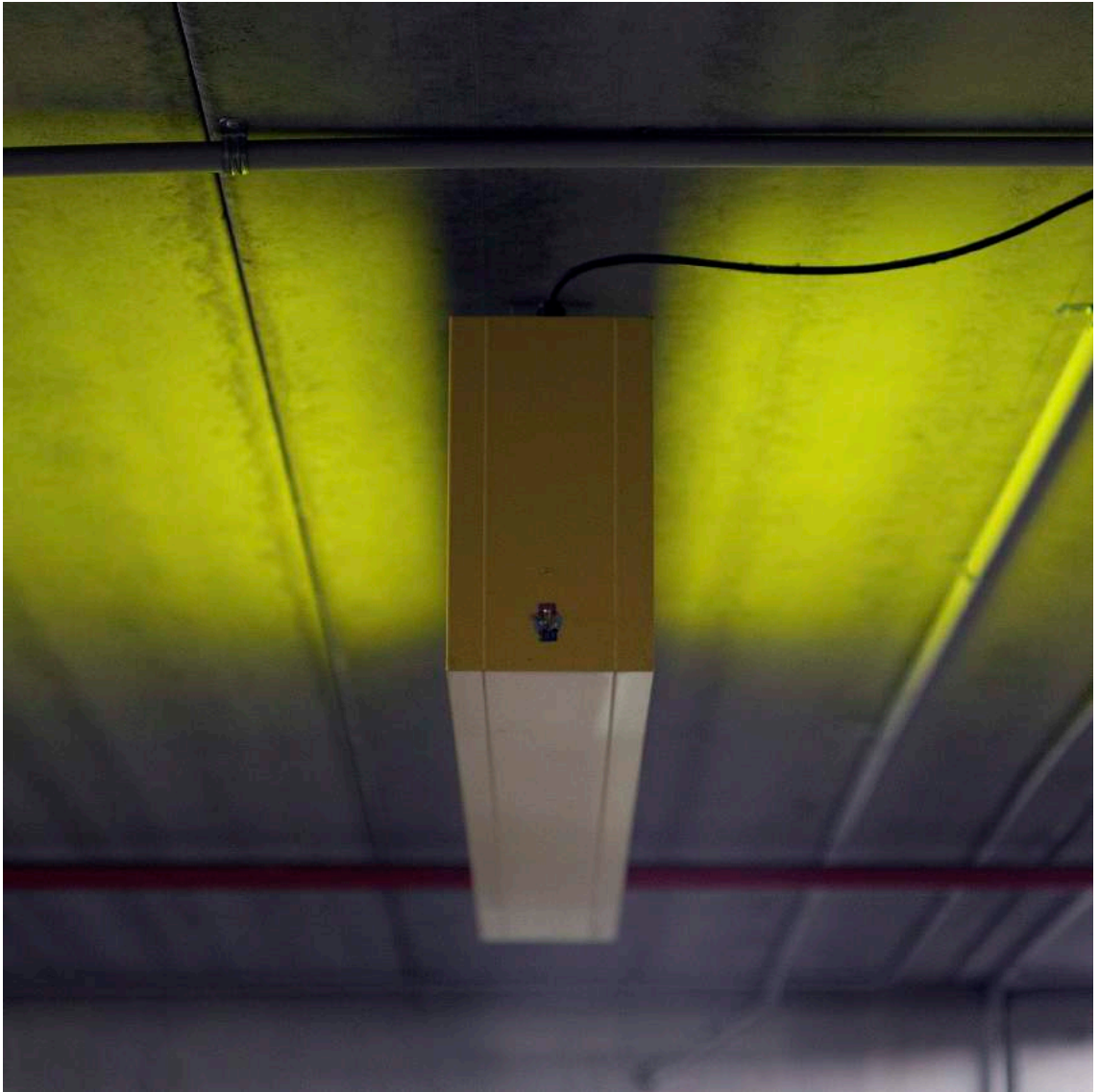
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*Introduction: The Sum of Things*

The modern city flickers with the warm glow of consumer fantasy. Whether via the corporate strongholds of television and print, or contemporary vehicles such as the internet and social media, consumers today are subjected to a relentless torrent of hypnotic colour and imagery. This dizzying assault encourages us to spend more, more often, especially when times are tough. Ironically, consumption often increases in times of financial or emotional hardship with the term retail therapy coined in order to describe the use of shopping as a salve with which to counter a consumer's low mood or disposition. Similarly comfort eating is akin to retail therapy, whereby eating becomes an obsessive pastime used in vain to abate low self-esteem – an attempt at using food to fill an emotional void. Blindly we seek gratification by consuming more, in spite of personal or environmental consequences. While such trends are not new, a burgeoning world population combined with continued dependence on fossil fuels and a proliferation of synthetic, disposable goods heralds an uncertain future. Society appears to have fallen into a consumption fueled neurosis.

This thesis sets out to define, explore and critique contemporary consumer culture. Whether due to sheer ignorance or shameless greed, the spending public must shoulder much of the responsibility pertaining to the issue of overconsumption. However, as consumers we face a near constant bombardment of seductive imagery from a sophisticated advertising industry that promises to sell us not just commodities - but lifestyles. This nefarious social coercion has been widely theorised, although perhaps most lucidly and enduringly in Guy Debord's book *Society of the Spectacle*. Debord (1967) spoke of the *spectacle* as a "social relationship between people that is mediated by images". He was highly critical of spectacular society's hold on the public psyche - a system that he alleged distracts us from pursuing any real meaning in life, but rather redirects our energy into a passive consumption of images.

Photography is inextricably linked with commerce, with photographs serving as ready vehicles for the promotion of commodities, perpetuating the desire for more stuff. Indeed, the very act of photographing is in itself a kind of consumption, a magic system for capturing impressions of the world. This thesis questions photography's long and convoluted relationship with consumption, as well as the potential ramifications of this concerning photography's suitability as a tool for consumption related critique. Scrutinizing the work of several key artists in relation to my own work, I explore photographic strategies for debunking consumer culture's mystique. Tracking a shift in my practice from the didactic, to an acknowledgment and celebration of the photograph's inherent ambiguity, I explore the merits of fusing poetry and politics.

*Picturing Consumption: Towards a Definition*

> There is little sign that most of the populace wish for anything other than a continual increase in the availability of such products and the benefits felt to be received by their possession.  (Daniel Miller, 1987: 185).

Consumption is a complex word. This complexity is partly owing to its various, and often interchangeable, meanings. The *Oxford Online Dictionary* (2011) defines consumption as:

1: the action of using up a resource:
    - the action of eating or drinking something.
    - [in singular] an amount of something which is used up or ingested.
    - the purchase of goods and services by the public.
    - the reception of information or entertainment by a mass audience.
2: (dated) a wasting disease, especially pulmonary tuberculosis.

Rather unsurprisingly, *Oxford's* primary definition is closest to common thinking around consumption – namely, the daily rituals pertaining to contemporary shopping culture, described by Campbell (1995: 104) as the "selection, purchase, use, reuse and disposal of goods and services". However, while this provides a good beginning, the term has come to embody a great deal more than Campbell's rather pragmatic interpretation. Consumption can also signify the persuasive influence of advertising within modern consumer culture. In this sense, the word evokes hegemonic associations, portraying the 'ruling' capitalist class as a sly dictatorship, governing mendaciously via the seductive imagery of spectacular society. This grim scene paints consumers as hapless dupes, or as Gabriel and Lang (2006) articulate, "the consumer as victim", describing a pacified and easily manipulated group in society. In their book *The Unmanageable Consumer* (2006), Gabriel and Lang identify various consumer typologies, including: The Consumer as Chooser; Communicator; Explorer; Identity-seeker; Hedonist or Artist; Victim; Rebel; Activist; and Citizen. The book's title refers to the unpredictability of the modern consumer, given that they occupy so many different moulds, sometimes shifting between these roles arbitrarily. This uncertainty serves to compound doubts over whether the unbridled consumption witnessed under Advanced Capitalism can sustain itself in the face of an onset of challenges including political and financial unrest, class struggle and ecological degradation.

The environment is one of the greatest victims in our race to consume. Many argue that society's rampant consumption can be attributed to an insatiable greed, ultimately resulting in unchecked growth. Taylor and Tilford (2000) cite the potentially catastrophic environmental impacts of overconsumption, alleging that the consumer "binge" is responsible for "devastating levels of environmental deterioration" (p. 464). Indeed, society's voracious appetite for commodities could be attributed to Williams' (2005) claim that society holds the belief that high consumption equates to a high standard of living. While there may be some truth to this, financial and material prosperity are out of reach of the vast majority. With the global population ballooning to seven billion in 2011, inequality is on the rise. Following the recent global financial crisis, the *Occupy Wall Street* protest movement of 2011 spurred from an increasing division of wealth. The protestor's slogan "We are the 99%" refers to the vast concentration of wealth sitting amongst the top 1% of income earners compared to the remaining 99%. Protesting against corporate influence on democracy – seeking the separation of money and politics – the movement quickly spread with *Occupy* camps springing up in town centres in countries around the world, including New Zealand. However, inequality, while widespread, is usually disguised in modern society. To ensure that the poor do not feel that the system has cheated them, consumption seeks to promote the illusion of choice for all. Miles (1998, p. 149) writes, "Consumerism cannot be all things to all men and women. Rather, it protects those with resources from those without." Widespread access to credit cards, cash loans and easy finance further promote this illusion of choice, resulting in an ever-expanding wealth divide.



Fig 2. *Globe,* (*Common Sense),* Martin Parr, 1997.

This class struggle can be explored by looking at Marxism. Karl Marx claimed that under the capitalist mode of production, the minority who own the means of production (the bourgeoisie), exploit and oppress the majority of the population who produce goods and services (the proletariat). No longer able to sell the products of their labour, workers are forced to sell their labour itself, effectively becoming commodities in the process. Surplus value created through their labour goes to the capitalist, further widening the gap. Separated from the means of production, workers become alienated, with this alienation creating a void that needs to be filled. As John Storey (1996) explains, "men and women are denied identity in (uncreative) production, and are therefore forced to seek identity in (creative) consumption. But this is always little more than a hollow substitute (a fetish)" (pp. 113-114); Echoed by Trevor Norris (2004) who suggests, "Because production is alienating, we seek fulfillment in consumerism; yet consumerism itself in turn has become a deeply alienating experience." Perhaps it is this disconnect that has us consuming at such a high rate, in spite of environmental and social costs. Under modern consumerist culture we no longer invest energy into realising our creative or productive potential, but rather channel our creative energy into the economy. This provides easy gratification, but any such fulfillment is usually fleeting. Companies have long understood, encouraged and exploited this, with Simon Patten (1889) arguing that maintaining consumer dissatisfaction is key to economic growth:

> It is not the increase of goods for consumption that raises the standard of life … [but] the rapidity with which [the consumer] tires of any one pleasure. To have a high standard of life means to enjoy a pleasure intensely and to tire of it quickly. (Quoted in Marchand, 1985, p.51).

How is it that products we desire and spend money purchasing, are often used briefly, then discarded? In his book *Emotionally Durable Design* (2005), Jonathan Chapman notes that much of the ecological impact due to overconsumption can be attributed to consumers' short-lived and under-stimulating relationships with commodities. Through an exploration of consumer psychology, Chapman proposes new strategies for designing objects capable of providing deeper, more meaningful relationships with their users. However, sustainable values are far from the minds of many big businesses, with some goods (especially electronics) intentionally designed to have a very limited lifespan. This of course ensures that such products will soon need replacing, ensuring future business, and prompting the term 'planned obsolescence'. The closer one looks at consumer culture the more destructive it would seem to have become. Indeed, as long as decisions are based on greed, industry risks being swallowed by its own voracity.

It is tempting to take the moral high ground and to discuss the phenomenon of consumption as a neutral observer, laying blame on corporate greed and the persuasive power of the spectacle, or to paint consumers as naïve and self-indulgent, victims of their short-sighted desire. However, I am conflicted. On the one hand, I foster an image of myself as a relatively intelligent, ethically-minded individual: I am vegetarian; I vote Green; I like to buy locally produced, organic, fair-trade products whenever possible. I own a modest wardrobe and keep clothes until they wear out. And yet if I am honest, I admit to being hopelessly implicated in commodity culture. I covet shiny new things and creature comforts: I own a fancy television and Italian espresso machine; I often drive when I could walk; I own nearly twenty cameras but regularly use just one or two. And while my ecological 'footprint' may be relatively small next to many, I certainly consume beyond my needs. In a hedonistic world of consumer pleasure it is easy to lose innocence. Rosalind Williams elucidates:

> The merchandise itself is by no means available to all, but the vision of a seemingly unlimited profusion of commodities is available, and, indeed, nearly unavoidable.  (Williams, 1982 p.3)
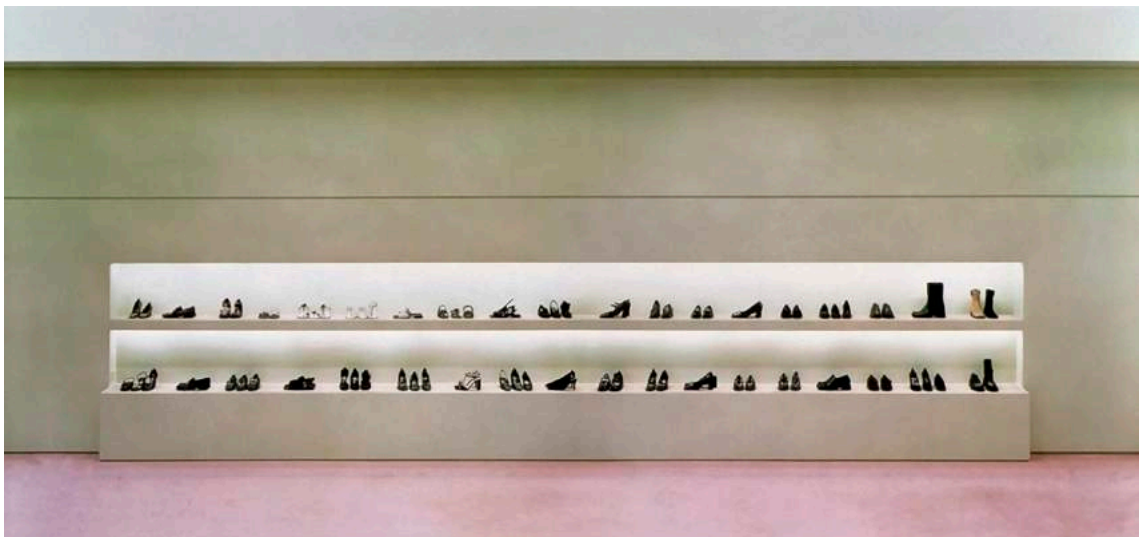


Fig 3. *Prada I,* Andreas Gursky, 1996.

*On Spectacle: Advertising, Photography and the Consumption of Culture.*

> [Advertising] is a commercial tool, a social language … a technique of persuasion; in fact, it is almost a world in its own right, with its own languages, customs and history, and one that sets the tone and pace for large parts of our lives.  (Davidson, 1992: 3).

While advertising can be traced back to Ancient civilizations, modern advertising developed alongside the rise of mass production in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It has since been described and theorised in countless ways, including: a system of organised magic (Williams, 1980), a hidden persuader (Packard, 1960), a form of myth making (Barthes, 1972), a science (Rothenberg, 1999), a language (Davidson, 1992; Goddard, 1998), a cultural system (Jhally, 1990), a form of popular culture (Fowles, 1996), a form of subliminal seduction (Key, 1972) and, the official art of capitalism (Harvey, 1990; Williams, 1980). However, despite its many clever names one thing is certain: Advertising is running amok. Omnipresent, advertisements permeate every sector of modern life to the point that we are often barely aware of their existence. Today ads have crossed into the realm of the unconscious, to be soaked up subliminally while we go about our daily lives. There is something undeniably unsettling about the sophistication of the modern advertising industry - a momentous automated machine, propelling itself ever forward, fueled by its own narcissistic fire. However, advertising is merely the subservient outward face of capitalist society. In his book *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), French Situationist Guy Debord claimed that capitalism exploits mass media to create an array of spectacles and illusions that promote commodity culture. Troubled by the endless proliferation of (typically photographic) media messages that saturate our existence – via billboards, films, television, magazines, newspapers, commodity packaging and ephemera (Ramamurthy, 2009) – Debord used the term spectacle to define a sophisticated system of persuasion intended to manipulate the general populace. He believed that modern industrial capitalism obscures reality, replacing it with a world of illusions and false consciousness, resulting in a largely depoliticised, passive society. Debord blamed the spectacle for a fundamental shift in the way people live and interact with one another, claiming that relations between commodities had supplanted relations between people. Parodying Marx, he began his Situationist manifesto:

> In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation.  (Debord, 1967).

Fig 4. *Gurnee, IL 2003,* Brian Ulrich, 2003.

Labeling it "an opiate of the masses", Debord (1967) believed that the spectacle dulls perception and critical thought, as well as divorcing us from our real desires and genuine activity. He claimed that capitalism had an isolating effect, whereby the spectacular system promotes commodities that encourage a disconnect between people, citing the examples of television and cars:

> The reigning economic system is a vicious circle of isolation … from automobiles to television, the goods the spectacular system chooses to produce also serve it as weapons for constantly reinforcing the conditions that engender 'lonely crowds'. (Debord, 1967).

Many of Debord's ideas surrounding the spectacle are supported by Roland Barthes, who alleges that what we accept as 'natural' is in fact an illusory reality, constructed to mask the true structures of power within society. Jean Baudrillard goes a step further in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1983), denying the idea that reality is merely hidden from us. Rather, he claims, it is disappearing altogether as we enter a hyper-reality – a post-modern world where any sense of 'reality' dissolves into a series of ever more sophisticated simulations. Eventually the model precedes the constructed world, creating simulacra. Advertising ascribes these 'authentic fakes' with arbitrary meaning, transforming them from mere functional commodities into signs. Thus, 'sign-value' accords the wearer of a Rolex watch increased status in addition to the watch's primary purpose of telling the time. Baudrillard's idea of the commodity-sign links the branded commodity (Rolex), the signifier, with meaning (status, prestige, etc.) as the signified. This posits that, as consumers, we communicate via the commodity-signs that we choose to acquire. This allows for self-expression, but also opens us to stereotyping or categorisation:

> Objects are categories of objects which quite tyrannically induce categories of persons. They undertake the policing of social meanings, and the significations they engender are controlled.  (Baudrillard, 1968).

Baudrillard warns that while objects' respective sign-values can help form a system of classification, ultimately these sign-values are fluid and precarious. Goods eventually lose all signification, standing for nothing beyond themselves. They mutate from depositories of social meaning into black holes into which meaning disappears (Baudrillard, 1983). Another dilemma is that while functional objects fulfill needs, signs operate on the currency of desire. "Consumption" states Robin Usher (2009), "marks a move from the satisfying of necessity, which can be satisfied, to desire, which can never be satisfied." Usher (2009) argues that desires are depthless, making any

Fig 5. *Marshall Fields, 2009,* Brian Ulrich, 2009.

fulfillment temporary, as desire is continually renewed, stating "When fulfillment can only be found through a world of simulation, there will always be more sign images to be consumed and more desires to be attended to, with fulfillment indefinitely postponed".

In a somewhat bleak conclusion to his book *The System of Objects* (1996), Baudrillard claims that the systematic and limitless process of consumption arises not from the fulfillment of needs or a desire for prestige, but rather as a total idealist practice in, and of, itself. Consumption must "keep surpassing itself or keep repeating itself merely in order to remain what it is – namely, a reason for living" (Baudrillard, 1996: 204). Following the eclipse of reality, "consumption is irrepressible," states Baudrillard, "because it is founded upon a lack." Indeed, this perceived lack is one of the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of the advertising industry. Blindly, we race around chasing a chimera, believing that an inner void will be filled through the acquisition of consumer goods:

> Whether one is looking for happiness, identity, beauty, love, masculinity, youth, marital bliss or anything else, there is a commodity somewhere that guarantees to provide it. Through advertising, meanings are spuriously attached onto commodities, which are then presented as the bridges to fulfillment and happiness. (McCracken, 1998).

Today, the environments in which consumption takes place often command equal influence over the consumer as commodities themselves. Popularising the phrase 'cathedrals of consumption', George Ritzer (1999) references both the rational and enchanting qualities of modern consumption settings. Typically applying the term to shopping malls - but extending the definiton to cover all manner of modern phenomena, including casinos, superstores, cruise ships and theme parks - Ritzer notes how these spaces manipulate time and space to create settings in which time seems to slow down. Bright, spotlessly clean, and secure, the mall attracts consumers with spectacle, then gently encourages them to stay and spend. Equally, the term cathedral can suggest the argument that consumption has replaced religion as "the dominant mode of contemporary public life." (Goss, 1993). Kowinski (1985) supports this idea, stating that, "malls are sometimes called cathedrals of consumption, meaning that they are the monuments of a new faith, the consumer religion, which has largely replaced the old" (p. 218). Photographer Brian Ulrich explored American 'cathedrals' in his project *Copia: Retail*, in which he photographs on the frontlines of American malls and big-box stores. Shooting unobtrusively from waist level, many of Ulrich's oblivious subjects appear to have fallen into some kind of shopping induced stupor. Caught in

a quandary over which fishing rod to purchase, a male shopper stares into space (fig 4). These glazed-eyed shoppers, lost in the long aisles of capitalist manipulation perhaps best epitomize the soulless activity of modern consumption.

More recently Ulrich's *Copia* extended to include sub-projects, *Thrift* and *Dark Stores*. *Thrift* documents the people, spaces and objects of thrift stores, examining the after-life of commercial products. Thrift stores serve as foster homes for discarded possessions - a last reprieve for goods en-route to the landfill. In *Dark Stores,* Ulrich explores 'dead malls'. Malls are considered 'dead' when they have no surviving anchor store or successor that could provide an entry into, or attraction to, the mall. Without the pedestrian traffic that a large store generates, sales volumes plummet for smaller surrounding stores and rental revenue can no longer sustain the costly maintenance of the mall. Ulrich's photographs from *Dark Stores* feature hulking monoliths of capitalism in decay (fig 5). Starkly beautiful, they impart a sombre warning pertaining to consumers' blind faith in mass consumption.



Fig 6. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.

*Spectacle case study #1 - McDonald's*

> The photograph is both a cultural tool which has been commodified as well as a
> tool that has been used to express commodity culture through advertisements and
> other marketing material. (Ramamurthy, 1996).

Of all the arts, photography is arguably the most versatile - also boasting a wide
variety of more ubiquitous applications, with advertising standing out as the most
obvious and pervasive use of photographic imagery today. Given the photograph's
entrenchment in the realm of advertising, it seems appropriate, if a little perverse, to
put the camera to work in a critique of consumer culture. However, this methodology
immediately presents a conundrum. With a tireless stream of persuasive photographic
advertisements constantly flooding the consciousness there is the very real risk that
any images produced with which to critique consumption will merely be disregarded –
or worse – absorbed by the spectacle. Early on in my project I encountered this very
problem, when a photograph I made of a McDonald's 'drive-thru' (fig 6) was widely
met with equal measures of confusion and indifference. I deduced that the 'Golden
Arches' absolute familiarity threatens to overpower, or defile, any image in which they
appear, dividing viewers' reactions into categories determined by their feelings (if any)
toward the brand. I predicted that those who hold negative or neutral associations
with McDonald's *may* engage with the photograph, before very likely relegating it to the
passing swarms of other 'like images' encountered daily through advertising. Conversely,
viewers could interpret the image as an over-zealous or ironic homage to the brand
– after all, who would bother taking a photograph of something as dull as a drive-
thru? Whereas in ardent McDonald's lovers it may induce salivation, with the very sight
of the arches triggering a conditioned reflex, akin to Ivan Pavlov's famous dogs. Of
course, if such a response were to occur, it would demonstrate the potency of the
spectacle's influence over our visual environment and psychological conditioning.

The McDonald's brand is a dominant symbol of capitalism, and as such is universally
recognisable. However, beneath the beaming face of the McDonald's arches lies a
company that runs its restaurants like factories – fast, predictable and efficient but
lacking any real sense of taste or personality. Indeed, the golden arches have become
a glowing beacon of globalised homogeneity. Their cheery neon glow paints city streets
the world over, with the official McDonald's website proudly beaming that there are
now more than 33,000 restaurants in 119 countries. The brand's ubiquity is such that
it renders the golden arches utterly recognisable, signifying an experience so familiar

Fig 7. *Kihun and His Blue Things,*
JeongMee Yoon, 2007.



Fig 8. *Jiyeon and Her Pink Things,*
JeongMee Yoon, 2007.



Fig 9. *Untitled (Red), (Automated Teller
Machines),* Stephen Rowe, 2007.



Fig 10. *Untitled (Blue), (Automated Teller
Machines),* Stephen Rowe, 2007.

and predictable that it serves as a light in dark places, or (however ironically) "a home away from home" (Kottak, 1978). In his essay *Rituals at McDonald's*, Conrad Kottak (1978) notes "In Paris, where the French have not been especially renowned for making tourists feel at home, McDonald's offers sanctuary". Kottak compares the restaurant chain to the church, "offering not just hamburgers but comfort, security, and reassurance". Viewed in this light, the arches begin to assume the role of icon, transcending borders and attracting loyal pilgrims in their droves. This wholesome, welcoming image continues to be nurtured by McDonald's who market themselves as a family restaurant, seducing kids with playgrounds, milkshakes and the promise of a mystery toy with their 'happy-meal'. Wishing to transform children into consumers, and indeed, viewing children as consumers in training (Fischer, et al. 1991), McDonald's appear to have succeeded in their "colonization of childhood" (Seiter, 1991). Children are certainly dancing to their tune, with chief mascot Ronald assuming an infectious 'Pied-Piper' celebrity amongst kids. Indeed, the appeal of the McDonald's brand is so palatable to the childhood psyche that it parallels the popular assumption that boys like blue and girls like pink (fig 7, fig 8). Gleaming smugly, the illuminated golden arches embody the cheery genius behind the McDonald's branding operation, guiding hungry juveniles and their parents to a universally symbolic 'home' away from home.

Wondering how I might subdue or subvert the psychological baggage of a symbol as powerful as the McDonald's arches, I recalled New Zealand photographer Stephen Rowe's project *Automated Teller Machines* (2007). Shooting in large-format, Rowe systematically photographed various banks' money machines, before making high resolution digital scans of the negatives. He then set about digitally removing all identifying brands, logos, numbers and text from the images. Once stripped of language, the machines revel in pure plastic surface, transformed into generic, yet beguiling, abstractions of light, colour and form (fig 9, fig 10). Rowe's approach could be seen to share attributes with the strategy of *détournement*, a technique developed in the 1950s by Guy Debord to turn expressions of the capitalist system against itself. A French word, détournement translates roughly to *misappropriation* in English, and can be loosely defined as a variation on an existing media work, in which the newly created work has a meaning that is antagonistic or antithetical to the original. Also, it is vital that the original work to be détourned must be at least somewhat familiar to the target audience, to ensure that they can appreciate the opposition, or irony, of the new message. A contemporary example of détournement is the *subvertisement*, a kind of satirical spoof-ad produced by Canadian magazine *Adbusters* to invert promotional messages of large corporations like Nike or Calvin Klein (fig 11, fig 12). However, while subvertisements are sometimes witty, they typically function as one-liners: startling or amusing for a moment, but lacking in persuasive punch or political longevity.
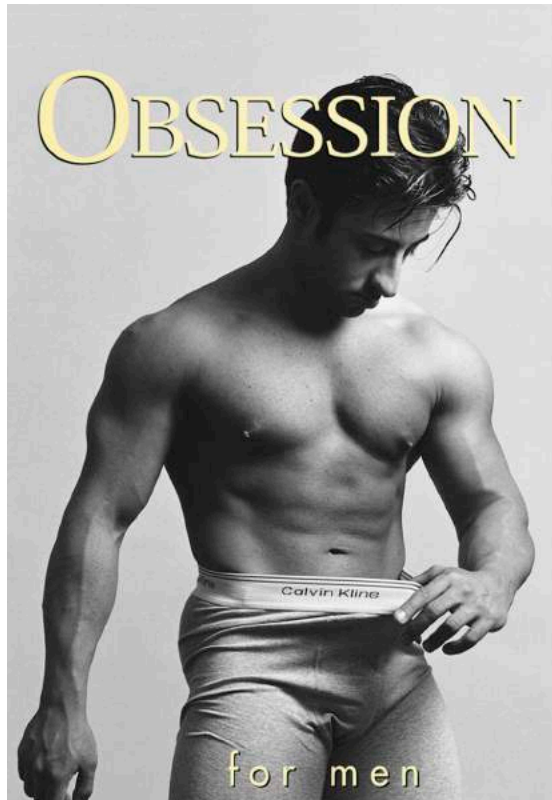
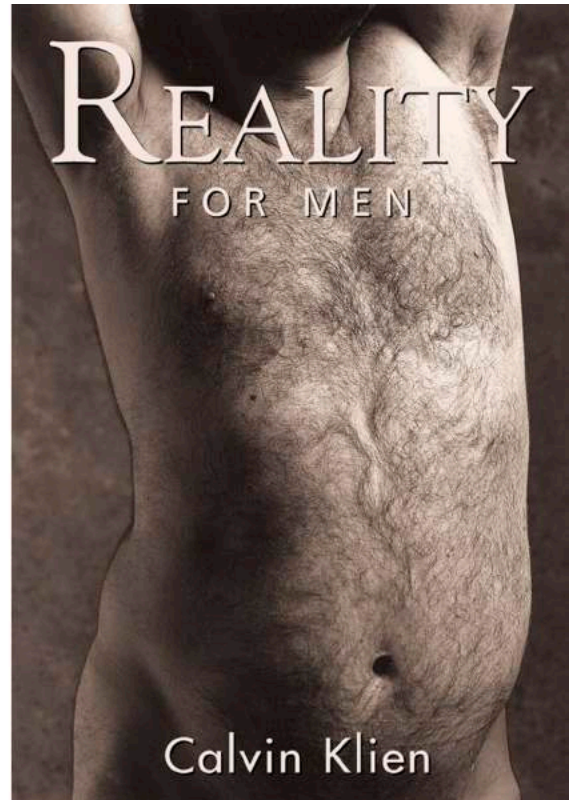Fig 11. *Obsession for men, Calvin Kline (spoof ad),* Nancy Bleck, date unkown.



Fig 12. *Reality for men, Calvin Klien (spoof ad),* Nancy Bleck, date unkown.

By comparison, it could be Rowe's less overt methodology that engenders *Automated Teller Machines*' their enduring appeal. Rowe's process is one of straightforward subtraction, with no intention of reinvesting his own subversive messages or branding upon the machines. However, the very removal of these markers is an irrefutably subversive act, as without them the bank's image is defiled, presented in an incomplete and unintended manner. And while the blank surfaces of Rowe's money machines may lend them some anonymity, their respective colours betray any mystery surrounding their identities, as within a defined geographical locality (in this case New Zealand) and political sphere, *red* equals *Westpac*, *blue* equals *ANZ* and so forth. We have become so well versed with the spectacle of modern banking that, even when assisted, we find ourselves unable to pry brand identities away from simple objects of colour and form. It is important to remember that any inability of Rowe's pictures to erase the corporate conditioning of the spectacle should not be perceived as a weakness of the work. Rather, it highlights the gravity of the spectacle, provoking an uncomfortable and confounding dialogue about the influence of brand power on the psyche.

Returning to McDonald's, I recalled a photograph I took some years earlier of the McDonald's arches (fig 13). This earlier rendering was more successful than my drive-thru photograph, due largely to a shift in perspective. Positioning the gaze above and behind the sign, the photograph scratched beneath the radiant façade of the global franchise. The subverted view reduced the scene to abstraction, revealing a grimy awning and the sign's hidden power supply. Evidently, the back of signage is rarely designed to be viewed – or even considered – as signs function solely as surface, projecting proudly outwards. American photographer and poet Tim Davis, who holds a fascination with corporate politics writes:

> We are a land of deep facades, of reverence for the flatness of advertisement, and the heroic energy of its erection. Photographs are particularly articulate with surface, and in fact converse poorly about anything else. Signage is the skin of meaning. We mean what we say we mean.  (Davis, 2005)

Davis's use of the word *façade* suggests he believes there is some underlying reality hidden beneath the surface of signs, an idea further supported by his inclusion of the words *surface* and *skin*. And while he praises the photograph's indexicality, he clearly has qualms about the medium's capacity for unearthing meaning. Davis seems convinced that signs by their very nature are impenetrable to the photograph's critique, perhaps owing to their shared property of 'flatness', which effectively cancel each other out. Alternatively, it could be argued that this common ground is what commends themselves to one another. In his *Retail* (2000) series, Davis provides a

Fig 13. *Untitled,* image by author, 2006.



Fig 14. *Shell 2,*
Tim Davis, 2001.



Fig 15. *McDonald's 2 (bluefence),*
Tim Davis, 2001.

unique rendering of the corporate sprawl into small town America. Shot at night, these quiet photographs of private homes slowly reveal the crude reflections of multinational brands (fig 14, fig 15). Initially, the abstracted shafts of coloured light reflected in the windows are mesmerising. However their stubborn smolder soon renders them obscene, with the logos assuming a voyeuristic presence, ever peering and lodging themselves in one's dreams. A conflicted Davis (2006) recounts:

> One evening after getting thrown out of Wal-Mart, I took a walk around a once lovely residential neighborhood that lingered at the periphery of a long archipelago of discount stores. Apparently on death row they leave the lights on all the time, and this neighborhood was in a similar predicament. I first noticed the bruise of yellow sodium vapor and bright blue halogen lighting up humble clapboard houses. In one modest home I saw the reflection of a Shell Oil sign on its front door. Everything that is celebratory in me of the power of photography to render, and all that is critical in me of American structures of power, reared their ugly, stately heads. Here was the red-hot brand of generic global corporate culture on our private lives; product placement, the commercials metastasizing into the drama. Here also was undoubtedly the most beautiful thing I'd ever photographed. The reflections of signs were fulgent, emanating light made physical and iconic. They glowed like stained glass windows, or the illuminated capitals of medieval manuscripts. I called the project Retail, but could have called it Sacre Bleu.

I feel Davis' inner conflict acutely. As much enthralled as he is disgusted, Davis walks the precipice between poetry and politics. However, as uncomfortable as this space is to tread, it is fertile ground. Davis clearly recognises all that is wrong in the scenes that he photographs, yet he is overcome - seduced by the medium. I contend that it is this very potential for seduction that nominates photography as a unique tool for political critique. The dichotomy of oppression and beauty, of ethics and aesthetics presents a peculiar yet compelling predicament. However, when appropriately engaged, the poetic potential of photography can lend the political a more palatable flavour. Political issues often remain invisible to the public eye. This could be attributed to the prevailing images of spectacular society glossing over serious issues, or an increasingly desensitised public - immune to bad news, or the plight of others. Gayatri Spivak suggests that poetry could provide politics better exposure, proposing, "maybe poetic language is what allows us to make the political visible, to produce it" (Spivak, 1997: 767).

Fig 16. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.
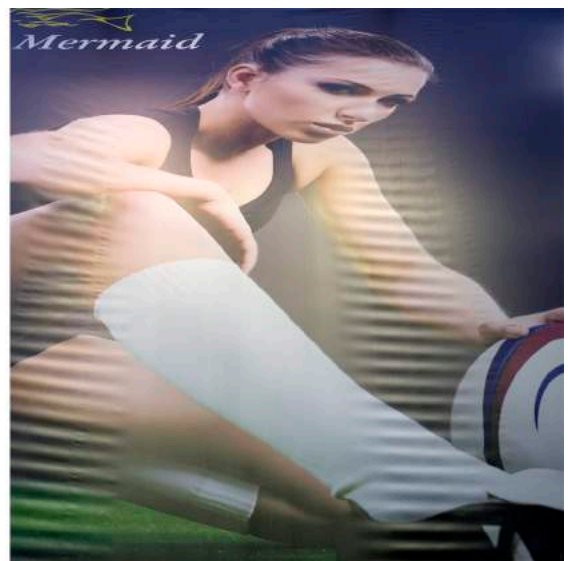


Fig 17. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.



Fig 18. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.

*Spectacle case study #2 - Rugby Relics*

Sport has become a stronghold within spectacular society, commanding audiences of millions and providing a ready vehicle for the promotion of corporate brands. Indeed, sports have acquired political importance, with Clarke and Clarke (1982, p. 64) noting, "sport has become a significant international currency"; Echoed by Blackshaw (2001) who cites that sport is now a global industry and accounts for more than 3 percent of world trade. Stretching beyond the playing field, sporting themes, images, narratives and celebrities occupy an increasingly global system of promotional cultures including movies, art, fashion, music and politics (Jackson, Andrews, Shearer, 2005). Top sportspeople are often exalted as celebrities – with elite players potentially earning millions through lucrative club contracts and product endorsements. Similarly, major sporting teams attract legions of loyal fans, for whom the team assumes a mythical, god-like status. Modern spectator sports bear great similarities to religion, with fan rituals closely resembling worship: sporting team colours, chanting and congregating en masse in a public display of faith. With this in mind, it is little wonder that sport is so heavily targeted by the advertising industry.

Rugby Union is New Zealand's national sport, making home team the 'All Blacks' local heroes. Indeed, the All Blacks are as much a part of the social fabric of New Zealand life as barbeques, beaches and beer. When it recently hosted the 2011 Rugby World Cup, New Zealand transformed into a rugby spectacle, resulting in rugby related shrines springing up everywhere. Determined to make the most of my proximity to the event, I became involved in *Off the Pitch* – a documentary project led by a group of Wellington based photographers exploring various aspects of the Rugby World Cup. My particular project focused on the event as a vehicle for the promotion of New Zealand culture and identity through a close scrutiny of the proliferation of Rugby World Cup advertising, merchandise and memorabilia. There was no need to hunt far. Seemingly no surface was spared from the onslaught of imagery promoting and celebrating the event (fig 16). Above checkouts, supermarkets erected the national flags of competing teams, welcoming pilgrims who had descended from distant lands. Cars, homes and shops sprouted smaller flags, signaling loyalty to favoured sides (fig 17). Local businesses were also quick to embrace the event – altering flyers, television advertisements and billboards to reference rugby, attempting to cash in on the hype. However, with official sponsors jealously guarding exclusive rights to directly associate themselves with the event, smaller businesses were forced to tread carefully, with strip club *Mermaids* adopting a 'less-is-more' approach (fig 18).

Fig 19. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.



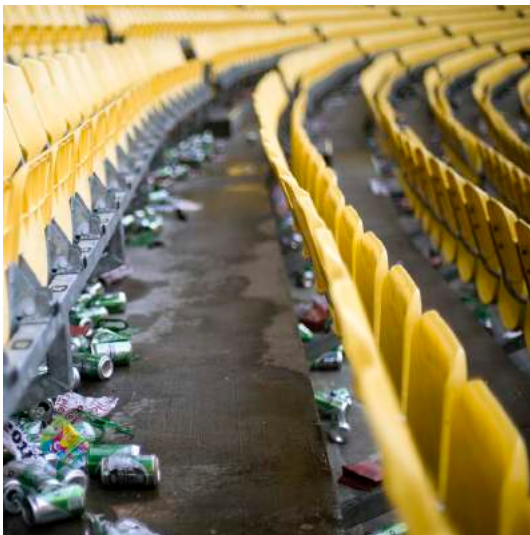Fig 20. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.



Fig 21. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.



Fig 22. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.

The spectacle of the 2011 Rugby World Cup was immense, owing largely to the sophistication behind the promotion of various facets of the event. In one example official sponsor and national airline Air New Zealand undertook a major rebranding specifically for the event. This involved everything from painting whole aircraft in the home team's colours, to producing a new pre-flight safety video featuring the All Blacks and an obligatory dose of rugby puns. Upon walking the gangway to board an aircraft, passengers were greeted by 'Captain Richie' and crew (fig 19). Even the onboard disposable coffee cups (fig 20) and snacks featured photographs and statistics of individual players. Of course, given my involvement in *Off the Pitch* these embellishments immediately stood out to me – indeed it was the very stuff I was after. My reaction was equal parts humour and dismay. I could appreciate the harmless fun of the national carrier displaying a patriotic streak, yet the lengths they went to seemed utterly superfluous. It was emblematic of our passive daily cycles of consumption: consume, discard and forget. Drink your coffee, smile briefly at the novelty cup, then wait for it to be taken 'away'. The rugby player on the side of the cup could easily have been replaced with Santa; it would still essentially exist as white noise – serving to fill a space, or cover a surface – merely for the sake of doing so. Afterall, what are images for if not to fill the blanks?

At the outset of the project I sought to expose the negative, but overlooked aspects of the event. Slipping into the stadium after games, I set about photographing the stands post-match, emptied of fans and covered in litter (fig 21). It seemed an obvious starting point. However, obvious options are rarely the best. On purely photographic grounds it was pleasing enough – contrasting banal, unsightly subject matter with an attractive, almost pictorialist rendering. Yet it remained largely one-dimensional. Undiscouraged, I attempted pairing it with a photograph of a couple of television announcers, caught in an unguarded moment after a game (fig 22). The pairing was an improvement, but still failed to fully engage the viewer. I concluded that the underlying problem with these images was their failure to account for viewer intelligence. They were didactic, ultimately patronising their audience rather than engaging them. Very few people appreciate being preached at – much less lectured about all that is wrong with society. It was a signal to adjust my radar and adopt a fresh approach.

Loosening up and beginning to shoot more instinctively, I abandoned preconceived ideas of the kinds of pictures I was after. Rather, immersing myself amongst revelers, I simply shot as I moved with the crowds. There was little need to search hard for signs of consumption – it was everywhere. The vast majority of fans dressed themselves in their country's colours – or in many cases, an adopted country's colours. A game between Australia and U.S.A saw many New Zealand fans back the American side, taking a dig at traditional All Blacks' arch-rival, the 'Wallabies'. There was a cruel

irony in the hordes of New Zealanders draped in the Stars and Stripes, waiting in lengthy queues to consume American fast food before the game. In one photograph a young man leaves no doubt about whom he is supporting, transforming himself into a walking collage of American popular culture motifs (fig 23). A poster visible in the background, advertising McDonald's special 'Kiwi Burger - Available for a limited time', only serves to amplify the irony. Other costumes alternated between the ingeniously assembled, but extremely disposable dress-up ensembles, and the 'uniform' of official branded merchandise (fig 24). En masse, the official Adidas outfits seemed altogether perverse. Certainly, they displayed solidarity and collective loyalty to the team – but equally served to transform crowds into self-funded, mobile Adidas commercials. During the competition All Blacks references appeared on a perplexing array of products that ranged from beer cans and boxing gloves, to infants' diapers and pacifiers. Evidently, dedication to the All Blacks requires dedication to the entire All Blacks brand, including team sponsors. Reaffirming the quasi-religious nature of spectatorship, such spending could be considered a contemporary form of tithing.



Fig 23. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.



Fig 24. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.

*Enigmatic Surfaces: Ambiguity and the Banal.*


"All photographs are ambiguous", states John Berger (1982, p. 91). This he claims is a result of photographs being taken out of a continuity, alleging that "discontinuity always produces ambiguity." The discontinuity of the still photograph creates an 'abyss' between the moment a photograph is recorded and the present moment of viewing it. In an attempt to offset this ambiguity photographs will often have language assigned to them, typically comprised of overlaid text in the case of advertisements, or through the inclusion of a title in fine art or journalistic modes. Citing this traditional relationship between words and photographs, Rosalind Krauss identified the "inherently hybrid structure" of the photographic image (Krauss 1999: 294). Berger's explanation by comparison is deceptively simple, suggesting that:

> In the relation between a photograph and words, the photograph begs for an interpretation, and the words usually supply it. (Berger, 1982, p. 92)

Evidently many consider words necessary, as they help direct the viewer in the 'correct' (or intended) reading of a photograph, operating as a safety net should they fail to decode an image. However this would imply that meaning is inherent in photographs, which remains a moot point. Certainly, one could argue that it is via the marriage of photographs to words that produces or cements meaning. Conversely, the interference of text could be construed as patronizing, as it denies individual interpretation of pictures – thereby revoking the freedom of looking – effectively nullifying any mystery or enigma that may have helped prolong a photograph's emotional or intellectual longevity. In *The Fashion System* (1983), Roland Barthes affirms this limiting potential of the relationship, while referring to the systematic use of captions that accompany press and fashion photographs:

> The image freezes an endless number of possibilities; words determine a single certainty.  (Barthes, 1983, p. 13)

And while Barthes acknowledges that words emphasize certain meaningful components of an image over others, thereby structuring it's meaning – he warns they equally risk impacting upon our initial fascination with the image, ultimately disappointing us. So is ambiguity necessarily bad? Berger clearly appreciates why people so regularly supplement photographs with words. However, he proposes that it could in fact be the photograph's inherent ambiguity that, if recognised and acknowledged as such, might offer photography a unique means of expression (Berger, 1982: 92).

I am not explicitly denying that photographs can act as vessels of meaning, but prefer to think of perceived meaning as fluid and migratory. As each person brings a unique perspective to an image, I believe it fitting that individuals are granted freedom in their respective interpretations of it. And while I have put forth an emphatic case against word-derived meaning, it simply reflects my continued confidence that photographs can function with minimal additional props. For me the photograph remains ambiguous. However, I believe this to be an asset of the medium – as ambiguity imbues the image with mystery. In his essay *Violence Inflicted on Images*, Baudrillard (2002) suggests that indeed, it is the photograph's very ambiguity that make it so fascinating, owing to the idea that, "behind every image, something has disappeared".

In any case, if one should later wish to bridge the 'abyss of meaning' that the still photograph's discontinuity creates, pairing or sequencing with other images opens the photograph to potentially endless readings. Rinko Kawauchi is a notable proponent of this methodology, creating large and often interchangeable bodies of photographs that are edited and re-edited before coming together in her preferred medium – the photobook. Using photography intuitively to reveal the beauty of quotidian things, Kawauchi explores her world through thematically disparate motifs, later reconciling them through the careful sequencing of images.

When unselfconsciously ambiguous, the photograph is empowered to counter – or certainly resist, the vacuum of spectacular society. Images from the mass media are routinely accompanied by words, producing, as Berger puts it, "an effect of certainty, even of dogmatic assertion" (Berger, 1982: 91). This assertion obliterates any trace of uncertainty, but it also strips the image of any enigma. Thus, the potential for meaning in the image is narrowed so acutely that it's message, while becoming immediately digestible, functions much like a laxative – going straight in, and heading straight out. Evidence, perhaps, that messages that are most easily recognised are also the most easily forgotten. I surmise that the tireless hunt for meaning in photographs is often forced and erroneous, echoed by Baudrillard (2002), who asserts, "we destroy images by overloading them with meaning, we kill them with significance." Clearly pained by what he viewed as the perpetual exploitation and abuse of the photographic medium, Baudrillard (2002) laments:

> It is often said that reality has disappeared under the profusion of signs and images. And it is true that there is violence within an image but this violence is largely compensated by the violence inflicted on the image: its exploitation for the purpose of documentation, testimony, message, its exploitation for moral, political, or advertising ends, or simply as a source of information.

I decided to shift my focus from grand symbols of consumer culture to a sweeping visual survey of my surroundings – after all, consumption is everywhere. Adopting the still-life mode, I began photographing around the home. Almost all objects that enter the domestic environment – whether luxurious or utilitarian – have made their way via the consumer realm. To consider domestic consumption may trigger thoughts of televisions, computers, appliances, beds, furnishings etc. However, while these big-ticket items mesh better with the vaguely negative or guilty associations many people attach to the word consumption, domestic consumption is equally about the banal objects that clutter our homes.
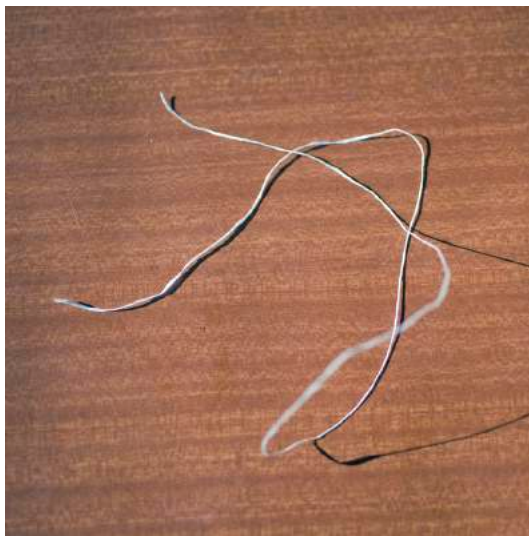


Fig 25. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.



Fig 26. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.

Take, for instance, a length of spent dental floss (fig 25), or a bathroom air freshener (fig 26). Perhaps it is these utterly mundane items that best lend themselves to a critique of consumer culture, given that their truly unremarkable nature only magnifies their innate ambiguity. This ambiguity, when married with photography's deftness for rendering light, colour and tone, promises to seduce viewers in for a closer look. What confronts them is perplexing. If unidentified as such, the floss remains a mystery. However, once recognised it becomes even more baffling, as it raises the question: *why photograph such a thing?* Stripped of both the language and spectacle of advertising, or even the context of its intended use, the dental floss returns to pure surface. Liberated from its usual context, the very materiality of the object is opened to interpretation, transforming it into a blank canvas. However, this blankness can be just as alarming as it is liberating, as the object now begs for an interpretation, and we will very likely struggle to provide it with one. This is all part and parcel of 'the banal', a broad aesthetic category that inverts the hyperreal logic of the spectacle – embodying rather an empty, seemingly indifferent gaze. Richard Goldstein (1988) stated that the

Fig 27. *Untitled, (Illusions of Stability),* image by author, 2006.



Fig 28. *Untitled, (Illusions of Stability),* image by author, 2006.

banal projects "an enigmatic surface, a willed simplicity that generates contemplation of emptiness" (p.81). Goldstein suggests that banality is a reaction to the illusions and excesses of advertising and the mass media, arguing: "the banal façade enacts a refusal to perpetuate the spectacular and largely abstracted existence of other, more commercial visual productions of late-stage capitalism." Could banality provide an antidote to the persuasion of the spectacle?

Within photography, banality has roots in vernacular and snapshot photography and can be traced through the work of a host of artists, including, Stephen Shore, William Eggleston, Wolfgang Tillmans, Nigel Shafran and David Bate. Eugenie Shinkle (2004) states that when judging an image in terms of our experience of it, "banal" and "banality" usually indicate work that is in some way unengaging. Certainly, the banal's typically informal style resists critical engagement, but to deem it unengaging is arguably a little premature. It is worthwhile of course to differentiate between subjects that are banal, and the banal as an aesthetic treatment. A bar of soap, for instance, is inherently mundane – but photography can still produce a beautiful rendering of it. This notion of 'beauty in the banal' can be examined through the work of William Eggleston. In his photographs, Eggleston sought a new kind of seeing, a so-called 'democratic vision'. Eggleston's real skill was his ability to discover the extraordinary in the ordinary. While his subject matter was typically prosaic, his photographs by contrast exhibited a sophisticated beauty, due largely to his innate sensitivity to colour and light. Much of my early work mirrored this approach, focusing on the overlooked aspects of the everyday.

> A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of
> stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality.  (Bachelard, 1964).

Taken from Gaston Bachelard's book *Poetics of Space* (1964), the above quote helped inform my 2006 project *Illusions of Stability*. During the project I documented my home, memorializing spaces and objects that are typically taken for granted, creating an intimate cultural document through the mapping of my domestic terrain. Forcing my gaze inward in a diaristic approach, I focused on the banal, unremarkable phenomena of contemporary domestic life. The resulting images explored the fluidity of the home environment, a space that exists in eternal flux due to daily cycles of order and disorder. Exploring the chaotic patterns of clutter, the project began to destabilize the romantic notion of the home as a sanctuary from the turbulence of daily life. Rather, exasperated by a steady flow of ephemera from the consumption cycle, the home becomes a dumping ground. Clutter is a symptom of surplus, and as proficient as we have become at consuming, it is often a struggle to make sense of the piles of stuff

that we acquire. Pictured in the detritus atop a dining table, a bench of unwashed dishes (fig 27), or a towel hanging lifeless from a bathroom rail (fig 28), signs of distress begin to appear. Visual representations of a quiet crumbling of comfortably constructed lives, these ultimately banal scenes attest to the increasing in-stability of contemporary domesticity.



Fig 29. *Badminton,* (*Think of England).* Martin Parr. 2000.

Shinkle (2004) states that "as a cultural condition, banality is bound up with the material process of commodity production", and is essentially the product of "too much stuff". The excesses of modern consumer culture begin to exhibit a drab familiarity, ultimately manifesting in perceptual boredom. Rick Poynor (2007) sums this up rather economically, describing boredom as the "existential corollary of excess". Deftly twisting his description further, Poynor named his book chapter on British photographer Martin Parr, *The Boredom of Plenty*. Martin Parr is a key figure in the investigation of both consumer culture and the banal dimension of photography. Condemned for "his tendency to collapse the everyday into the abject" (Shinkle, 2004), Parr is a polarising figure in the world of art photography. Employing irony and satire in his critique of modern society, Parr's photographs render a unique and penetrating perspective on the topics of leisure and consumption. His images typically feature unusual motifs, garish colours and ordinary people and places. Gaining admission to the ranks of Magnum Photos in 1994, Parr's photographic style seems to grate with the traditional documentary approach of the Agency. Poynor (2007) notes that, "Where a photographer like Cartier-Bresson instinctively sought the good in people,

producing dignified, celebratory images of everyday life, Parr rubs the viewer's nose in squalor, tackiness, affectation and monotony" (p. 17); Echoed by Colin Jacobson (2000), who describes the photographer as, "a gratuitously cruel social critic who has made a large amount of money by sneering at the foibles and pretensions of other people." However, while Parr's detractors are quick to label his work as exploitative and condescending, others describe it as intimate and anthropological – a view shared by Parr who claims to be just as middle-class as the folk his images so vividly portray. Referring to one of his photographs, in which a man struggles with a bacon sandwich (fig 29), Parr (2005) reflects:

> If you're eating a bacon sandwich the bacon rind is very annoying. If you look at it objectively it is a very revolting photo but also it's a very affectionate photo because it reminds us that we're all part of a sort of bigger scheme of things and it's something like bacon rind that joins us all together. However superior we may feel, or indeed inferior, we still have the same problems with bacon rind. (2005, in Krief & Fleischer)

In Parr's project *Common Sense* (1998), themes of consumption and excess take centre stage. Switching from a medium format camera to a 35mm SLR, Parr mounted a macro lens and ring-flash to his camera – a combination typically reserved for medical photography. This allowed Parr to bring viewers uncomfortably close to his subjects: a banal array of consumption-related motifs, including junk food; cigarette-butts; sex-toys; stuffed animals; sunburn and bacon. Val Williams (2002) noted, "Common Sense is like a dictionary of sins, a malodorous concoction of the sugary, rotting and fascinating detritus of the western world". These images, in all their vivid colour and intense detail equally fascinate and disgust. A visual rollercoaster ride, Parr's work strands the viewer somewhere between pleasure and discomfort, simultaneously depicting and challenging contemporary culture. Williams (2002) concludes:

> Parr's photography is, above all, a visual extravaganza; a large and skillfully honed collection of aesthetic devices that are used not just to define a social point or to underline a cultural statement, but for their own sake, in celebration of photography's singularity as a still, two-dimensional image acting as a mirror to the way we live.

With this in mind, Parr is cleared of any allegations of cruelty, as he is merely "telling it like it is". His tireless curiosity and critical eye allows him to portray the blatant absurdity of a culture that, despite plentiful wealth displays a distinct lack of taste and good judgement.

Fig 30. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.



Fig 31. *Untitled,* image by author, 2011.

## Conclusion

As a topic consumption is impossibly vast. The word is loaded, signifying countless different things to different people. It can trigger emotion, ranging from glee to guilt, and even despair. In order to make any sense of the word consumption one needs to bite off a chunk. Today the spectacle that Debord theorised in the 1960s is growing ever stronger and more sophisticated, planting seeds of desire in our fertile consumer minds. Fundamentally though, little has changed; The wealthy continue to oppress the poor; we continue to isolate ourselves in technology, and the array of commodities stretch ever farther across virtual horizons. The spectacle's colonisation of culture is complete, spreading like wildfire through the human psyche.

I came into this project conflicted. Consumption was a bad word to me, signifying bad people and bad practices. However, it quickly dawned on me that I am implicated in the cycle – my hands are dirty, so to speak. Consumption is everywhere, so to take the moral high ground and seek absolution by adopting 'better' practices like vegetarianism, or environmentalism is to simply don a paler shade of grey. Better, certainly, but far from exonerated. Indeed, industry has cottoned on to this notion that consumers wish to feel better about their consumption – spurring such terms as *green-washing,* to describe companies that spend more time and money claiming to be 'green' through advertising and marketing than actually improving business practices to reduce environmental impact. Of course, dirty tactics like green-washing exploit the power of the spectacle, leaving us vulnerable, unable to tell good from bad. To be successful, my project needed to channel my dismay at the state of contemporary consumption into an effective counter to subdue spectacular society's persuasive power. However, photography's entrenchment in the advertising game only served to hinder such a strategy.

Heading off on my McDonald's tangent for a time was worthwhile. It drove home the dominance of the spectacle, demonstrating that the golden arches were very nearly invulnerable to attack. Eventually I got the message, and shifting my focus to a more ambiguous aesthetic mode, I began to revel in the many surfaces of contemporary consumption. Reducing consumption objects and scenes to mere surface erased the fog of the spectacle and encouraged an exploration of scale and form. When viewed together, the painted markings of an airport tarmac (fig 30) and the lines on the palm of a hand (fig 31) begin to reference one another. I also took inspiration from Val Williams' (2002) cogent account of Martin Parr's practice – essentially: an extravaganza of aesthetic devices used to celebrate the photograph's still, flat surface, reflecting the way we live. It embodies so much of what endears me to the medium, hinting at the

Fig 32. *MFA show, (The Sum of Things 1/2),* image by author, 2012.



Fig 33. *MFA show, (The Sum of Things 2/2),* image by author, 2012.

curious, voyeuristic pleasure of simply looking. Over the course of the project I have honed my practice, adopting a freer, less fussy methodology. With photography it can be easy to overcook an idea, or indeed, to think you need all the answers before you begin. However, such an approach invariably produces work that verges on the didactic or one-dimensional. Given that much of the joy of photography lies in what you can't see – that which has disappeared behind the picture – I see little to be gained by merely spelling things out. For me, the ambiguity of the photograph is what lends it an enigma – and indeed, paradoxically – what makes it complete. This seemingly utter contradiction *can* be explained however, because, as Berger and Barthes suggested, to attach words to photographs is to narrow their meaning and limit their longevity. Rather, my decision to imbue meaning through aesthetic interplay allows ample room for individual readings of the work. My *Off the Pitch* work may seem at odds with my more abstract images of consumer surfaces. However, with careful sequencing they promise to confound viewers' sensibilities, hopefully engendering a deeper and more lasting engagement. Consumption exists in many guises, and I believe a fusion of poetry and politics may provide the ink needed to connect the dots. While I have conceded and given the project a title, my chosen title, *The Sum of Things,* is adequate precisely *because* of its *inadequacy* to describe or disrupt the content of the work. *The Sum of Things* embodies the kind of foolhardy assertion that authorities would have us believe - that any concerns about consumption are quantifiable. With a playful conceit it suggests: 'No need to worry, we have it all figured out.'
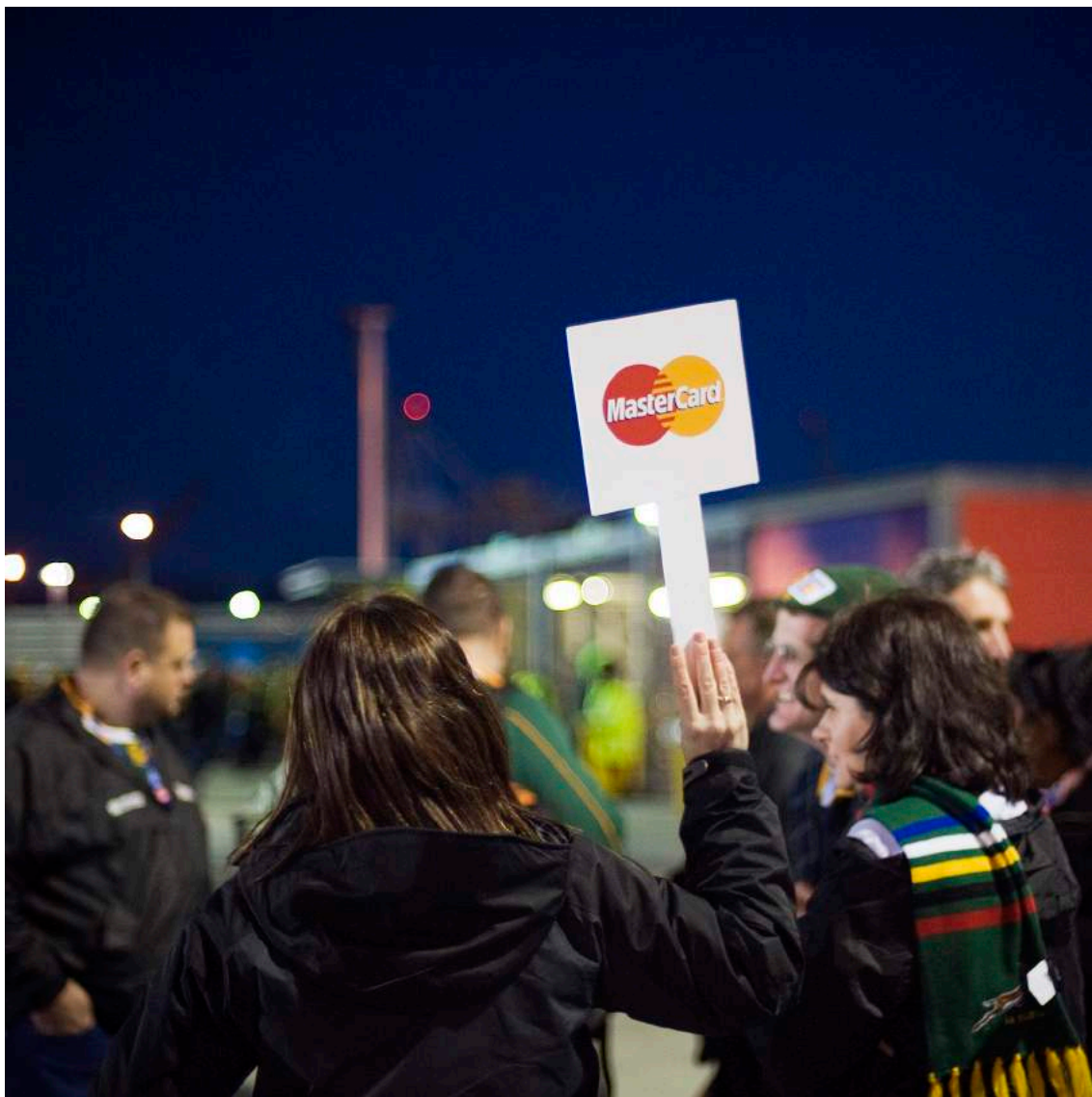
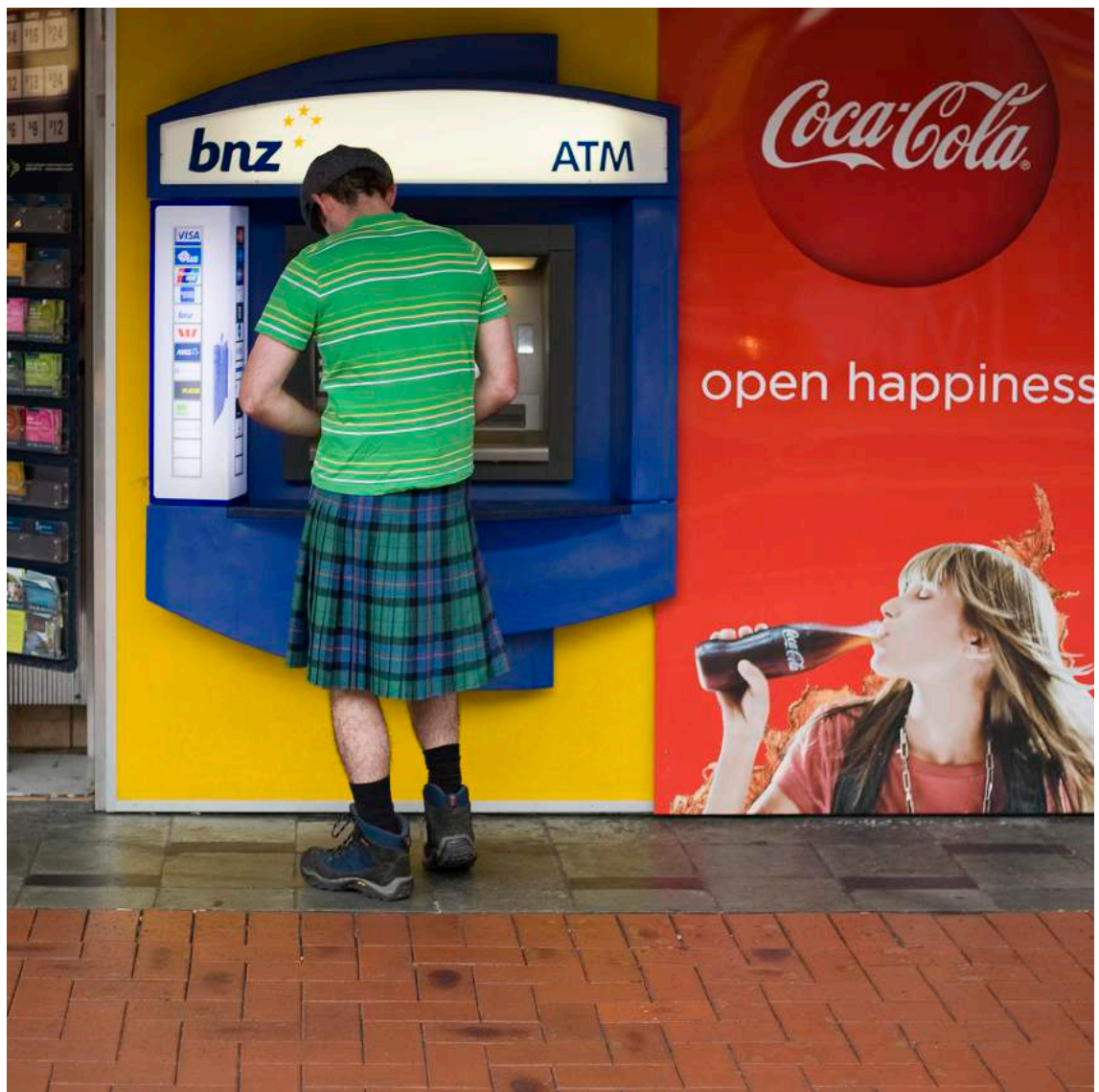Fig 34. *Untitled, (The Sum of Things),* image by author, 2011.

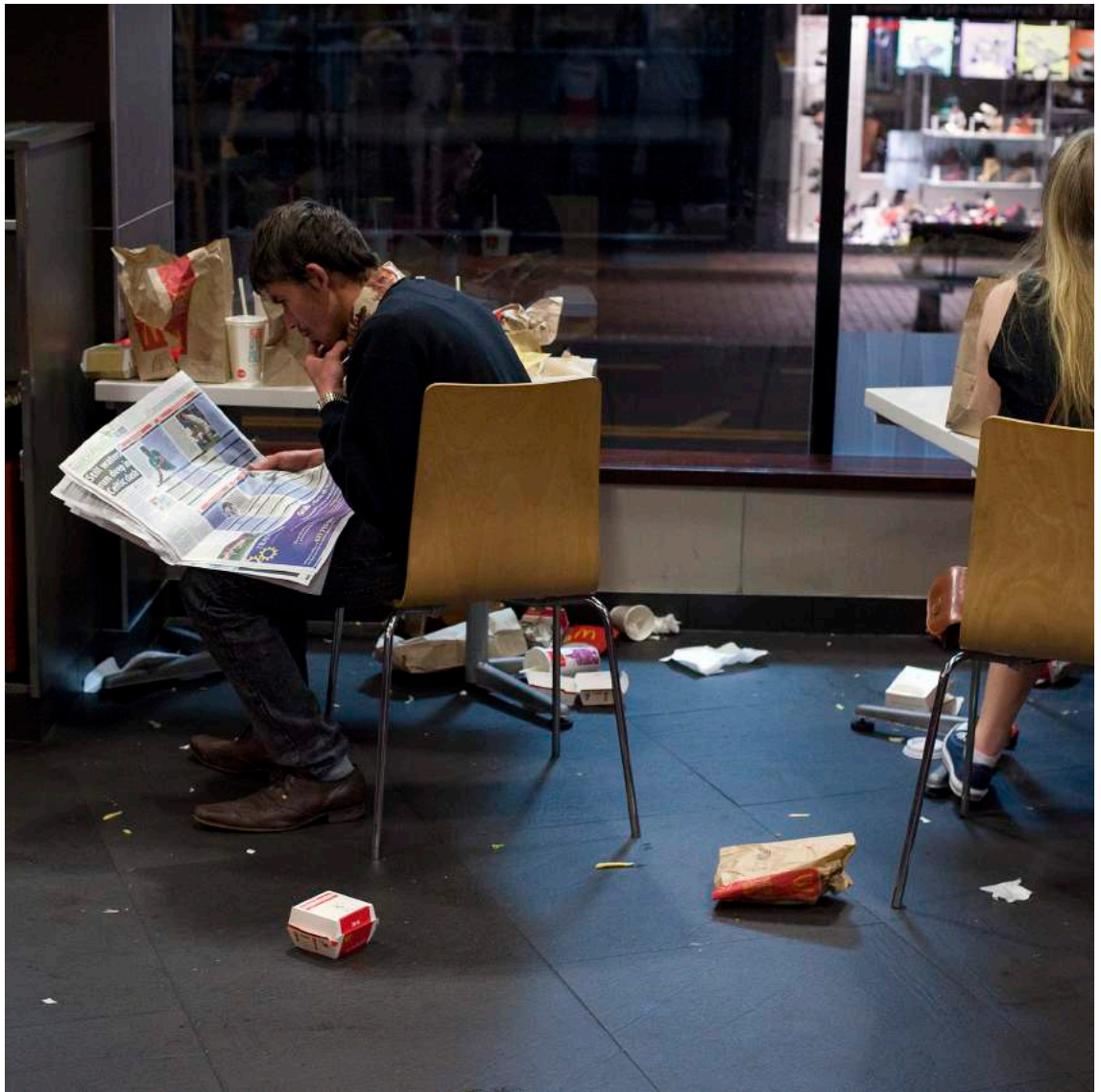Fig 35. *Untitled, (The Sum of Things),* image by author, 2011.

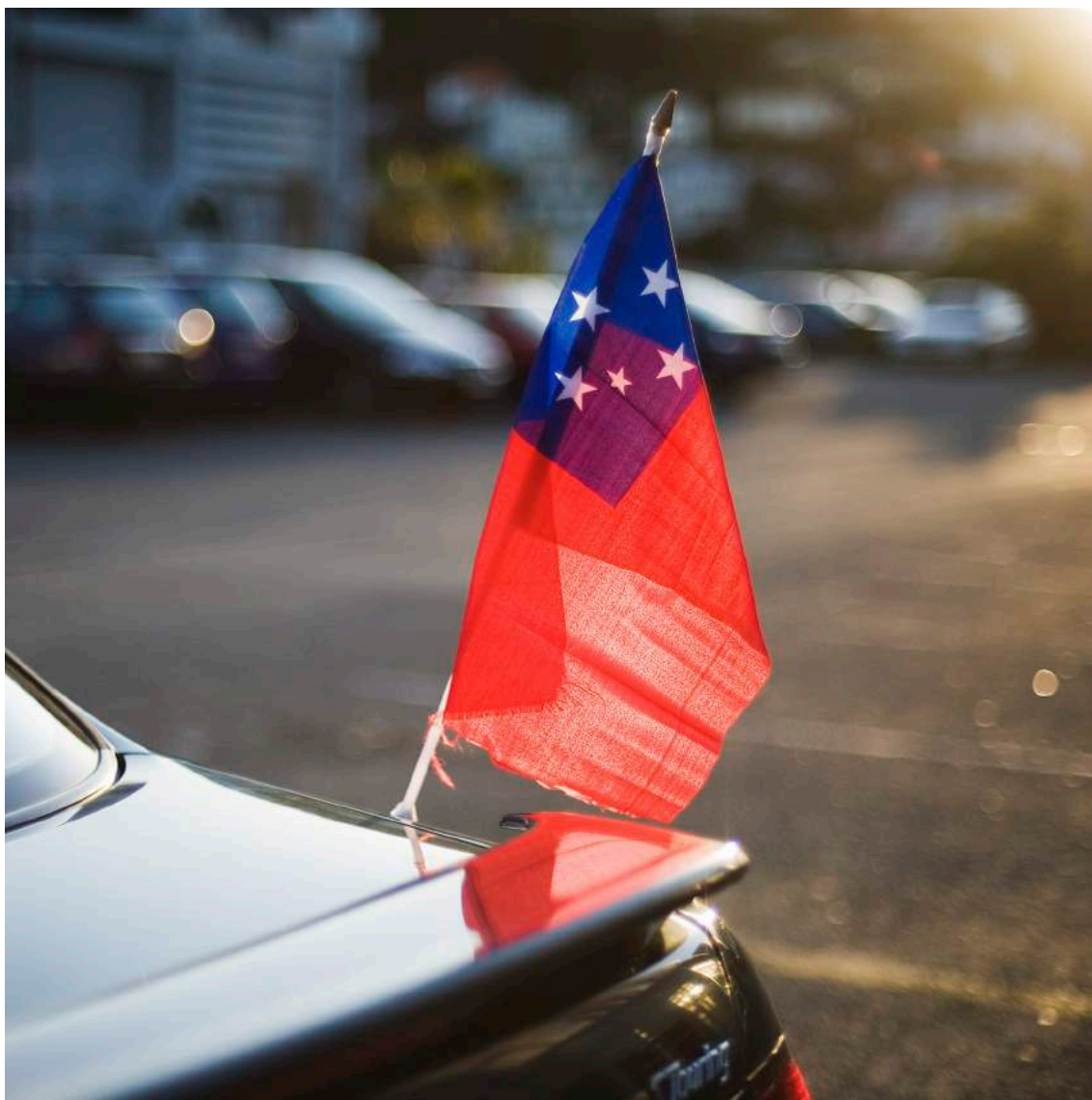Fig 36. *Untitled, (The Sum of Things),* image by author, 2011.

Fig 37. *Untitled, (The Sum of Things),* image by author, 2011.

Fig 38. *Untitled, (The Sum of Things),* image by author, 2011.

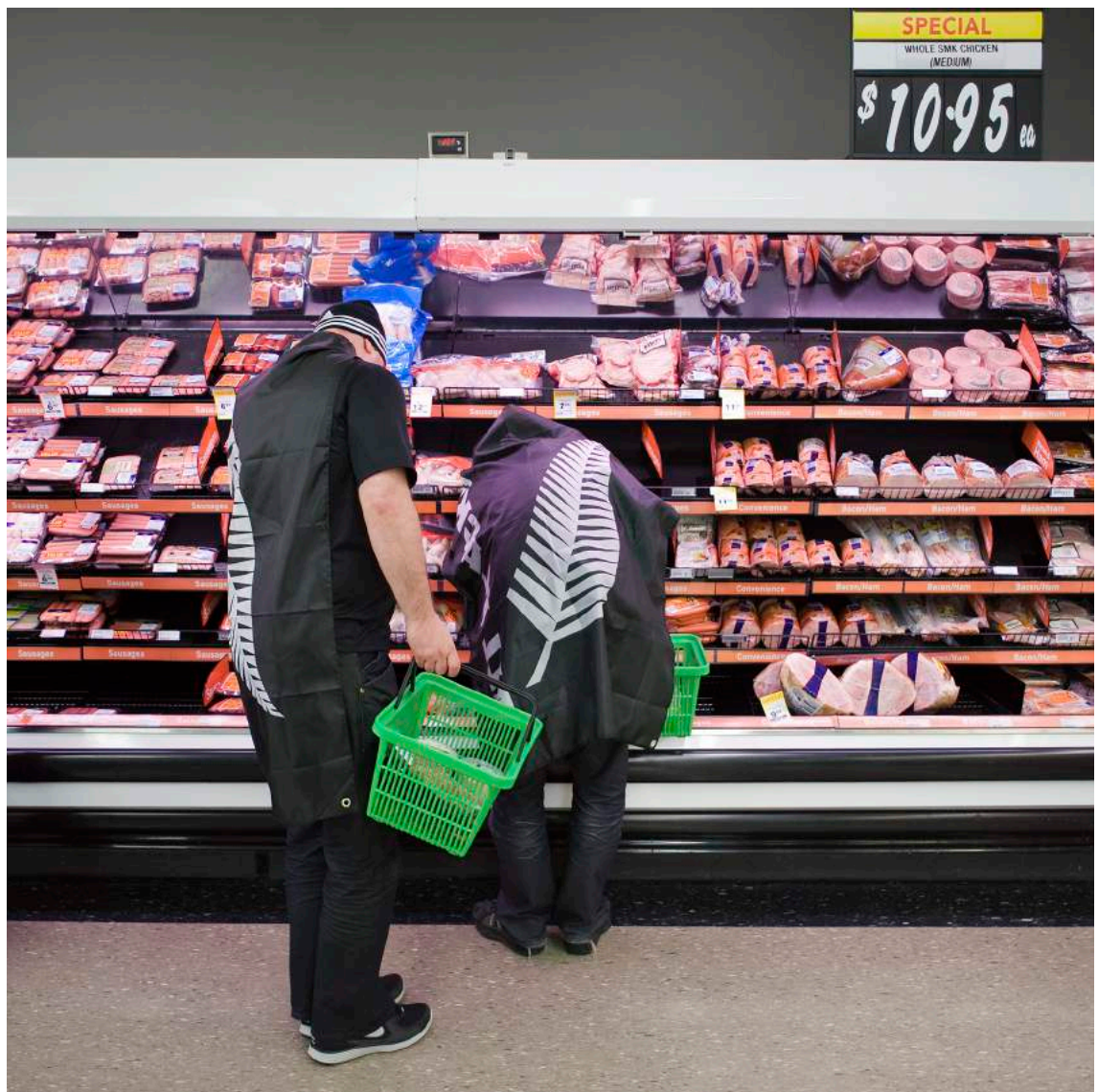Fig 39. *Untitled, (The Sum of Things),* image by author, 2011.

Fig 40. *Untitled, (The Sum of Things),* image by author, 2011.

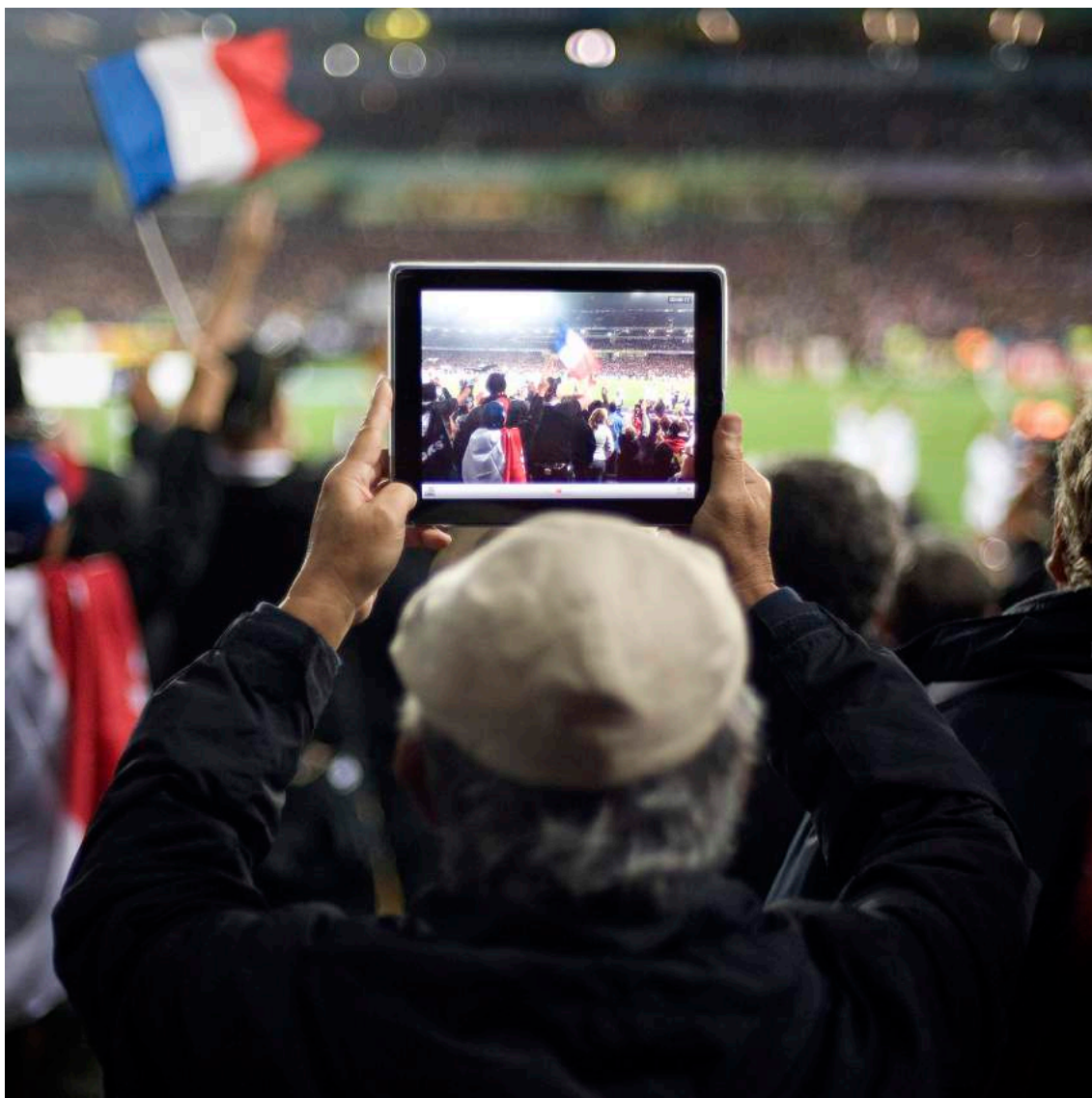Fig 41. *Untitled, (The Sum of Things),* image by author, 2011.

Fig 42. *Untitled, (The Sum of Things),* image by author, 2011.

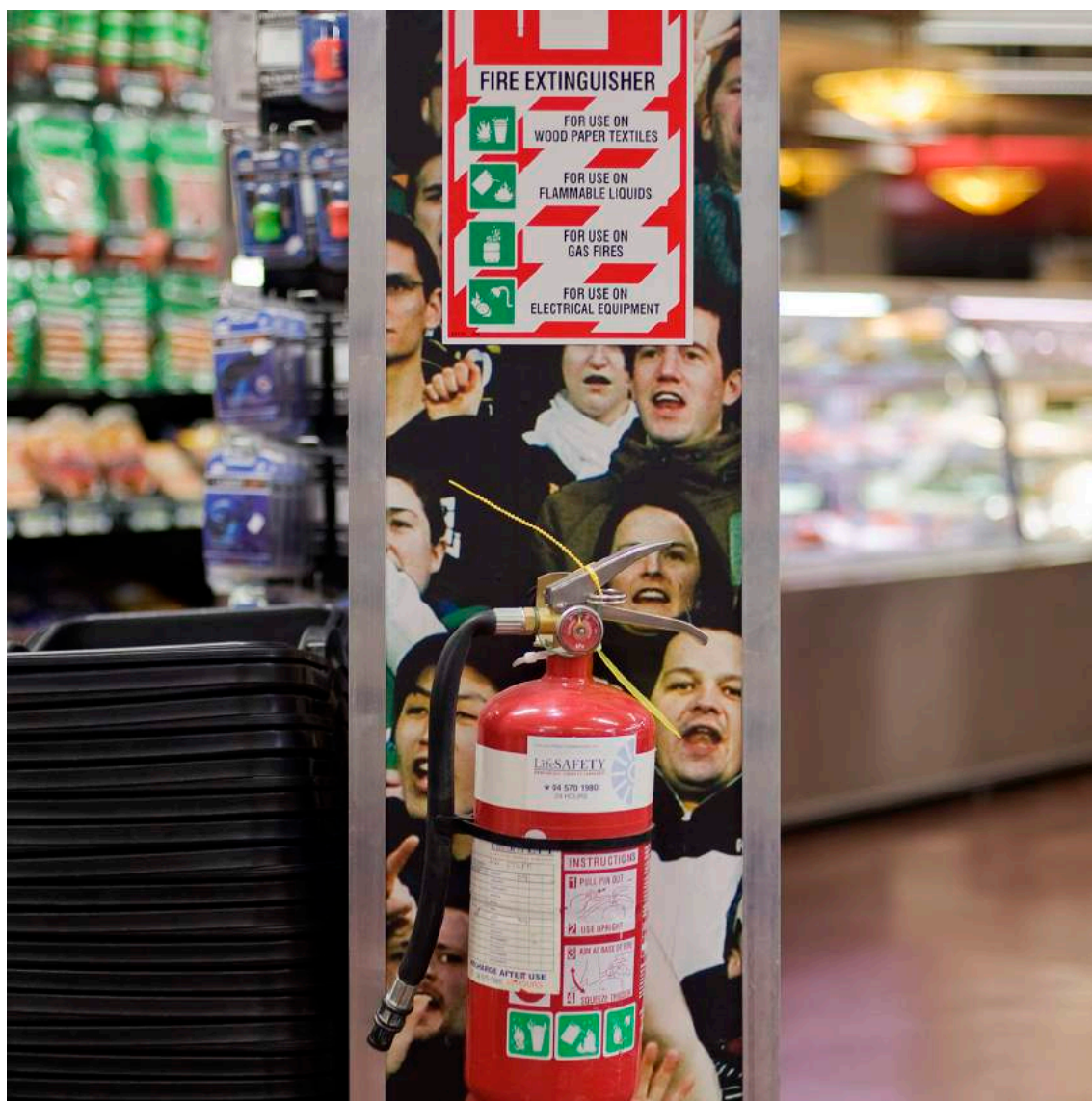Fig 43. *Untitled, (The Sum of Things),* image by author, 2011.

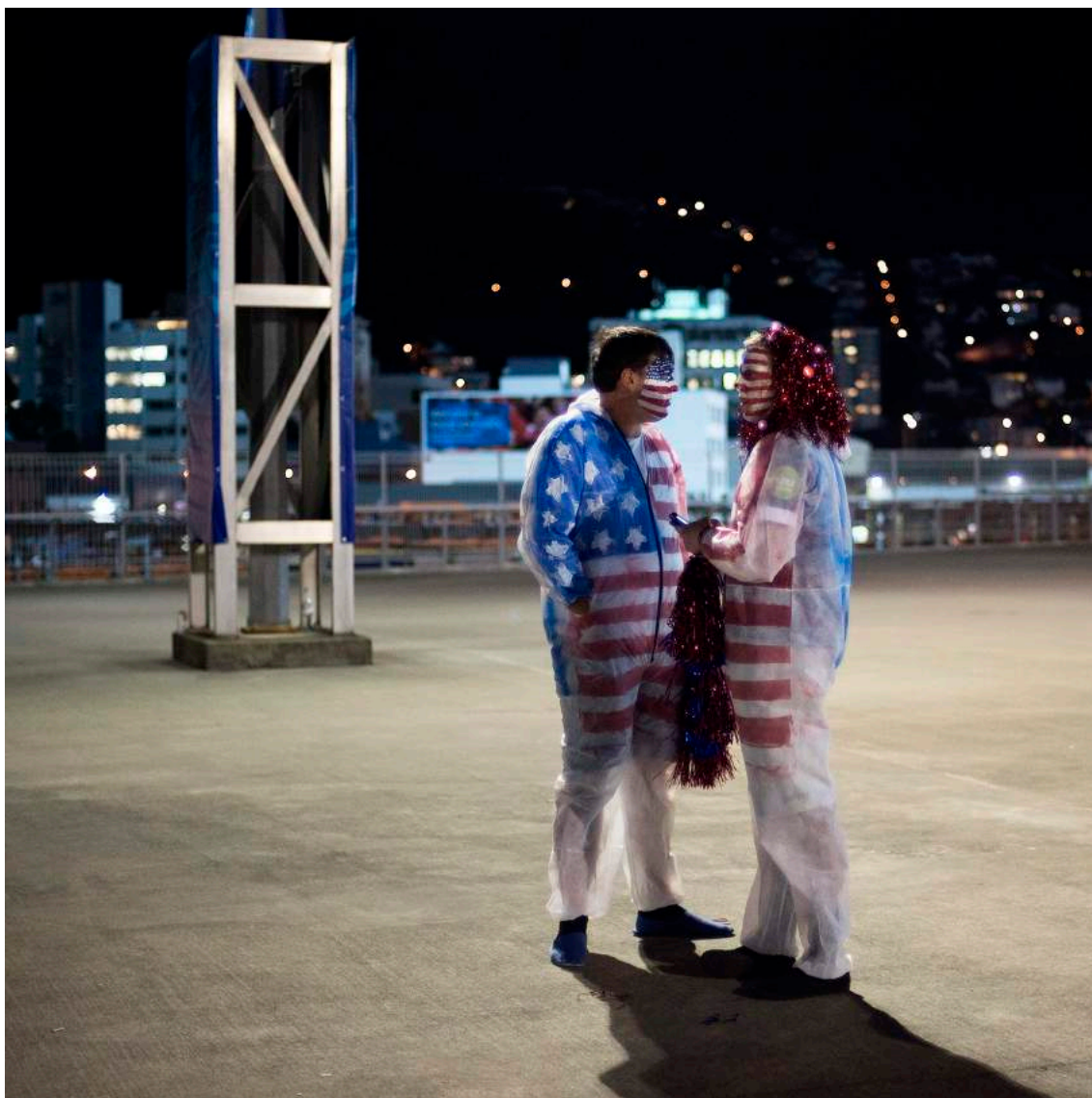Fig 44. *Untitled, (The Sum of Things),* image by author, 2011.

Fig 45. *Untitled, (The Sum of Things),* image by author, 2011.

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