Ferreira, MC and Scaraboto, D

 "My plastic dreams": Towards an extended understanding of materiality and the shaping of consumer identities

http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/2198/

Article

"My plastic dreams": Toward an extended understanding of materiality and the shaping of consumer identities

Abstract

Individuals relate to consumption objects as a means to develop, reinforce, transform, or align their fragmented individual identities. Prior research has mainly focused on understanding the identity-shaping potential of finished consumer products, such as branded shoes. Less attention has been dedicated to understanding how material substances, designer intentions, and marketing efforts jointly influence materiality and the shaping of consumers' identities. Drawing from a netnographic investigation of an online community of plastic shoe aficionados, we extend current understandings of object–consumer relations to include pre-objectification – a process whereby cultural forms are translated into material objects. This expanded view allows us to examine the outcomes of consumer interaction with material elements inscribed in consumption objects. Our study uncovers a collective materialization process where culturally situated material interactions give shape to consumer identities and feed back into consumer culture.

Keywords: materiality, object relations, objectification, consumer identity, plastic shoes, netnography

"My plastic dreams": Toward an extended understanding of materiality and the shaping of consumer identities

1. Introduction

Consumer research has extensively examined how interactions with products help consumers to shape their identities and selves (Belk, 1998; Ahuvia, 2005). Product design, for instance, can elicit infatuation in object–consumer relations (Lastovicka and Sirianni, 2011), and consumers may become attached and develop relationships with specific material objects, independently of these objects' brands (Lastovicka and Sirianni, 2013). Although recent research in various disciplines has started to move beyond finished consumption objects to look at the material characteristics objectified in them, a comprehensive framework for examining the identity-shaping outcomes of consumers' interaction with pre-objectification elements is absent (Dant, 2008; Ingold, 2012; Borgerson, 2013). The "thingness" of consumption objects (Miller, 1987, 2005) thus has the potential to support consumer identity-shaping in ways that we do not fully understand. Our study addresses this gap by proposing an expanded view of materiality that considers how interaction with objectified material elements may influence consumers' identity projects.

In elaborating our framework, we focus on shoes, a consumption object that is frequently associated with consumers' identity-shaping efforts (Belk, 2003; Marion and Nairn, 2011). Shoes, like clothes, are an example of an object that is "especially suitable for studying the relationship between personal values and values attributed to material goods because of its close association with perceptions of the self" (Crane and Bovone, 2006). Material culture surrounding shoes stimulates consumer imaginations through fantasies and dreams of escape from reality (Huey and Proctor, 2011). In many fairy tales, movies and TV shows, shoes are gifted with "the magical power that gives the ordinary and humble the ability to move out of their environment into a better world" (McDowell, 1989, p. 86). Hence shoes have been extensively examined as meaning-laden consumption objects, being considered primarily in light of their magical, fetish-related or cultural

properties, "in terms of what they stand for (usually femininity and sex) rather than what they are" (Sherlock, 2014, p. 26). Consequently, their thingness – that is, the material substances and shapes they are made of – disappears into the background of academic research analyses (but see Braithwaite, 2014, for an exception). But as our study demonstrates, substances, shapes, and the intentions of object creators also support the shaping of consumer identity when we consider pre-objectification – a process whereby cultural ideas are translated into material forms (see section 3.2).

In examining how consumers interact with the thingness of shoes, our study's makes three important contributions to the literature. First, we extend research on materiality, which attends mostly to finished products (Ingold, 2007), through advancing our understanding of the outcomes of consumer interaction with material elements, namely material substances, designer intentions, and marketing efforts inscribed in consumption objects (Dant, 2008; Ingold, 2012; Borgerson, 2013). The marketing efforts objectified in consumption objects have been extensively covered in the branding literature (Ahuvia, 2005; Fernandez and Lastovicka, 2011). Hence, while we keep in mind the marketing efforts that shape brand identity, we center our analysis of object–consumer relations on the other two pre-objectification elements: material substances and design intentions.

Second, by analyzing consumer interactions with the elements that materialized in material consumption and the way these interactions are displayed, shared, and collectively extended online, we uncover a more detailed process through which culturally situated material interactions shape consumer identities and feed back into consumer culture. Current research largely overlooks how material interaction shapes the broader cultural context where it happens (Watson, 2008), focusing instead on outcomes manifested at the individual level (e.g., Belk, 1988; Ahuvia, 2005; Shankar, Eliott and Fitchett, 2009). Recent exceptions (Bettany, 2007; Watson and Shove, 2008) have highlighted the importance of understanding consumer interactions with material in order to complement our understanding of how meanings shape the socio-cultural world (Levy, 1959; McCracken, 1986).

Third, we bridge the gap between understandings of object relations in social psychology and current understandings of object–consumer relations in consumer culture research and other disciplines. We do so by developing a theoretical framework that details the process of materialization into its pre-objectification and objectification phases, connected by what we call *creative space*. Based on Winnicott's (1971) concept of "third space", the creative space is loaded with the emotional energy that emerges as consumer and object interact. The final stage in the materialization process, the creative space represents the phase where consumer and object transformations get embedded into consumer identity projects and cultural forms.

We apply our model to examine consumer relations to shoes that are produced with a distinct material and style: plastic shoes commercialized under the brand Melissa. By empirically examining how Melissa consumers relate to the shoes' material substance and design, we offer an illustration of how our framework allows for considerations of the influence of pre-objectification elements in support of consumer identity work and transformations of self.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. We briefly review consumer research and other literature that examines how object relations shape consumer identity projects, present key elements of materiality research that are relevant for understanding consumer-object relations, and introduce our conceptual model of extended materialization. We then describe our research context and our methods, present our findings, and conclude with implications for business research and practice.

2. Object–consumer relations and their outcomes

Consumer culture scholars have extensively elaborated on the implications of objects' symbolic dimensions for consumers' identity projects (Belk, 1989; Ahuvia, 2005). For instance, Ahuvia (2005) notes objects' capacity to transform consumer selves into new desired forms. In expanding on Belk's (1989) proposition that relationships between a person and a thing always involve a third person who may also want to partake of the object, the author explains that objects

are also used to express and mediate relationships among people. Therefore Ahuvia (2005) extends the notion of self towards social interaction with objects by discussing love as an overarching emotional state that is useful to consumers to experience and sustain a diversity of coherent identity narratives as these consumers interact with their possessions.

More recently, other scholars have been discussing the notion of self-concept as a dialectic interaction between distinct dimensions of self to address consumers' emotions in dealing with many self-conceptualizations (Bahl and Milne, 2010; Hamilton and Hassan, 2010). Marion and Narin (2011) also understand self-concept as a dialectic interaction and find that consumers' coherent identity narratives are not only based on their differentiation in selfhood (experiences of oneself) but also on the sameness (oneself over time) in their life project. Hence, consumer identity becomes an incremental process in which the uniqueness of each person endures over time while transformations are welcome as long as they make sense to one's lifetime self-concept. Altogether, these studies shed light on emotional aspects of consumers' constituting their sense of self in relation to society. They also show that possessions work beyond self-representation as consumers make use of objects to reflect on their self-concepts. However, the material aspects of object–consumer relations fade in their analysis.

Other understandings of identity as an outcome of social relationships have been developed that clearly indicate how objects are employed to develop and reflect processes of self-transformation, also transforming how individuals are treated by others (Dittmars, 1992; Miller, 2010; Choi, Ko and Megehee, 2014). For instance, Shankar et al. (2009) note that while choosing an identity may seem an agentic choice, it can also be a very threatening one because of its potential to cause social rejection. Whereas Shankar et al.'s (2009) analysis focuses on what constrains consumer identity projects, it also highlights the role of objects as a stabilizing force in human life. As individuals go through life changes, they fix their identities in objects, allowing these identities to be retrieved later when they are desirable and socially appropriate.

Conversely, material goods may drive consumers to recall aspects of their existing identities that may be seen as unfitting to the consumers' current forms of socialization and ongoing identity projects (Shankar et al., 2009). This disconnect could undermine consumers' relationship with these objects and their brands. Therefore the capacity of objects to work in consumers' favor by supporting their identity projects (Ahuvia, 2005) is relative. These findings highlight the need to attend to the constraints on consumer agency when objects are taken as active in consumer identity-shaping (Shankar et al., 2009). In addition, the capacity of material goods to introduce reflexive thoughts and actions into the object–consumer relation should be highlighted, as the agency of objects seems to play a more prominent role in the process of materiality than that which has been granted to it by consumer research thus far (Borgerson, 2013). In order to advance these understandings, we provide the following overview of the research on materiality and consumption.

3. Materiality

Material goods are frequently understood through the lens of material embeddedness and studied as the process of objectification (Miller, 1987; Schatzki, 2010). But material goods have also been examined as the embodiment of cultural ideals, achieved through a process supported by interactions between consumers and objects (Ingold, 2007; Dant, 2008; Woodward, 2011). Engagement between individuals and objects is what is common to both approaches to materialization, and people's engagement with objects is motivated by the possibility of self-transformation (Woodward, 2011). Through its mediating role, materiality is regarded as a dynamic process that is able to connect – and transform – objects and consumers simultaneously.

Advancing the concept of materiality, Borgerson (2013) has expanded the notion of materialization to recast the importance of material embodiment in the process of objectification. She does so by arguing that object interfaces are in fact what instigate object–consumer interactions and then transform the subjectivity of both. Woodward (2011, p. 367) also sees materialization as productive interaction – an unfolding sequence of material engagements that allows "strong links

between embodied practices, imagination and emotion" – and this point strengthens the notions of both processes of materiality as interdependent. Inspired by these authors, we address objectification and embodiment as interrelated parts of the process of materialization and use this extended process as a starting point in our work in order to explore how material substances, designer intentions, and marketing efforts jointly influence the materiality of objects and its identity-shaping outcomes. We review the extended materialization process in detail below.

3.1. Objectification

Centered on the object–consumer relation, objectification investigates the ways objects are situated in the lives of individuals, groups, and, more broadly, institutions. Objectification can be understood as a process where consumers materialize their particular understanding of the world yet objectify their individuality and values through material culture and consumption acts (Miller, 2005). Grounded in the indispensable engagement with objects, the notion of objectification has shifted the understanding of material culture from that of physical representation of ideas to that of a dynamic relation in which cultural forms come into being as they are objectified (Miller, 1987).

The process of objectification happens in a series of steps. As objects become part of the lives of consumers, they are reworked in order to support distinct forms of sociality as well as a variety of consumer identity projects (Tilley, 2006). While the reworking happens, consumers are also transformed as ideas, values, and relations are promptly internalized by them. It is the substrate of consumers' transformations that is then recast onto objects, completing the objectification process. Hence, objectification is a dialectic process whereby consumers and objects are co-constitutive in their relationship. As Tilley (2006, p. 61) puts it:

> *Personal, social and cultural identity is embodied in our persons and objectified in our things. Through the things we can understand ourselves and others, not because they are externalizations of ourselves or others, reflecting something prior and more basic in our*

consciousness or social relations but because these things are the very medium through which

we make and know ourselves.

Understanding material forms as a medium for objectification challenges the dualism between consumers and objects in two ways. First, objectification is implicated in action. Therefore, the object–consumer relation is the focal point in the process, whereas the objectification is made evident through consumers' practical engagement with objects in any given time and place. Epp and Price (2010), for example, tracked the history of a family object (a dining table) to show that transformations in the family's network of practices resulted in the object's movement in the network. As a medium for family members' interactions, the table was moved back and forth, changing from irreplaceable to almost displaced possession due to life contingencies (such as changes in the family, space constraints, and manifestation of other objects) to support the family's identity transformations. This example illustrates how processes of objectification are accomplished in action, a point well covered by the materiality literature through applications of the concept of objectification in a variety of research contexts (Ger and Wilk, 2005; Browlie and Hewer, 2007; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010).

Second, the interaction between consumers and objects sustains the process of objectification. Through engagement with objects, the relation becomes "bound up not only with the agency of persons but with the agency of things in relation to these persons" (Tilley, 2006, p. 63). Thus agency on both parts keeps the objectification ongoing. Largely understood as the ability to act, agency bonds participants in the process of objectification because intentionality becomes a property of both consumers and objects (Borgerson, 2005). For instance, Bettany (2007) demonstrated how intentions shared between agents shape and qualify an interaction. In that study, the object (a tool for plucking a dog's coat) acts as a medium in the relationship if used with the purpose of presenting the dog as near to the ideal shape as possible; thus the object is materialized as being a tool of artifice and adaptation. Conversely, the object is materialized as a tool of authenticity and preservation if the dog's breeder has not intervened through artificial grooming

practices. Thus, distinct use of the object reflects upon the dog's breeder, who could win prizes and gain higher status in the community, illustrating how object–consumer interactions can sustain the action. Moreover, as interactions keep happening the object increases its power over the subject, reaching a point where different outcomes become part of a richer process of objectification.

Always in synergy, the object and consumer relation explained by the notion of objectification sees each part as co-constitutive. For instance, consumers can infuse specific objects with sentiments and ideals, thus granting these objects, over time, a status of being indispensable and cherished possessions (Curasi, Price and Arnould, 2004). In this status, consumption objects come to objectify particular meanings, values, and social relations, therefore supporting consumers' identity projects (Kravets and Örge, 2010). Objectification then is a sort of materialization in the making that never ceases to reproduce, legitimize, or transform both entities: consumers and objects.

3.2. Pre-objectification

In order to differentiate objectification from traditional forms of materialization, Miller (1987, 2005) argued that in material culture, engagements with objects are never-ending actions, a view which works in opposition to the one-way route of cultural representation held by the traditional notion of material embodiment. His idea is justified through Hegel's (1977) philosophy, in which there is no underlying division between humanity and materiality as all material forms are created in history or in imagination, allowing Miller (2005, p. 9) to affirm that "our humanity is not prior to what it creates". This assumption leads Miller to infer that nothing exists without objectification, thus deeming any claim about pre-objectified forms as rather romantic. At a philosophical level, we agree with Miller (2005, p. 10); however, at a more practical level, we argue that pre-objectification does exist, and it is comprised in the process of materialization by which material substances, designer intentions, and marketing efforts are brought together to give origin to – and become – a consumption object.

Even though theories of objectification have advanced consumer researchers' understanding of materiality, they have downplayed the role of the material substances and design intentions that go into composing objects in that process (Dant, 2008; Ingold, 2007). In other disciplines, researchers examining how consumers relate with objects have noted that individuals not only relate to finished objects, but also to the elements that compose those objects. Dant (2008, p. 11), for instance, explains the role of one such element – design:

Those who design and manufacture objects anticipate how they will be interacted with and how they will fit within the existing material culture. Their intentions are embedded within the form of the objects they produce and are responded to or 'read' during interaction by consumers or users.

Similarly, Ingold (2012, p. 435) has observed that material substances play a fundamental role in object–consumer relations: "To view [a] thing as a sample of material, by contrast, is to see it as a potential – for further making, growth, and transformation. In a world of materials, nothing is ever finished: 'everything may be something, but being something is always on the way to becoming something else (…) And to focus on the life of materials is to prioritize the processes of production, (…) over those of consumption".

Even before their integration into an object form, design intentions and material substances interact with each other to shape a consumption object. For instance, Borgerson (2013, p. 135) explains that new technologies encourage a multiplicity of visual design efforts as "design thinking and design practitioners may attempt to create designed interaction with as many possible alternative paths as inventiveness and innovation would allow". But design efforts are also evidently invested in contexts other than technological products. Thinking in terms of product design, technology also helps new forms to come along when material substances such as plastic gain an unexpected shape, as is the case with plastic high-heeled shoes, whose support system challenges the notorious flexibility of the material substance. Moreover, designers act as interpreters of cultural ideals as they combine material substances, imagination, and the industrial

resources available to them to sometimes pervert historical forms (which are a key aspect on Miller's theory of objectification). As Borgerson (2005) explains, human agency lies in one's ability to intervene over other actors, giving the person some power over the relation. However, such intervention prompts the agency of the object and other beings (Borgerson, 2005) and thus their intentionality can also influence the outcome of the interaction.

For instance, a designer's intention to recreate ballet shoes in plastic has to overcome the limitations, or the intentions, of the material substance and of the cultural forms historically associated with such shoes. Interventions on plastic made possible by technologies of production also interfere with the designer's creativity and agency. The outcome of such interactions may be a plastic pointed shoe, a more rigid version of the conventional ballet slipper, which is an object originally made of soft fabric and loose forms that end up limiting the designer's intervening capacity. Yet the designer may have not only interpreted the historical forms of ballet shoes, but also produced a new object that finds in the glossy finishing of plastic its uniqueness and so its capacity to mirror and shape current material culture.

Finally, producer intentions, in the form of marketing efforts, also play a role in the objectification of consumption objects. Producer intentions go beyond product design because marketing efforts invest the object with additional cultural ideals and meanings producers want to mobilize. Producers and their intentions also reach consumers through a variety of channels (e.g., advertising, pricing, branding) beyond the consumption object, indicating that material embodiment can no longer be seen as a one-way route of cultural representation as proposed by Miller (1987, 2005).

We argue that materials, design, and marketing are interconnected and could be studied as a part of the process of materialization that we call pre-objectification. In taking seriously the notion of pre-objectification, our intention is not to downplay Miller's (1987, 2005) notion of objectification, but to extend it. With that intention in mind, we follow Borgerson (2013) and Woodward (2011) in seeing objectification and embodiment as interrelated in the process of

materialization. In order to further examine the relations that consumers form with objects at the core of the materialization process, we draw from psychoanalytical theories of object relations, which we review in the following section.

4. An overview of object relations theory

Object relations theory, as developed in psychoanalytical research, has the potential to contribute to consumer researchers' understanding of object–consumer relations and their outcomes (Woodward, 2011). According to this perspective, as they relate with objects, individuals are socialized, from early infancy, into the world of object-symbols (Dittmars, 1992). In fact, it is through object relations that individuals learn the boundaries between themselves and what else is in the world: "Feeling the boundaries of a physical object means having a *simultaneous* perspective: the sense of self touching the object and the object's rigidity [or flexibility] against which the hand rests" (Dittmars, 1992, p. 77). The importance of playing with material objects at infancy as studied by psychoanalysts also finds its relevance in adulthood (Miller, 1987).

In object relations theory, objects are not limited to physical things, but also include "psychological objects such as a parent or body part" (Woodward, 2011; Winnicott, 1971) or, as the term is most frequently employed in psychopathology treatment, to people. Hence, objects can be animate or inanimate, human or non-human. Further, the object relations perspective differentiates between part-objects and whole-objects: "For example, a parent would be considered a whole-object, while the particular bodily part of the mother's breast would be a part-object" (Woodward, 2011, p. 373). In the context of our investigation, we understand plastic shoes and consumer bodies as whole-objects, while plastic (material substance) and feet (body part) are seen as part-objects.

Another tenet of object relations theory is that "[t]here is a *dialectic of transference* of energies at play in people-object relations. On the one hand, people *project onto* objects particular meanings, fantasies, desires, and emotions, and on the other, objects are being *taken into* the self, used, elaborated, played with and eventually exhausted" (Woodward, 2011, p. 374). All meanings,

desires, fantasies, and emotions are projected onto and drawn from objects. Hence, objects are the center of individuals' emotional lives (Klein, 1952). This understanding reinforces the point introduced into consumer research by Miller's theory of objectification (2010), which suggests "that object agency performs and appears differently (…) by engaging the co-creative and co-transformative interactions of humans and the stuff that surrounds them" (Borgerson, 2013, p. 131).

Moreover, object relations theory highlights that objects are used as material resources to bridge inner and outer worlds, self and other. That is, individuals use objects to *transition*. As developed by Winnicott (1971), the notion of transitioning objects leads to the creation of a "third space" which is:

… neither the individual subject, nor the external object environment; neither inner nor outer, self nor material thing, but the spaces of creativity, play and productive imagination that are created when both meet. The third space is often taken to represent a cultural space because it unites the human subject with the external environment via a transitional object. In the process of the human subject using the object and in turn projecting emotional energy onto the object, a type of transaction is established which charges, and changes, both subject and object. It is in the third space that desires come to be materially expressed and transitioned. (Woodward, 2011, p. 375)

Winnicott's notion of the transitional object is central to theories of object relations, and it has been usefully extended by Bollas (1987), who preferred to refer to these objects as "transformational objects." Bollas notes that transformational objects are experienced as processes, and emphasizes their creative potential. Further, he suggests that there is a wide collective search for transformational objects in adult life, given that consumption objects promise self-transformation, thereby evoking "a psychosomatic sense of fusion that is the subject's recollection of the transformational object" (Bollas, 1987, p. 16).

Other object relations theorists have argued that it does not matter whether the subject involvement with the object is based on cognitive, moral, or aesthetic responses (e.g., Krieger,

1976). This concurs with a view of materiality as a process where neither society nor cultural forms are privileged a priori, but rather seen as mutually constitutive (Miller, 1987). Thus, from a consumer research perspective, it is more important that object relations theory considers the interactions between consumers and objects as capable of producing not only symbols, meanings (as discussed in a voluminous consumer research literature), and value (as addressed at the intersection between consumer culture theory and the service-dominant logic), but also imagination, emotions and desires for self-transformation. Emotions are more than a fleeting state in the mind of consumers, the way they imagine the world to be and picture the life of others influence the feelings associated with their identities (Beruchashvili and Moisio, 2013). Moreover, as suggested by Gopaldas (2014), it is worthwhile to examine emotional aspects of consumption to move beyond the effect of meanings on consumer identities and behaviors. In addition to looking at consumption objects as vessels of meaning (McCracken, 1990), we propose that objects (and the elements objectified in them) be highlighted for their capacity to elicit, provoke, and motivate emotions and their expressions. We have developed a conceptual model that combines the notion of object relations developed in psychoanalytic theory with current understandings of the outcomes of object–consumer relations in consumer research and other disciplines (Figure 1). This model details the process of materialization into its pre-objectification and objectification phases, as discussed in the previous sections. We provide a brief overview of this conceptual framework here and then further detail it, illustrating each step with examples from our data, in the sections that follow.
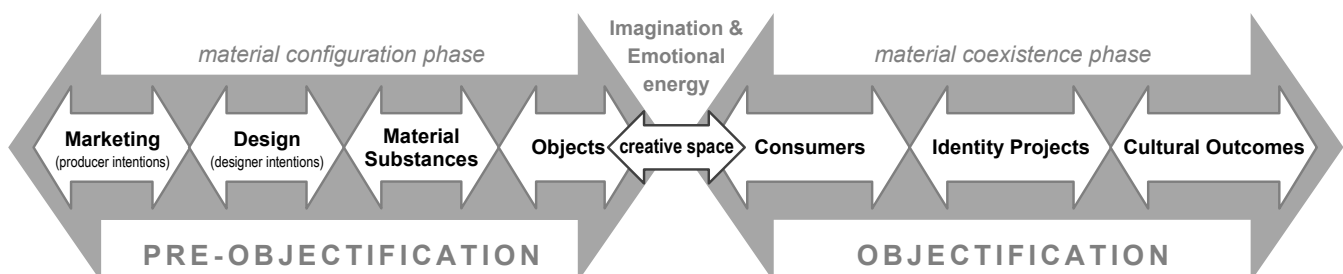

Figure 1: An extended model of materialization

What we call pre-objectification is the phase in the materialization process where material substances, designer intentions, and marketing efforts are the elements involved in creating and producing a consumption object. Of note, these elements interact in a non-linear and non-sequential fashion: designers and marketers work *with* material substances to create an object and imbue it with meaning. As Ingold (2013, p. 31) explains:

> *... practitioners not so much interact as correspond with [materials]. Making, then, is a process of correspondence: not the imposition of preconceived form on raw material substance, but the drawing out or bringing forth of potentials immanent in a world of becoming.*

Similarly, material substances may shape (and be shaped by) producers' intentions. For instance, when producers search for lowering costs through the development of new material substances or when encountering a new substance enables producers to develop new products and bring them to market. Hence, even though we depict our framework horizontally for simplicity, the double arrows (small and large) are meant to indicate mutual influence among all elements that compose it.

The center of the framework illustrates the creative space emerging as object and consumer interact. This space is loaded with emotional energy, which feeds into the consumer's imagination and allows transitions between one's internal and external worlds, and one's current, past, and desired selves. The last stage in the materialization process is that in which such outcomes are materialized, and consumer and object transformations become embedded in consumer identity projects and cultural forms.

Building on this conceptual model, and complementing the brand identity literature examining consumer relations to marketing (producer intentions), we ask: How do consumers relate to design intentions and material substances in the context of object–consumer relations? And what identity-related and cultural outcomes can be unveiled through highlighting the role of design intentions and material substances on object–consumer relations? We next describe the context in which we collected data that would enable us to answer these research questions.

5. A brief history of plastic and its usage in the shoe industry

Natural flexible materials such as amber have been molded into small solid objects like jewelry since ancient Greece (Bijker, 1993). However these materials have only undergone deliberate chemical modifications since the technological revolution in the nineteenth century (Fenichell, 1996). Vulcanized rubber was the first attempt to create a semi-synthetic flexible material (Lambert and Baveystock, 2008) and it was shortly after used for mechanical production of consumer goods such as decorative objects and imitation jewelry, spreading its consumption to the lower classes (Bijker, 1993). Extensive use in new industrial processes (e.g., electrical insulation, equipment coating and surgical instruments) soon doomed crude rubber to imminent scarcity, encouraging the development of new flexible materials (Bijker, 1993).

Parkesine is arguably the first man-made plastic (Fenichell, 1996). However, its production was soon proved not commercially viable (Lambert and Baveystock, 2008) and subsequent experiments led to celluloid becoming the first mass-produced plastic (Fenichell, 1996). Celluloid was promoted as a "chameleon" material that could either be substituted for conventional solid materials (i.e., wood or metal) or imitate the surface of flexible materials such as amber, ivory, or tortoise shell (Vincent, 2013). Cellulosic plastics started being used widely in domestic objects such as toiletries, household items, toys, billiard balls and garment facings (Fenichell, 1996). Bakelite, the first of many commercial synthetic plastics, was enormously popular among designers who used the material resourcefully in electronics, machinery, furniture and interior furnishings and much more (see Tambini, 1999). Its plasticity allowed "adventurous" curves (Ashby and Johnson, 2009) and Bakelite was embraced by the fashion industry when designers, such as Coco Chanel, started using the material to create the light and colorful costume jewelry that was in fashion in the1930s (Crespy et al., 2008). It was the first time plastic was used as something beyond a simple substitute for or imitation of natural materials.

Relative to jewelry and clothes, shoe design was quite late to benefiting creatively from the use of plastic. In the mid-1930s Salvatore Ferragamo had worked with a variety of substitute materials for leather, but not plastic (Walford, 2008). Plastic became a very popular choice for shoes in the 1940s as its shiny and vibrant color as well as easy care and waterproof qualities were well appreciated by consumers (Cosgrave, 2000). Synthetic rubber was substituted for leather in shoe soles starting in the mid-1940s and in the following decade new synthetic plastics were seen as better than natural materials, as in the case of Neoprene for soles, Perspex in heels, and Vinylite for shoe uppers that were particularly effective in imitating patent leather (Walford, 2008). Even though innovation could be seen in the first injection-molded sandals made in Britain in 1956, at the time the majority of the plastic in use for footwear was allocated to the production of cheap shoes (Swann, 1982).

Roger Vivier's fine creations in satin and PVC showed glimpses of creativity increasing the use of synthetic materials in footwear in the late 1960s; particularly his Courrèges boots have inspired many copies (Rothstein, 1984). However, shoes made entirely of plastic were abandoned for general wear by the end of the decade (Swann, 1982). In the 1980s, soft plastic sandals called jellies made a comeback and have remained popular ever since (Cosgrave, 2000). Currently, commercial shoe production follows the clothing industry in using plastic largely as a substitute for natural materials. It was not until the 1980s when the brand Melissa started producing jellies in partnership with fashion designers that plastic shoes became desirable fashion items. Ever since, plastic's material capabilities have been in the service of creativity, freeing it from the lowly role of aesthetic material imitation.

6. Melissa shoes: "Always the same, always different"

Melissa is not a shoe but an object of design that goes beyond form and substance to transmit its true message: plastic as a choice. To the brand, technology is at the service of human emotions. It believes that new modes of production are a step forward to seeing new

paths. Influenced by the world of fine arts, architecture, music, photography and many other universes the brand creates new versions of itself. (Melissa press release)

Our investigation is centered on a fashion brand of plastic shoes, Melissa, and its aficionado consumers. In this section, we introduce readers to the research context by discussing Melissa shoes in relation to their pre-objectification elements: material substances, design, and marketing.

6.1. Material substances: The essence of material interaction

Melissa shoes are made of a patented material called Melflex, which is composed of PVC crystals stabilized by calcium and zinc, arguably less toxic than the heavy metals usually employed in PVC compounds. According to Melissa's manufacturer, Brazilian shoe producer Grendene, the material is "versatile, durable, totally reusable and extremely environmentally friendly." Nevertheless, environmental groups such as Greenpeace argue that PVC, in any of its forms, is the most environmentally damaging of all plastics (Marati, 2012).

Melflex can be melted at 150 degrees Celsius and then molded into any imaginable shape. It is possible to add pigments, glitter, crystals, flakes, and other elements to the PVC. The physical and chemical properties of this particular plastic compound, that is, its "plasticity," allow it to be thickened or thinned, depending on the mold that gives the shoe its shape. These factors have allowed designers to create myriad different shapes and finishes for Melissa shoes (see Figure 2), varying from high-gloss to opaque, from sequined to velvety. As a result, even though all Melissa shoes are plastic shoes, the experience of touching or wearing one of Melissa's models is not necessarily similar to that of touching or wearing another. One consistent element across models and collections is the shoes' scent: aroma particles are incorporated into Melflex, lending all Melissa shoes a characteristic bubble-gum scent. Most Melissa shoes will deform under excessive heat, and because plastic is not porous or breathable, most Melissa shoes will repel water and will not absorb perspiration. Plastic is a durable material, and Melissa shoes are consequently long-lasting. Yet, each of the different finishes employed in different Melissa models mean that different

shoes will degrade in different ways throughout usage and interaction with consumers and their body parts.

As the quote that introduces this section illustrates, the Melissa brand builds its relationships with consumers on positioning plastic as the material of choice and by investing in technological developments that encourage tactile interaction with the products, like a finish that is velvety to the touch and evoking childhood memories through a bubble-gum scent. In order for this interaction to happen, the shoes have to be designed with such intention in mind. As noted by Dant (2008, p. 12), "[t]o design an object is to build into it characteristics of form and function that will be responded to by the consumer through material interaction". Thus, designers' ability to transfigure the plastic influences object–consumer relations and the outcomes of these relations.

Figure 2: Textures and shapes of Melissa shoes

6.2. Design: The interpretation of cultural forms

      So, more than a substance, plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation; as its everyday name indicates, it is ubiquity made visible. And it is this, in fact, which makes it a miraculous substance: a miracle is always a sudden transformation of nature. Plastic remains impregnated throughout with this wonder: it is less a thing than the trace of a movement.

(Barthes, 1972, p.97)

      As interpreters of cultural ideas, designers are influenced by the capacity of plastic to introduce reflexive thoughts into their creative process. "Plastic is such a malleable material, so flexible, biomorphic, high performing, democratic, comfortable, soft, complex, moldable and variable," says Karim Rashid, the designer of a high-heeled Melissa shaped as teardrops (Greenwood, 2010). Bringing their imagination to the development of new objects, designers are allured and challenged by the possibilities of plastic.

      Grendene claims that the first Melissa was inspired by the sandals of the fishermen from the French Riviera, but as discussed previously this model is very similar to a product manufactured in Britain in the mid-1950s (see Swann, 1982, p. 82). A novelty in the local market, the injection-molded sandals appropriated the cultural imagination of a glamorous summer abroad and thus managed to change consumers' perception of plastic as a low-grade material. From this first monochromatic model – black and opaque in finish – to the current colorful, multi-textured and fashionable shoes produced by the brand, Melissa gave shape to plastic, transforming the mundane material into extraordinary consumption objects via product design. However, such transformation took several years to materialize. On one hand, the persistence of the company in producing shoes in the format of sandals held back its style evolution. For two decades, the designs were quite conservative, with only incremental changes to the shoes' heels, which varied over time between flat and wedge, with the occasional chunky mid-heels in between. On the other hand, Melissa was keen to experiment with the material substances that went into its manufacturing to offer consumers the variety they sought. Variety was achieved mostly through the mixing of textures (e.g., opaque

strips and clear heel), through the combining of colors (shoe's sole in one color and body or details in another), and through interposing metal appliqués and decorative stencils alongside the plastic and painting effects on it. Initially, however, Melissa just followed prevailing fashion and, apart from varying between polished and opaque finishes, product design did little in the way of exploring the possibilities inherent to plastic such as flexibility, lightness, and resistance.

Responding to a couple of years of sales stagnation in the early 2000s, Melissa started developing improvements in its material substance and production process. It also partnered with designers known for their innovative and audacious work. For the first time, the product design no longer looked like a reproduction in plastic of "real" shoes, but rather an object whose conceptual form had been chosen to be materialized in plastic. From that moment on, the interaction between the designer and the material substance became the catalyst of the object transformation, as Jason Wu, another fashion designer invited to collaborate with Melissa, explains: "It was really interesting for me to explore design possibilities with plastic. I wanted to take advantage of the materials I was given, make it all completely functional and waterproof and yet still remain extremely sophisticated" (Cullity, 2012).

The creativity of designers inspired by their relation with plastic can be seen in the Melissa flats designed by the Campana brothers, who, guided by their furniture-making background, molded plastic in the shape of wires and corrugated cardboard sheets (see Figure 2), crafting the shoes out of these shapes. Karl Lagerfeld added classy designs, yet with a sense of humor, by giving Melissa stilettos high-heels shaped as ice-cream cones. Gareth Pugh worked with the material to design a futuristic and bulky platform shoe in a silver color that defies most traditional shoe forms. Altogether, over 500 different models materialize Melissa's transformation into high-end fashionable shoes. This transformation was only possible when product design was explored to its fullest, as designers started prizing the material substance. The efforts made by Melissa producers in advertising and promoting the brand and each of its new collections further imbue Melissa shoes

with meanings associated with plastic's properties: a flexible, modern, versatile, and irreverent product.

Figure 3: Futuristic, daring and modern forms of Melissa shoes

6.3. Marketing: The intentions of Melissa producers

Since the brand's origins in 1979, Melissa shoes have targeted the modern, fashion-oriented crowd of consumers. With the popularization of plastic shoes in Brazil through the 1980s, prices dropped, devaluing the brand for fashionistas. Plastic shoes also became synonymous with cheapness, and perceptions of the material as uncomfortable, inferior to leather, and a producer of nasty odors gained currency among Brazilian consumers. To change the image of plastic shoes and rescue the brand, Grendene decided to reapproximate consumers to the material substance and to elevate plastic shoes to the status of fashionable accessories. First, the promotion of plastic as its material of choice allowed the company to incorporate the substance's material qualities into the brand identity. Looking once more at the quote that introduces our findings, the company says that, influenced by a variety of artistic universes, "the brand creates new versions of itself" thus suggesting that Melissa's identity relies on the possibility of plastic for infinite transformations (Barthes, 1972). Next, the company introduced a new brand image, inviting famous Brazilian soap-opera actresses to become spokespersons for Melissa and later entering international markets

through partnerships with fashion designers and renowned architects. Melissa thus transformed the image of plastic shoes in the fashion industry while repositioning its brand.

Seeking to capture the evolution through time of the proposed meanings for plastic, plastic shoes, and the brand, the authors of the present study collected digital copies of 112 print ads for Melissa shoes launched over 34 years (1978–2012). We conducted synchronic and diachronic semiotic analysis of those ads, focusing on the interplay between plastic and body in each advertisement and on the evolution of this interplay through time (Berger, 2012; Philips and McQuarrie, 2002). Table 1 describes this evolution in six phases distinctly marked by changes in how body and plastic relate in the ads. This analysis informed our understanding of how marketing efforts correspond to plastic in the pre-objectification stage and will support our interpretation of the interactions between consumers and the material substance.

Time period	Description of advertisements	Example of advertisement	Metaphor for plastic-body relation
1979-1985	The body does not touch plastic: the sandals are worn with socks. Brazilian actresses are portrayed in natural, informal postures. Models have their feet on the ground (literally) and plastic is visible only in the shoes. The caption for one of these ads reads: "Melissa: the star of the plastic era."		Friendship
1990-1994	Ads portray famous Brazilian and international top models wearing Melissa shoes without socks. Contrasting with the previous phase, now there are other plastic elements on the ads in addition to the shoes. Body and plastic are shown in a comfortable relationship.		Lusciousness
1998	Non-famous teenagers pose in playful or resting poses, wearing the plastic shoes and minimal clothing (comfortable, underwear). The shoes are transparent, beige, or black. The feeling is of intimacy, and the plastic shoes are portrayed as part of the almost naked body. Melissa launched a campaign targeting teenagers, with the slogan "Always the same, always different."		Intimacy
2002-2005	Melissa ads featured Barbie-like dolls instead of human models. The body becomes plastic. The ads are colorful and playful, and slogans refer to the attractiveness of plastic ("The men who invented plastic ended up victims of their own invention," and "Before resorting to silicone, try plastic"). This is Melissa's first attempt to replace body with plastic in ads, a representation that would be resumed later, at phase 6 (Sublimation).		Fusion
2006-2011	Human models are back in the ads, following the brand's strategy to invest on celebrity sponsorships. The models showing in the ads gain plastic-like properties: firm, doll-like postures, and un-natural smoothness and glow to their skin. These portrayed models and celebrities are juxtaposed over colorful graphics, in scenarios redesigned by computer.		Simulation

Table 1: Melissa's advertisements through time

7. Methodology

In order to examine Melissa consumers' relation to material substances and the identity-related and cultural outcomes from consumer relations with Melissa shoes, we conducted a netnography of an online community of Melissa fans and collectors, who call themselves "Melisseiras." For 10 months (January–November, 2014), the authors observed and participated on websites, social network pages, and blogs dedicated to Melissa shoes. Both authors also reflected on their experiences as consumers of plastic shoes since childhood and exchanged notes on their relation to the material, the shoes' design, and the brand. One of the authors currently owns 10 pairs of Melissa shoes of different finishes, colors, and shapes, which fueled her understanding of the material substance the shoes are made of and her participation in the online community. After having identified the boundaries of the Melissa fan community, we narrowed our data collection to the activities of four fans who blog about Melissa, and collected all Melissa-related posts on their blogs. These core bloggers are the most influential ones in the online community. They command the largest audiences on social media, are frequently linked to by other bloggers, and consistently interact with other Melissa fans through frequent and regular postings about Melissa shoes. The data includes text, images, and videos produced by these four bloggers, as well as comments made on those by other Melissa fans who interact on these platforms. Table 2 lists the platforms and data collected for each Melissa fan. Bloggers' consent was obtained for using the data in this project.

Both authors coded a sample of the dataset and conferred, reaching agreement on all codes and coded excerpts. The authors then separately coded the remaining data, and notes were exchanged through a process that allowed the authors to develop a joint interpretation of the complete dataset.

BLOG	Blogger	Data collected
De Repente Tamy http://www.derepentetamy.com/	Tamy Yasue, 31	1,881 pdf pages (April 2009-June 2014)
Burguesinhas http://www.burguesinhas.com.br/	Carla Sant'Anna, 26	908 pdf pages (March 2009-October 2014)
Karina Stanlei http://www.karinastanlei.com/	Karina Stanlei, 27	503 pdf pages (February 2013-October 2014)
Blog da Maaanuh http://blogdamaanuh.com/	Emanuelle Scotá, 26	3,258 pdf pages (November 2012-October 2014)
Total:		**6,550** pdf pages

Table 2: Platforms and data collected

8. Findings

In attending to the object–consumer relation, we focused on reports by Melissa consumers of their relationships with the elements that are objectified into Melissa shoes. In particular, we considered consumer descriptions and evaluations of the shoes' material substances.

Melissa bloggers usually get inside information from Grendene or from the retailers they partner with on upcoming Melissa collections. Prior to the launch of each collection, bloggers publicize it on their blogs, describing each new Melissa model in detail, examining its shape and color palette as well as the texture of its plastic and finishes (Figure 2). Bloggers are also usually the first to try on new Melissa models, and these "test walks" are similarly described on the blogs, commonly accompanied by videos and photos that illustrate the fit of the shoes. Other Melissa consumers comment on such posts, sharing their impressions or asking the blogger questions about additional aspects of the shoes. In their comments, consumers also share their imaginings related to upcoming collections, suggesting that the creative space of interaction with an object starts to exist even before the materialization of the object itself – or before consumers are able to physically interact with that object. In developing those imagined interactions, consumers incorporate new models into their creative space by relating them to their prior experiences of material and object interaction, as illustrated by the following quotes:

"I am slightly afraid of tripping over something and breaking this bow…in my humble opinion, it should be flexible like that of the Ultragirl with a big bow, and not hard like this. If I

tripped I would break it easy breezy, that's why I won't buy it. XOXO, ladies…" (Denise, comment on De Repente Tamy, August 18, 2010)

"Carlinha, we know you love Ultras ☺ Your blog photos don't lie ;;) These last collections really refreshed the model, didn't they? The plastic seems much softer and much more comfortable. I am also a fan."(Juliana, comment on Burguesinhas, October 23, 2014)

Consumers' reflections on past experiences illustrate what Hodder (2012, p. 19) has described as the dependency of feelings on things: "It is not possible to desire without having had some experience of desiring, however much description and comparison might be engaged". As they consider incorporating a new model of Melissa into their wardrobe or collection, consumers ponder the characteristics of the plastic and the shoes' design and wonder how those would interact with their feet, retrieving elements from past interactions with both components and from prior instances of desiring other Melissa models:

"I am praying to all saints so my roll-like feet will fit on these beauties!" (Vivi, comment on De Repente Tamy, January 21, 2011)

"I am in love by Campana Fitas, but the Campana [models] don't go along well with my feet (si\w 35 ia loose while size 33/34 is a tad too tight – but still better than the 35…) so only trying it on, really …… I am afraid I won't resist to Magnolia, sooooooo beautiful!!! *.*" (Deta, comment on Blog da Maanuh, September 7, 2013)

As these quotes suggest, there is some level of anxiety among consumers about the new models they desire. However, consumers' concerns about material constraints imposed by their own bodies is reminiscent of Shankar et al.'s (2009) finding that not only social constraints and historical forces limit consumers' agency in shaping identities as desired, but also certain body characteristics which consumers find difficult to modify or renegotiate. Consumers who do acquire and wear a new model frequently offer input on the blogs that is meant to help other Melissa fans in making their decisions as to whether or not to acquire those shoes:

"Comfort: I found it extremely soft, its plastic is veeeeery flexible, totally different from Ladys, so much that fingers get printed on it easy, what does not diminishes its beauty not even a little! Maaany girls have asked me if it slips off the feet. I walked on them a lot around here, I jumped and all that, and it did not slip off, and I also asked a few friends that already have it, and they also affirmed that this does not happen." (Maanuh, comment on Blog da Maanuh, December 30, 2013)

As they need to deal with constraints on their own agency throughout those manifestations of imagined or lived object–body and material–body, Melissa fans attest to the shoes' agency. Most of those descriptions of Melissa agency pertain to its effects on the body, but consumers also note that the objects actively influence the relations consumers form with them:

"This Christmas I got an Ultra as a gift, loved it, it is beautiful! But it is killing my foot ☹" (Aline, comment on De Repente Tamy, January 7, 2010)

"As always, Melissas want to clog my closet and empty my pocket." (Asbelial, comment on Burguesinhas, June 24, 2009)

"That's lovely! Melissas are usually photogenic, right? Haha *--* All your photos are gorgeous, congratulations! XOXO!" (Gabriela, comment on Burguesinhas, March 06, 2014)

The attribution of agency to an object that acts over the subject through (sometimes painful) body interaction has been widely documented in consumer research (e.g., Thompson and Hirschmann, 1995; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010). Indeed, this is a type of agency has been attributed to shoes other than Melissa, such as stilettos (Belk, 2003), ballet shoes (Medina, 2007), and walking boots (Michael, 2000). Yet Melissa consumers go beyond that level of agency attribution to assign almost human properties to the shoes (Fernandez and Lastovicka, 2011), fetishizing Melissa as if it would be able to "strike a pose" for the camera in order to make itself more alluring to consumers and capable of seducing them. What these quotes evidence, therefore, is materialization as productive interaction (Woodward, 2011), where a strong emotional link is built, grounded in consumers' imagination, which thus motivates self-transformation. In addition to

noting the agency of finished shoes, consumers note the capacities of the material substances that are objectified into Melissa shoes:

"I loved almost all the new collection from Melissa. I have the Melissa Liberty in orange and it's a showstopper wherever I go. It's so pretty and reflects the sunlight beautifully." (Ts, comment on Burguesinhas, July 18, 2010)

"To me, that is also the most beautiful color I've ever seen in a Melissa! No wonder I bought it! And it's funny, this color, the plastic is purple with blue glitter, what makes it blue on the photos (it never comes out purple) and when we wear it, depending on the lighting, it may seem purple or blue! LOL, I love this! xD" (Isabel, comment on De Repente Tamy, May 17, 2010)

As the above quotes illustrate, consumers attribute capacities to the material that go beyond the flexibility and shine of plastic. Melissa's colors, shapes, and finishes also attract consumers' attention, drive desire and purchases, and direct emotional energy toward the shoes. For instance, on the same thread discussing the blue-purple sandals described by Isabel in the quote above, another Melissa fan attempts to explain the effect the shoes' color has on her:

"It is the color of the night sky when one is in love! hahaha incredibly beautiful this 3SE [Three Stripes Elevated]" (Dani, comment on De Repente Tamy, May 18, 2010)

"Dani, what a beautiful definition!! Loved it!!!" (Tamy, comment on De Repente Tamy, May 18, 2010)

"Hehe, it is just that I found the color so surreal that it feels more like a wellbeing sensation than something real." (Dani, comment on De Repente Tamy, May 18, 2010)

The *provocateur* object, the consumers allured by it, and the legitimacy granted to this relation by other surrounding actors (Borgerson, 2005, 2013) clearly show how the agency of multiple elements influences the outcome of object–consumer interactions. Despite their partial power over the object–subject relation, Melissa consumers explore and expand, through registering and sharing these interactions as blog posts and comments, the third space created by object–

consumer interaction (Winnicott, 1971; Woodward, 2011). As our data evidences, two key outcomes arise from this creative space: the Melissa fan identity (emic term: Melisseira) and cultural outcomes derived from Melissa fans' interactions with the plastic shoe and its elements. We describe each outcome in turn, illustrating them with excerpts from our dataset.

8.1. Melisseira identity

As young women find out about Melissa shoes, acquire and wear their first pairs, and start interacting with other Melissa consumers online, many of these women work to develop an aspect of their identity that is strongly grounded in their interaction with the plastic shoes: the Melisseira identity. As illustrated by blogger Karina Stanlei's narrative, this transformation is not subtle and gradual (as the long-term identity projects discussed by Shankar et al., 2009). Rather, consumers' relationship to Melissa shoes resembles infatuation: immediate, overpowering, and impossible to resist, a relationship to which they "surrender" or "become addicted to" (emic terms). In that sense, the Melisseira identity seems to be as effortlessly achieved as the archetypal transformation of movie characters (Choi et al., 2014). The following account, by one of the bloggers we studied, illustrates this:

"I'm Ana Karina, aka "Karina Stanlei" in this Melissa world. Well, I know the brand Melissa since I was a little girl because my mother always bought them for me. But my true melissistic life started in 2009. It was my birthday and my fiancé took me to a Melissa store (…) I found it a bit strange but it was a gift and all women love gifts isn't it? He told me that he find women wearing Melissa very beautiful and sweet. Then I entered the store and there it was the '08/'09 collection, called "Secret Gardens" (see Figure 4, ad on the right). And I didn't waste any time, swept 3 pairs of Melissa, left the store feeling extremely happy and already enchanted by the different models and the scent. My dating anniversary came, then Christmas, and guess what I wanted as gifts? Melissa for sure! Then my birthday came in January and I was crazy for

getting Melissa again. It became an addiction."(Karina Stanlei, comment on Blog da Maanuh, January 30, 2013)

Figure 4: Melissa advertisements – "Power of Love" and "Secret Gardens"

Stanlei's narrative also illustrates a common aspect across Melisseiras' accounts of identity transformation through Melissa consumption: feelings are described as heightened, emotions are exaggerated, and their relationship to the shoes is described as nothing short of transformative. Through time, these manifestations become the norm among Melissa fans, and these consumers seem to understand that a Melisseira must manifest her connection to the product by showing strong emotions, as the quotes below illustrate:

"So lovely! The pink one lives in my heart already." (Thai, comment on De Repente Tamy, September 30, 2010)

"LooooOOOOOVE! I want this pink one to call it mine. Do you know how much is it going to cost? xx" (Monique, comment on De Repente Tamy, October 3, 2010)

"This little wellies is love for my whole life." (Nai, comment on Burguesinhas, June 18, 2012)

This emotional intensity feeds back into Melisseiras' relationship to the shoes and their elements. Consumers note how specific aspects of the shoes motivate them to feel "hate," "love," or "despair":

"Probably after receiving a lot of critiques about the Ultragirls in partnership with Disney being too similar to each other, only changing the insoles – which do not show up when we are wearing them - Melissa thought 'let's fix this in style' and placed a gigantic heart (or a bow) made of glitter in front of it. The result: master cuteness and lots of Melisseiras in love for Ultragirl Sweet Love + Disney." (Carla Sant'Ana on Burguesinhas, March 14, 2014)

As a result, the Melisseira identity can be described as one characterized by drama, intensity, and passion – which are somehow reconciled with the cuteness, girliness, and romanticism of many Melissa shoes. In fact, this very duality is present in the objects themselves, which even when designed in futuristic, daring, and modern forms (Figure 3), still come in pastel colors to please the romantic Melisseiras and are infused with a bubble-gum scent, which is known for triggering nostalgic childhood feelings. Melissa advertisements also offer Melisseiras resources to align those two aspects of their identities. The series of print advertisements called "Brazilian Beauty" (Figure 4) makes reference to the 1999 Oscar-winning film American Beauty.

Figure 5: Melissa advertisements – "Brazilian Beauty"

In tandem with the unfolding of the Melisseira identity, Melissa fans create and adopt a whole new vocabulary to refer to the shoes, specific models, and to certain practices of wearing, caring for, and repairing Melissa shoes. Demonstrating collective creativity (Boulaire and Cova, 2013), Melisseiras have coined terms such as "plastic dreams," "plastic life," and "plastic love,"

which are frequently employed to refer to the "Melissa universe." Variations of the word Melissa are also employed, as in "my melissistic life." Indeed, bloggers and other fans employ the verb "to Melisse" and its inflections, such as in "melissing all around." Through these terms, consumers seem to manifest that plastic, as a material substance, comes to represent key outcomes of their object object–consumer relation (Ingold, 2011, 2012), that is, their identity projects and broader cultural outcomes. Other neologisms, such as "glitterizing," "unflocking," and "reflocking" refer to specific acts of customization and repair that Melissa fans enact upon the shoes. Through developing these terms and enacting the practices they refer to, consumers interact with plastic as a material resource capable of bridging consumers' inner and outer worlds, and their selves and others. As they work to transform, repair, and customize Melissa shoes, consumers extend their creativity over the material. Thus, Melissa shoes become, in their substance and form, a transitioning object allowing consumers to craft and manifest desired selves (Winnicott, 1971).

Increased identification with the Melisseira identity makes it difficult for these consumers to let go of the objects that supported their transition into the desired Melisseira self. When Melissa fans resell their shoes, they refer to the practice by the term "detachment," as the following excerpts illustrate:

"Some of my Melissas were bought in detachments because they are from past collections and they weren't for sale anymore!" (Maanuh, March 19, 2014)

"Lots of Melissas to detach from! I am practicing detachment from those feet murderers and from those I rarely or never wear!! Get out!! LOL" (Juliana, comment on Blog da Maanuh, March 19, 2014)

The collective creation and diffusion among Melisseiras of neologisms associated with consumer interactions with the shoes also evidence the importance of certain collective practices that support the development and maintenance of the Melisseira identity. As they participate in the online community, Melissa fans collaborate with each other to improve their relation to the materials and to the shoes. For instance, most Melisseiras become collectors and tend to own a large

number of Melissa shoes (in our dataset, collectors mentioned having anywhere from 23 to 271 pairs). Collectors search for specific models to add to their collection and take more care of those shoes than the average consumer would (Belk, 2003). In fact, in videos and photographic tutorials, bloggers describe extensive rituals of cleaning, caring for, and repairing the shoes, as exemplified by the quote below:

"I ALWAYS WASH my glitter Mels with an old toothbrush ... I just let water run over parts where there is no dirt, and closer to the soles where mud gathers (yep, mud, sometimes that happens in the city) there I would brush, always very softly… and so it works that I only had to reglitter it long after I bought it. And I am also washing the glittered Dance Hits and it is normal, it does not let the glitter go as many girls think." (Rosi Rocha, comment on Blog da Maanuh, February 04, 2013)

When their shoes get damaged, Melisseiras manifest intense concern, and turn to other members of the community, who offer help and empathy:

"My three stripes opaque is all scratched from feet friction! Help me! Does this only happen to me?" (Andressa, comment on De Repente Tamy, April 18, 2010)

"Andressa, mine is also scratched! It looks as if I had sanded it. Luckily is just on the inside…annoying, isn't it?" (Tamy, comment on De Repente Tamy, April 18, 2010)

The material transformations consumers engage in when wearing or caring for the shoes not only help them maintain their Melissa collection but also sustain the "passion" that is at the core of their Melisseira identity. For instance, the majority of posts related to object transformation deal with matters of material preservation and, when it is needed, restoration of the shoes' original features.

"Darling I loved the tip for taking off stains, worked super right. My [Melissa] Lady Dragon is even smiling now." (Gabriele, comment on Blog da Maanuh, November 18, 2013)

These care and maintenance rituals highlight the "cuteness" inherent in the Melisseira identity. As "good girls," Melisseiras are well mannered, and take very good care of their Melissa

shoes. These characteristics of caring for and tending to extend to other aspects of the fans'

appearance. Bloggers frequently post photos of themselves in outfits that they and their readers

describe as "cute" (Figure 5). Indeed, many Melisseiras manifest their appreciation for "cute dresses

and all things cute," as symbolized in the abundance of candy colors, bows, cherries, owls, hearts,

and references to cartoon characters such as Tinker Bell and The Smurfs. Reflected in the

objectification of Melissa shoes, these aspects are heightened in the bubble-gum scent of the shoes,

and the frequent employment of cute elements in the design of Melissa shoes. Producer intentions

also incorporate cute and ludic elements in them, as illustrated by the series of print advertisements

for the collections "Power of Love" and "Secret Gardens" (Figure 4). Nevertheless, the discourse of

"cuteness" is the way Melissa consumers interact and interpret their self-representations,

developing a collectively coherent identity narrative (Ahuvia, 2005). Each blogger, in fact, displays

her uniqueness in taste and fashion choice in elaborate photos showing the "look of the day" (see

Appendix, Figure 7).

8.2. Cultural outcomes

As evidenced in our analysis, Melissa consumers create a universe of meanings around

desired objects whose significance helps them to "define the boundaries of their community and

their own values and beliefs" (Woodward, 2007, p. 108). As they interact with the shoes and

collectively build their Melisseira identities in the online communities, Melissa fans also work to

create cultural forms that are disseminated beyond their fandom. Therefore, each consumption

event becomes one part of the broader cultural practice where "social actors seek ritualized,

enchanting engagements with objects that originate across [and feed back into] the economic and

cultural spectrum and which are perceived to symbolize variegated ideals such as goodness, beauty,

authenticity, or truth" (Woodward, 2012, p. 675). For instance, the image "walking on the street

with or without Melissa" (Figure 6), created by the blogger of *Simplemente Melissas* (Simply

Melissas) and shared across social networks, modifies a popular meme to express Melissa fans'

sense of collective identity. Illustrating what it means "to Melisse," an image in black and white shows one girl walking crestfallen in a hoody and slippers next to an iconic photo of pop singer Beyoncé in which she walks on stage in high heels, wearing a golden outfit, her hair flowing. In this image, the cultural ideal of shoes as objects gifted with transformational power (McDowell, 1989) allies with consumers' imagination and emotional energy to materialize the cultural practice of Melisseiras. The meme materializes the feeling and emotional energy contained in imagining that "melissing all around" is equivalent to feeling like a pop diva.

Figure 6: *Simplesmente Melissas* (Simply Melissa) – Materialization of cultural practices

The cultural forms created by Melisseiras out of their interaction with the shoes and their elements allow for the materialization of emotional energy, which navigates from acts of self-expression to cultural forms of socialization. The quote below illustrates another such process of materialization:

"I also like to save the pouches that come with the shoes. They are useful for many things like for instance storing jewelry, carrying underwear for travelling, rubbish bin for the car,

clothes peg bag, anyway, I use them for many things. And I always wished that the pouches were

personalised, but as my wish hasn't been fulfilled yet I have started to customise mine. I have

one ready, but I'm still designing the other ones." (Sarah, comment on Blog da Maanuh,

February 17, 2013)

As a new cultural form is made concrete in the objects she creates, Sarah's identity as a

Melisseira is also embodied in a handmade peg bag decorated with drawn hearts and pink

typography. In that act of materialization, Sarah's imagination draws not only on objects associated

with Melissa shoes (the cloth bag), but also from emotions and elements (design, materials) derived

from her interaction with Melissa shoes. Other cultural forms created by Melissa fans are

materialized not in objects, but in social rituals, as illustrated by the following account:

"My love for Melissa started at the collection of the first Ultra Tinker Bell (Secret

Gardens) and then the love was only growing and the collection increasing. A few years passed,

I got engaged, we set up the date for the wedding, and I decided that I would definitely marry on

Melissas, because my beauties had to be with me on the most important day of my life. After all,

they represent part of who I am, of my personality." (Daniela, comment on Karina Stanlei blog,

category: Melisseira Bride, September 1, 2014)

This cultural understanding of incorporating Melissa into important life occasions has

diffused among Melisseiras. In their weddings, brides who are Melissa fans are expected to select at

least two models of shoes: a high-heeled one to wear at the ceremony, and a more comfortable pair

(usually flats or flip-flops) to dance in at the reception party. In its latest collection, Melissa

launched two models called Wedding, designed by makeup artist J. Marsk. Covered in Swarovski

crystals, the two Melissa shoes, one high-heeled and one flat, clearly appeal to the cultural trend of

brides wanting to get married wearing Melissa shoes and attest to the materialization of this

outcome of object–consumer relations (see Appendix, Figure 8).

Materialization of cultural forms through rituals build up from individual-level initiatives,

such as when a Melisseira wears Melissa shoes at her wedding, engagement proposal, or graduation

ceremony, or start at the collective level when, for instance, a special model of Melissa shoes is selected by the blogging community as a must-have model for celebrating Carnival, or to wear during the World Cup or on New Year's Eve. Generating intense online discussion and widespread adoption, these celebratory Melissa models show that the engagement of Melisseiras with objects potentially feeds back into the economic and cultural spectrum.

Cultural spaces come into being via object–consumer interaction, as manifested in the Melissa universe. The blogs created by Melisseiras evidence transformation of the third space into a cultural space as it unites the human subject with the external environment via "transitional" (Woodward, 2011) or "transformational objects" (Bollas, 1987; Woodward, 2011). Emotional energy still works as a catalyst of the cultural space, and it feeds into consumers' imagination and allows transitions between their internal and external worlds, and their core and extended selves. For instance, Melissas are frequently treated as transitional objects by mothers, who have worn the shoes in their own childhood and are now keen to introduce their daughters to the shoes, as the quote below illustrates:

"What a beauty, gosh each day Melissa excels! I am in love with Melissa, it's everything, the most perfect shoes that exist on the shoe industry and I am nooot kidding I am completely passionate by Melissa. Until a few days ago, I wondered why there was no Melissa for kids. Now I'm totally happy with the launching of Melissa for Girls, I'll introduce Melissa to my daughter's life!" (Estrela da sorte, comment on Burguesinhas, January 20, 2010)

This finding reinforces the co-constitutive nature of objectification (Miller, 1987; Borgerson, 2013) and allows for an extension of the process of materialization as suggested by our model. Primarily, transitional objects become a key element in the mother's identity-shaping outcomes; and the Melissa universe we investigated illustrates this with a multitude of blog posts where little girls wear models of Melissa shoes similar to those of their mothers. In addition, the cultural forms materialized through the introduction of young children to the Melissa universe by their mothers not only shapes these young consumers' identities and behaviors, but also motivates

their emotions, desire, and sense of self-transformation in such a fashion that deeply influences future cultural outcomes.

9. Discussion

"Prettyyyyyyy, this is it!! Melissa is really everything… more than pieces of plastic with a sweet scent... they are little dreams in each and every pair!" (Ingrid Stella, comment on Blog da Maanuh, April 05, 2013)

In highlighting the role of material interaction in object–consumer relations, our study has shown that the space created by the interaction is one of imaginative elaboration and reflexivity – a space of cultural possibilities that shapes consumer identities and consumer culture. Manifested through blogs, consumer creative energy resonates in social media where personal identity narratives become part of a broader cultural practice. Creative energy also recasts the importance of material embodiment in the process of objectification. Consumers' emotional states and imagination not only modify the cultural forms that ground objectification (Miller, 1987) but also intensify the interaction with material substance and product design, which encourages transformations in both entities: consumers and objects. In other words, collectively the materialization brings to identity projects cultural forms of socialization that, refreshed by creative energy, enrich the culture of consumption around the brand.

The emotional energy projected into Melissa shoes evidences that the object–consumer interaction portrayed in the blog posts and comments of Melissa fans happens in a creative space characterized by flexibility and versatility. Consumers interacted in depth with material forms to customize and alter the shoes, playing with plastic and its finishes. Melissa fans explore product design by daring to wear edgier, ludic, or cute styles and by alternating between many models. Fans also draw from marketing efforts, such as an advertising campaign launched by Grendene in 1997 under the slogan "Always the same, always different", to bridge their inner and outer worlds. Just like plastic, the identity of a Melisseira is stable enough to be kept through the years, maintaining a

sense of "sameness," yet flexible enough to accommodate the caprices of fashion, allowing consumers to experience in full their sense of "selfhood" (Marion and Narin, 2012). Thus the multiple identity projects consumers maintain while assuming other roles (e.g., mother, bride, fashion expert) find in Melissa shoes a way to materialize their sense of uniqueness. This finding has implications for theorizing consumer identity work and transformations of self, suggesting that some consumption objects are able to spur connections among consumers' multiple identity projects across social contexts and through time. More importantly, our study evidences that consumers may find in material elements – not only finished objects – the properties and capacities (indeed, the agencies) they need to support these connections among identity projects. For instance, we show that, in selectively projecting their emotions onto one or another element of the pre-objectification stage rather than on the finished shoes, Melissa consumers can build flexible identities that minimize the risk of social disapproval that come with identity choices (Shankar et al., 2009).

In covering the relevance of material substances, designer intention, and marketing efforts, we unveil how these elements may enable object agency, but also impose limitations on consumer agency, as consumers attempt to shape their identity, to develop and integrate multiple identity projects, and to manifest their transformed selves. Hence, brand managers and marketing professionals should promote the materiality in brands and products by emphasizing the cultural forms and material elements that offer valuable benefits to consumers. In incorporating the properties of material substances more explicitly into the brand identity, practitioners can guide consumers into interacting with selected elements, and sow into the creative space aspects that may later emerge as relevant cultural outcomes. Then, the materialized cultural practices may be drawn from the creative space to support future branding and marketing efforts. While it makes sense for Melissa to highlight the flexibility of its products' core material substance, that is, plastic, other brands should identify how the material substances that go into the making of their products can be mobilized to support consumer identity projects. One successful example is how the diamond

industry has highlighted the rocks' hardness and linked it to the solidity and permanence consumers aspire to in their romantic relationships.

This extended approach to object–consumer relations can be applied to a wider range of consumer research than that presented here. For example, our model can be used to advance and systematically analyze the role of materiality in empowering consumers and enabling the formation of consumer collectives such as brand communities, consumption subcultures, and consumer tribes. Recent work on consumer collectives, particularly a stream of research employing assemblage theories (e.g. Martin and Schouten, 2014; Scaraboto and Fischer, *forthcoming*; Thomas, Price and Schau, 2013), discusses the material aspects of consumer collectives, albeit focusing on finished objects. An application of our framework to analyze the "fatshionista" collective studied by Scaraboto and Fischer (2013), for example, would highlight how the frustrated plus-sized consumers who want more offerings of fashionable clothing unite through shared experiences of interaction with material elements. Even though most "fatshionistas" do not wear the same branded products, these consumers are able to connect to each other by discussing the specifics of clothes' fit, fabric, cut, and finishes in relation to their larger-than-average bodies. Through online discussions about the frequent wear and wash, stretched seams and stitches, occasional rips and tears to their clothes, the fatshionistas note how material aspects influence their sense of self and get in the way of the successful development of their fashionable identity projects. Moreover, moved by the emotional energy that emerges in the creative space of object–consumer relations, plus-sized consumers create the collective fatshionista identity and numerous cultural outcomes (e.g., plus-size fashion shows) that materialize the transformations experienced by consumers and objects.

Our study is not without limitations. Even though Melissa is currently an international brand, our sample of Melissa bloggers is exclusively composed of Brazilian consumers. Considering the specificity of cultural forms, other contexts should be examined for variations in object–consumer relations and the outcomes thereof. Moreover, even though our study considers designers and producers as elements who constitute consumption objects, it does not examine in

depth the role of brand strategies in translating outcomes of object–consumer relations back into the material object. Hence, future research might examine the role of brands (and other actors such as marketing and advertising professionals) in retro-feeding the materialization process. Such an examination could contribute invaluable insight regarding the roles of materiality in shaping brand image, fostering brand preference, and eventually generating brand loyalty.

References

Ahuvia, A. C. (2005). Beyond the extended self: Loved objects and consumers' identity narratives. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (1), 171-184.

Arnold, R. (2001). Fashion, desire and anxiety: image and morality in the twentieth century. IB Tauris.

Ashby, M. F. & Johnson, K. (2013). Materials and design: the art and science of material selection in product design. Butterworth-Heinemann.

Bahl, S., & Milne, G. R. (2010). Talking to Ourselves: A Dialogical Exploration of Consumption Experiences. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(1), 176–195.

Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and Extended Self. *Journal of Consumer Research,* 15 (2), l39-l68.

Belk, R. W. (1998). The Double Nature of Collecting: Materialism and Antimaterialism. *Etnofoor*, 11 (1), 7-20.

Belk, R. W. (1989). Extended self and extending paradigmatic perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research,* 16 (1), l29-l32.Belk, R. W. (2003). Shoes and self. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 30, 27-33.

Berger, A. A. (2013). Media and communication research methods: An introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.

Beruchashvili, M & Moisio, R. (2013) Overweight and emotional identity projects. In The Routledge Companion to Identity and Consumption (pp. 63-70). Routledge.

Bettany, S. (2007). The material semiotics of consumption or where (and what) are the objects in consumer culture theory?. *Research in Consumer Behavior*, 11, 41-56.

Bijker, W. E. (1987). The social construction of Bakelite: Toward a theory of invention. *The social construction of technological systems*, pp.159-187.

Bollas, C. (1987). *The Shadow of the Object. Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Borgerson, J. L. (2005). Materiality, agency, and the constitution of consuming subjects: Insights for consumer research. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 32, 439-443.

Borgerson, J. L. (2013). The Flickering Consumer: New Materialities and Consumer Research. *Research in Consumer Behavior*, 15, 125-144.

Boulaire, C., & Cova, B. (2013). The dynamics and trajectory of creative consumption practices as revealed by the postmodern game of geocaching. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 16 (1), 1-24.

Brownlie, D., & Hewer, P. (2007). Prime beef cuts: culinary images for thinking 'men'. *Consumption Markets and Culture*, 10 (3), 229-250.

Choi, H., Ko, E., & Megehee, C. M. (2014). Fashion's role in visualizing physical and psychological transformations in movies. *Journal of Business Research*, 67 (1), 2911-2918.

Cosgrave, B. (2000). The complete history of costume & fashion: from ancient Egypt to the present day. Checkmark Books.

Crane, D. & Bovone, L. (2006). *Approaches to material culture: The sociology of fashion and clothing*. *Poetics*, 34(6), 319–333.

Crespy, D., Bozonnet, M. & Meier, M. (2008). 100 Years of Bakelite, the Material of a 1000 Uses. *Angewandte Chemie International Edition*, 47, 18: 3322-3328.

Cullity, C. (2012). Plastic Power. *Fashion Capital*, Spring/Summer 2012, 13-14.

Curasi, C. F., Price, L. L., & Arnould, E. J. (2004). How individuals' cherished possessions become families' inalienable wealth. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (3), 609-622.

Dant, T. (2008). The pragmatics of material interaction. *Journal of Consumer Culture,* 8 (1), 11-33.

Dittmar, H. (1992). *The social psychology of material possessions: To have is to be*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Epp, A. M., & Price, L. L. (2010). The storied life of singularized objects: Forces of agency and network transformation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (5), 820-837.

Fenichell, S. (1996). Plastic: the making of a synthetic century. Harper Business.

Gabrys, J., Hawkins, G. & Michael, M. eds. (2013). Accumulation: The material politics of plastic. Routledge.

Ger, G. & Wilk, R. (2005). Religious material culture: Morality, modernity, and aesthetics. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 32, 79-81.

Gopaldas, A. (2014). Marketplace Sentiments. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41 (4), 995-1014.

Greenwood, H. (2010) Pretty poly. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 18. http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/pretty-poly-20100518-vap8.html. Last accessed: 13/11/2014.

Hamilton, K., & Hassan, L. (2010). Self-concept, emotions and consumer coping. *European Journal of Marketing*, 44(7/8), 1101 – 1120.

Hegel, G. W. F. (1977) *Phenomenology of spirit*. Gloucestershire: Clarendon Press.

Huey, S., & Proctor, R. (2011). *New shoes: contemporary footwear design*. Laurence King.

Hodder, I. (2012). *Entangled: An archaeology of the relationships between humans and things.* West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.

Ingold, T. (2007). Materials against materiality. *Archaeological Dialogues*, 14 (1), 1-16.

Ingold, T. (2011). Being alive: Essays in movement, knowledge and description. London: Routledge.

Ingold, T. (2012). Toward an ecology of materials. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41, 427-442.

Ingold, T. (2013). *Making: Anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture.* London: Routledge.

Klein, M. (1997). Envy and Gratitude: And Other Works, 1946-1963. Random House.

Kravets, O, & Örge, Ö. (2010). Iconic Brands A Socio-Material Story. *Journal of Material Culture*, 15 (2), 205-232.

Krieger, M. (1976). Theory of criticism: A tradition and its system (p. 152). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lambek, M. (2013). The value of (performative) acts. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory,* 3 (2), 141-160.

Lambert, S. & Baveystock, Z. (2008). Object Lessons 3: plastics. Social History Curators Group.

Lastovicka, John L. and Nancy J. Sirianni (2011). "Truly, madly, deeply: Consumers in the throes of material possession love," Journal of Consumer Research, 37 (2), 323-342.

Lastovicka, John L. and Nancy J. Sirianni (2013). Beloved possessions: ends or means? In Ruvio, Ayalla A., and Russell W. Belk, ed. *The Routledge companion to identity and consumption*. Routledge, 2013.

Laver, J. (2012). Costume and Fashion, a concise history. 5th edition.

Levy, Sidney J. (1959). Symbols for sale. *Harvard Business Review,* 37 (4), 117-124.

Marati, J. (2012). Behind the label: The sustainability claims behind Melissa shoes. http://ecosalon.com/behind-the-label-the-sustainability-claims-behind-melissa-shoes/. Last Accessed: 13/11/2014.

Marketing, 45(11/12), 1746-1756.

Marion, G. and Nairn, A. (2011) We make the shoes, you make the story' Teenage girls experiences of fashion: Bricolage, tactics and narrative identity. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 14 (1), 29–56.

McCracken, G. D. (1986). Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13 (1), 71-84.

McCracken, G. D. (1990). *Culture and consumption: New approaches to the symbolic character of consumer goods and activities*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

McDowell, C. (1989). *Shoes: fashion and fantasy*. Rizzoli International Publications.

Medina, E. (2007). Ballet slippers. In S. Turkle (Eds.) *Evocative objects: Things we think with* (pp. 54-61). Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Michael, M. (2000). These boots are made for walking…: Mundane technology, the body and human-environment relations. *Body Society,* 6 (3-4), 107-126.

Miller, D. (1987). *Material culture and mass consumption.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Miller, D. (2005). Materiality: an introduction. In D. Miller (Ed.), *Materiality* (pp.1-50). Duke: Duke University Press.

Miller, D. (2010). *Stuff*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Patterson, M. & Schroeder, J. E. (2010). Borderlines: Skin, tattoos and consumer culture theory. *Marketing Theory*, 10 (3), 253-267.

Philips, B. J. and McQuarrie, E. F. (2002). The development, change, and transformation of rhetorical style in magazine advertisements 1954-1999. *Journal of Advertising*, 31 (4), 1-13.

Rothstein, N. ed. (1984). Four Hundred Years of Fashion. V&A Publications.

Scaraboto, D., & Fischer, E. (2013). Frustrated Fatshionistas: An Institutional Theory Perspective on Consumer Quests for Greater Choice in Mainstream Markets. *Journal of Consumer Research, 39*, (April), 1234-1257.

Scaraboto, D., & Fischer, E. (*forthcoming*). Triggers, Tensions, and Trajectories: Toward an understanding of the dynamics of consumer enrollment in uneasily intersecting assemblages. In R. Canniford & D. Bajde (Ed.), *Assembling Consumption: Researching actors, networks and markets*. Routledge.

Schatzki, T. (2010). Materiality and social life. *Nature and Culture*, 5 (2), 123-149.

Schwob, A., & de Valck, K. (2010). Better understanding construction of the self in daily contingencies: An investigation of the materiality of consumption experiences in online discussion forums. *Research in Consumer Behavior*, 12, 287-311.

Shankar, A., Elliott, R., & Fitchett, J. A. (2009). Identity, consumption and narratives of socialization. *Marketing Theory*, 9 (1), 75-94.

Sherlock, A. (2014), "'It's kind of where the shoe gets you to I suppose': Materializing identity with footwear", Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty 5 (1), 25–51.

Swann, J. (1982). Shoes. The Costume Accessories Series. Batsford.

Tambini, M. (1999). The look of the twentieth century: Design icons of the 20th century. New York: Dorling Kindersley.

The Design Museum (2009). Fifty shoes that changed the world. Conran Octopus.

Thompson, C. J., & Hirschman, E. C. (1995). Understanding the socialized body: a poststructuralist analysis of consumers' self-conceptions, body images, and self-care practices. *Journal of Consumer Research,* 22 (2), 139-153.

Tilley, C. (2006). Objectification In C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M, Rowlands, & P. Spyer (Eds.). *Handbook of Material Culture* (pp. 60-73). London: Sage.

Vincent, B. B. (2013). "Plastics, materials and dreams of dematerialization." Accumulation: The material politics of plastic. Routledge, pp.17-29,

Walford, J. (2008). Forties fashion: from siren suits to the new look. Thames and Hudson.

Watson, M. (2008). The materials of consumption. Journal of Consumer Culture, 8(1), 5-10.

Watson, M., & Shove, E. (2008). Product, Competence, Project and Practice. DIY and the dynamics of craft consumption. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 8(1), 69-89.

Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. London: Routledge.

Woodward, I. (2011). Towards an object-relations theory of consumerism: The aesthetics of desire and the unfolding materiality of social life. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 11 (3), 366-384.

Woodward, I. (2012). Consumption as cultural interpretation: Taste, performativity and navigating the forest of objects. In J. C. Alexander, R. Jacobs, P. Smith (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology* (pp. 671-697). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Appendix

(Look of the day)

(Look of the day and variety of hairstyles)

Figure 7: Melissa Universe – Identity, Uniqueness and Versatility

Figure 8: Melissa Universe – Socialization, Imagination and Emotions