

MY PINS ARE MY DREAMS:
Pinterest, Collective Daydreams, and the Aspirational Gap

by

Lingyuxiu Zhong
B.A. Yale University (2012)

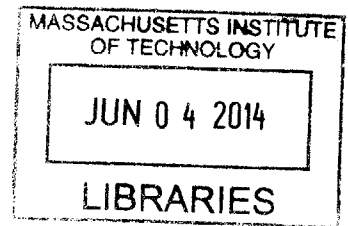
Submitted to the Department of Comparative Media Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Comparative Media Studies

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
June 2014

ARCHIVES



© 2014 Lingyuxiu Zhong. All rights reserved.

The author hereby grants to MIT permission
to reproduce and to distribute publicly paper and electronic copies of this thesis document
in whole or in part in any medium now known or hereafter created.

Signature redacted

Author

Lingyuxiu Zhong
Department of Comparative Media Studies
May 7, 2014

Signature redacted

Certified by

William Uricchio
Professor of Comparative Media Studies
Thesis Supervisor

Signature redacted

Accepted by.....

Heather Hendershot
Director of Graduate Studies, Comparative Media Studies

Pinterest, Collective Daydreams, and the Aspirational Gap

by

Lingyuxiu Zhong
B.A. Yale University (2012)

Submitted to the Department of Comparative Media Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Comparative Media Studies

Keywords:

consumption, collection, images, pleasurable imagination, taste, taste-based communities, symbolic value of images, souvenir, cultural capital, Baudrillard, Bourdieu, Veblen

Abstract

In the early twentieth century, the emergence of national market and maturation of color-printing technologies brought a revolution in advertising. Consumers received and collected many colorful advertising images and pasted them into scrapbooks. Nowadays, a group of visually-driven social commerce sites like Pinterest.com provides a platform on which both businesses and consumer-collectors publish, collect, and circulate images en masse. This thesis examines historical scrapbooks as well as a variety of Pinterest collections through the theoretical lens of sociology to determine whether Pinterest enables new modes of collection, consumption and community formation. This thesis shows that while collections of commercial images of products are often spaces in which we express consumer desires for products and engage in hedonistic imaginative play, the socially-networked nature of Pinterest allows a new type of malleable, global and taste-based community to develop that can engage in collective imaginative play.

Thesis Supervisor: William Uricchio
Title: Professor of Comparative Media Studies

Table of Content

List of Figures
Biographical Note
Acknowledgement

1 Introduction	7
1.1 Methodology	
1.2 Literature Review	
1.3 Site History and Mechanic	
1.4 Roadmap	
2 Paper Dollhouse	21
2.1 Understanding Paper Dollhouses	
2.2 Case Study: Mary Kirk and Her Paper House	
2.2.1 Power and Control of an Imaginative Space	
2.2.2 Training to Become Consumers and Homemakers	
2.2.3 Decontextualized Uses and Personal Idiosyncrasies	
2.2.4 A Female Community	
2.3 Conclusion	
3 Pinterest and Pleasurable Imagination	43
3.1 Background Theories	
3.2 Business	
3.2.1 Case Study 1: Boards as Catalogs	
3.2.2 Case Study 2: Benjamin Moore	
3.2.3 Case Study 3: SJP: A Day in Her Shoes	
3.3 Customer Imagination	
3.4 Conclusion	
4 Pinterest and Collective Imagination	68
4.1 Background Theories	
4.2 Taste Transmission Between Individuals	
4.3 Categorization	
4.4 Networked Narratives	
5 Conclusion	84

Bibliography

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Excerpt from Mary Kirk’s Scrapbook (ca. 1905)	30
Figure 2.2 Excerpt from Mary Kirk’s Scrapbook (ca. 1905)	33
Figure 2.3 Excerpt from Mary Kirk’s Scrapbook (ca. 1905)	38
Figure 2.4 Excerpt from Mary Kirk’s Scrapbook (ca. 1905)	42
Figure 3.1 Screen capture from Bergdorf Goodman Pinterest board, SHOES (that make us swoon)	51
Figure 3.2 Screen capture from J.Crew Pinterest board, April 2014 Style Guide	51
Figure 3.3 Image from Roebuck and Company Sears, <i>Catalog No. 124</i> from 1912	52
Figure 3.4 Screen capture from Benjamin Moore’s board, <i>doors!</i>	54
Figure 3.5 Screen Capture from Nordstrom’s board, <i>SJP: A Day in Her Shoes</i>	57
Figure 3.6 Screen capture of the first image in <i>SJP: A Day in Her Shoes</i>	58
Figure 3.7 Screen Capture from Lauren Gray’s board, Fashionable	61
Figure 3.8 Screen Capture from Lauren Gray’s board, Wardrobe + My Closet	62
Figure 3.9 Screen capture of Lauren Gray’s board, Destinations + Travel	65
Figure 4.1 Screen capture from Margarita Kurlyanchik’s board, THiNGS i WANT.. (or will get) .	72
Figure 4.2 Screen capture from Lauren Santo Domingo’s Pinterest boards	76
Figure 4.3 Screen capture from Lauren Santo Domingo’s board, Dining Rooms	76
Figure 4.4 Screen capture from Lauren Gray’s board, Destinations + Travel	78
Figure 4.5 Screen Capture from Lauren Gray’s board, Destinations + Travel	79
Figure 4.6 Screen capture from Tiffany Beveridge’s board, My Imaginary Well-Dressed Toddler Daughter	82
Figure 4.7 Screen capture from Tiffany Beveridge’s board, My Imaginary Well-Dressed Toddler Daughter	83
Figure 5.1 Screen capture from Joy Cho’s board, Oh Joy for Target	87

Acknowledgement

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my committee—my advisor William, who saw this project from its inception through completion, and helped me structure my initially random ideas into a coherent research project. He always found time to read drafts and provided detailed feedback even with very short notice, and he was both strict and supportive throughout the process. I am also deeply grateful to my committee member Catherine Clark, for the unfailing intellectual and moral support she has given me. She gave freely of her expertise in mass culture studies and visual studies. I am deeply grateful to both of them.

I would also like to thank the Comparative Media Studies faculty members, especially T.L. Taylor and Heather Hendershot, who both offered invaluable feedback to my work. I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Scot Osterweil and my colleagues at Education Arcade, whose creativity and enthusiasm for education for children convinced me that what we are studying could indeed lead to a better future.

I would also like to thank Professor Ellen Garvey, whose expertise in the field of early twentieth century advertising and women's collections first led me to see the connection between historical and contemporary practices, and who provided valuable feedback during the brainstorming process of this project. Thanks to Ellen Shea, librarian and archivist at the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University, who helped me navigate the large oeuvre of scrapbooks at the archive.

Lastly, thanks to my family for their unending support in all of my endeavors.

Biographical note

Lingyuxiu Zhong graduated from Yale University with a B.A. in history in 2012. Her undergraduate thesis studied how collective memories of the past can impact a society's identity formation process. At MIT she has worked at the MIT Education Arcade and assist with the design and development of educational platforms. She helped design Radix, a massive multiplayer online game for high school scientific curriculum, and co-taught a pilot class that tried to improve the Massive Open Online Course model and to make it more interactive.

Chapter One Introduction

In 1935, Elizabeth Rogers, a nine-year-old girl from Baltimore, received a gift from her mother. What initially looked like an unimpressive old 8*9 notebook with faded grey linen cover and badly worn binding turned out to be her favorite toy for years to come: when flipped through, it contained a grand mansion for paper dolls, replete with parlors, music rooms, nursery and gardens, each painstakingly designed and pasted in with tiny cutouts of furniture, curtains, paintings, and even giddy housemaids. It was a dollhouse on paper made by her aunt exactly twenty years ago, gifted to her mother, and now passed on to her. Elizabeth Rogers enjoyed it so much that she began making her own dollhouse.¹ Nearly 80 years later, in 2012, some seventy thousands users on Pinterest—an online service that offers virtual albums that resemble old-fashioned pin-boards and can be used to collect digital found images—looked at a collection of 230 photographs of living rooms by Lauren Santo Domingo, contributing editor at *Vogue*, with equal fascination. They marveled at the design of space, choice of furniture and pairing of color, and they started imitating and saving these images to their own collections.² Similarly, in 1924 Miriam Andrus, a thirteen-years-old girl also from Baltimore, cut out photos of London, Vienna, Munich from *National Geographic* and pasted them in a notebook as reminders of places she wanted to go to.³ In 2012, a collection named “Wanderlust” by Nicole Song on Pinterest contained more than a thousand images of places all over the world and is “followed”—subscribed to—by over half a million users.⁴

The paper dollhouse, travel scrapbook, and Pinterest boards are all collections of images produced by manufacturers, retailers and magazine publishers targeted at female consumers and are acquired, collected and creatively appropriated by women. They are similar in that the images were all produced and published in a commercial context and are used for non-commercial purposes. They are drastically different in scale, both in terms of content and potential audience. The most ambitious scrapbooks contained a hundred pages while digital collections such as those on Pinterest

¹ Scrapbook, Mary Kirk, ca 1905, box 3, folder 6V and 7, *Papers of Anne Kirk Cooke, 1860-2004 (inclusive), 1970-1997 (bulk)*, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

² “Lauren Santo Domingo (thelsd),” *Pinterest*, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/thelsd/>.

³ Scrapbook, Miriam Andrus, ca 1924, box 7, folder 16, *Miriam Jay Wurts Andrus Papers, 1833-2001*, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

⁴ “Wanderlust,” *Pinterest*, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/nicolesong/wanderlust/>.

easily contained thousands or more. The most influential scrapbooks were perhaps read by one's mother, sisters and best friends, while Pinterest boards are read by anyone from anywhere in the world. Yet they are created with the same motivation—to collect and to share commercial images—and had it not been for Pinterest, their scale would probably not have grown exponentially.

These personal collections of commercial images beg important questions as to what consumption means to women, how advertisement shapes culture, and how the public display of products interface with a world of private usage, collection and imagination. All three questions have been the focus of scholarships and have large oeuvres of literature dedicated to them. Summarizing on a very high level, there are generally two camps within consumption studies that disagree on the primary function of consumption. One school, typified by Thorstein Veblen, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Pierre Bourdieu, consider consumption to be primarily a gesture that signifies class by displaying different forms of capital.⁵ The other school, characterized by Colin Campbell, argues that consumption is primarily for personal hedonistic pleasure.⁶ Women's collection of images reveals that both forces are at work. Women clearly derive intense gratification from imaginative play with commercial images, but they also seek to convey taste as a form of cultural capital in sharing these collections with others. My work benefits from both threads of work within consumption studies and I will provide a more detailed literature review later in the introduction.

These scrapbooks and Pinterest boards also touch on the cultural importance of advertisements. Many scholars have reflected on the central stage advertisement has taken in our culture. In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, Campbell argued that “representations of products rather than the products themselves” occupy an important place within our culture, because modern consumption is ultimately about hedonistic imagination about the product instead of actual acquisition, usage and disposition of a product.⁷ Studying consumerist culture in the 1900s, cultural historian Ellen Garvey argued that advertisements became “touchstones of modernity,” such that ads came to seem natural and ordinary to readers by the end of nineteenth century. Magazines became the dominant source of information for female consumers, and as their main revenue switched from subscription to support from advertisement,

⁵ See Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. B. W. Huebsch, 1912; John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998; and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986.

⁶ Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1987)

⁷ Ibid., 92

magazines became an institution that buttressed the commercial discourse and the interest of advertisers as a whole.⁸

How, then, does a world of advertisements intervene with the personal domain, as exemplified by these scrapbooks, paper dollhouses, and Pinterest boards? In the 1880s, the popularity of coveted, mass-produced trade cards and souvenir materials inspired a mania for collecting. Customers collected trade cards, catalogs and magazine advertisements, decorated their kitchens with them, and sometimes accorded the pieces a special status by pasting them into scrapbooks. Some took it a step further and created entire worlds such as the paper dollhouse we saw. Again Garvey argued that the magazine as a repository of commercial images was no longer “the site of a war between commerce and culture,” but rather “joined in one package, or booklet,” the commercial world of products and sales, within the world of private fantasy. Analyzing nineteenth century scrapbooks of advertising trade cards, a genre of colorfully printed business calling cards that preceded mass marketing, Garvey illustrated how readers in the 1890s learned to fantasize in the language of advertising and in the process constructed themselves as consumers.⁹

The rise of Pinterest, a visually-driven social commerce site that allows its users to either upload or save images from the internet, sort them into different categories, and share them with everyone else on the site, stirred great enthusiasm amongst advertisers, retailers, publishers, tech observers and other third party journalists. As the third largest social media site worldwide now, Pinterest experienced a startling growth and was the fastest website of any kind to accrue ten million unique monthly users.¹⁰ The site received academic attention, too. Beginning in 2012, twenty-two academic papers have been presented in different computer science conferences, including industry-famous ACM (Association for Computing Machinery), AAAI (Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence), and SIGMETRICS (ACM Special Interest Group on Measurement and Evaluation). Predominantly quantitative, these studies tried to classify the most popular content on the site, establish correlation between gender and user behaviors, analyze keywords as an index to predict whether an image would be popular, and suggest ways in which Pinterest can be used in

⁸ Ellen Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4

⁹ Ibid., 4

¹⁰ Josh Constine, “Pinterest Hits 10 Million U.S. Monthly Uniques Faster Than Any Standalone Site Ever -comScore,” *TechCrunch*, accessed May 11, 2014, <http://techcrunch.com/2012/02/07/pinterest-monthly-unique/>.

archival and educational settings. For example, one study by Gilbert and Chang concludes that being female means more “repins”—an image being collected by another user—but fewer followers. Performing a text frequency study, they found that four verbs set Pinterest apart from Twitter: use, look, want and need.¹¹ Their second study suggests that sharing diverse types of content increases following, but only up to a certain point, and that people repin content from other users who share their interests.¹² Notably, Zarro and Hall, two graduate students at Drexel University, developed a web crawler that collected 291,125 pins and from there developed a typology for different types of Pinterest activities. They identified four modes of primary usage: collecting, discovering, collaborating and publishing.¹³ In 2013, Elizabeth White of the London School of Economics published a master’s thesis on Pinterest in which she conducted semi-structured interviews with fourteen Pinterest users. She analyzed the responses and argued that Pinterest is used as a “safe space” by women to pursue their predominantly “feminine” interests.¹⁴

However, none of these studies situates Pinterest in the longstanding history of female consumers collecting and sharing images. If, as Garvey argued, readers’ interaction with advertising has never been passive absorption of advertising messages, and market research data does not fully tell us what advertising meant in the lives of readers, then these personal collections really shed light on the important issue of how these women as consumer-collectors interacted and made sense of advertising.¹⁵ With the publicity and transparency of Pinterest, such interplay becomes even more complex, as personal collections are now shared with millions other consumer-collectors. User activities on Pinterest are, therefore, an important channel that allows us to study a history of meaning of consumption, of collection, and particularly of what used to be a private world full of hedonistic fantasies that has now become socially networked.

¹¹ Eric Gilbert et al., “I Need to Try This?: A Statistical Overview of Pinterest,” in *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, CHI ’13 (New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2013), 2427–36, doi:10.1145/2470654.2481336.

¹² Shuo Chang et al., “Specialization, Homophily, and Gender in a Social Curation Site: Findings from Pinterest,” in *Proceedings of the 17th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing*, CSCW ’14 (New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2014), 674–86, doi:10.1145/2531602.2531660.

¹³ Catherine Hall and Michael Zarro, “Social Curation on the Website Pinterest.com,” *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 49, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 1–9, doi:10.1002/meet.14504901189.

¹⁴ Elizabeth White, “Pinning Pretty: A Qualitative Study of Pinterest Users’ Practices and Views” (Master’s dissertation, London School of Economics and Political science, 2013)

¹⁵ Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor*, 16

This thesis asks the following questions: does the social collection site Pinterest enable new modes of collection, consumption and community formation? How do we collect pictures produced in a commercial setting, such as advertisement, catalogue, and magazine clippings, and do such images go through a functional transformation once collected? What roles do taste and product-inspired fantasies play? How are interactions on Pinterest different from historical practices of collection, consumption and community formation? My claim, in short, is that since the rise of image-based mass marketing, American middle-class females have collected commercial images and creatively adapted them to form personal collections that activate an imagined world of pleasurable consumption. The social dimension of Pinterest enables the formation of a new type of disembodied, malleable and taste-based community which can engage in collective pleasurable imagination based on but not limited to these commercial images and in which taste is conveyed without acquisition of actual products.

1.1 Methodology

With the notable exception of Zarro, Hall, and White, most of these studies identify themselves as quantitative, statistical studies and call for a qualitative, ethnographic research approach. Gilbert and Chang acknowledge that while statistical methods allow them to make claims about broad, large-scale practices on the site, they have blind spots and “cannot uncover users’ motivations and goals for using Pinterest.” Specifically, they recognize that the text data and count is more analytically tractable, but they do not have analogous methods for analyzing image data, which is the main type of content that drives Pinterest activity. They called for qualitative research methods that could provide “thick descriptions of motivations and goals for using Pinterest.”¹⁶ Zarro, Hall and White make important contribution in introducing qualitative analysis methods into the field. Zarro and Hall collected analyzed textual comments on Pinterest, developed a typology for user activities, and White conducted focused, semi-structured interviews and analyzed informant responses. In this thesis I perform a close reading of images, textual comments, and traces of interaction—repinning, liking, tagging—via theoretical lenses while engaging in historical comparisons.

¹⁶ Eric Gilbert et al., “I Need to Try This?” 2435

Because many user interviews identify the high quality visuals on Pinterest to be the key driver of their activities on the site,¹⁷ I engage in close reading of images within people's collections on the site. Three main areas of my inspection are the image itself, organizational structure by the collector, and social interaction inspired by the image. Firstly, I analyze the image itself. The subject of the image, its aesthetic style, context of production, and the intended audience shed much light on what makes the image appealing to its collector. Secondly, I analyze the names of boards, the captions and descriptions for each image to learn more how the original collector had intended to organize her collections. Finally, metadata such as what images get commented on, liked, or "repinned," whether original collectors respond to comments, what captions do these consumer-collectors give to their pins, who they are speaking to with these captions, and what sentiments are expressed via these captions offer insight into social interactions inspired by a particular image.

In terms of sampling, I have striven for both random sampling and exemplary cases cited by third-party sources. For successful business strategies, I have solicited Pinterest official guidelines and advice articles from third party experts such as TechCrunch¹⁸ and have examined twenty most frequently cited "successful" brands including retailers (Nordstrom, Bergdorf Goodman, Etsy and others), manufacturers (Ben&Jerry, Chobani, Tory Burch, J.Crew and others) publishers (Real Simple, Martha Stewart and Vogue), and others. I have chosen eight brands that most tellingly demonstrate what I saw as successful business strategies. For power users, I have examined the twenty most followed accounts on Pinterest (Joy Cho, Jenny Wang, Bekka Palmer and many others) and have added ten additional from various popular articles that suggested accounts to follow (Laura Santo Domingo, Tiffany Beveridge). For average users, I recorded the most recent pins from the "Everything" feed, which is a real time compilation of everything that was just collected by Pinterest

¹⁷ For example, see users interviews at "What's behind the Pinterest Craze? 15 Super-Users Share Their Thoughts," *Communications Conversations*, accessed May 16, 2014, <http://www.arikhanson.com/2011/12/13/whats-behind-the-pinterest-craze-15-sauper-users-share-their-thoughts/>.

¹⁸ For official guidelines from Pinterest, see "Pin like a pro," *For Business*, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://business.pinterest.com/en/pinning-principles>. Pinterest promotes 18 brands as "Success Stories." The analysis of each can be found at "Success Stories," *For Business*, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://business.pinterest.com/en/success-stories>. There are many third party advice pieces online. For a sample, see "Social Media Marketing, News, & Tools for Business," *Entrepreneur*, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://www.entrepreneur.com/video/embed/233658>; Todd Wasserman, "The 10 Most-Followed Brands on Pinterest," *Mashable*, February 22, 2012, <http://mashable.com/2012/02/22/10-most-followed-brands-on-pinterest/>; and "These 5 Brands and Nailing It on Pinterest," *HootSuite Social Media Management*, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://blog.hootsuite.com/5-brands-pinterest/>.

users, every four hours during a twenty-four hour period. I teased out non-American and non-female users as they are outside of the scope of my thesis. I have also studied fifteen users who were chosen randomly and interviewed about their experiences by an online communications consultancy.¹⁹ Eventually I arrived at 21 distinct users and have chosen the most representative ones to tell this story.

With the historical portion of my study, I have examined twenty-seven distinct scrapbooks from 1860s to 1960s that are housed at the Schlesinger Library of the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard or at the Massachusetts Historical Society.²⁰ I have referenced Beverly Gordon,²¹ Rodris Roth²² and Ellen Garvey's²³ work on contemporary scrapbooks to situate my work. After going through twenty-seven scrapbooks, I have chosen Mary Kirk's paper dollhouse as it exemplifies the type of imaginative play that I saw within other scrapbooks. With generous help from Garvey, I have identified twelve contemporary advice pieces that help us understand the conventions and expectations of paper dollhouses as a genre.

Finally, in my analysis I have evoked sociological theories such as collection theory by Susan Stewart,²⁴ boundary objects by Star and Griesemer,²⁵ and simulacra and simulacrum by Jean

¹⁹ "What's behind the Pinterest Craze? 15 Super-Users Share Their Thoughts," *Communications Conversations*, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://www.arikhanson.com/2011/12/13/whats-behind-the-pinterest-craze-15-super-users-share-their-thoughts/>.

²⁰ I examined twenty-five intact scrapbooks from Schlesinger Library, along with miscellaneous loose pages. In addition, I have looked at four carte-de-visite photo albums from the Massachusetts Historical Society. For a complete list of the scrapbooks, refer to the bibliography section.

²¹ Beverly Gordon, *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives, 1890-1940* (University of Tennessee Press, 2006)

²² Rodris Roth, "Scrapbook Houses: A Late Nineteenth-Century Children's View of the American Home." in Eleanor McD Thompson, *The American Home: Material Culture, Domestic Space, and Family Life*, 1st edition (Winterthur, DE: Hanover, NH: Winterthur, 1998),

²³ There are two articles from Garvey that I lean on. Ellen Garvey, "Readers Read Advertising into Their Lives: The Trade Card Scrapbook." In *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Ellen Garvey. "Scrapbook, Wish Book, Prayer Book: Trade-Card Scrapbooks and the Missionary Work of Advertising." In *The Scrapbook in American Life*, edited by Susan Tucker et al., Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006)

²⁴ Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993)

²⁵ Star, Susan Leigh, and James R. Griesemer. "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39." *Social Studies of Science* 19.3 (1989): 387-420. ss.sagepub.com. Web. 7 May 2014.

Baudrillard.²⁶ While these theories are helpful in interpretation and analysis of the images, it is ultimately the artifacts—the images, comments—that drive my analysis. Each chapter in this thesis will be foregrounded with a section of theories that inform my analysis.

1.2 Literature Review

This thesis is situated within a large body of literature in consumption studies that have long theorized about the motivation for consumption. Scholar such as Thorstein Veblen, John Kenneth Galbraith, Pierre Bourdieu, Juliet Schor and Colin Campbell provide some foundational theories on what drives consumption and what is it that we are consuming. One core thread in Veblen, Galbraith, Bourdieu and Schor’s work is the idea that consumption of material goods can be ways to display power. Veblen argues that we live in a hierarchical social structure, in which wealth determines status. As such, a publicly visible form of consumption is the most direct form of displaying wealth and validating status. Veblen makes two assumptions: one is that we share a commonly recognized set of consensual status symbol, and the other is that all individuals are intentionally seeking to maximize their status. Their pursuit is always socially driven. This leads to two implications for the Veblenian theory: one is that because lower social class always aspires to exaggerate its status, products go through a trickle-down mechanism, in which the highest class of goods become acquired by increasingly lower class, and new high class products have to be invented to fill the void at the top. The other implication is that consumers, engaging in this perpetual cycle of possession upgrading and rampant Prisoners Dilemma in which you know your neighbors too are trying to acquire the newest and most expensive cars, furniture or jewelry, are always unsatisfied and frustrated.²⁷

John Kenneth Galbraith, another important scholar in consumption studies, agrees with Veblen that consumption is a proof of status, but differs from him in emphasizing the “seduction” of consumers by business through the form of advertising. Galbraith tackles the basic economic assumption that consumer desire exists first and production caters to that demand, and instead argues that in the post WWII system, production is paramount and consumer desire is the adaptive

²⁶ Benedict, James, and Jean Baudrillard. *The System of Objects (Radical Thinkers)*. Verso, 2006. Print.

²⁷ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.

variable, being passive and largely manipulated by the advertiser.²⁸ Once basic affluence is achieved, business instills in us a greater “craving for more elegant automobiles, more exotic food, more erotic clothing, more elaborate entertainment—indeed for the entire modern range of sensuous, edifying, and lethal desires.”²⁹ Consumers are seduced by business, but derive little to no intrinsic value from purchases. Galbraith pessimistically predicts that the eventual outcome of the obsession with private spending would be the disinvestment in public goods.

Bourdieu’s work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* extends the Veblenian model of status-motivated consumption. Bourdieu argues that consumption is constrained by different forms of capital, such as economic, social and cultural capital. Cultural capital is informed through family socialization and education, which in turn shapes his tastes and preferences. These tastes and preferences are communicated to the public through purchase decisions, and therefore indicate one’s social class. Bourdieu argues,

Whereas the ideology of charisma regards taste in legitimate culture as a gift of nature, scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education: surveys establish that all cultural practices (museum visits, concert-going, reading etc.), and preferences in literature, painting or music, are closely linked to educational level (measured by qualifications or length of schooling) and secondarily to social origin...To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of “class.”³⁰

Economist Juliet Schor builds on Veblen’s theory on consumption as display of power and argues for the symbolic importance of consumption. A central notion in Schor’s argument is that of a reference group and of an “aspirational gap.” Schor studies television viewership and consumption patterns and argues that consumers make inferences about others’ purchasing behaviors through reference groups. Traditionally reference groups are neighborhoods, and people try to “keep up”

²⁸ Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*.

²⁹ Ibid., 115

³⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1-2.

with what their neighbors bought, an act that Schor termed "competitive spending."³¹ However, competitive spending occurs only with a particular set of visible products, such as clothing, housing, and automobiles. As the neighborhood declined as a focus of social interaction, so has its anchoring role. People have first turned to their workplace for references, and then increasingly to the TV and its accompanying cultural texts and commercials. As television often gives a heavily skewed picture of spending patterns by portraying the wealthy and glamorous, we have experienced an "inflation of norms," which raises aspirations and then leads to more spending. In her studies of modern consumers, Schor calls the "difference between what they aspire to and the income they have available to spend" the "aspirational gap." As upscale lifestyles dominate our popular media outlets, the aspirational gap continues to grow wider.

Schor argues that competitive spending focuses on the visible products—clothing, furniture, and houses—because these objects are the most visible to our peers. She argues that this focus distracts from non-visible spending such as leisure and travel. However, the focus on visible spending has shifted in our Internet era, because traveling and leisure are heavily broadcasted within one's social network. We habitually acquire information on our friends' spending pattern from social network sites such as Facebook and Google+, which studies have shown often portray a magnified and glorified version of real life.³² Our source of information on others' spending patterns, therefore, is easily an enlarged vision of one's life. Interview data suggests that a chief appeal of Pinterest is the absence of self-aggrandizing posts that are rampant on Facebook. Pinterest provides a mental haven where people could indulge in countless images of products, houses, and cars and curate a personal collection about these products without actually making purchases.³³ Why, then, is the curation of such images so enjoyable that millions of users keep coming back to Pinterest? What

³¹ Juliet Schor, "What's Wrong with Consumer Society?: Competitive Spending and the 'New Consumerism.'" in *Consuming Desires: Consumption, Culture, and the Pursuit of Happiness* ed. Roger Rosenblatt (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1999), 40-45

³² See, for example, Alexander H. Jordan et al., "Misery Has More Company Than People Think: Underestimating the Prevalence of Others' Negative Emotions," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 120-35, doi:10.1177/0146167210390822, and Libby Copeland, "The Anti-Social Network," *Slate*, January 26, 2011, http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2011/01/the_antisocial_network.html.

³³ Carina Chocano, "Pinterest, Tumblr and the Trouble With 'Curation,'" *The New York Times*, July 20, 2012, sec. Magazine, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/magazine/pinterest-tumblr-and-the-trouble-with-curation.html>.

is the charm of such collecting behavior—is it the images, the products they stand for, the community that are doing similar things, or something else?

Contrary to Veblen, Galbraith, Bourdieu and Schor, Campbell argues that the crux of modern consumption is a self-illusory pleasurable daydream. More specifically, he argues that a “modern consumer revolution” in the eighteenth century completely overwrote what consumption meant in our modern world so that pleasure from consumption transitioned from sensory pleasure of the body, such as food, clothes and music, to the emotional pleasure of the imagination—daydreams of finer lifestyles, novel consumer goods, and exotic experiences.³⁴ Campbell calls this activity daydreaming, or the “ability to create an illusion known to be false but felt to be true.”³⁵ In other words, it is not buying, owning or consuming, but rather imagining that brings us pleasure. Modern consumers became adept at what Campbell calls “autonomous imaginative hedonism” long before the media or advertising industries developed. Campbell’s formulation of the “autonomous hedonistic imagination” and “daydreaming” are particularly relevant to us, as lots of interview data suggest that when engaging in digital found image collection on sites such as Pinterest, it is the imaginative and aspirational component of the experience that is the most intoxicating.

1.3 Site History and Mechanic

In order to better understand Pinterest, we have to know more about its history and user experience. First launched in March 2010, Pinterest is similar to earlier projects of social image bookmarking services such as David Galbraith’s 2005 project Wists.³⁶ It allows users to save any image they see on the web and categorize them on different “pinboards,” a unique Pinterest invention that resembles old-fashioned corkboards. While the site was operated out of a small apartment by its founder Ben Silberman and a handful of programmers until the summer of 2011 and remained in invitation-only open beta till August 2012, it took all the media attention when it became one of the top 10 largest social network services in December 2011. The site proceeded to

³⁴ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 17-36

³⁵ Ibid, 77-78

³⁶ “The History of Pinterest,” accessed May 17, 2014, <http://thehistoryofpinterest.blogspot.com/>

become the fastest site in history to break through the 10 million unique visitor mark in January 2012.³⁷ Just as this thesis is coming out, Pinterest is valued at 5 billion dollars market value.³⁸

The commercial value of Pinterest was not altogether clear in the beginning. Jennifer Chong, a California-based designer and photographer, and one of the most followed Pinterest account with over 2 million followers, was one of the very early adopters of the site. She commented that on Pinterest nowadays “overall there are just more brands on Pinterest versus the beginning, when it was mainly used by individuals.”³⁹ However, Pinterest soon attracted the attention of the business-to-customer sector retail companies with the potential purchasing power generated by its users. By December 2011, Pinterest was driving more referral traffic to retailers than LinkedIn, YouTube, and Google+ combined.⁴⁰ And even though it is still lagging behind Facebook and Twitter, the average Pinterest users spend \$180 as opposed to \$65 by Facebook and \$21 by Twitter users⁴¹. The sleek design and visual appeal boosted by the site further attracted style-conscious retailers, as products can easily be visualized either within a fashion taste-making context or within a consumer context.

When a user sees an image on any webpage that she wishes to keep, she could use the Pinterest web-browser add-on to grab the image. The extension is a web crawler that then scrapes all images from the website and asks the user to choose one and save it to one of her boards. Users can have both pre-constructed boards or create a new board on the spot. The image is then “pinned” on to her board, but also works as a hyperlink to the original web page. Therefore that page is fragmented and represented by an image.

³⁷ Constine, “Pinterest Hits 10 Million.”

³⁸ “Pinterest Confirms Raising Another \$200M At \$5B Valuation,” *Forbes*, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffbercovici/2014/05/15/pinterest-confirms-raising-200m-at-5b-valuation/>

³⁹ Britney Fitzgerald, “Jennifer Chong, Pinterest’s 2nd Most Popular User, On What Puts Pinner In A Tizzy,” *Huffington Post*, July 9, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/09/jennifer-chong-pinterest_n_1652328.html.

⁴⁰ Zoe Fox, “Pinterest Drives More Traffic Than Google+, YouTube and LinkedIn Combined [STUDY],” *Mashable*, February 1, 2012, <http://mashable.com/2012/02/01/pinterest-traffic-study/>.

⁴¹ “How Facebook, Pinterest Compare In Social Commerce,” *Forbes*, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/davefeinleib/2012/05/22/how-facebook-pinterest-compare-in-social-commerce/>.

When a user logs into her account, she could see her entire collection. Each board is a universal sized module that has a name and a cover. Users can customize the name as well as select one pin to be the cover of a board. She can also adjust the position of boards to make one appear in front of another. Therefore the image that is grabbed gets organized on a pinner's board.

The user could also “follow” other users with similar interest. And when she logs into the “feed,” she sees a stream of pins, neatly stacked in universal sized modules, created by the pinners that she follows. She can then choose to either comment on it, click a “like” button, or “repin” the image onto any of her own board. It is very common that users take a pin and put it on a completely different board that erases the image's original intent. For example, many retailers include art pieces as part of their catalog collection to complement the product pins, and these art pieces are often clipped for their own visual appeal onto boards such as “Artsy,” “I do doodle,” “design and typography” or the highly localized “my favorite things.” In this way, the pin becomes re-organized by other uses. This is significant because, statistically, about 80% of pins on Pinterest are repins, suggesting a high volume of circulation within the site. It also suggests that while some users acquire while they are browsing external webpages, many users just go on the site itself and browse through what others are pinning. It results in a high re-circulation rate within the site and could mean that high-quality images that are repeatedly repined might not become sedated in any board but rather remain active. It also represents a departure from pre-digital personal collection, where the circulation and replication of any image is much more difficult. Theorizing about Pinterest, Zarro and Hall define Pinterest as an example of social curation websites, “which combine social features and collecting capabilities. They exist at the intersection of social media sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Tumblr) and push-button private content collection sites (such as Instapaper, Evernote and Read it Later). Social curation sites offer a new way of creating, curating and sharing information on the web.”⁴²

1.4 Roadmap

This thesis is presented in three chapters. I begin with one of the earliest instances of consumers collecting mass-market advertising materials at the beginning of twentieth century.

⁴² Catherine Hall and Michael Zarro, “Social Curation on the Website Pinterest.com,” *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 49, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 1–9, doi:10.1002/meet.14504901189.

Bedazzled by the color-printed trade cards, catalogs and magazines, consumers collected these images and pasted them into scrapbooks. Reading one case study of historical paper dollhouses, I argue that the handcrafted paper dollhouse is in fact a space where young girls familiarize and train themselves to become future consumers and homemakers, while engaging in powerful and imaginative creation through decontextualized uses of commercial images (Chapter One). The link between advertisement, collection and imaginative play continues into the digital era. The second chapter builds on the themes of imaginative play and collection and examines the interplay between business and consumer-collectors on Pinterest. Many brands attempt to evoke consumer desire by embedding images of products within a set of images that suggest a transformative experience. While many consumers respond positively and engage in pleasurable imagination constructed of these images, such pleasurable imagination can be independent of products and more closely suggests a transformative personal experience (Chapter Two). Further considering the shifting nature of such consumer imagination, the final chapter examines the implication of the social dimension on the site and describes the formation of a malleable, global and taste-based female community that is able to exchange taste and engage in collective imaginative play (Chapter Three). We end with Baudrillard's prophecy forty years ago about a disaggregation between the symbolic and material value of objects and speculate that Pinterest likely facilitates an alternative consumerism in which the acquisition of products becomes deessentialized.

Chapter Two Paper Dollhouses

Interacting with a paper dollhouse would have been a pleasurable activity that heightened sensory awareness and sensibility, and it provided opportunities for imaginative fantasy. It was also an activity that reinforced the importance of the domestic domain, a sense of community, and background rather than workplace values.

----Beverly Gordon⁴³

Precipitated by economic and cultural forces, the U.S. society entered a new stage in the history of goods and consumption around 1890. The rise of modern consumer culture brought qualitatively different modes of production and consumption. The industrial revolution that had begun more than a century ago with more efficient production of cotton and woolen textiles had by then revolutionized the production of most everyday goods. After the civil war, mass-produced, branded products began to replace previously homemade items or other generic goods bought at local general stores. As cultural historian Susan Strasser observes, in the late nineteenth century “household routines involved making fewer things and purchasing more; consumption became a major part of the work of the household...Formerly customers, purchasing the objects of daily life from familiar craftspeople and storekeepers, Americans became consumers. They bought and used mass-produced goods as participants in a national market.”⁴⁴

The increased productivity and unprecedented diversity and abundance of goods spurred businesses to explore new ways of selling more products to consumers. According to historian of consumer culture Kaithy Peiss, businesses during this period “devised a national system of mass production, distribution, marketing and advertising.”⁴⁵ Department stores like Macys, mail-order houses like Sears, and chain stores syndicates such as Woolworths cropped up all over the country and transformed the landscape of commerce. Culturally, this newly risen consumer culture explicitly

⁴³Beverly Gordon, *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives, 1890-1940* (Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2006), 39

⁴⁴ Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1989, pp. 15-16. For other accounts on the emergence of national market, see Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998 and James D. Norris, *Advertising and the Transformation of American Society, 1865—1920*, 1990.

⁴⁵ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 97-98.

identified the middle-class urban women as the target consumer. Two factors contributed to the identification of women with consumerism. First, their domestic roles dictated that she would be the main purveyor of household supplies, such as food, clothes, and appliances. Secondly, women are perceived to be impulsive and emotional when it comes to purchasing decisions. Advertising agencies, magazine editors, and manufactures actively sought to influence women's purchasing conceptions and habits. Peiss argued, "If the nineteenth century offered a carnivalesque, chaotic promotional world of peddlers and hucksters, the modern ad agency promised to create a national market of consumers, indeed, to systematize desire."⁴⁶

The manufacturers, retailers and publishers' effort to reach customers can be seen in the rise of colorful trading cards, widespread and expansive catalogues from such retailers as Sears, and mass-circulated and advertising-supported women's magazines. Cultural historian Ellen Garvey identified the colorful advertising trading cards that dominated national advertising for products in the 1880s, before they were replaced by magazine advertising in the 1890s.⁴⁷ By 1907, nearly three million copies of Sales catalogues, which contained a wide range of products, were circulating throughout the country. New mass-circulated magazines helped with the formation of a female consumer culture. The six most influential women's magazines in America in the twentieth century—*Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Delineator*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Pictorial Review*, and *Good Housekeeping*—were all founded between 1885 and 1910.

The publication and circulation of these advertising materials was predated and propelled by the maturation of chromolithography, a technology that could produce color printed images en masse based on the chemical repellence of oil and water. The technical simplification and economic savings meant that the cost of color-printed materials plummeted; and for the first time the US population experienced a color revolution because advertisers could afford to liberally send color-printed materials to potential customers. Because color itself conferred value in the early days of

⁴⁶ Kathy Peiss, "American Women and the Making of Modern Consumer Culture" (lecture, University at Albany, State University of New York, New York, March 26, 1998).

⁴⁷ Ellen Garvey, "Readers Read Advertising into Their Lives: The Trade Card Scrapbook." In *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 18

chromolithography, retailers believed that sending colored materials would be perceived by customers as a gesture of goodwill.⁴⁸

Many women and children collected the color printed materials they received and mounted these colorful images into bounded scrapbooks. An umbrella term for various artifacts that center around the organization and arrangement of images, objects and ideas into a bounded album, the scrapbook is frequently associated with photographs, autographs, and other forms of material ephemera such as textile or locks of hair.⁴⁹ However, with the popularization of chromolithography, the collection of printed material from magazines, trade cards and catalogues became more common. Garvey found multiple scrapbooks in which women had pasted in colorful trade cards.⁵⁰ In my research at the Schlesinger archive at the Radcliffe Institute, I also found twenty seven albums from early 1900s that contain trade cards, magazine clippings and other color printed materials.⁵¹

Children and adolescent girls' scrapbooks, in particular, are touted as serving noble educational purposes. Educators believed that scrapbooks helped children gain valuable cognitive abilities by introducing them to objects in daily life. Scrapbooks were used for special projects in studying natural history, geography, spelling, reading, and object lessons at the primary level. Dr.

⁴⁸ Ellen Garvey. "Scrapbook, Wish Book, Prayer Book: Trade-Card Scrapbooks and the Missionary Work of Advertising." In *The Scrapbook in American Life*, edited by Susan Tucker et al., Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006), 98

⁴⁹ For a general definition see Katherine Ott, Susan Tucker, and Patricia P. Buckler. "An Introduction to the History of Scrapbooks." In *The Scrapbook in American Life*, edited by Susan Tucker et al., Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006), 1-20.

⁵⁰ In Garvey, "Readers Read Advertising," she discusses how the promulgation of colorful trade cards and scrapbooks in the 1880s and 1890s elicited consumer interaction with advertising. The mass produced, widely distributed cards became a medium with which children could enact the interplay between mass produced goods and the individual home that was becoming an increasing part of their daily lives. Cards also reinforced the sense that planning consumption or deciding what to buy could be yet another source of pleasure, and encouraged consumers to seek out, read, and collect more ads. Moreover, as a two-dimensional simulacrum of shopping that joined social, religious, commercial, and sometimes narrative pleasures, the scrapbook primed its compilers to interact with the magazine as another such two-dimensional form, and to see advertising as an indispensable part of it.

⁵¹ See, for example, Goell, Theresa. Papers, 1906-2005, 50FB.1. Scrapbook of published images depicting birds, flowers, animals, children, and religious symbols and texts, n.d.; Papers of Lorraine Huling Maynard, 1850-2006 (inclusive), box 10, folder 2, Scrapbook of Postcards ca. 1912; Lansing, Ruth. *Scrapbook, 1904-1909 (inclusive)* SC 40; Mooar, Eva Alberta, 1887-1967. *Papers, 1904-1967 (inclusive), 1905-1915 (bulk)*, n.d. SC 44 1v; Worth, Helen Henderson, 1895-1954. *Scrapbook, 1912-1916 (inclusive)*, n.d. SC 12 1 volume; Miller, Marian Blackall. *Scrapbooks, 1907-1929 (inclusive)*, n.d. SC 8 2 volumes; Mariner, Marion Waters, 1900-. *Scrapbook, 1919-1923 (inclusive)*, n.d. SC 46 1 folder; Thoma, Maryalice Secoy, 1900-1983. *Papers, 1903-1951 (inclusive)*, n.d. SC 84, 1V; James, Anna Louise, 1886-1977. Papers, 1874-1991; Papers of Elizabeth David, 1743-2007; All at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

James. C. Jackson, for one, advised parents about the correlation between cognitive abilities and a child's familiarity with everyday objects:

What such children, boys or girls, need to know, are those and only those things which can be taught through the exercise of the senses; hence their lessons from day to day should be through the observation and understanding of objects which are brought to their knowledge.⁵²

Additionally, the trade-cards and postcards that children received were perceived to take on a sentimental value and should therefore be saved. For example, Ellis Davidson, a contemporary educator, wrote in *The Happy Nursery*,

The exquisite Valentines, Christmas and New Year cards are by far too good to be wasted, and, besides, children should be taught to value them as tokens of affection, since most of them are sent by those who love them, and it is in the nursery that all the best and warmest feelings of the heart ought to be cultivated.⁵³

Furthermore, in the process of collecting these images and creating scrapbooks, children often interacted with consumer culture. Garvey's research showed how the promulgation of colorful trade cards and scrapbooks in the 1880s and 1890s elicited consumer interaction with advertising. She argued that the mass produced, widely distributed cards became a medium with which children could enact the interplay between mass produced goods and the individual home that was becoming an increasing part of their daily lives. Because these collections are considered to aid cognitive development, to cultivate prudent lifestyles, to help with socialization, and to familiarize children with the booming consumer culture, they are actively encouraged by parenting experts and educators. Parents often guide and participate in the construction of these scrapbooks. Many of these scrapbooks are meticulously designed and executed and some even create entire imaginative worlds.

In this chapter, I'd like to consider the interplay between commercial images and personal imagination within an exceptional type of children's scrapbooks—the paper dollhouses. The paper dollhouses are two-dimensional conceptual houses that are portrayed on paper and made up of cutouts from catalogues and magazines, like the one I described at the beginning of this thesis. As

⁵² James C. Jackson, *Training of Children, or, How to Have Them Healthy, Handsome and Happy* (Dansville, N.Y.: L. Austin, Jackson, 1872), 74.

⁵³ Ellis A. Davidson, *The Happy Nursery: A Book for Mothers, Governesses and Nurses Containing Games, Amusements, and Employments for Boys and Girls* (London: Cassell, Petter, and Baplin, 1872), 65.

they call for vast collection of commercial images and quixotic imagination and creation, they shed light on how middle-class urban young girls worked with commercial images to engage in pleasurable imagination and to express personal idiosyncrasies.

I will first describe the conventions and process of making a scrapbook paper dollhouse. I will then examine one case study, a twenty-seven-page dollhouse constructed in Delaware in 1905. As these are expansive and elaborate projects that call for close attention, I have chosen this particular paper dollhouse as it most tellingly engages with historical prescriptive literature, demonstrates the characteristics that I saw in other examples, and builds upon secondary literature on this genre. I will show how this particular paper dollhouse demonstrates four major characteristics: it endows its maker power and control over an imaginative space, it trains her to become future consumers and homemakers, it enables identity experimentation through decontextualized and idiosyncratic uses of commercial imagery, and it is enabled by a community of female homemakers.

The paper dollhouse as a genre is studied mostly by women's cultural historians and material cultural historians. Other than a 1992 lecture by Rodris Roth that treats paper doll house as part of household training, an article by Hartigan that looks at the genre as decontextualized collage projects, and two recent articles by Beverly Gordon on the genre as a female aesthetic endeavor, I rely mostly on that period's women's magazine articles, advice literature, and one paper dollhouse at the Radcliff Institute of Harvard. Roth and Gordon had examined many of the children's or family magazines that proliferated in the nineteenth century, such as *St. Nicholas* and *youth's Companion*, and big-circulation women's and home periodicals such as *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Harper's Bazaar*, *Godey's Lady's Book* and so forth, and they have compiled a bibliography of related advice literature, which I reference with great gratitude.

2.1 Understanding Paper Dollhouses

The paper dollhouse is undoubtedly one of the most visually appealing and manually demanding types of scrapbooks that makes use of image from advertisement, catalogues and magazines. Known variously during their life time as "paper doll house," "houses for paper dolls," "doll house scrapbooks," "house albums," "scrapbook houses," "bookhouses," or more recently descriptively referred to "collage albums," the paper doll houses are primarily produced and used as

little girls' toys between 1860s and 1920s.⁵⁴ A typical paper dollhouse is a carefully constructed notebook that contains a conceptual house, with double-page spreads containing collages of individual rooms. Pasted-in pictures constituted the architectural features, furniture, and accessories. The advice literatures regarding paper house began appearing en masse between 1880 and 1900, and the paper house as genre probably reached maturation around turn of the century. The majority of paper dollhouses were handmade, although a few commercially produced paper houses were published.⁵⁵

Paper dollhouses can often be grand projects. In her study of over twenty paper dollhouses, Gordon found paper dollhouses that contain up to forty rooms: gates and gardens are customary at the beginning of each scrapbook, parlors, kitchens, pantries, dressing rooms, music or art rooms, schoolrooms, gymnasiums, ballrooms ensue, bedrooms, bathrooms and dressing rooms usually ensue and are perceived to be more private and held "upstairs," and, in one remarkable example, the maker included a home theater. Some of the scrapbooks also contain a backyard, incorporating gardens and even outdoor cottages.⁵⁶ Each room is represented by one of these double-page spreads and becomes a contained mini narrative in itself.

Constructing a paper dollhouse is a long and difficult process. It usually takes place across multiple stages: acquiring the notebook on which to compose, collecting and categorizing scraps from magazines and catalogs, preparing the pages, and eventually arranging the furniture and personnel. These paper dollhouses can be made either in blank notebooks or in old ledgers or account books that are repurposed and pasted over with newspapers.⁵⁷ Recycling of ledgers or

⁵⁴ Rodris Roth, "Scrapbook Houses: A Late Nineteenth-Century Children's View of the American Home." in Eleanor McD Thompson, *The American Home: Material Culture, Domestic Space, and Family Life*, 1st edition (Winterthur, DE : Hanover, NH: Winterthur, 1998), 306-307

⁵⁵ Beverly Gordon, "Scrapbook Houses for Paper Dolls: Creative Expression, Aesthetic Elaboration, and Bonding in the Female World," In *The Scrapbook in American Life*, edited by Susan Tucker et al., Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006), 131-132. Gordon noted that after the turn of the century, many publishers and manufacturers tried to capitalize on the popularity of handmade paper dollhouses by publishing their own versions of the handmade prototype. But it was a short-lived phenomenon for about a decade, with only a handful of paper dollhouse prototypes being published. Gordon identified the latest one she found published in 1921 in England, around the same time that paper-dollhouse making was ending in the United States.

⁵⁶ Gordon, *The Saturated World*, 43

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 41

account books was common in the earlier years of the genre. When Jessica Ringwalt published the very first article on paper houses in the “Fun by the Fireside” column as “A Help to Mother” in *Ladies’ Home Journal* in 1880, she gave a list of detailed instructions on how to fashion the houses, and her advice stayed for generations. She indicated that “any convenient blank book with pages of at least 8”x9” would be suitable.”⁵⁸ Later examples were more often made in new books, some of which were expressly sold as scrapbook albums. Advice literature seemed to presume that most makers would amass large quantities of images of furniture ahead of time, cut them out, sort them by category or room, and carefully store them for future use.⁵⁹ The pictures were taken from the commercial sources, such as magazines, trade catalogs, and advertisements, and some more ambitious house makers added in hand-drawn details. In one instance, Gordon found an envelope within a partially completed scrapbook that contains multiple cut out images, suggesting that the collection and categorization likely happens way before the actual making of the album.

Once the house maker collected all the images, she needed to decide the sequence of rooms as well as to prepare the interior space. As the viewer flips through the pages, she also moves further and further into the house. The maker had to divide each page into three or four horizontal bands that signify the floor, the ceiling, the space in between, and other architectural features.⁶⁰ She then had to delineate each with fancy papers of different patterns, textures or colors, and then superimpose and arrange the decorative features such as windows and doors. Eventually she could arrange and paste in furniture or even add cutout images of paper dolls. Many advice literature pieces suggested about leaving a slit open when pasting in furniture, so that paper dolls could be inserted there and moved about. In her research, Gordon saw albums with dolls tucked into them, and albums with slits or pockets in cut-out beds or other furniture that flat figures were designed to slide into. The paper dollhouse that I studied at the Radcliffe Institute also showed dolls into living rooms, music rooms and bathrooms.

Like most other visual scrapbooks, the paper dollhouse has an explicit association with the feminine domain. Even though both genders were encouraged to keep scrapbooks, men and boys

⁵⁸ Jessie E. Ringwalt, “Fun for the Fireside: A Help to Mothers—The Paper-doll’s House,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 20 (August 1880): 160-62

⁵⁹ See, for example, Carolyn Wells, “A Paper Doll’s House,” *The Puritan* 9 (1901): 273-75; Emily Hoffman, “Homes for Paper dolls,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (January 1904): 84-87; and Carolyn Sherwin Bailey, “A Doll’s House,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (July 1910): 474.

⁶⁰ Gordon, *The Saturated World*, 43

were inclined to collect informational clippings, quotes and generally compile them in a topical fashion. They were instructed to save didactic material and organize their scrapbooks in a rational manner. Women and girls, on the other hand, collected primarily attractive visual materials.⁶¹ The paper dollhouse was often suggested as a girls' pastime: writing about tips on how to construct a paper doll house in 1893, Lina Beard and Adelia B. Beard described their work as inspired and encouraged by the recent publication of *American Boy's Handy Book*, such that they are filling in a gap for "the American boy's neglected sisters."⁶² As such, women and girls often filled their albums with commercial trade cards, greeting cards, small paper cut-outs that were given away by manufacturers, and, in one case, religious mottos and verse cards distributed by the church.⁶³ Unlike the rational and grid-like organization of mottos of the works by their male counterparts, women and girls were much more interested in treating each double-page spread as a compositional unit, on which they arranged these visual materials in pleasing patterns. This often involved cutting out specific shapes, color combination, pattern, and even perspectives. The paper dollhouse is the epitome of such an artistic arrangement, because it takes not only elaborate collection of images, but also meticulous designing of interior space, deep understanding and maneuvering about perspective as well as demanding and precise scissor-work. Mary Kirk's paper dollhouse demonstrates these genre conventions but also has interesting features that showcase the complexity of this particular genre.

2.2 Case Study: Mary Kirk and Her Paper House

Born in 1896 in Baltimore, Maryland, Mary Kirk was the second of three daughters of Henry Child Jr. Kirk and Edith Huntemuller Kirk. Her father ran their family business, Samuel Kirk & Son, a prominent silver manufacturing company. Mary had a wealthy family and she attended Oldfields School, the most expensive girls' school in Maryland, from 1912 to 1924. During her high school years she became close with Wallis Warfield, the famous American socialite who married King George VI. Six months after Wallis Warfield divorced her second husband, Ernest Simpson, Mary Kirk became his wife.

⁶¹ Ibid., 40.

⁶² Lina Beard and Adelia B. (Adelia Belle) Beard, *How to Amuse Yourself and Others: The American Girl's Handy Book* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), <http://archive.org/details/howtoamuseyourse00bearrich>, iii

⁶³ Garvey, "Scrapbook, Wish Book."

Mary made a paper house scrapbook circa 1905 and gave it to her younger sister Anne Kirk, who later made a similar but much less ambitious paper dollhouse.⁶⁴ Both paper houses were given to Anne's only daughter, Elizabeth Rogers, who served as the family archivist and donated the collection to the Schlesinger Library in 2001. A close reading of Mary's paper house reveals that it's an imaginative space where she assumes control, that in the process of making the paper dollhouse she is being trained to become a future consumer or homemaker, that she also used the space to experiment with identity as she used the commercial images in decontextualized manners, and eventually that she was highly aware of a community of audience. Overall, the paper house was much more than a simple collage of externally found images, instead it created an imaginary space in which Mary could test out her thoughts, desires, and a growing sense of the self.

2.2.1 *Power and Control of an Imaginative Space*

Opening up Mary's scrapbook from over a century ago, we are immediately struck by the richness of the world lying in front of us. Mary's paper dollhouse contained twenty-seven pages depicting grandiose façade, large gardens, sophisticated parlors and rooms, each self-contained and complete and each casting its spell on viewers. Consider, for example, the sheer scale and design of the front gate that Mary had designed for her house, particularly in light of what was recommended to little girls at that time. Ringwalt recommended that while making the first page of the book, one should outline a rectangular doorway near the center of the page "in the simplest manner." The open doorway, the frame above it, the outer door and the vestibules are all created by cutting and pasting simple images over one another. One may use crayons or watercolor to give some additional hues, and, if one wishes to show taste, "tinted papers can produce quite a pretty and fanciful effect for this grand entrance." The most ambitious makers can choose to make "further improvement or elaboration" by showing the whole front of the house.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Scrapbook, Mary Kirk, ca 1905, box 3, folder 6V and 7, *Papers of Anne Kirk Cooke, 1860-2004 (inclusive), 1970-1997 (bulk)*, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Mary's scrapbook contains meticulous cutout images of architectural features, furniture, and accessories. Anne's paper house is much smaller in scale and contains filled in drawings by Elizabeth Rogers, her daughter, at about age seven.

⁶⁵ Ringwalt, "Fun for the Fireside."



Figure 2.1 Excerpt from Mary Kirk's Scrapbook (ca. 1905). Courtesy Schlesinger Library, Radcliff Institute, Harvard University

In light of this, Mary's creation has far exceeded even the "most elaborate" standard prescribed by Ringwalt. Clearly intending for her house to be a majestic and impressive project, Mary pasted in an image of front view of a grand gate (see figure 2.1). Beyond the exquisitely decorated gate, one could catch a glimpse of the entranceway leading to a large house, surrounded by cypresses and oak trees. On the opposite page, Mary pasted in what seems to be a garden. In the middle of the garden is a man-made rock formation that rises above a naturally formed pond and resembles a natural hill. A baroque-style pavilion sits above the hill, surrounded by many willow trees. At the lower left corner, Mary pasted in a single sheep whose pastoral appearance immediately creates a jarring visual dissonance: Does Mary intend there to be a lavish garden in her house? What is this single sheep doing in a baroque-style garden?

As Gordon reminds us, such visual juxtaposition evokes the notion of "fairylane," which occupied a center stage in popular culture and imagination in the late nineteenth century and early

twentieth century.⁶⁶ A leitmotif that originated in Scottish folklore, by the mid-nineteenth century it had evolved to describe any event, object, or space that was felt to be aesthetically rich, enchanting, or otherworldly. Visually, the notion of fairyland is frequently associated with vibrant and rich colors. Culturally, the notion of fairyland is often means the unsullied innocence of childhood. Children are perceived to be the least tainted by practicalities of this world and therefore closest to such magical landscape—such as the wonderland in *Peter Pan*, which is open only to children. Girls, in particular, are encouraged to cultivate such sentimental fairyland ideal, as can be seen in popular children’s books such as *The Wizard of Oz*. Perhaps, then, scrapbook house making can be understood as an expression of fairyland making, an effort to create appealing environments that were decorated to the point of transformation. We can imagine that Mary, born at the end of that nineteenth century and creating the paper dollhouse at age nine, was heavily influenced by such cultural obsessions and created these wildly whimsical, imaginary spaces where the pastoral ideal is combined with baroque extravagance.

Mary’s scrapbook incisively demonstrates one of the key qualities of this particular genre: that they are aspiring endeavors, meant not to simply capture reality but to expand on and to create entire space out of one’s imagination. The twenty-seven double-page project contains music rooms, pantries, ten bedrooms, bathrooms, and a background—whose elegance could only be matched by the magnificence of the front entrance. Some of the rooms have multiple portraits hanging on the wall, almost like a picture gallery. Others have standing guests and maids. All rooms are designed to be as impressive as possible and the construction was executed with great care.

These paper dollhouses can be seen as complete, miniature worlds that invite the viewer to navigate and occupy the space. Miniature things, Gordon argues, give us a sense of “power and protectiveness, magic and delight.”⁶⁷ When the miniature is in the form of a house, its potency doubles because it is a space that could be entered. One of the most significant ways that Mary’s paper dollhouse invites us in is through her impressive understanding and execution of perspective. In all of these rooms, Mary divided the page into three or four horizontal panels, each emulating the ceiling, the wall, and the floor. Writing in 1901, Carolyn Wells recommended that users “draw a line clear across the [center of the] page. This marks the division between the floor and the wall, and is

⁶⁶ Gordon, “The Paper Dollhouse,” 41-42

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 48

the only attempt at perspective to be made.”⁶⁸ Mary’s work appeared to surpass Well’s suggestion; in a beautifully compiled living room (see figure 2.2), she meticulously sketched in a window on the upper right corner, divided the room into three horizontal panels, painted the wallpaper in a bright green hue in watercolor, and added a hand-drawn staircase from the lower right corner of the page, spanning horizontally across the page, and disappearing in the upper left corner.

The staircase that Mary drew intensifies the enchanted and embodied nature of the room. It not only helps to structure the current space as laid down in front of our eyes, but it also hints at the rest of the paper dollhouse—at the music rooms, lounges, and bedrooms in the pages to come. Staircases suggest a passageway, a channel to a yet unseen room waiting to be explored by the viewer.⁶⁹ Advice pieces further recommended that house-makers arrange the staircase such that paper-dolls can be slipped into it: “if, in the pasting [of a staircase], loose spaces are left in the tread of the stair, the paper-dolls can be slipped in, and will then appear to be walking up and down upon the staircase.” These paper-dolls are analogue avatars that help viewers imagine their bodies at a different scale, and “imagine going into the minuscule space in a kinetic and tactile manner.” They “change our sense of time and space, creating and allowing us to experience the wide-eyed wonder of a child.”⁷⁰

The imaginative and creative dimension of paper dollhouses has long been acknowledged as its main appeal. Emily Hoffman, writing in 1904, points to the potential of paper dollhouses as offering opportunities for girls to take everyday subject and turn them into “one’s own integrated, personal environment and thereby feeling a sense of personal power.” “Imagination ruled in this world,” and with the paper dollhouses every little girl can be “her own architect.” The little girl, intensely occupied in the process, was creating an entire world, a unified and living entity that is organized based on her own fantasies. When a girl spent time with these books, Hoffman claimed, “ennui was forgotten.”⁷¹ House-making was an ultimately creative pastime, making something orderly, whole, and new out of disparate pieces.

⁶⁸ Carolyn Wells, “A Paper Doll’s House,” *The Puritan* 9 (1901): 273-75.

⁶⁹ Gordon found another paper dollhouse by Harriet Green Brown of Mystic, Connecticut, made for one of her children in the 1880s that contains an elaborate staircase. Gordon suspects that Brown was an art student trained in perspective drawing.

⁷⁰ Gordon, “The Paper Dollhouse,” 48

⁷¹ Emily Hoffman, “Homes for Paper dolls,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (January 1904): 84-87



Figure 2.2 Excerpt from Mary Kirk's Scrapbook (ca. 1905). Courtesy Schlesinger Library, Radcliff Institute, Harvard University

2.2.2 *Training to Become Consumers and Homemakers*

With her paper dollhouse Mary also learned much about contemporary consumer culture and toyed with imaginary ownership of consumable products through careful combination of images. It is clear that in the process of compiling a paper house like this, Mary would have had to browse through many trade catalogues and newspapers in search for the ideal piece. The collection process could take a long time. Carolyn Wells, publishing an article on paper dollhouses in the *Puritan* in 1901, makes a note on the excitement that can be stimulated upon coming across the right pictures: "The furniture for the whole house consists mainly of pictures of furniture cut from advertisements or catalogues. If you once begin to make paper dollhouses, you will soon find

yourself pouncing on pictures suitable for your use wherever you may run across them—and running across them everywhere.”⁷²

As a nine-year-old at the time of making the paper house, Mary likely obtained her first exposure to the myriad of household appliances and furniture in the process of soliciting trade catalogues, magazines and other sources. The collection of relevant images led her to identify and categorize a lot of these items based on their use at home. It is possible that in the process, she gained valuable insight into how to run a household. Indeed, as Roth argues, paper dollhouses trained their makers to be better consumers. The various furniture and appliances show that Mary had been making a conscious effort to identify their uses. The front parlor contains a walnut-colored display case, two armchairs and a footstool, a chest drawer, a coat hanger, a standing clock, multiple small stands, and, on the far left corner, and what seems to be a modern electric heater. The upper panel of the chest drawer is laid open so that there is a flat platform, on which she pasted multiple books. The electric heater, being invented by Thomas Edison only in 1893,⁷³ must have been a relatively new phenomenon. Not everybody could afford electricity in 1905, though it is highly likely that the Kirks did because of the success of Henry Kirk’s silver manufacturing business. If they did, then, by pasting in an electric heater, Mary is implicitly hinting at the comfort and luxury that her home actually lives in. If they didn’t, Mary is gesturing towards an idealized home with electric appliances that she knew existed, thereby expressing her wishes.

Indeed, advice literature talks about collecting little pieces of furniture as a form of virtual shopping. These images originate predominantly in advertisements, and many articles give girls what seems like a virtual shopping list of what to look for when perusing these catalogues. For a parlor or living room, “in advertising sheets and newspapers, cuts of chairs, tables, sewing-machines, stoves, pianos, and other furniture can frequently be found, and may be colored to suit the taste either with water-colors or crayons.” For bedrooms, you should look for “any pretty pieces you can find in the advertisements, such as bureaus, chiffoniers, dressing tables, chairs and couches.” Selectivity is key in shopping for furniture, as the little girl is frantically looking for images that aesthetically match, that are “suitable for her use,” or that require a little retouch or enhancement through coloring.⁷⁴

⁷² Wells, “A Paper Doll’s House.”

⁷³ “Who Invented the Electric Heater?,” accessed May 16, 2014, <http://www.ask.com/question/who-invented-the-electric-heater>.

⁷⁴ Ringwalt, “Fun for the Fireside”

The search for virtual home furniture translates into real world consumer behaviors and often urge the paper dollhouse maker to reach out to real world business: because looking for suitable furniture can be challenging, after you begin making paper dollhouses, “you will soon find yourself pouncing on pictures suitable for your use wherever you may run across them—and running across them everywhere.”⁷⁵ Furthermore, if the little girl doesn’t have a catalogue, she is encouraged to reach out and find one: “send a postal card to any department store in any large city, and you will probably receive one by return mail”⁷⁶—helping them to interact with real world businesses.

But making a paper dollhouse doesn’t end with shopping; it trains the house makers to become wives, mothers, and future homemakers. The purpose of a paper dollhouse is to provide a shelter for the otherwise unprotected paper dolls. The paper dolls are “poor little things” that get thrown around in a nursery and frequently sabotaged. The paper house, then, is when “any small girl who really wants a home for her family of paper dolls will find a book the very best kind of house.”⁷⁷ And as such, the paper dollhouse is akin to a real house, and needs to be run and maintained properly. For example, the placement and arrangement of furnishings shows one’s understanding of functions of different domestic space. When read closely, a lot of advice literature specifies the function of each room to such meticulous detail that it reads similarly to instructions for real world first-time housewives. Wells talks about what to put in each room. Next to the cupboard, for example, she suggests a sideboard on which “you will put all the old family silvers, rare bits of china, decanters, and perhaps a pitcher of ice water. Add tall, straight backed dining room chairs, and a fireplace and mantel if you have room for them.” And she goes on to delineate what each room would look like.⁷⁸ House making, then, educated little girls about a range of domestic activities.

Furthermore, the little house maker also learns about the status and role of each person in the house and provides them with materials and furniture that match their status and assigned role. In the “papa doll’s den,” for example, “there will be a telephone, of course, and a phonograph, and possibly... a typewriter.” This is in compliance with the paradigm cultural notion of gender norms.

⁷⁵ Wells, “A Paper Doll’s House.”

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Carolyn Sherwin Bailey, “A Doll’s House,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (July 1910): 474

⁷⁸ Wells, “A Paper Doll’s House.”

The gentlemen should always be “well provided with the latest style of easy-chair and reading-lamp, he will also have his box of cigars and his smoking-table and any other little masculine comforts.” The female head of the house gets something entirely different, the mamma doll will be supplied, from the same source, with sewing-machines and pianos, rocking-chairs and baby-jumpers.” Running the house is also about decorum and propriety in the servants. “The cook can have her choice of cooking-stoves and pots and pans, while the most delectable serving-maids . . . are always irreproachably capped and aproned, and offer chocolate or steaming soup with an ingratiating smile and a small tray.”⁷⁹ In a way, the little housemaker is learning about the stereotype of each of the family members and recreating them in a virtual household where she is in control. Indeed, the end goal is to have a house for the poor paper dolls such that “the paper dolls may be shut safely inside its charming pages, and they will never, never want to run away”⁸⁰ and so that “her pampered pets can enjoy all the comforts of home and fairly revel in luxuries.”⁸¹

2.2.3 Decontextualized Uses and Personal Idiosyncrasies

While the sourcing and arranging of household items very closely resemble our modern notion of shopping and undoubtedly familiarized the little house maker with available consumer products, sometimes the creative treatment of commercial images seems so decontextualized that such arrangement could equally be gesturing at personal idiosyncrasies rather than consumer desires. As Gordon argues, the actual arrangement of the room—decisions about what would be in the foreground, what would overlap or be superimposed, and what would sit on the table or the mantel—offered many opportunities for experimentation.⁸²

In our example, there are very clear cases in which Mary experimented with multiple images of furniture, tried on different composition, and eventually settled on one composition that, when read very closely, conveyed a potential psychological journey she took on the brink of reaching adolescence. According to the Victorian notion of decorum, public spaces such as the parlor, music room and lounge would precede private spaces such as bedrooms and bathrooms. The fact that Mary created eleven bedrooms in a paper house of twenty-eight pages shows her fascination with

⁷⁹ Hoffman, “Homes for Paper dolls.”

⁸⁰ Bailey, “A Doll’s House.”

⁸¹ Hoffman, “Homes for the Paper dolls.”

⁸² Gordon, “The Paper Dollhouse,” 43

such interior spaces. On the ninth page, immediately after a music room and a reading room, Mary presents the first bedroom. The page is divided into four horizontal panels, representing respectively the floor, walls, ceiling and other architectural features. Vertically the page is divided into three panels to represent three walls. Our vantage point is from that of the fourth wall, not unlike the traditional three-walled box set in a proscenium theater, through which the audience sees the action on the stage (see figure 2.3).

She clearly paid great attention to and devoted much effort toward its construction; the pasted-in bed is carefully contoured, to the extent that the tiny space in between the bars above the bed is meticulously carved out to give the bed an immaculate look. This does not appear to be true for subsequent beds that appear in the book, where Mary simply cut out the entire image and pasted it in. One could only imagine the skill and effort such an act would require of a nine-year-old. Yet it is not intended to be a master bedroom because the size of the bed indicates that it is for a single person. That this is the first bedroom we see as well as the most polished and crafted one, along with the fact that Mary is the oldest daughter in the house, leads us to speculate that Mary had strong identification with this particular room, if she hadn't constructed it explicitly as her own room.

The interior design of the room, however, invites speculation about the identity of the owner of the room. The dominant theme of children and maternal figures, as well as the pink color, seems to suggest that this room belongs to a young child. In the room, a hand-drawn window appears on the upper right corner, half covered by pink curtains. The wallpaper is painted in a lush, vivid pink shade. Four paintings hang from the wall: one is cut into a circular shape and shows a young mother reading from a book in her lap and three children surrounding her. The other is a Japanese woodblock print that shows a woman dressed in a lavish kimono. The other two images are both of a young child, playing by the water. However, furniture in the room includes a tall chiffonier, a dressing desk and chair with an oval mirror on top, multiple chairs, and a tall standing oval mirror. The size of furniture and the presence of three mirrors in total seem to suggest that the inhabitant of the room is a young female. Indeed, several other rooms later in the page seem specifically designed for younger children, with soft, warm colors and a plethora of dolls and stuffed animals pasted in. This room by contrast has no toys or other elements that are strongly reminiscent of childhood. One possibility is that this is a room in which Mary dealt with her awakening consciousness of adolescence and gender norms. The age of nine is important because she is on the brink of entering adolescence but still retains strong ties to her childhood. As readers of her creation a hundred years

later, it is impossible for us to know whether she identifies with the young child playing by the water or by the motherly figure reading to other children in the painting, but very likely this is exactly the same struggle she was going through at the time. The theme of introspection and reflection is confirmed by the presence of multiple mirrors in the room; the room, presented in a way that resembles a stage, invites its audience to observe keenly and to contemplate on the identity play that lies beneath the production process.



Figure 2.3 Excerpt from Mary Kirk's Scrapbook (ca. 1905). Courtesy Schlesinger Library, Radcliff Institute, Harvard University

This kind of toying with images or symbols of physical materials is significant because it suggests mental activities. Gordon makes the connection between the extensive sourcing and arrangement of images in paper dollhouse construction with a group of writers who talked about “enriching our lives by engaging deeply with the particulars of the everyday things around us and

treating them as symbols and embodiments of our inner lives.”⁸³ House makers pour so much effort and thinking into using these images in a creative and sometimes decontextualized manner that in a sense they’ve poured themselves into these images. The advice literature, too, extols the effort a little girl puts into the construction. Each child will achieve “different effects” with her effort, and “the child who is resourceful” will congregate a group of different materials to compose. “Out of furniture advertisement [she will cut] a perfectly plain bureau, elsewhere she will find a brush and comb. . . still at third she may discover candles.” And by the time “she’s combined all these, her bureau becomes something more than a mere bureau, it is an achievement of which she is justly proud of.”⁸⁴ In a way, the new bureau is her creation, her expression of creativity, and is divorced from its original commercial context. In a similar vein, Gordon saw the creative uses of Ivory Soap commercial characters as proof that these scrapbooks actually subverted the consumer model, that “the objects of the consumer world were used as raw materials— as fodder for the creative imagination. They came in free, or give-away form, and then they were further decontextualized and recycled into seething else.”⁸⁵

2.2.4 *A Female Community*

Both the making and the using of such paper dollhouses suggest that they are not merely individual endeavors. Very often they are made as a collaborative effort between different women in a household, children often being aided by mothers, sisters or nurses. Once a paper dollhouse is finished, it is often enjoyed and passed around by multiple people, sometimes even passed down through generations. It is notable, however, that the community of maker and users of paper dollhouses were always bound by real world connections. One likely received help from immediate family members and showed her paper dollhouse to people whom she already knew and was close with. Because of the domestic nature of paper dollhouses, they were not very likely to be taken on trips and shown to many other people.

The level of skill and dexterity required in a lot of these paper dollhouses means that they could not have been made by a child alone. Paper dollhouses must have been taken seriously as

⁸³ Gordon, “The Paper Dollhouse,” 48

⁸⁴ Hoffman, “Homes for Paper dolls.”

⁸⁵ Gordon, “The Paper Dollhouse,” 55

works of art by adult female figures such as mothers, older sisters, and nurses. Writing in 1880, Ringwalt instructed the house maker to make a small key hole in the pate such that

Upon turning the page, the child will be much surprised and delighted to find a tiny door-key hanging on the wall just behind the door. Such details seem to furnish the last touch of excellence of the toy; and as an additional perfection, a chair may be pasted below it in the corner, for the hall servant or porter, who can be represented by a man in livery, or by a boy in fanciful costume, well bedizened with buttons.⁸⁶

It is clear that she is not addressing a child because the instructions are too complicated for a child to follow, and it talks about “surprising” a child as if the toy is created for her. Indeed, Gordon talks about finding extant paper dollhouses that explicitly indicated they were made by grown women. An example in the Smithsonian collection bears a “childishly penciled inscription” by Edith E. Washburn of Thomaston, Maine, that says “Miss Scanison (my nurse) made this when I was sick in 1892. I am always going to keep it to remember her by.”⁸⁷ Some paper dollhouses were received as gifts from mothers and sisters. Indeed, Mary Kirk’s paper dollhouse is gifted to her sister Anne Kirk, who then passed on to her daughter Elizabeth Rogers, who had put in an inscription “Aunt Mary’s scrapbook.”

Secondly, that the paper dollhouse is consumed by a group of people is evident when we consider the strong awareness of a potential audience in Mary’s paper dollhouse. Indeed, as many advice literature suggested, these pages are to be presented to its readers as mini-theaters. The creators are highly aware of a potential audience. Ringwalt suggests that each room was to be made into a “perfect” vignette. The house was presented overall as if it were “being viewed by a guest,” and some paper houses of the era were even flanked on either side by a drawn curtain or portiere, rather like a stage set revealing an ongoing play. The presence of paper dolls was also highly dramatic. When pasting in a chair, Ringwalt suggests, “two slits are made in the middle of the side of chair, running side-ways to furnish a narrow band or support, behind which the figure of a paper-doll can be slipped, so as to appear standing by the chair, and ready to open the door.”⁸⁸

One detail that shows Mary’s awareness of a potential audience is how she deals with openable curtains that the audience may interact with. In a half finished room later in the book, Mary layered multiple items, including two classical sculptures, an armchair with elaborately embroidered

⁸⁶ Ringwalt, “Fun for the Fireside.”

⁸⁷ Gordon, “Scrapbook Houses,” 122.

⁸⁸ Ringwalt, “Fun for the Fireside.”

upholstery, a lavishly decorated wooden bedframe and a pair of velvet curtains (see figure 2.4). The items bear no obvious relationship to one another and the juxtaposition and layering reminds one more of a collage than a coherent interior space. While the wooden bedframe is layered on top of the velvet curtains, they are both only partially glued onto the page and the overlapping part can be easily lifted and opened. This is more than mere oversight; to do so requires Mary to pre-plan where to apply the glue and then apply it with precision that can be difficult for a nine-years-old. Therefore, it must be an intentional design choice, one that Mary painstakingly executed.

Such an intention is confirmed by Wells' suggestion that when making bookcases, "if you cut and paste them carefully, they can be made to open and shut, which adds greatly to the fun." To do so is not an easy feat; it requires cutting and pasting with precision. "The bookcases...may have doors cut down the middle and across the top and bottom. The doors can then be opened and shut at will, and when opened may show rows of books, which were pasted in place before the bookcase was."⁸⁹ The house is made to be as interactive as possible precisely because it is meant to be shared and consumed together with others. Wells suggests, "if your dearest friends have houses too, it is great fun for your dolls to visit them." Ringwalt too instructs, "the doll house should be presented as if it were being viewed by a guest." In conclusion, these paper dollhouses are made and used within a community of females across generation, often including children, mothers and sisters.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have studied one relatively little-known genre, the paper dollhouse that prospered between 1860s and 1920s. We have seen how it rose as a reaction to the sudden abundance of color-printed images at the turn of the century, how a community of female makers in collaboration created these massive, elegant, and imaginative domestic spaces. In the construction of these dollhouses, the makers expressed their desire for consumer products, acquired household management insights, and experimented with creative adaptation and juxtapositions of images. How then, do collections of images and consumption patterns play out in our contemporary era? Are there any similar outlets in which female consumers express consumer desires and engage in imaginative repurposing of commercial images? And has the notion of community—bounded by physicality and single copies of physical artifacts in the pre-digital era—evolved now that images are

⁸⁹ Wells, "A Paper Doll's House."

infinitely replicable? I will now proceed to examine female individual behaviors on Pinterest and argue that they too engage in pleasurable imagination based on commercial images that are often aspirational in nature.

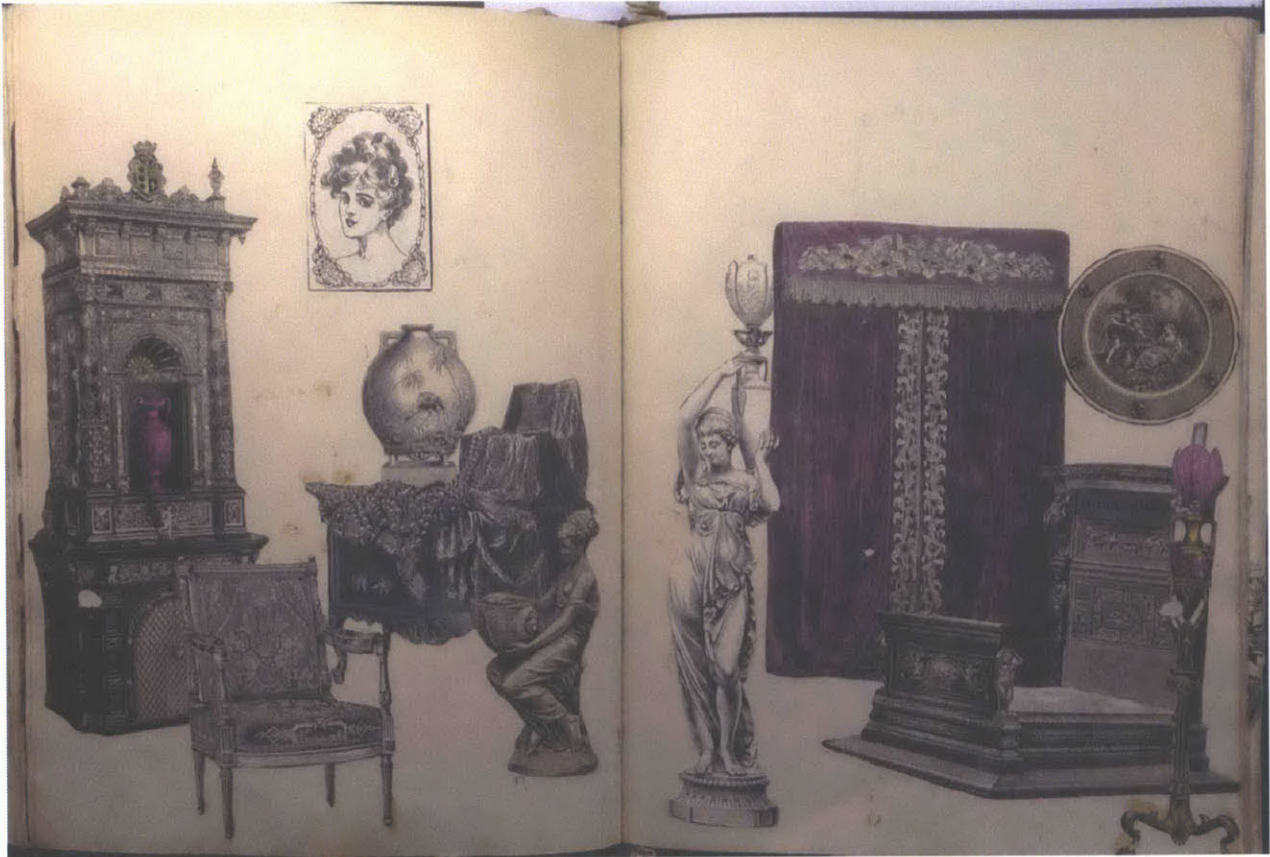


Figure 2.4 Excerpt from Mary Kirk's Scrapbook (ca. 1905). Courtesy Schlesinger Library, Radcliff Institute, Harvard University

Chapter Three Pinterest and Personal Pleasurable Imagination

A friend of a friend calls his addiction to sites like [Pinterest] “avenues for procrastination,” but I think there’s something else involved. These sites force you to engage and derive meaning or at least significance or at the very least pleasure from a random grouping of pictures. Why not dive into an alternative world full of beauty and novelty and emotion and the hard-to-put-your-finger-on feeling that there’s something more, somewhere, where you’re not chained to your laptop, half dead from monotony, frustration and boredom?⁹⁰

----Carina Chocano

The rise of Pinterest has provoked a range of competing visions about the ability of advertising to facilitate new modes of consumer interaction. This chapter addresses that ability by applying sociological theories and principles to a selection of Pinterest collections “curated” by retailers and consumers alike. It paints in detail a range of established business and consumer practices on Pinterest, contextualizing them by drawing on historical antecedents and analyzing their cultural and personal consequences. The previous chapter showed how consumers in the early twentieth century reacted to the ever-present representation of products through advertisements, trade cards, catalogues and magazines. This current chapter will illustrate how consumers in the digital era are approached by and reacting to advertisements on Pinterest.

This chapter begins by introducing relevant background theories by Campbell and Stewart that will be critical to the current analysis. Second, it examines three emerging trends in business accounts’ practices on Pinterest. Although business accounts only comprise 0.7% of total Pinterest accounts,⁹¹ these business accounts use high quality images and active efforts at image dispersion to wield substantial influence in the overall Pinterest ecosystem (and in consumers’ spending habits). What is the content of these businesses’ collections, who are their targeted audiences, and what effect do they strive to achieve? What are the strategies, then, employed by business accounts to promote their brands? In searching for an answer, I examined official guidelines from Pinterest, semi-official and third party advices from online marketing professionals and media like

⁹⁰ Chocano, “Pinterest, Tumblr and the Trouble”

⁹¹ “65 Amazing Pinterest Stats (April 2014),” DMR, accessed May 16, 2014, <http://expandedramblings.com/index.php/pinterest-stats/>.

TechCrunch and Hubspot, and the strategies of more than fifteen brands that were consistently mentioned as “successful examples.”⁹² From these sources I have also chosen to analyze the boards of eight brands that most effectively demonstrate what I saw to be three emerging trends, as follows: the creation of digital equivalents to paper catalogs, boards that offer a wide range of Do-it-Yourself projects, and enclosed collections that invite customers to imagine their futures. This close reading produced a few findings: while a number of businesses on Pinterest create digital equivalents of paper catalogs, new forms of advertising have emerged. Additionally, many lifestyle-focused business brands are creating boards that offer a wide range of DIY projects, resembling a repository for inspiration. Finally, high-end fashion brands are increasingly embedding images of products within enclosed collections that invite customers to have holistic imaginative experience projected into future.

This chapter concludes by considering two competing framings of consumer-collectors’ practices on Pinterest. Many manufacturers, advertisers and retailers are convinced of Pinterest’s potential to incentivize consumers to make purchases. Pinterest users are more apt to spend money: Pinterest referrals on average spend 70% more than visitors referred from traditional advertising channels channels. Pinterest users also actively engage with brands: of 17 million brand engagements—pins, repins, comments, and likes—it was found that only 15% originated on brands’ boards, the other 85% were contributed by users. Of people surveyed in 2012, 43% prefer to associate with retailers or brands on Pinterest versus only 24% choose to associate with brands on Facebook.⁹³ These statistics support the view that the majority of user activity on Pinterest is a precursor of or alternative to consumption. However, after examining 25 randomly selected users, I have found an alternative framing that considers Pinterest users’ behaviors actually to be independent of consumption. I offer a case study of Lauren Gray’s Pinterest activities and argue that while certain collections inspire imaginative play for the products involved, collections can also be independent of the products and inspire dreams of an aspirational, alternative future.

3.1 Background Theories

⁹² See note 18

⁹³ Brian Honigman, “100 Fascinating Social Media Statistics and Figures From 2012,” *Huffington Post*, November 29, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brian-honigman/100-fascinating-social-me_b_2185281.html.

Campbell's theory helps us understand the nature and range of psychological activities on Pinterest. As we have briefly discussed in introduction, Campbell considers the core of post-Eighteenth century modern consumption to be an autonomous, self-illusory fantasy that he calls daydreaming. He distinguishes between satisfaction, a sensation derived from the gratification of basic human needs, and pleasure, a type of reaction that humans commonly have when encountering certain stimuli. While one typically needs to make use of objects in order to discover their potential for satisfaction, it is only necessary to employ one's senses in order to experience pleasure. Thus, while only reality can provide satisfaction, "both illusions and delusions can supply pleasure."⁹⁴ Modern consumption is fundamentally connected with the subject's ability conjure up stimuli and control the meaning of objects and events. This means that "individuals employ their imaginative and creative powers to construct mental images," which are "known to be false but felt to be true" and are consumed "for the intrinsic pleasure they provide"—"a practice best described as daydreaming or fantasizing."⁹⁵

On the other hand, Stewart's distinction between a Collection and a Souvenir is instrumental for our understanding of digital found image curation because every board on Pinterest can be seen as existing somewhere on the spectrum between a Collection and a Souvenir. Stewart posits that the Collection and the Souvenir are two narratives about longing, as we contract "the social disease of nostalgia" we realize the ineffable gap between language and experience, between "signifier and signified."⁹⁶ The key distinction between a Collection and Souvenir is in how they are related to their original context and to one another. The Souvenir, according to Stewart, is a trace of authentic experience when it is associated with a "supplementary narrative discourse that both attaches it to its origins and creates a myth with regard to those origins."⁹⁷ The Souvenir substitutes a context of "perpetual consumption for its context of origin." In other words, the Souvenir is what binds us to an authentic experience through its repeated reference to that experience. While Stewart used the term "Souvenir" to suggest a past experience, I would like to expand its scope to include image,

⁹⁴ Campbell, *Romantic Ethic*, 61

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 77

⁹⁶ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Duke University Press, 1984), 17

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 136

object, or idea that serve as a reference to an experience, whether experienced in the past or projected into the future.

The Collection is completely different in that it “creates a world which is representative yet which erases its context of origin” by weaving intricate webs of meaning and establishing strong bonds among items within the Collection.⁹⁸ It does so by destroying the origin of the individual items, and with it the original value of the item. For example, while a piece of rock has intrinsic value as a tool, or exchange value if it is a rare kind, once it enters a collection of rocks it eschews its material value and undertakes a symbolic value by virtue of being part of a larger set. The Souvenir might retain some value in its instrumentality, but the Collection “represents the total aestheticization of use value.”⁹⁹ The key difference between the Collection and the Souvenir, then, is that the former has removed any link to the original context in the process of its formation, while the latter exists to explicitly bear reference to its original context. In this light, each board on Pinterest can be seen as existing somewhere on a spectrum between Souvenirs that link to their original contexts (i.e. catalogue-like boards in which different pins point to disparate products) and Collections that have a narrative arc and that curates a holistic experience (i.e. inspiration-boards in which different pins together enable a brainstorming experience).

Furthermore, scholars such as Alsop, Durost and Kron argue that at the heart of most collecting practices is the need to “complete” a set. This means that the collected object is significant in its relationship to other objects in the same set. One of the definitive characteristics of a collection is the symbolic value that individual objects undertake upon entering a collection:

A collection is basically determined by the nature of the value assigned to the objects, or ideas possessed. If the predominant value of an object or idea for the person possessing it is intrinsic, i.e., if it is valued primarily for use, or purpose, or aesthetically pleasing quality, or other value inherent in the object or accruing to it by whatever circumstance of custom, training, or habit, it is not a collection. If the predominant value is representative or representational, i.e., if said object or idea is valued chiefly for the relation it bears to some other object or idea, or objects, or ideas, such as being one of a series, part of a whole, a specimen of a class, then it is the subject of a collection.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., 152

⁹⁹ Ibid., 151

¹⁰⁰ Walter N. Durost, *Children's Collecting Activity Related to Social Factors* (New York: AMS Press, 1932). 10

The key distinction Durost makes here is that when an item enters a collection, its earlier utilitarian intent has to be abandoned and it somehow becomes “special”. This is particularly obvious with items whose exchange value is minimal compared to its symbolic value, such as advertisements, pebbles on a beach, cereal boxes, or old postcards. While rare art items and other precious items may enter a collection without a significant change in their extraordinary nature, i.e. the aesthetic value for which they entered a collection is not multiplied, they take on an additional sacred meaning because “by being part of the collection each piece is transformed from its original function of toy, icon, bowl, picture, whatever, into an object with new meaning—a member of an assemblage that is greater than the sum of its parts.”¹⁰¹

While helpful in interpreting collections of physical objects, collection theories are complicated by collections of digital materials. Digital images are not bounded by physical rarity: they are nothing but pixels and bits, can be replicated with no great effort, and are therefore neither rare nor unique. What is it, then, that makes the collection of digital images on Pinterest such a popular activity, especially when the images are predominantly commercially produced and therefore bear little relation to personal memories?

3.2 Business

Campbell described the consumers’ enjoyment of advertisements in *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* as proof of how advertising images activate pleasurable imagination. Campbell argued that the important place occupied in our culture “by representations of products rather than the products themselves” reveals “[the fact] that the imaginative enjoyment of products and services is a crucial part of contemporary consumerism.”¹⁰² By representations of products, he was referring to not only overtly commercial advertisements and catalogues, but also all cultural products that covertly endorse commercial products: “magazines, periodicals, posters, cards, calendars and even works of art.” He argued that cultural products for entertainment are often indistinguishable from commercial advertisements, because consumers seem to “enjoy” images from advertisements in much the same manner that they enjoy a novel or a film.¹⁰³ This inability to distinguish between entertainment and advertisement suggests that both fulfill the same function of

¹⁰¹ Joan Kron, *Home-Psych: The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration* (Potter, 1983). 193-94

¹⁰² Campbell, *Romantic Ethic*, 92

¹⁰³ Ibid

facilitating imaginative hedonism, and further explains why people regularly enjoy looking at images of products they will never be able to afford.

The “enjoyment” of ads has been prevalent throughout history, as can be seen in the previous chapter. Businesses have always understood and capitalized on customers’ appreciation of advertising. As we have seen in chapter one, advances in chromolithography and the emergence of a national mass market in the 1870s and 1880s led to an abundance of colorful advertisements, which were collected and cherished by customers. Eye-catching trade cards were sent out to consumers to promote businesses and product lines. Trade catalogs advertised everything from packaged foods to men’s topcoats. Catalogs came in a range of size from simple pamphlets to big encyclopedias, sometimes even containing samples of particular products. Magazines became supported largely by advertisement and featured colorful, visually arresting images. These images functioned as precious tokens from the manufacturer—keepsakes that individuals collected, appropriated, and cherished.¹⁰⁴

If Campbell was right in that ads and cultural products are enjoyed equally by consumers because their chief function is to facilitate hedonistic imagination, then Pinterest, with its focus on visual materials, e-commerce, and collection, is the perfect platform on which the representation of products is distributed and “fed” to consumer imagination. Pinterest is filled with businesses that actively and aggressively promote their brands and push for sales, and it is also full of fervent consumer-collectors who eagerly collect, curate and share images of products they found online.

When Pinterest rolled out special services for business accounts in 2013, it published a set of best practice guides, success examples, and web analytics tools to help its business users maximize the site’s potential. Pinterest makes five suggestions to business when it comes to pinning: “Put Pinners First; Curate Your Collection; Show What Inspires You; Be Authentic; and Share your Pins.” What lies at the heart of these suggestions is that one should share visually pleasing images that are relevant to one’s target audience. Outside of Pinterest, a plethora of third party guidelines for business owners also emphasize the site’s philosophy on “curating a lifestyle.”¹⁰⁵

3.2.1 Case Study 1: Boards as Catalogs

¹⁰⁴ “Baker Library Historical Collections.” Harvard Business School.
<http://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/artadv/scrapbooks.html> (accessed May 19, 2014).

¹⁰⁵ See note 18

Despite explicit admonishment from all the guidelines not just to pin one's own products,¹⁰⁶ many Pinterest boards are strikingly similar to popular trade catalogues from over a century ago. Examined via the theoretical lens of Collection and Souvenirs, these boards display characteristics of a Souvenir.

The trade catalog was an important medium in an era of emerging national market and commerce. In the American economy of the early 1800s, retailers distributed basic goods, such as textiles and soap, to local general merchants. Given the steady demand for these goods, their generic nature, and their local distribution, there was little need to advertise or to differentiate one product from another.¹⁰⁷ After the civil war, however, mass-produced goods began to replace items that were previously homemade or acquired at local general stores. The paper catalog rose as a prominent venue where advertisers could convince customers of the superiority of national brands and large manufacturers. In the late 19th century, with the expansion of American railroad system and westward migration, traveling businessmen saw the increasing necessity to send their customers neatly designed lists of available products. Montgomery Ward, a savvy businessman, published a catalog sheet right after the Civil war that listed 163 distinct items. Within two years, that catalog grew to 240 pages with thousands of items.¹⁰⁸ Ward and his chief competitor, Sears Roebuck, set policies that promised a great variety of products at a fair price with service and satisfaction guaranteed. The catalogs became an important channel of direct response marketing in the Post-Civil war America.¹⁰⁹ Considering content, aesthetic and intended uses of their images, a small group of Pinterest boards such as the March Style Guide by J.Crew could be interpreted as a digital equivalent to the paper catalogs.

¹⁰⁶ For example, see "My Top Pinterest Tips," *Amy Lynn Andrews*, accessed May 19, 2014, <http://amylynnandrews.com/pinterest-tips/>.

¹⁰⁷ "Baker Library Historical Collections." Harvard Business School. <http://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/artadv/national-markets.html> (accessed May 19, 2014).

¹⁰⁸ "A Brief History of Mail Order Catalogs." History of Mail Order Catalogs. <http://www.imagineinc-usa.com/articles/historyofmailorde.html> (accessed May 19, 2014).

¹⁰⁹ The distribution of catalogs is made extra affordable for business because the postal system permitted the classification of mail order publications as aids in the dissemination of knowledge, entitling these catalogs the postage rate of one cent per pound.

The J.Crew board that resembles a paper catalog can be seen as a Souvenir because each image contains a link to the original product. For the viewers, each image is a disparate, “repeated reference” to one distinct product page. Even though they are collected within the same board, their connection to each other is nonexistent. These boards are similar to catalogs because they extend explicit invitations towards the customer to finish the transaction. For example, J.Crew offers contact information for its viewers to finish a purchase: “Love what you see? Our Very Personal Stylist team can help you pre-order the looks before they become available on Wednesday 26 February. Call 800 261 7422 or email erica@jcrew.com.”¹¹⁰ This caption effectively instructs the customer and offers points of contact in the process of purchasing. The cordiality is reminiscent of the “Simple Rules for Ordering” direction given at the beginning of Sears catalogs: “Use our order blank...tell us in your own way what you want...don’t be afraid you will make a mistake in making out the order. WRITE US IN YOUR OWN WAY, IN ANY LANGUAGE.”¹¹¹ Such a parallel suggests that these Pinterest boards are conceived and utilized by the brand as a direct response-marketing tool, similar to the early paper catalogs. The aesthetics and content of images on the board also demonstrate heritage from paper catalogs. The photographs are unanimously professional shots of products. Some of the pins, like those in Bergdorf Goodman’s *SHOES (that make us swoon)* (see figure 3.1), are unadorned, straight up shots of single shoes against a white background; others like those in J.Crew’s *May 2014 Style Guide*, feature different models posing in their clothes (see figure 3.2). While these images are clearly processed to edit out blemishes and rough edges, they remain simple portraits of the products themselves. Despite the technical difference between a photographic image and an illustrated image, these boards bear a striking visual resemblance to historical paper catalogues such as the 1912 catalogue from Sears (see figure 3.3).


¹¹⁰ “March 2014 Style Guide,” *Pinterest*, accessed May 19, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/jcrew/march-2014-style-guide/>.

¹¹¹ Sears, Roebuck and Company. *Catalog No. 124*. Sears, Roebuck & Co., Chicago, 1912. *Internet Archive*. Web. 10 May 2014.

SHOES (that make us swoon)


Obsessions know no bounds. Particularly when it comes to shoes. These are the pairs that make our heart flutter. <http://BG.com/Shoes> or 212 872 8947. #BGObsessed

Bergdorf Goodman
Follow Board
Send Board
300 Pins
61,609 Followers




BG from Bergdorf Goodman
Alexandre Birman Python & Suede Laced-Back Sandal

Not only do strappy sandals give a glamorous vibe, they give your foot




BG from Bergdorf Goodman
Jimmy Choo Willis Snake Half d'Orsay Pump, Blue

Wild thing. Jimmy Choo, 212 872 8947



BG from Bergdorf Goodman
Valentino Rockstud Rubber Rainboot, Red

This summer is supposed to be heavy on the rain. Think of it this



BG from Bergdorf Goodman
Saint Laurent Paris Leather Peak Pointed-Toe Pump, Red


Girl on fire. Saint Laurent, 212 872 8947

Figure 3.1 Screen capture from Bergdorf Goodman Pinterest board, *SHOES (that make us swoon)*


April 2014 Style Guide

For our friends on Pinterest, a look at our April Style Guide. Love what you see? Our Very Personal Stylist team can help you order the looks. Call 800 261 7422 or email erica@jcrew.com.

J.Crew
Follow Board
Send Board
103 Pins
114,656 Followers




J from J.Crew
Linen baseball tee in colorblock




J from J.Crew
Hooded fatigue jacket

J.Crew hooded fatigue jacket.



J from J.Crew
Eyelet shirtdress

J.Crew eyelet dress.



J from J.Crew
Double-knit merino boyfriend V-neck cardigan

Figure 3.2 Screen capture from J.Crew Pinterest board, *April 2014 Style Guide*



Figure 3.3 Image from Roebuck and Company Sears, *Catalog No. 124* from 1912. Notice the visual similarity with screen capture from Bergdorf Goodman's board, SHOES (that make us swoon). Credit Sears, Roebuck & Co., Chicago, <http://archive.org/details/catalogno1240sear>.

3.2.2 Case Study 2: Benjamin Moore

The concept of Collection is significant because many boards can be understood as “Collections” of images whose connection to their original contexts have been obliterated. Because these images exist only in relationship to each other, their meanings are nested so that together they point to one coherent experience. A group of boards by business brands on Pinterest distinctively displays characteristics of a “Collection.” For example, Benjamin Moore, a paint company, creates boards that serve as an inspiration repository for the viewer. One of their boards, *doors!*, features 52 images of brightly painted doors from external blogs (see figure 3.4). The board features an eclectic set of doors painted in every possible color imaginable and located all around the world, and identifies the corresponding Benjamin Moore paint product in the caption below. By focusing not on the product, but rather on a range of possible handicrafts or cooking projects, BM was able to

attract close to twenty thousand followers. Most of the followers identified themselves as homeowners who are looking for ideas for the next front door painting projects.¹¹²

Captions and comments that accompany the images demonstrate that the board is intended to provide users with a virtual window-shopping experience before they make a purchase. Under the very first image in the board, featuring a navy blue door, the board manager tagged a local towel service owner and asked what other colors or ideas she had in her “idea phase.” Tagging and commenting is a subtle gesture that invites another person to see a particular image and respond to it. Perhaps the towel business owner should look around in this board and gain inspiration from all the other images? Other followers’ comments show that they are indeed mentally “shopping” for the perfect color. Comments alternatively show deliberation (“I wonder how this would look”), emotional responses (“yes!” “love it!” “What a cool door.”), solicitation of opinions (“What is the name of this lovely color?” “what color door should I go with?”), and commitment to execution (“I plan on painting my door the same color!!!”). The images in this board provide points of comparison and contrast with one another: together they make up a Collection that provides the viewer with a virtual shopping experience. Looking and clicking through images is like virtual shopping, where the viewer is presented with a range of possibilities and does not have to commit to any.

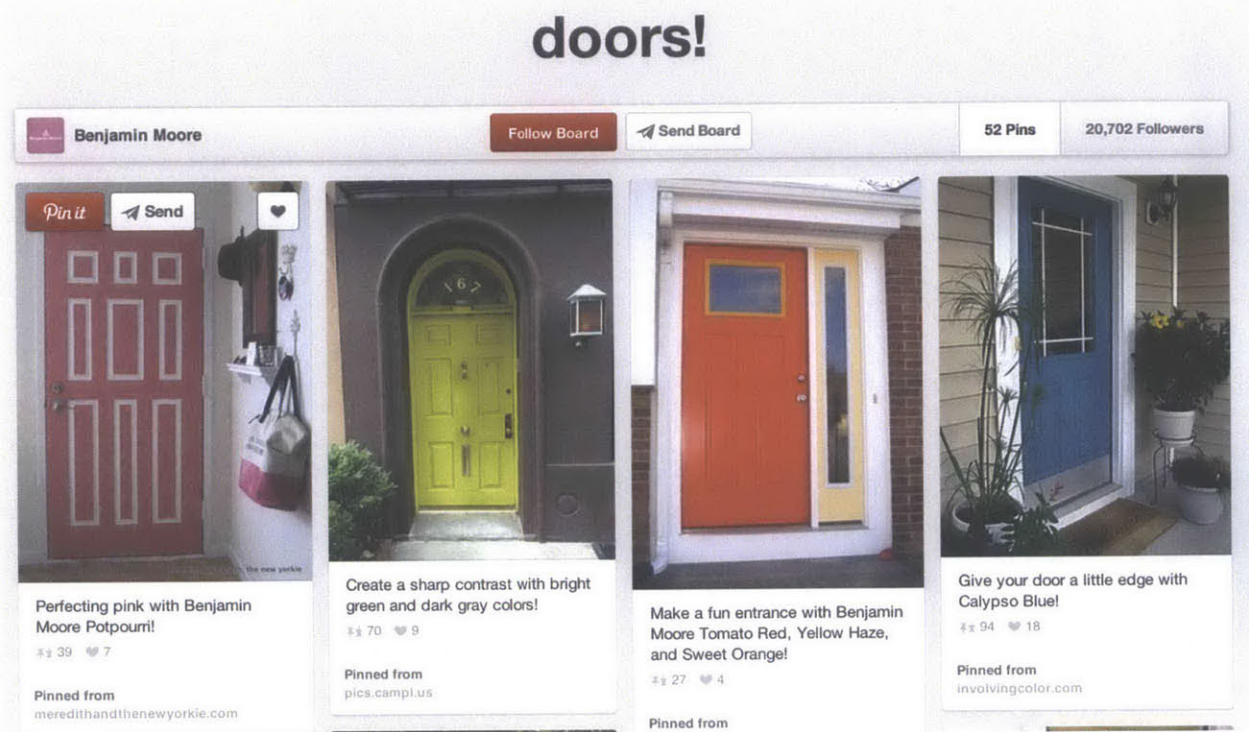
Benjamin Moore’s strategy was recognized by marketing companies as effective and exemplary. Hubspot, a leading internet marketing consultancy, nominates the company as an exemplary case of using Pinterest to market, commenting that while for the company a strategy of directly pinning cans after cans of paint “isn’t going to work,” they did well by instead “creating a board around something people actually want to see more about”¹¹³—namely the experience of browsing through many colored doors as a collection.

Other boards can be viewed as similar attempts to portray products not directly but rather as a component towards the future potential outcome. Lowes, the hardware giant, created a board named “Build it!,” featuring 113 pins of DIY ideas for home furniture, entertaining close to 3.5

¹¹² “Doors!,” *Pinterest*, accessed May 19, 2014, http://www.pinterest.com/benjamin_moore/doors/.

¹¹³ “10 Brilliant Pinterest Board Ideas From Real Brands,” accessed May 19, 2014, <http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/pinterest-brand-board-examples-li>.

million followers.¹¹⁴ Hubspot touted Lowe's boards for their effort to feature not just Lowe's products but DIY projects and instructions from external bloggers. Similar to Benjamin Moore "doors!" board, followers can find a wide range of DIY projects, ranging from small scale furniture assembly to full scale kitchen make over. Because the projects are more complex as compared with those at Benjamin Moore, instructions are more complex and intricate. Follower commentary shows a tendency to focus on the feasibility of the process and desirability of the eventual outcome.¹¹⁵



¹¹⁴ "Build It!," *Pinterest*, accessed May 19, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/lowes/build-it/>.

¹¹⁵ one possible explanation of the popularity of these boards is that they cater to the strong do-it-yourself and handcraft culture on Pinterest. As of March 2014, Pinterest boards are divided into thirty-three categories, with Home, Arts and Crafts, and Fashion/Style being the top three most popular categories. According to an Internet research firm RJ Metrics, 17.2% of all pinboards are categorized under Home, followed by Arts and Crafts (12.4%).¹¹⁵ The fact that Home and Arts and Crafts are so popular suggests that many users appreciate pins with a hands-on component where a purchased product can be turned into something new. Academic research also suggests a heavy hands-on, crafty tendency amongst Pinterest users. A statistical overview by Gilbert and Chang performs a textual analysis comparing what users say on Pinterest versus what they say on twitter. They found that a concise set of terms that characterize Pinterest usage also have experiential quality, such as *DIY*, *recipe*, and *book*¹¹⁵, as compared to Twitter's focus on temporality (*now*, *today*, *tonight*.)

Figure 3.4 Screen capture from Benjamin Moore's board, *doors!*

Sephora Nailspotting is a crowd-sourced board where images uploaded by users onto Instagram with a hashtag of "Nailspotting" are selected and then pinned onto the brand's board. Displaying 1,333 user-generated images nail projects to date, the board enjoys over 180 thousand followers.¹¹⁶ Chobani, a Greek yogurt brand, also hosts multiple boards that feature recipes that contain greek yoghurt ingredients ("baked with Chobani," "Chobani creation and smoothies," "Yogurt paparazzi"), each enjoying close to 30 thousand followers.¹¹⁷ Etsy, a popular online craft maker's market, boosts multiple boards that show people how to use their products in daily life. One marketing firm used Etsy as example of best practices, advising other brands seeking to use Pinterest most effectively to follow the same practices, because "giving your customers new ideas for how they can use your products will give them more reasons and incentives to buy from you."¹¹⁸

3.2.3 Case Study 3: SJP: A Day in Her Shoes

When viewed through the lens of Souvenir and Collections, it becomes clear that some of the most poignant and affective boards are showcasing the product as an inherent part of a personal and personable experience by embedding images of products with a Collection. This is especially prevalent amongst high-end fashion retailers and brands because their clothing items rely primarily on aesthetic and branding nuances to differentiate themselves from other brands rather than on practical functional differences.

Lifestyle branding is a longstanding tradition within marketing; in a way, many high-end fashion brands' boards on Pinterest are bringing lifestyle branding to its logical conclusion by including all self-expressive activity. Driven by a need for self-expression, marketers believe, customers are prone to make purchasing decisions to align themselves with a brand that is publicly associated with a lifestyle that they identify with. Older brands such as Harley Davidson, Ralph Lauren and Abercrombie & Fitch are traditional practitioners of lifestyle marketing. Marketers see

¹¹⁶ "Nailspotting," *Pinterest*, accessed May 19, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/sephora/nailspotting/>.

¹¹⁷ "Chobani (chobani)," *Pinterest*, accessed May 19, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/chobani/>.

¹¹⁸ "Etsy (etsy)," *Pinterest*, accessed May 19, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/etsy/>.

lifestyle positioning as a way to break free from the cutthroat competition within an industry where functional differences are hard to maintain, and seek to connect to consumers on a personal level. Recently, however, marketing scholars have argued that in doing so marketers are trading in-category competition for even fiercer cross-category competition. “Because lifestyle brands compete for a share of a consumer’s identity, this competition is not bound by product categories. They compete with virtually any self-expressive activity, such as ordering one’s favorite coffee, listening to one’s favorite band, or social networking. Focusing on lifestyle puts brands like Abercrombie & Fitch, Harley-Davidson, Gillette, Puma, Starbucks, and Facebook “in direct competition with one another,” argues Kellogg Professor Chernev.¹¹⁹ These fashion brand boards often include all self-expressive supplements and use them to feature their product.

One particularly telling example is the designer footwear line that Sarah Jessica Parker launched in collaboration with Nordstrom, a premium fashion retailer. Sarah Jessica Parker is an actress and fashion icon that became popular due to her leading role in the popular TV show *Sex and the City*. Parker has dabbled in fashion design on and off since 2003, first signing a multimillion dollar and multi seasonal contract with Gap, followed by her own perfume collection. On February 28th, 2014, she launched a mid-end shoe and handbag collection with retailer Nordstrom, offering finely crafted, well-designed, Italy-made leather shoes at an affordable price. Her collection of shoes is made available online and in select Nordstrom locations, and she is also doing a US tour where she makes personal appearances at Nordstrom locations in Seattle, Los Angeles, Dallas, Chicago, Miami and a pop-up store in New York’s SoHo neighborhood (see figure 3.5).

A close reading of the pins, captions as well as follower comments on Nordstrom’s promotional board show that the board owner was actively cultivating a holistic experience for viewers. Making use of the Place Pin—a Pinterest feature launched in November 2013 that geotags pins onto an added map and is created to cater to a growing number of users interest in travel—Parker and Nordstrom marketing managers pin about suggested stops in cities where Parker is promoting the brand.¹²⁰ The suggested stops include restaurants, theaters, shopping malls, other

¹¹⁹ “Lifestyle Branding: The New Frontier of Competitive Differentiation,” *Marketing Science Institute*, accessed May 19, 2014, <http://www.msi.org/articles/lifestyle-branding-the-new-frontier-of-competitive-differentiation/>.

¹²⁰ “SJP: A Day in Her Shoes,” *Pinterest*, accessed May 19, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/nordstrom/sjp-a-day-in-her-shoes/>.

locations that Parker considered worth visiting, paired with appropriate shoes from her collection. The very first image in the collection explicitly invites the viewer to think of herself as having transformed into Sarah Jessica Parker.

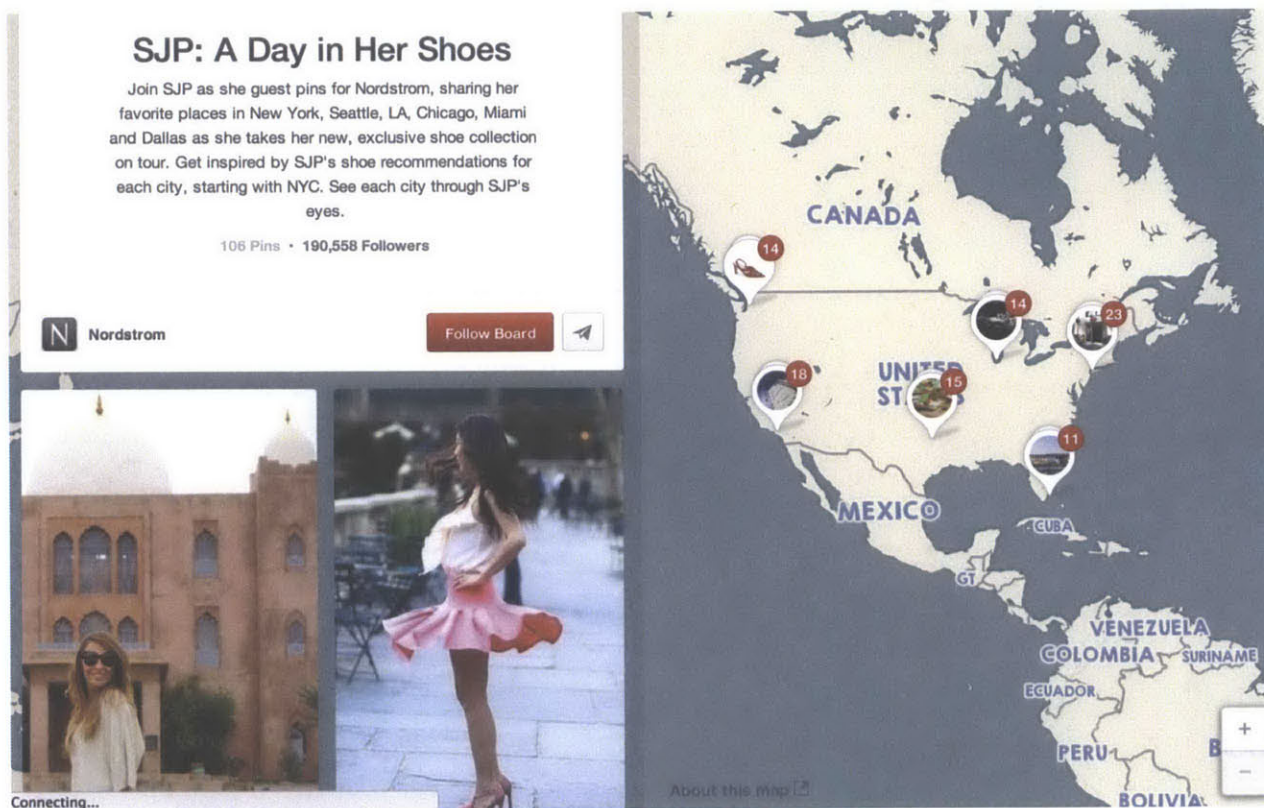


Figure 3.5 Screen Capture from Nordstrom's board, *SJP: A Day in Her Shoes*

The image itself is a studio portrait of Sarah Jessica Parker sitting on a white coffee table while leaning forward and touching her right shoe, a bright red high heel, with her left hand. Even though Parker is surrounded by stacks of salmon pink shoeboxes, the image appears uncluttered against a white background, drawing the visual attention to the only bright color in the picture, her high heels. Parker is beaming, and the image radiates joyfulness. The image is geo-located as SJP's flagship store in Manhattan (see figure 3.6). In the caption of this pin, the board manager addresses the followers by asking, "Where would you go in SJP's shoes?," assuming immediate viewer recognition of the celebrity's initials. The wording of the question is illuminating. A clever word play,

it plays off of the idiom of “stepping into one’s shoes” and invites the follower to see the world through SJP’s eyes. The assimilation process that one undergoes before one “steps into SJP’s shoes” is literal: one literally “steps into her shoes” by purchasing and wearing these shoes.¹²¹ In light of Susan Stewart’s theory, this board demonstrates the characteristics of a Collection because the pins together construct a holistic experience. The viewer is presented with a complete and detailed itinerary at the end of which she becomes assimilated to the celebrity herself, stepping indeed “in her shoes.” SJP’s board exemplifies a range of boards that, contrary to the simplistic, unadorned digital boards that resemble historical paper catalogs, strives to evoke consumer imagination by embedding images of their products into collections that depict rich experiences.

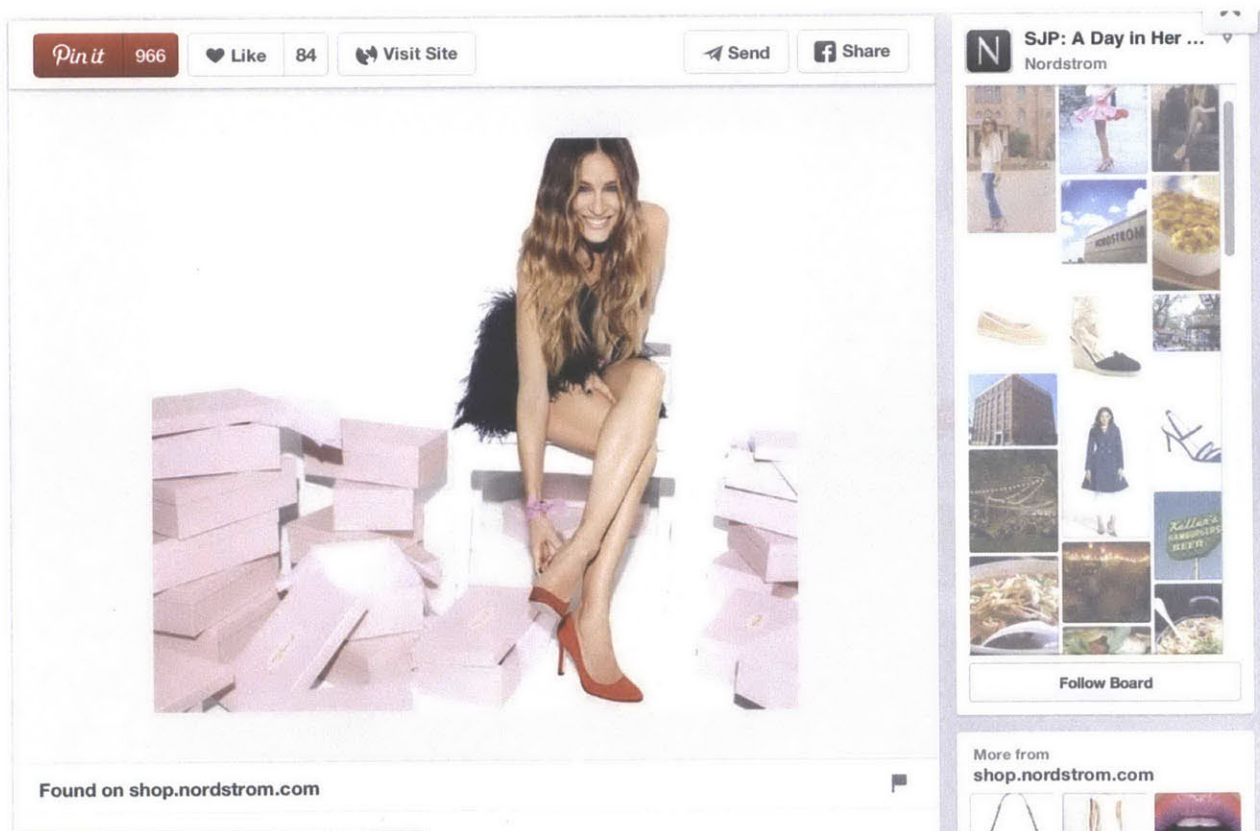


Figure 3.6 Screen capture of the first image in *SJP: A Day in Her Shoes*

3.3 Consumer Imagination

If, as Campbell theorized, commercially produced images in the form of advertisement are materials that facilitate consumers' hedonistic imagination, then the response from customers on "SJP: A Day in Her Shoes" board confirms his claim and showcases the range and nature of imaginative play that pinners engage in with these images. Customers responded to the question, "Where would you go in SJP's shoes?" with great enthusiasm. They took the prompt to be an opportunity to daydream, to engage in roleplaying, and to take ownership of the products represented by the pins.

Some popular answers to this question involve planning an elaborate itinerary that draws on locations and activities from one's real life. One woman says, "I would do the mall, lunch at Sal's in Scottsdale, and a walk in the park barefoot while carrying my pretty, classy footwear." The type of fantasy she has is concrete, specific and executable. Certain imaginations can spring from real life and be pragmatic. Other types of fantasies are more whimsical and wild in nature. A few women planned on going to Oscars: "I would go to the Oscars this weekend and hope to dance the night away with John Travolta at the after party!" while another woman said that she would "go power walking to the moon and back." New York and Paris are both popular destinations, consistent with the two cities' reputation as fashion capitals. Customers often explicitly state the dream-like nature of their answers: "NYC and Paris: a girl could dream!" "I would go shopping in NYC! I have never been there!" Furthermore, New York City holds an extra level of charm as the place where *Sex and City* is set. Many women dream of having a "'Sex and City' girls night out." Being in NYC means to be closer, physically and mentally, to the show and to the celebrity herself:

"If I was SJP and I would have the chance to go somewhere in her shoes; I would go over the streets of NYC. [N]o questions asked, that city makes her the luckiest girl she is today. I would go over galleries, restaurants, go to see a show in Times Square and hey!! Of course walk through Manhattan and Central Park. In her shoes I can realize how lucky this city makes her as a person and as an artist. ♥" (Karlita Ramos).

Pinners' enthusiastic responses to SJP's shoes express a sense of self-empowerment through the imaginative ownership of these shoes. "Nothing makes you feel better than a great pair of shoes." Sometimes the enhancement is physical and tangible: "I would wear mine in my new body in summer time walking around Central Park." Some were more abstract, in the form of an enhanced

or rekindled relationship: “I would make my husband take me out dancing!” Some rejoiced over the sense of a renewed self, and bright futures: “anywhere! Everywhere! With anything and everything! But the best place to wear them, when I am home with my feet up looking at my shoes, being powerful and dreaming of my positive future while wearing the SJP Shoes!” Such imagination is pleasurable because it allows these women to see an alternative future in which they are confident, attractive, and empowered.

Customer responses confirm that this business strategy is working and customers are imagining experiences and identities based on products. These product-based imaginations seem to be supported by Campbell’s implication that daydreams are tied to products or representations of products. In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, Campbell points to the ability of products and advertisements to stimulate imagination. Campbell argues that novel products are admired by modern consumers because they allow the consumers to “project some of the idealized pleasure he’s thought of” onto them, because ultimately “modern consumers’ basic motivation is the desire to experience in reality the pleasurable dramas they have already enjoyed in imagination, and each new product is seen as offering a possibility of realizing this ambition.” Not only do physical objects allow the modern consumer to indulge in these pleasurable imagination, but symbols, images, and representations of products do, too. Campbell talks about advertisements, magazines, novels and films being consumed because they “serve as aids to the construction of day-dreams.”¹²² Even though they offer aesthetic and sensational gratification, “the greater pleasure is likely to be derived from its open invitation to be used as material for illusory enjoyment.”¹²³ Imagination is not free; it’s tied to products.

Responses like those quoted above, combined with the sales driven by Pinterest activity, led Huffington post journalist Chocano to pessimistically predict that customer collection of scraps on Pinterest is not really collection, but rather ultimately subservient to advertising. Chocano argues that what Pinterest evokes is actually a feeling of addictive yearning because something is missing or incomplete. By trapping users into this feeling of obsessive longing, Pinterest has the same psychological effect as advertising: “advertising trains us to keep our desire always at the ready, nurturing that feeling that something is missing, then redirecting it toward a tangible product,” and all the pent-up yearning found resolution in the purchase of a product.¹²⁴ Our feeling of

¹²² Campbell, *Romantic Ethic*, 92

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Chocano, “Pinterest, Tumblr and the Trouble”

incompletion is redirected, among the thousands of pictures of designer shoes and newer houses, towards a tangible product.

However, contrary to Chocano's pessimistic observation, some boards are constructed explicitly against consumption. Lauren Gray, an active Pinterest user, develops a dichotomy between images for consumptive uses and images for imaginative users. She has two boards on fashion, "*Fashionable*" (see figure 3.7) and "*Wardrobe + Closet*" (see figure 3.8). "*Fashionable*" is "Looks I wish I could pull off, want to buy or just like in general" while "*Wardrobe + my closet*" is constituted with "looks I would actually wear or pieces I actually own." The construction of these boards are specifically motivated by the distinction between items that she would wear in actuality and those that she wishes, in a fantasized sense, that she could wear. The distinction suggests that one underlying assumption about these aspirational, fantasized items is that they activate mental activity that excludes activity associated with the acquisition of an actual product.

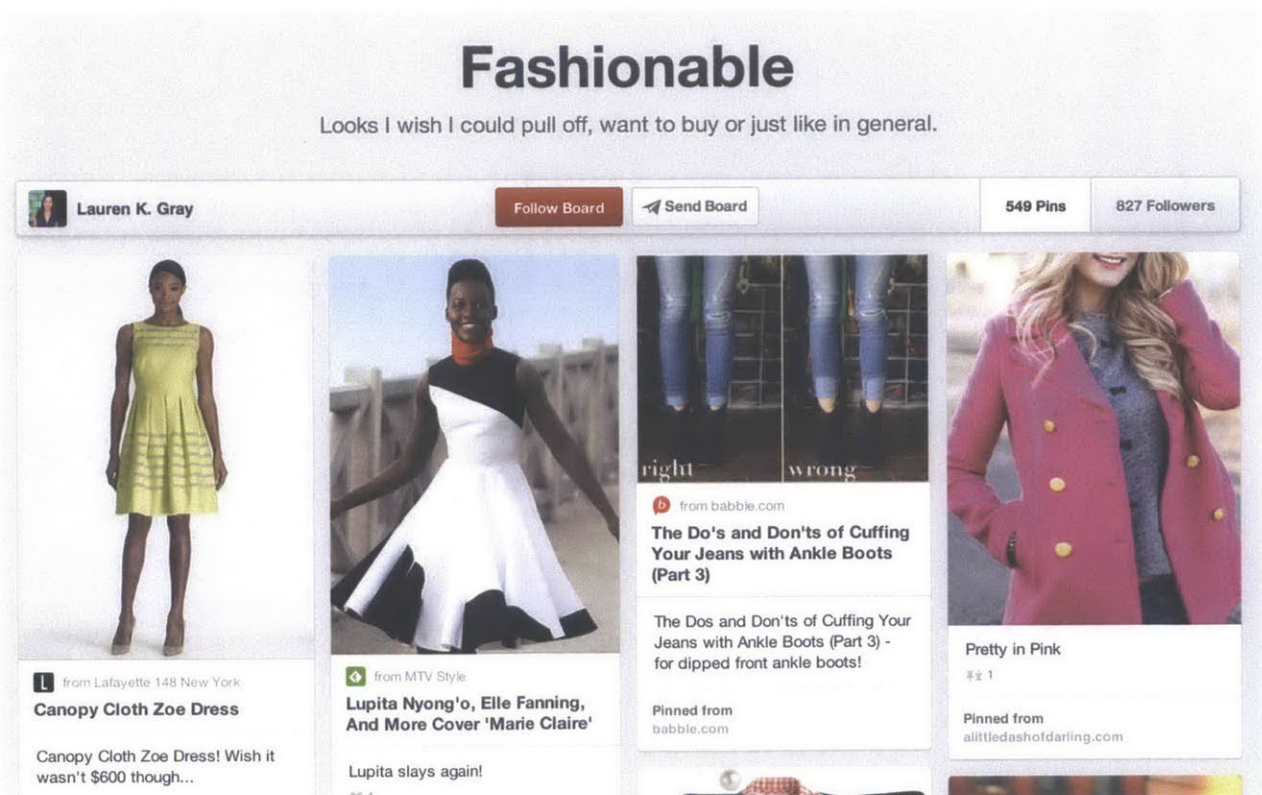


Figure 3.7 Screen Capture from Lauren Gray's board, Fashionable

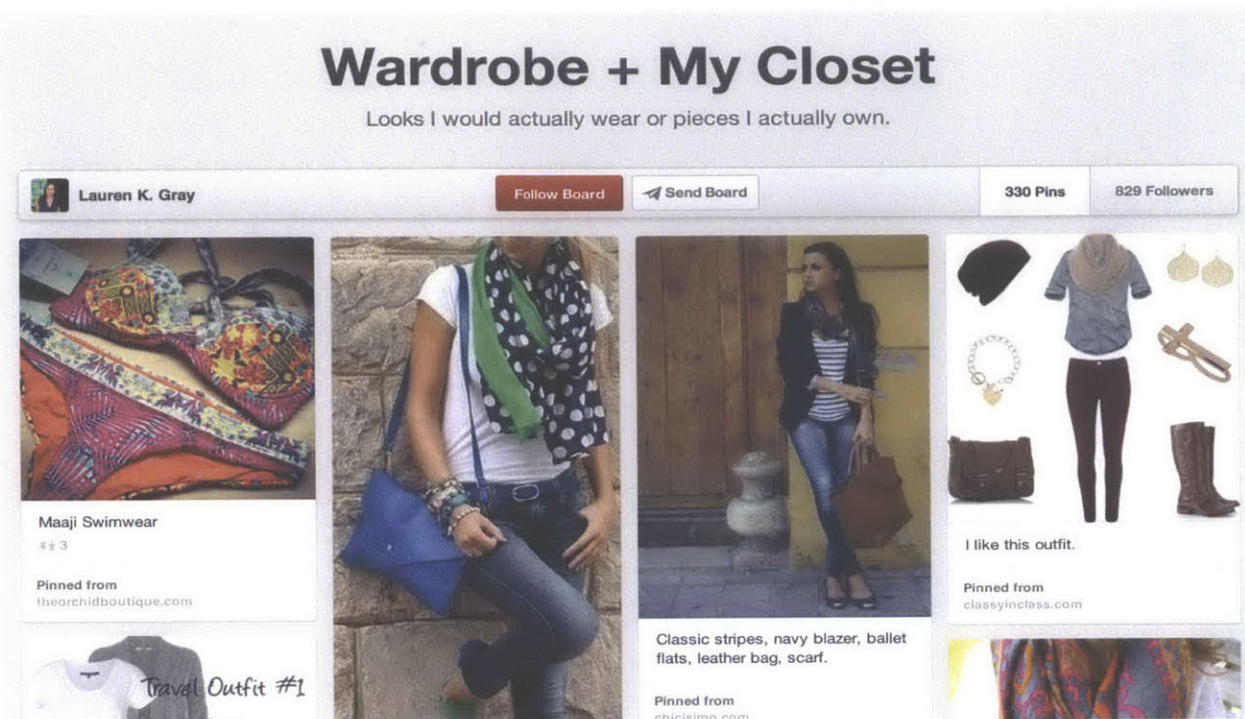


Figure 3.8 Screen Capture from Lauren Gray's board, Wardrobe + My Closet

What kind of mental activity is engaged then? Lauren identifies it as an imagining of one's future through a range of projects:

I can see my future and things I want to create from this site. I see the new and developing technologies, I see the puppies I want, I see the wedding pictures I know I will want to try and I see the recipes I know I will love...what [Pinterest] comes down to is [the fact that] we want to look at things we desire to imagine an improvement to our own lives whether it be through a simple craft, a new dress or a place to visit.¹²⁵

Lauren encapsulates one key feature of Pinterest: pinning is ultimately an act of expressing desire for an object, a craft or an experience. The image becomes a blueprint upon which fanciful imaginings are constructed, and frequently such imaginings are not simply about products ("the technologies," "the puppies," "the wedding pictures"), but rather about an aspirational self projected into the future. These images capture "my future and things I want to create." The key difference between Pinterest and earlier forms of pleasurable imagination, then, is that on Pinterest daydreams are not necessarily tied to products anymore. Customers can construct boards that help with imagination

¹²⁵ Lauren Gray, interview by Arik Hansen.

because of the overabundance of found images and the flexibility that Pinterest allows its users to craft images into collections in malleable ways.

Lauren's board, "Destinations and Travel," for example, showcases that her imagination can be independent of products and is rather about traveling as a transformative experience.¹²⁶ In the board Lauren Gray collects images of "Places I have been or want to visit." Visible in her collection is the firm belief that traveling is hedonistic and pleasurable because it both provides an escape from mundane daily life and promises adventure, enlightenment and ultimately self-improvement.¹²⁷ The board has 238 pins and 818 followers, which exceeds the 538 followers that Lauren's overall profile has. Her pins span a wide range of destinations including Greece, Italy, and Thailand, and include unspecified locations and images of quotes about traveling.

Other than images of specific travel destinations, a large number of images on Lauren's board contain a short quote, rendered in great typeface against a beautiful background. These quotes unanimously praise the transformative power of traveling. These quotes systematically elevates traveling into a way of life that has the power to remove oneself from mundane daily life, make one happy, and put things in perspective: "Live, travel, adventure, bless, and don't be sorry," "I love places that make you realize how tiny you and your problems are." Those who do not travel are restricted in their vision and breadth of life experiences: "The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page." At the same time, traveling is perceived to be eye-opening and enlightening, and the traveller comes out of the experience being a better self. Learning is a key component of traveling: "...adventures are the best ways to learn," "Traveling—it leaves you speechless and then turns you into a storyteller." And self-discovery is a very important part of that learning: "we must take adventures in order to know where we truly belong." In the end, the traveler comes home having become wiser, more insightful and more capable of making the most of one's current situation. "We travel because we need to, because distance and difference are the secret tonic to creativity. When we get home, home is still the same. But something changes inside of us, and

¹²⁶ "Destinations + Travel," *Pinterest*, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/laurenkgray/destinations-travel/>.

¹²⁷ According to RJ metrics, an online analytics company, travel ranks as the ninth most popular board category and accounts for 2% of total boards. Although it may seem few compared with boards on Home (17%) or Arts and Crafts (12%), its influence is such that Pinterest launched a new function, Place Boards, because they saw an increase in users' demand in geo-tagged and location specific pins.

that changes everything.” These quotes effectively elevate traveling as an abstract experience to such a status that it is perceived to have power to educate, to uplift, and to transform.

Aesthetically, a lot of the images in this board evoke the “fairyland ideal” that we have seen in chapter one. Some pins portray exotic locations or awe-inspiring natural scenery. For example, there is a pin on a Jungle Dinner in the Maldives, a “Lantern Festival in Thailand,” and another one set in a South Asia tropical forest, in which a stone statue stands in the background and a dark-skinned man with white garments raises a bowl up to a stream of spring that oozes out from an opening in the statue (see figure 3.9). Some pins depict mysterious travel destinations such as the “Hunyard Castle in Transylvania” or a small street tunnel in Isle of Crete, leading to the ocean, captioned “passage to the sea.” Other images portray unusual architectures such as underwater hotel suites at “Poseidon Resort, Fiji.” Heavily edited and featuring stunning views, many of these pictures portray travel destinations that are otherworldly, majestic and mysterious. They seem like “a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be,”¹²⁸ in the words of British painter Edward Burne-Jones (describing the type of art he wished to create in the midst of the Pre-Raphaelite art movement). Lauren’s descriptions and comments show that she is responding to the fairyland ideal. She captions many images with the phrases, “Would love to see this,” “How awesome of a sight!” and “definitely on my list of to-dos!” She expresses an acute longing to visit these places, because traveling to such places is associated with intense pleasure, such that that “my life will not be complete until I’ve gone down this [superglide into the Mediterranean Sea, Sicily, Italy].” Her inspiration for these sites could come from the web as well as from her real life acquaintances: under one pin of Brighton, England, she adds “My brother JUST got back from staying here and I’m so jealous!!”

¹²⁸British Museum - Edward Burne-Jones (1833-98)." British Museum - Edward Burne-Jones (1833-98). http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/articles/e/cdward_burne-jones_1833-98.aspx (accessed May 19, 2014).

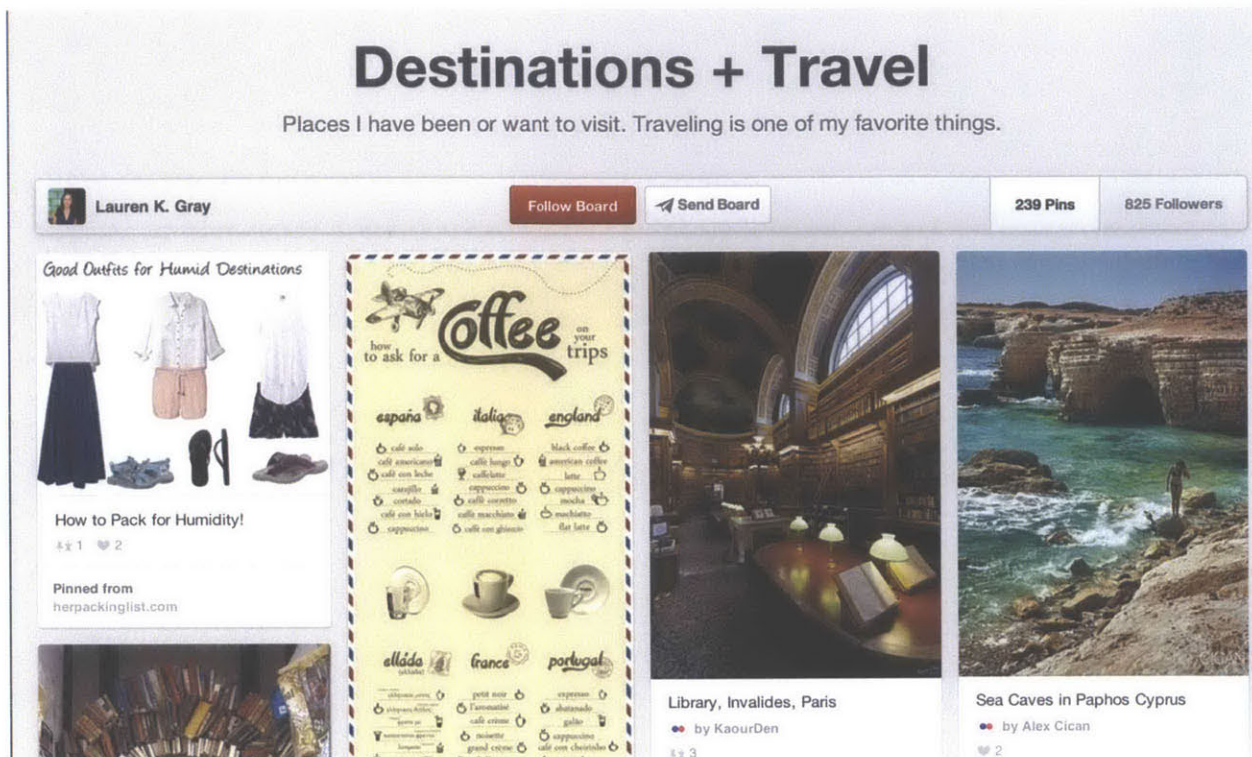


Figure 3.9 Screen capture of Lauren Gray's board, Destinations + Travel

Such imagination is comparable to the two examples that Campbell gave while demonstrating the “unique feature of the psychic experience of the modern man.” The two examples are “exaggerated” because they did not seem to rely either on actual products or even symbolic representation of products. Instead, these types of imaginings are pleasurable for the consumer often because they are aspirational and provide an escape from one’s mundane daily life. James Thurber’s 1939 short story, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, and Keith Waterhouse’s 1959 novel, *Billy Liar*, both argue for the pleasurable nature of modern consumption and imagination. Although they are both fictional characters, Campbell believed that they present “in an exaggerated form...a characteristic and unique feature of the psychic experience of modern man.”¹²⁹ Walter Mitty, a mild-mannered middle-aged man who accompanies his wife to Waterbury on her weekly shopping trips, creates five episodes of heroic daydreams, including piloting a navy plane through a hurricane, taking over at a critical stage in an important operation, making a dramatic court-room confession, and carelessly volunteering to fly a bomber single-handedly on a hazardous, daredevil mission. William Fisher, a 19-year-old rural British boy who is bored with his clerk duties, invents and shares

¹²⁹ Campbell, *Romantic Ethic*, 78

“preposterous stories about himself and other people.” Both characters, Campbell observes, experience “boredom, even failures” in their real life.¹³⁰ Their fantasies provided them with an escape from the unglamorous and underwhelming aspects of real life. Does this “escaping” factor from the boredom of real life also play in the pleasurable imagination concocted by Pinterest users? The next section shows that this is indeed the case, as much of the boards on Pinterest are ultimately about transformative experiences and aspirational activities. By engaging in pleasurable imagination about experiences that have a life-changing power, users express desires for a renewed and refined self.

Like paper dollhouses kept little girls “busy and happy” and out of “nursery ennui” by indulging them in imaginary scenarios,¹³¹ Pinterest users equally found their own personal escapes through pinning. While Chocano thinks that ultimately Pinterest redirects our feeling of incompleteness to a product, Lauren’s board demonstrates that it can be about experiences. It is not only boards about traveling that stirs pleasurable imagination; users have created boards that activate the imagination on relationships, companionships, and possessions. These boards bear striking resemblance to the paper dollhouses that we saw in the first chapter. Both Pinterest and paper dollhouses help their makers construct an imaginative space where the individual is free from real life constraints, can indulge in aspirations, and may toy with alternative visions of the self.

Conclusion

In this chapter we saw how businesses on Pinterest provide consumer-collectors with images and materials that in turn fuel their hedonistic imagination in a way similar to that of the paper dollhouses for their makers. Are these two types of imagination the same? Campbell talks about pleasurable imagination evoked by advertisements as “necessarily covert and individualistic in character and cannot, by its very nature, be communal—but this doesn’t mean that individuals may not sit side by side whilst lost in private words of their own.”¹³² Yet Pinterest’s espousal of transparency and publicly led many to believe in its potential to tap an area that Facebook is particularly weak in: connecting people through their interests in things. Commenting in early 2012, journalist Bosker wondered, “This sharing of things rather than personal updates, while deeply

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Hoffman, “Homes for Paper dolls.”

¹³² Campbell, *Romantic Ethic*, 92

consumerist, enables Pinterest to connect strangers in ways that Facebook hasn't yet perfected. While Facebook pioneered the concept of the social graph that allows us to peruse a Web personalized by all the people we know, Pinterest may be paving the way for an interest graph, whereby we can discover and connect with people whose tastes we share, but whom we've never looked in the eye. Pinterest has an opportunity to branch into still unconquered territory and exploit a Facebook weak spot by helping people 'meet' and connect over their shared love for, say, shabby chic."¹³³ Is this true? Are we just individuals forever stuck in our personal, covert imagination about products? Even when we go so far as to construct full-fledged paper dollhouses, are we still bounded in our sociability because there is only one physical copy of it? Or are we capable of connecting with others in an unprecedented way now that the platform is networked? The next chapter examines the communal aspect of pleasurable imagination and argues that the unique affordances of Pinterest actually support the construction of product-centered, malleable, global female communities that could engage in collective pleasurable imagination.

¹³³ Bosker, Bianca. "The Secret To Pinterest's Success: We're Sick Of Each Other." *Huffington Post*. N. p., 14 Feb. 2012. Web. 13 May 2014.

Chapter Four A Female Community of Taste and Dream

*Hopefully, brands can have the guts to stay out of it and let it be an organic, legit form of word-of-mouth. Commercializing everything is becoming incredibly boring.*¹³⁴

–Julie Kucinski

As of July 2013, there are 70 million users on Pinterest busily collecting, curating and sharing images.¹³⁵ Their activities resemble those that started a century ago when consumers collected colorful images from trade cards, magazines and catalogues and pasted them into scrapbooks. However, Pinterest bears one significant difference from those early scrapbooks: it is social.

Campbell once argued that the pleasurable imagination elicited by advertisements is necessarily covert and personal. As such, an individual can experience parallel imagination that will never converge with those experienced by others.¹³⁶ However, Campbell was describing an era before personal activities such as reading, photography, and scrapbooking were transformed into social activities through services like Goodreads, Instagram, and Pinterest. The change does not imply that people never socialized during these activities—people discussed books at book clubs, brought photo albums to family gatherings, and shared scrapbooks with friends—but now socializing is an inherent part, if not a main driver, for these experiences. While many people describe their activity on Pinterest as one of personal enjoyment, the site is anything but personal. All boards are set by default to be publicly visible. Not until December of 2013 did Pinterest allow users to have up to three “secret boards” that could be kept private.¹³⁷ Pinterest’s default setting means that anyone can browse through others’ collections without permission. How does the collecting of images change when it becomes inherently exhibitionistic?

This chapter examines the social nature of Pinterest, applies the sociological theory of boundary objects to various images and boards, and evaluates groups of users on Pinterest against the sociological concept of virtual communities. Pinterest exhibits three aspects of sociability. First,

¹³⁴ Julie Kucinski, interview by Arik Hansen, December 13th 2011, published at “What’s behind the Pinterest Craze? 15 Super-Users Share Their Thoughts,” *Communications Conversations*, accessed May 16, 2014, <http://www.arikhanson.com/2011/12/13/whats-behind-the-pinterest-craze-15-super-users-share-their-thoughts/>. (Hereafter Interview by Arik Hansen)

¹³⁵ “65 Amazing Pinterest Stats (April 2014),” *DMR*, accessed May 16, 2014, <http://expandedramblings.com/index.php/pinterest-stats/>.

¹³⁶ Campbell, *Romantic Ethic*, 92

¹³⁷ As this thesis is being written in February 2014, Pinterest lifted such limitation. See “Pinterest Now Lets You Create As Many Secret Boards As You Want,” *The Next Web*, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://thenextweb.com/insider/2014/02/28/pinterest-now-lets-create-many-secret-boards-want/>. However, that such a stringent cap is kept for over two years is indicative of Pinterest’s reluctance to encourage users to curate content that is not publicly visible.

Pinterest's espousal of publicity and transparency means that personal collections become powerful tools of identity projection and taste transmission. Second, the site allows the creation of powerful trendsetters, whose meticulously categorized collections allow them to reach a massive number of users. Third, groups of users develop collective, fragmented, and serial narratives constructed from shared images.

4.1 Background Theories

In this section I would like to introduce three background concepts that are helpful to our understanding of Pinterest. The first is Zarro and Hall's typology that divides Pinterest users into professional and personal users.¹³⁸ The difference lies in their purpose for using the site: professional users are on the site to promote their organization, products, or services while personal users are primarily discovering and collecting images for recreational purposes. Professional users generally seek to reach a wide audience. Zarro and Hall catalogue most business organizations, large or small, in this category. Personal users, on the other hand, do not seek such attention and use the site primarily to find inspiration and to curate personal collections. Zarro and Hall suggest that a third group, "bloggers," represents a gray-area that combines characteristics typical of both professional and personal users; "while not strictly promoting their businesses, these individuals do use the site more as means of attracting attention [than of curating personal collections]."¹³⁹ I group together professional users and "bloggers" as *tastemakers*, an umbrella term I give active users who have large numbers of followers and are visibly managing their boards to attract more followers, promote a business, or serve other professional purposes. Not all tastemakers have an explicit monetary incentive for using the site, but their influence means that they play an active role in setting trends and shaping tastes on Pinterest.

The second concept instrumental to our study is the notion of community. The concept of community remains a powerful tool in the sociological study of political and intellectual life. Sociology scholar Steven Brint revisits the long-debated discourse on community and develops a typology for subtypes communities. He makes use of four partitioning variables:

- (1) Ultimate context of interaction: geographical versus choice-based communities.
- (2) Primary motivation of interaction: belief-based versus interest-based communities.
- (3) For geographical communities, Brint distinguishes them based on frequency of interaction. For choice-based communities, he uses the location of other members.
- (4) Amount of face-to-face interaction.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Zarro, Michael, Catherine Hall, and Andrea Forte. "Wedding Dresses and Wanted Criminals: Pinterest.com as an Infrastructure for Repository Building." In *Seventh International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 2013. <http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM13/paper/view/6101>.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7

¹⁴⁰ Steven Brint, "Gemeinschaft Revisited: A Critique and Reconstruction of the Community Concept," *Sociological Theory* 19, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 1–23, doi:10.1111/0735-2751.00125, 11

With such partitioning variables, Brint comes up with eight major subtypes of communities: (1) communities of place, (2) communes and collectives, (3) localized friendship networks, (4) dispersed friendship networks, (5) activity-based elective communities, (6) belief-based elective communities, (7) imagined communities, and (8) virtual communities. Brint takes the term “Imagined Communities” from Anderson, who originally used it to describe communities of believers in the nation-state, and expands the notion to mean people who share beliefs and ideas but do not necessarily have face-to-face contact with one another, including supporters of entertainers and sports teams, expressive genres, political tendencies, or philosophical schools.¹⁴¹ He uses the notion of “virtual communities” to mean communities in which members interact exclusively through the medium of computer technology.¹⁴²

Within these eight subtypes, Pinterest communities display characteristics of (5) activity-based elective communities, (7) imagined communities and (8) virtual communities. But communities on Pinterest also complicate such distinctions in three major ways. In terms of primary motivation, Pinterest is not a single community but rather multiple communities that congregate over images that showcase aspirations and taste, such as fashion, inspirational quotes, cooking, and crafts, just to name a few. Taste is more intangible than activities, beliefs, and interests. Although one could argue that pinning can be thought of as an activity and that the collected images can represent interests, this is not always the case. Users differ in how much they use the site to browse, to collect, or to share. Therefore, using Pinterest reflects a more incorporeal behavior than conventional interest or activities. Secondly, Pinterest demonstrates that virtual communities and imagined communities can have overlaps. Communities of interest (shared ideologies, etc.) are enabled by technologies that allow people to find others with common beliefs outside of the traditional limitations of real-time and physical space. While scrapbooking displays many characteristics similar to Pinterest’s bricolage practices, the communities that they formed were limited to local groups. Thirdly, in terms of in-person versus virtual interaction, Pinterest communities display a remarkable indifference to the notion of persona. The mechanism for following others on Pinterest is based not on any pinner’s whole collection, but rather individual boards within the pinner’s oeuvre. Therefore most users follow specific boards, choosing to assemble around artifacts rather than people. Although notable tastemakers do emerge in the community, they came to prominence through massive collections and meticulously categorized boards, which in turn cultivate their personas, rather than the other way around.

Finally, the notion of boundary objects is a sociological concept critical to our understanding of Pinterest communities because it sheds light on how taste is transmitted among users, and on how boards by tastemakers and personal users differ in organization. An idea developed by Star and Griesemer in 1988, boundary objects refers to entities that mediate the boundaries between

¹⁴¹ Benedict Anderson, “Introduction,” in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1991), 1-8

¹⁴² Brint, “Gemeinschaft Revisited,” 11

groups.¹⁴³ They can be objects, procedures or rituals that are shared, but used by different groups for different purposes. Boundary objects are imbued with different meanings that are negotiated according to time and context. On Pinterest, personal preference and taste is a real asset that becomes attached to an image as part of the image's symbolic meaning. As images are shared and transmitted, taste and preferences also pass from one user to another, while its meaning is interpreted and negotiated across different contexts.

Originally, Star and Griesemer suggested four categories of boundary objects—repositories, ideal types, coincident boundaries, and standardized forms. In their study of Pinterest, Zarro and Hall argued that Pinterest collections are most similar to repositories because they are “ordered ‘piles’ of objects...indexed in a standardized fashion.”¹⁴⁴ Taste can be arbitrated via socially visible collections of images on Pinterest because these images and collections are repositories that have interpretive flexibility. Interpretive flexibility means that the object can have different meanings across social worlds.¹⁴⁵ On Pinterest, different groups are able to interface with and successfully use the same objects (pins), even as they negotiate these objects' use, form, and meaning. Images enjoy an interpretive flexibility that allows them to be repinned onto different boards with different descriptions, without soliciting consent from the original collector. No further negotiation is necessary even as different social worlds intersect.

4.2 Taste Transmission Between Individuals

Pinterest actively increases a person's exposure to similar images whenever possible by showing various contexts in which one image appeared. For example, once a viewer clicks on an image, on the immediate right Pinterest shows the thumbnails of the rest of contents of that collection. Immediately below the image Pinterest tells her who this image was “added by” or repinned “via”, so that one can browse the image's multiple collectors' boards and find similar images. It also tells the user which other boards the image also appears, where similar images are likely collected. Eventually Pinterest provides the user with an infinite scroll of “related pins” that have been algorithmically determined to have similar content. Such effort to boost image exposure is effective, as statistics show that repinning—taking existing pins and adding them to one's own pinboards—represents 80% of activities on Pinterest. The extreme fluidity of content on Pinterest means that any image can propagate quickly across the entire network.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Star, Susan Leigh, and James R. Griesemer. “Institutional Ecology, ‘Translations’ and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39.” *Social Studies of Science* 19, no. 3 (August 1, 1989): 387–420. doi:10.1177/030631289019003001, 392-393, 408-413

¹⁴⁴ Zarro and Hall argue that Pinterest is not a repository of images, rather it is an infrastructure for building repositories. This is because the site provides tools and enables users to build such collections. While people can and do develop local unique vocabularies and norms to describe their collections, Pinterest does provide thirty-one categorization of content across local collections.

¹⁴⁵ Leigh and Griesemer, “Institutional Ecology,” 408-413

¹⁴⁶ Eric Gilbert et al., “I Need to Try This?,” 2430.

Margarita Kurlyanchik's board *THINGS i WANT.. (or will get)* showcases how she shares her taste with others.¹⁴⁷ In this board, she collected 240 images of cute animals, tattoo patterns, designer handbags, Tory Burch shoes, houses, furniture, and even Zac Effron (captioned simply as “my boo”). The diverse range of topics indicates that the board is constructed chiefly for personal reasons. Kurlyanchik was not consciously adapting the board for broadcasting, since its low coherence and lack of specificity would have turned away most followers. However, the captions, the repetition and similarity of many images clearly suggest that the board is not intended to be a literal wish list or shopping list. Many captions express a self-mocking sense of longing that doesn't seek to be fulfilled: “I need this like right now,” “um, YES please,” or “my next car.” The recurrence of highly similar images of small dogs and shoes further indicate that the board was not intended as a shopping list, as she would not want to purchase so many of the same things. Instead she collected these pins to show what she desires and to broadcast her taste. This board displays a level of content and structural flexibility that allows Kurlyanchik to transition from her identity as a personal user to that of a tastemaker effortlessly.

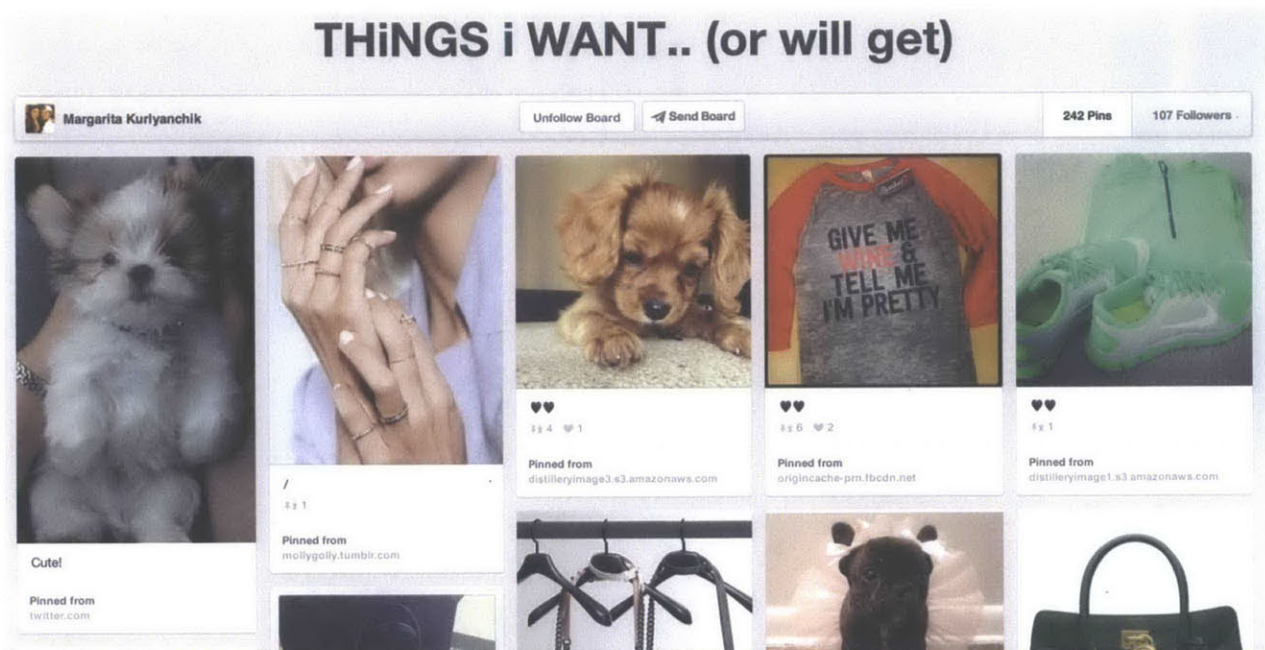


Figure 4.1 Screen capture from Margarita Kurlyanchik's board, *THINGS i WANT.. (or will get)*

Pinterest fosters a malleable, global and taste-based community that is capable of collective daydreams. Users frequently describe Pinterest as an opportunity to get to know people based on their personal taste. One user compares Pinterest to Flickr, and says that “to really participate in the

¹⁴⁷ “THINGS I WANT.. (or Will Get),” *Pinterest*, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/margaritank/things-i-want-or-will-get/>.

Flickr community you have to take photographs. To participate in Pinterest, you just have to see cool stuff online and pin it.”¹⁴⁸ Communities on Pinterest revolve around shared appreciation of selective objects—personal taste—rather than a real-world activity like photography.

Users comment that a taste-based community offers a “new way of connecting” that helps one “glean insights into people that I would not otherwise have.” The excitement is unlike other forms of connection. One interviewee described to me that when she pins something she really likes and it becomes repinned, she feels that “someone out there gets it!”¹⁴⁹ implying that connections based on taste can create a relationship at a deep, personal level. One user explicitly compared taste-based connections to those developed on other social media: “you find out things about them that you wouldn’t on Twitter, and a lot of times you can see that they have the same style or you both are obsessed with Harry Potter or whatnot. I find it’s teaching me a lot about those people because you only post things you like.”¹⁵⁰ Taste-based community, therefore, offers its members a meaningful and genuine form of relationship independent of real-world activities.

The transparency of a person’s taste and its unique follow mechanism on Pinterest allows users to customize what they follow effortlessly. Pinterest specifically allows users to follow pinboards (i.e., they follow the collection of pins, not the person creating those pins). Zarro and Hall’s interviews also show that participants commonly prefer to follow only specific boards, rather than the entirety of another member’s activity.¹⁵¹ One user describes Pinterest as “a magazine with no words that can appeal to every type of person because you can tailor it to be exactly what you want... [where I can] pick and choose what I want to see by following specific people, and even more specific, I choose which boards I want to follow from people.”¹⁵² Ultimately, the ability to follow specific boards and customize one’s feed allows users to develop multiple and flexible communities based on different things. For example, a user can follow multiple boards on shoes, a few others on makeup, and a third group on beach houses—essentially creating a new community for each of her interests.

This ability to distinguish between a board and a user leads to the disaggregation of a collection of images as artifacts and a collector behind such creation as a persona, and Pinterest communities congregate over artifacts rather than persona. Each user could curate a portfolio of collections, and while frequently these collections add to a coherent persona, they do not have to. As Drew Hawkins observed, “On Pinterest, I don’t have to follow all of my friends’ boards and pins. I can only follow the parts of their Pinterest activity that I like, without having to filter through a lot of noise.” The ability to subscribe to artifacts rather than to people offers a relief from the feeling of being inundated with updates from friends. Hawkins points out, “on G+ people choose what they

¹⁴⁸ Meghan Wilker, interview by Arik Hansen

¹⁴⁹ Francesca de Vries, interview by author, April 2nd 2014

¹⁵⁰ Julie Prior, interview by Arik Hansen

¹⁵¹ Zarro, Hall and Forte, “Wedding Dresses,” 9

¹⁵² Kristen Geeley, interview by Arik Hansen.

share with you...on Pinterest, YOU choose what's shared with you...[the] ease of opting in or out is what makes the difference. There's less sharing fatigue."¹⁵³ Kary Delaria compares Pinterest to other social media: "On G+, I see a lot of the same blog posts, and updates, and articles that I see shared on Twitter and Facebook. Pinterest is quiet...there's no pressure to stop in daily and feed the beast."¹⁵⁴ People are actively managing whose feed and which boards they see. In minimizing the "noise," they are seeking a community that's most directly relevant to their particular taste.

This level of structural and interpretive flexibility enables people to gather over shared interpretation of an image, forming malleable and transient communities based on taste as expressed through images. As soon as the context changes, such communities also possess the structural flexibility to dissolve quickly without any organizational inconvenience and are able to congregate over a new set of images.

4.3 Categorization

As the community develops, power users who have large collections and many followers begin to emerge. The site affordances allow some users to become *tastemakers* in the community, attaining massive amount of followers and publishing large numbers of images. Pinterest not only allows images to be publicly visible to millions of users, but also maximizes their exposure such that they never sit idly within a particular collection, but are rather circulated, recycled, and reused quickly. Images are simultaneously embedded within a private collection and published amongst an audience that is unbounded by location or by group size. If an image is repinned by many people, it will get published to the "Popular" category, which drastically maximizes its chance of being seen by other site users. The images then attract these interested people to follow a particular board or particular user. Pinterest's site mechanism helps power users to get more influential by spreading their collections.

Some boards therefore become massive in their reach, both in terms of content and in terms of number of followers. One of the largest boards, *Delicious* by Jane Wang, has more than 9,000 pins and almost nine million followers.¹⁵⁵ Her images, when repinned, will carry with them a reference to the original pinner (recall the "via" tab under each image) in a snowballing effect. The more people repin her images, the more likely these images will appear in "Popular" feed and as "related pins," and the more exposure and followers she will get. When a user consistently posts popular images, she usually gets an enormous number of followers. The top ten most followed users on Pinterest enjoy somewhere between one and eleven millions of followers.¹⁵⁶ It is easy to imagine the influence they wield over followers, as the images they post will carry their preference and taste.

¹⁵³ Drew Hawkins, interview by Arik Hansen.

¹⁵⁴ Kary Delaria, interview by Arik Hansen.

¹⁵⁵ "Delicious," *Pinterest*, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/janew/delicious/>.

¹⁵⁶ Lauren Indvik, "10 Most-Followed Users on Pinterest," *Mashable*, February 19, 2012, <http://mashable.com/2012/02/19/pinterest-most-followed/>.

The transparency on Pinterest means that different social contexts would invariably intersect often. As a result, tastemakers need to build repositories that resonate broadly, and therefore have to strive for a classification system and textual descriptions that have global meanings and will not vanish in different contexts of reading. Close reading of some of the most popular boards on Pinterest reveals that one key characteristic is the specificity, coherence, and scale that showcase their awareness of their audience and active effort to exert influence on their followers. Such organizational structure helps not only the person posting the pins, but more importantly those perusing it. It provides a clear undergrid on which viewers can navigate the collection easily.

Lauren Santo Domingo's boards show that the specificity and coherence of boards are often two key criteria in reaching a massive audience. Lauren Santo Domingo, the contributing editor at *Vogue* magazine and co-founder of the online fashion retailer *ModaOperandi.com*, is frequently hailed as one of the world's most recognized style authorities.¹⁵⁷ Having accrued almost 200,000 followers, Domingo has 75 boards on fashion icons, animals, and history, but her most significant concentration is in home décor.¹⁵⁸ Her boards bear a striking topical similarity to the paper dollhouses, but are nonetheless much more extensive (see figure 4.2). Her boards are broken down into painstakingly meticulous categories. She has sixteen different boards on different parts of a house, based by their functionality: Garden, Pool, Entry hall, Library, Living Rooms, Master bedrooms, Dining Rooms, Study/ Office, bath, kitchens, powder rooms, children's rooms, Guest Bedroom, Boudoir, Urban Garden, and sun porch. On top of these, she has eight boards on interior design and decorating ideas: Furniture, wall paper, textiles, Rug, Lights offl, details, tabletop, and bedding. Finally, she has four boards on various types of houses: Country Houses, Beach House, Farmhouse, and Conservatory. In each of these boards, LSD collected high quality visual images that adhere strictly to the proclaimed theme. Some of these boards contain hundreds of images.¹⁵⁹ Her boards all have roughly 60,000 or so followers. While the paper dollhouse makers could have taken their creations and played with their friends, sisters, mothers and other real world connections, their radius of influence was always bounded by who they knew in real life and how far they could travel. Most likely these paper dollhouses were never seen outside of domestic contexts beyond one's native neighborhood. LSD's collections, however, reached at latest 60,000 people each time she added something, plus the additional exposure she gets whenever someone repinned her images. LSD's collection is also visible and collectible to multiple people all at once, whereas the paper dollhouses were physical objects that can only be shown to a much smaller audience, without the possibility of replication.

¹⁵⁷ "Lauren Santo Domingo | The Coveteur," accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.thecoveteur.com/lauren-santo-domingo/>.

¹⁵⁸ "Lauren Santo Domingo (thelsd)," *Pinterest*, accessed May 17, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/thelsd/>.

¹⁵⁹ It is perhaps illuminating to think of the difference between LSD's boards and paper dollhouse collections. While LSD likely spent tremendous effort in collecting and categorizing these images, her workload is significantly lessened by the digital and networked nature of Pinterest. Each of her boards is a literal correspondence to one type of room, represented by double-page spread in a paper dollhouse. For each double-page representation in a scrapbook, LSD has a virtual archive of hundreds of images.



Figure 4.2 Screen capture from Lauren Santo Domingo's Pinterest boards

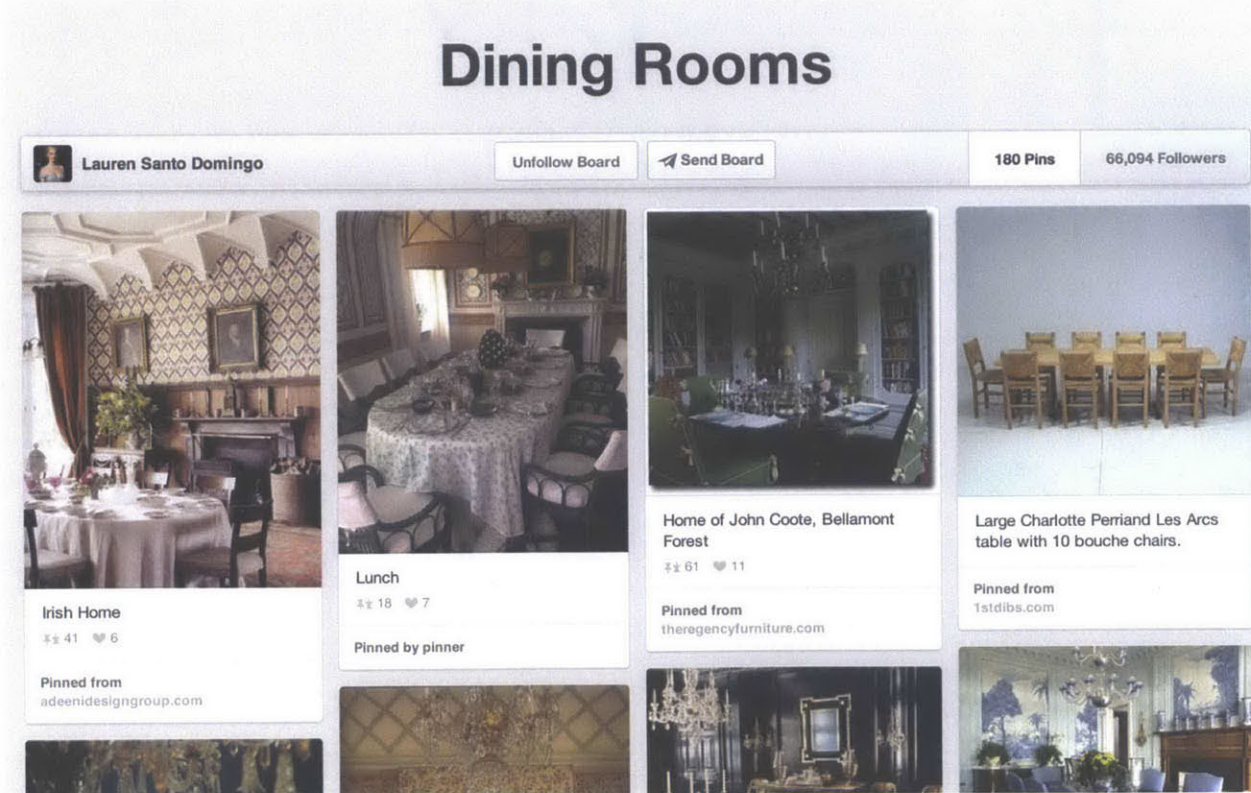


Figure 4.3 Screen capture from Lauren Santo Domingo's board, Dining Rooms

Meticulous classification system like LSD's is found repeatedly in the boards of other tastemakers, and is hailed by many online advice and blog posts as successful strategies in garnering more followers. Nina Garcia, creative director of Marie Claire Magazine, breaks her collection on fashion trends into year, season, and elements.¹⁶⁰ Katja Anderson, a freelance writer, curated whole collections of photographs that break down by models, photographers, and era.¹⁶¹ When compared with the more haphazard, casually constructed boards by personal users in which diverse range of materials are collected, their scrupulous classification system and board coherence can be read as an effort to make it more focused, relevant and search accessible for a wider audience.

Statistical analysis and third party advice confirm that such meticulous organizational structure is positively correlated with high followership. Many advice pieces suggest board owners to break their boards into easily identifiable categories, and use "keywords, descriptive titles and hashtags" to increase their chances of showing up in search results.¹⁶² Such a strategy is statistically found to be correlated with high followership. A group of researchers found that board coherence, which they have defined to be the board content's adherence to a relatively small set of discernible themes, is correlated with the board's popularity.¹⁶³ In a quantitative study of over 150,000 boards, they found that coherent boards have more board-level social actions such as repining and following. In other words, boards that are focused and consistent are more likely to receive higher numbers of repins and following. Even though the specificity and coherence of these boards can be purely personal practice, the fact that these scrupulously designed boards coincide so frequently with a large viewership and immense popularity of their owners allow us to speculate that they are at least partially an active endeavor to make themselves accessible to more users and in that process to convey certain taste of the board owner.

We are likely to speculate that the personal user is less restricted in adhering to labels, descriptions and categorization schemes that resonate broadly, since they are not pinning for a wide audience. This is true. Many personal boards are essentially playful, whimsical and disorganized. Traces of temporary obsession with one topic and migration to another topic are visible. At times users construct boards with clear themes but then put unrelated images in them. Recall Lauren

¹⁶⁰ "Nina Garcia (ninagarcia)," *Pinterest*, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/ninagarcia/>.

¹⁶¹ "Katja Anderson (katja2511)," *Pinterest*, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/katja2511/>.

¹⁶² "10 Tips to Get More Followers on Pinterest," *Search Engine Journal*, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.searchenginejournal.com/10-tips-get-followers-pinterest/88071/>.

¹⁶³ Krishna Y. Kamath, Ana-Maria Popescu, and James Caverlee. "Board coherence in Pinterest: non-visual aspects of a visual site." *Proceedings of the 22nd international conference on World Wide Web companion*. International World Wide Web Conferences Steering Committee, 2013.

Gray's board on travelling, for example, that we saw in the last chapter.¹⁶⁴ The earliest ten pins are not about traveling, but are rather about interior design, bookshelf configurations, silverware storage, and swimming pool design. Once she collected a few images of beautiful outdoor spaces, she gradually shifted to fifty or so images on various destinations in Greece, Italy and Paris. It wasn't until a few months after she collected the first image when she remarked, "how many pins do I have about Greece already? I think it's trying to tell me something." This suggests that for Lauren, the board in its early stages remained open to different types of pins as long as they were aspirational in nature, visually attractive and allow for a gratifying viewing experience. Categorization and organization come later. Her boards are much more flexible and non-restrictive than those by tastemakers. They change and adapt as her preferences form and change. While a more thorough, meticulous tastemaker would have gone back and edited the earlier pins out once the theme of traveling emerged, Lauren did not and the early traces of her collection lend us a valuable glimpse into her early thought process and source of inspirations.

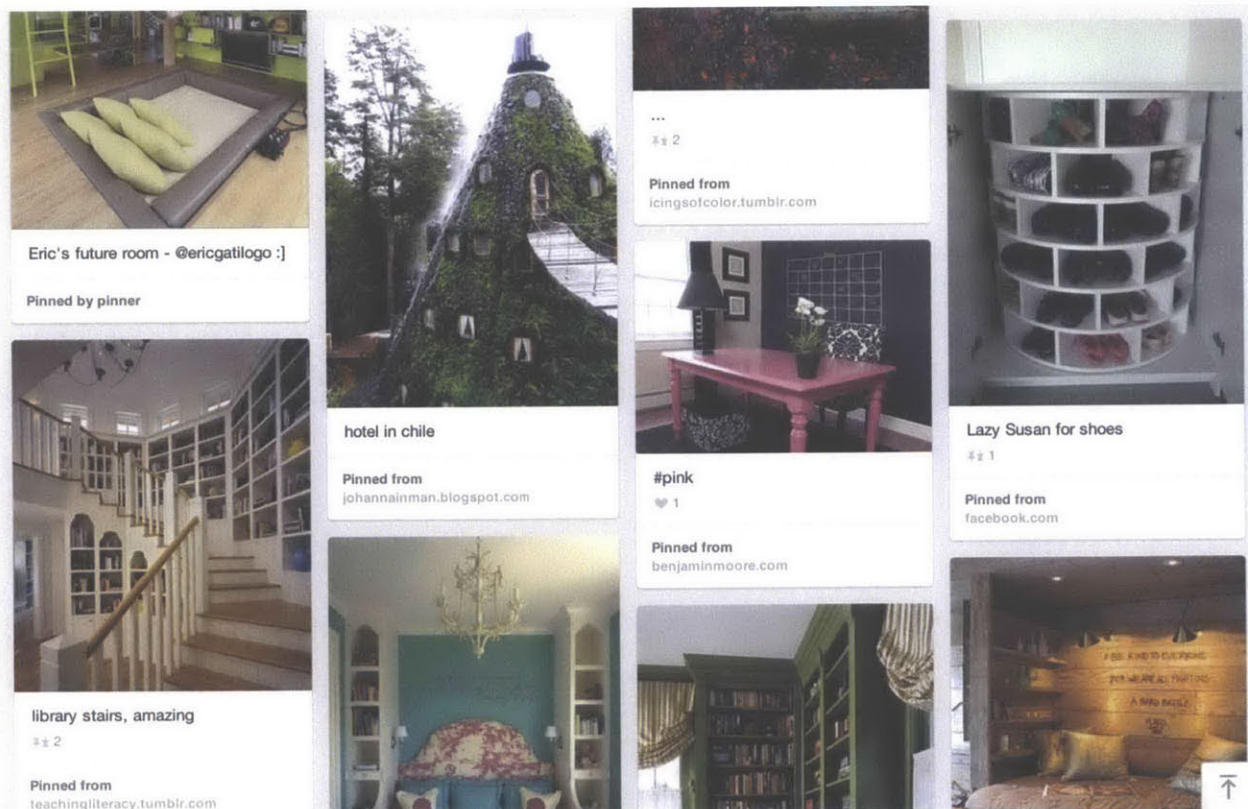


Figure 4.4 Screen capture from Lauren Gray's board, Destinations + Travel

¹⁶⁴ "Destinations + Travel," *Pinterest*, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/laurenkgray/destinations-travel/>.

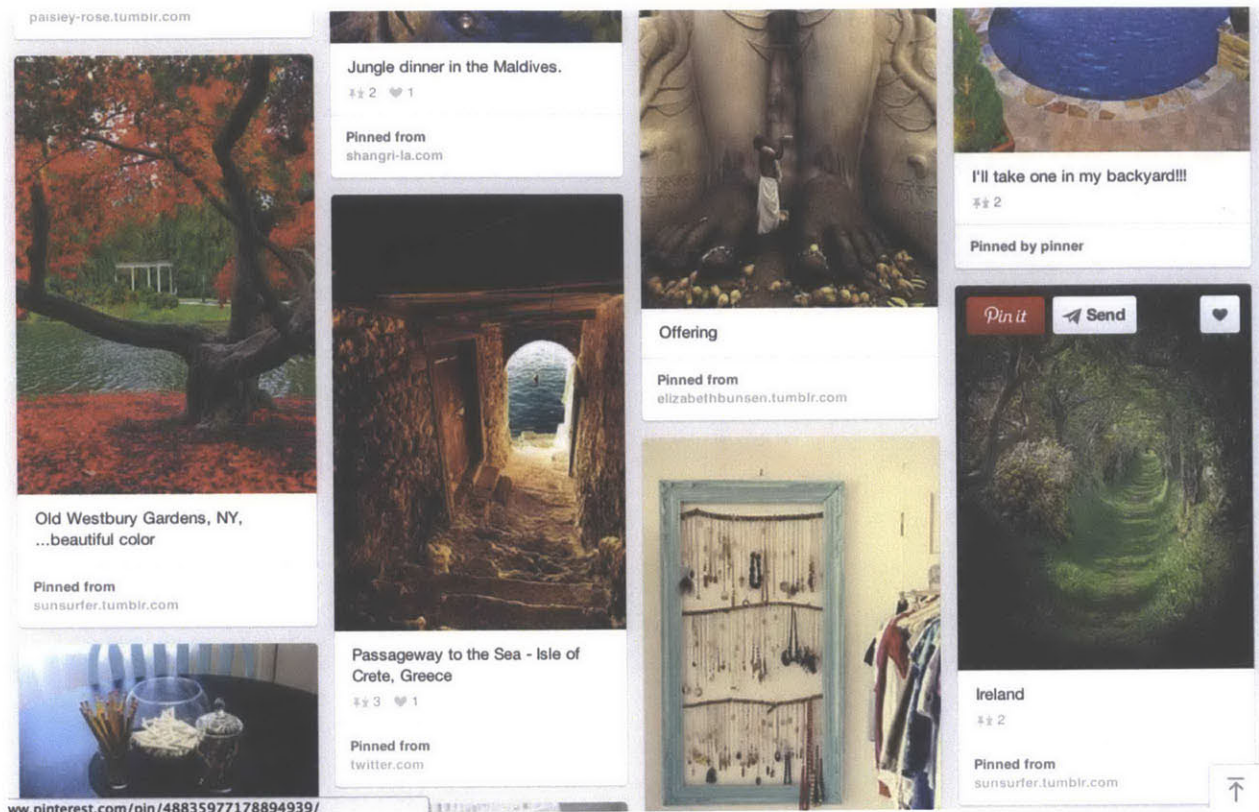


Figure 4.5 Screen Capture from Lauren Gray's board, Destinations + Travel

4.4 Networked Narratives

Perhaps the most important quality of these communities is that they enable people to get together and engage in collective fantasies whereas in personal boards on Pinterest only individualized imagination took place. In a way, active repining itself is an act of collective daydream: one user posted an image of an aspirational project, quote, or product, and it is immediately picked up by her followers and by repining they too become engrossed in this daydreaming. But some communities engage in even more complex and full-fledged fantasies. Tiffany Beveridge's board, "*My Imaginary Well-Dressed Toddler Daughter*," provides a perfect example of how one user's fantasy becomes so expansive that community members started entangling themselves in her imaginary world and narrative.¹⁶⁵ The story became so involved that it was eventually picked up by major media like Huffington Post, DailyMail and BuzzFeed.¹⁶⁶ Soon the story of the fictionalized protagonist of this

¹⁶⁵ "My Imaginary Well-Dressed Toddler Daughter," *Pinterest*, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/tiffanywbwg/my-imaginary-well-dressed-toddler-daughter/>.

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, Ellie Krupnick, "Imaginary Well-Dressed Toddler Meets Real-Life Well-Dressed Toddler For Brunch (PHOTOS)," *Huffington Post*, June 25, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/25/imaginary-well-dressed-toddler_n_3496790.html; "My Imaginary Well-Dressed Toddler: Little Quinoa Is the Star of a Spoof Pinterest

board, a little girl named Quinoa, will be published in print. This process shows how, when focused correctly, collective daydreams of a community have the potential to turn digital found images into a concrete project that generates real world economic value.

My Imaginary Well-Dressed Toddler Daughter, or MIWDTD, is the brainchild of Australian writer Tiffany Beveridge. It was started as a board for girls' clothes she adored, even though she had two sons and no daughter. "I kept seeing cute things on Pinterest for girls, but felt I had no claim to them since I only have boys," she said. "Then I thought, why not? After all, Pinterest is really just an adult Fantasy Land. So I named the board for my imaginary daughter and started re-pinning clothes from friends that I thought were cute and fun."¹⁶⁷ Realizing the parody in her board, Beveridge turned the board against itself and let her sense of humor take the better of her. She collected photographs of "Quinoa" and accompanied them with sardonically observed commentaries that give us snippets of narratives. Beveridge chose the name "Quinoa" after noticing that quinoa was cropping up in endless recipes over Pinterest.

The popularity of Quinoa is in many ways a result of the absurdity of the whole story. Quinoa is an impossibly cool, couture-clad, nonchalant girl who likes to give others fashion tips and have philanthropic passion for other children in the world. The board is an explicit fantasy and Beveridge acknowledged, "if I'm going to spend time dressing an imaginary daughter on Pinterest, why not go all the way?" She ends up constructing detailed pictures about Quinoa's personality: "Know what really gets Quinoa down in the dumps? Pleather." "Sometimes Quinoa is too cool for school, so she doesn't go. Wouldn't be fair to the other kids."

We learnt that Quinoa is considered the fashion guru not just among her peers but also in the adult world: "It was a moment Quinoa will never forget, when Bordeaux got down on one knee and asked for her hand in styling him for his preschool interviews." "Every time I find Quinoa in my closet, she gives me a disapproving lecture about relying too much on navy blue." Quinoa is ridiculously wealthy and has a strong sense of class: a photo of Quinoa dressed in hotpants, waistcoat and a slouchy beanie hat looking forlornly into the distance is accompanied by the comment: "One time, when Quinoa and I got separated in a busy train station, she thankfully remembered our safety training: stay in one place, look spectacular and don't talk to poor people." Quinoa also has friends whom are as snarky as her but none as fashionable: "Quinoa loves her friend Hugo, but wishes that he didn't try quite so hard." "When we met Quinoa's friend Ridley for lunch, he was unhappy to learn that the bistro's chicken nuggets were not free range." "From his

Page Lampooning Overstyled Children," *Mail Online*, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2348372/My-Imaginary-Well-Dressed-Toddler-Little-Quinoa-star-spoof-Pinterest-page-lampooning-overstyled-children.html>, and "My Imaginary Well Dressed Toddler Daughter' Is The Definitive Best Pinterest Board," *BuzzFeed*, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/aibhemalone/my-imaginary-well-dressed-toddler-daughter-is-the-definitive>.

¹⁶⁷ Tiffany Beveridge, interview by Hilary Manton Lodge, published online at Hilary Manton Lodge, "Hillary on Writing: The Adventures of Quinoa: An Interview with Tiffany Beveridge," *Hillary on Writing*, June 23, 2013, <http://hillaryonwriting.blogspot.com/2013/06/the-adventures-of-quinoa-interview-with.html>.

fine Italian leather booster seat, Quinoa's friend Harbinger opined about the good old days when children were well mannered and a properly tied ascot really said something about your character.”

The story Tiffany weaves becomes so intricate and the world she created becomes so expansive that community members soon opted in and started building the world together, adding in details about Quinoa's possessions, clothes, personalities, and relationships. Followers repeatedly commented “I am crazy about Quinoa and her friends,” tagging real-world acquaintances and suggesting them to “follow immediately,” and asking “when will Quinoa have her own talk show?” In an image of Quinoa and her friend Fandango sitting at a table in a diner, Tiffany Beveridge wrote, “Fandango was in a bit of a stupor after the fact, but Quinoa has always said that if she is handed a menu with chicken nuggets on it, it's going to get thrown, and hard.” Followers commented that Fandango “needs to learn the Ways of Quinoa,” and that “Hurray for Quinoa [that] she wants to eat real food. I could see her having high tea in a really fancy tea shop.” Elsewhere, in a picture of Quinoa and her “BFF Chevron” standing together, with a jacket draping from Chevron's head and covering her face, Tiffany Beveridge commented that “While playing “Oil Tycoons,” Quinoa decided that she would be the billionaire CEO with the penthouse office and Chevron would be the coat rack.” Followers unanimously fell to support Chevron. One suggested that Chevron should “have a talk with Quinoa about playing nicely and taking turns,” another considers a time for Chevron to “spin-off,” and one says “one of these days Chevron is going to fight back. I live for this day.” These comments show that followers not just subscribe to Tiffany Beveridge's story line but actively add descriptive details (“is Fandango related to Harry styles?”), make judgments, take sides (“Chevron should take revenge”), and get very emotionally involved (“I live for this day.”). What had started as Tiffany Beveridge's collection of girls' clothes eventually became characters so rich and a story world so expansive that nearly 10,000 followers participated in a collective daydreaming act that further enriches the fictionalized fantasy.

If we recall Campbell's distinction between consumption in a purely economic sense and consumption in a sociological sense, then it becomes clear that in many ways, people on MIWDTD are engaging in consumption of fantasies in the latter sense. Campbell argued that in a purely economic sense, consumption is the exhaustion of resources that does not necessarily involve human gratification. Consumption in this sense is the logical opposite of production. For example, one can cut down wild flowers or pour food into drainage without deriving any pleasure from it. Consumption in the sociological sense, on the other hand, is all about human gratification that does not necessarily have to involve the exhaustion of resources—think, for example, of the enjoyment derived from friendship or from a beautiful sunset. It is clear that on MIWDTD, people are consuming a collectively constructed fantasy, or communal pleasurable imagination, that has little to do with actual products. What originally was one woman's fantasy world was able to attract thousands of users, who perfectly understood the absurdness and ludicity of this fantasy world, yet still chose to be play along and be emotionally engaged. They are consuming a collective imaginative play that is “known to be false but felt to be true,” as Campbell had predicted¹⁶⁸.



Figure 4.6 Screen capture from Tiffany Beveridge's board, My Imaginary Well-Dressed Toddler Daughter

4.5 Conclusion

Writing in 2012, Huffington Post journalist Bosker predicted that Pinterest had a potential to connect people via shared interest in images.¹⁶⁹ In this chapter we saw how communities are constructed on Pinterest, as tastemakers and personal users communicate taste through images in their collection. When seen as boundary objects, boards and images display a high level interpretive flexibility that allows taste to be transmitted via images. Juxtaposing the massive boards created by popular active tastemakers and more modest collections by personal users, we can see that not only do images circulate freely and are interpreted differently according to their contexts, but the boards and the board owners, too, have mobile and adaptive meanings that are negotiated across context. These communities appeal to an unlimited, global audience and can be infinitely malleable based on changing taste and preferences. And this community is capable of indulging in collective hedonistic imagination that is flexible, detailed and crowd-sourced.

¹⁶⁹ Bianca Bosker, "The Secret To Pinterest's Success: We're Sick Of Each Other," *Huffington Post*, February 14, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/14/pinterest-success_n_1274797.html.

The screenshot displays a social media board with several pins and comments. The top-left pin features a photo of legs and text: "To illustrate the concept of karma to her friend Doterra, Quinoa picked a bushel of fresh herbs from cranky old Mrs. Bonpoint's garden and then knocked on the door and sold them to her for a generous profit. #MIWDTD". Below it, a list of users has pinned the post, including Stephanie T. Sneaky!, Belle Époque, churchlady_NE, Mira Rastegorac, Real Practical Housewives, Jenn Rian, Kim L., and Coryn Fuente.

The top-middle pin has a photo of a woman and text: "Think about it: Quinoa and her BFF Chevron have never been seen at the same time as Shag and Flatweave, the superhero duo responsible for eradicating linoleum worldwide. #MIWDTD". It has 51 retweets, 117 likes, and 3 comments. Comments include Hillary Arveseth, Carolyn Robinson, and Casey O'Connell.

The top-right pin has a photo of a woman in a hat and text: "When the hatter asked how many roses she wanted added to her derby hat, Quinoa thoughtfully replied, 'All of them.' #MIWDTD". It has 110 retweets, 124 likes, and 5 comments. A comment from churchlady_NE says "Ahh, that's the sweetest one yet!".

The bottom-right pin has a photo of a young girl and text: "arms and said, 'I will be your eyes.' #MIWDTD". It has 191 retweets, 377 likes, and 35 comments. Comments include Karyn Barbato, Nikki C., Haley J Pledger, Cathy Davis, and Kimberly Alberta.

Figure 4.7 Screen capture from Tiffany Beveridge's board, My Imaginary Well-Dressed Toddler Daughter

Chapter Five Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that while collections of commercial images of products are often spaces in which we express consumer desires for products and engage in hedonistic imaginative play, the socially-networked nature of Pinterest allows a new type of malleable, global and taste-based community to develop that can engage in collective daydreams. In the early twentieth century, a special subtype of scrapbooks—paper dollhouses—both educated young girls to become better consumers and homemakers, and allowed them to explore themes related to aesthetic taste, gender, and identity. Nowadays, a group of visually-driven social commerce sites like Pinterest.com performs a similar function. Pinterest provides a platform on which both businesses and consumer-collectors publish, collect, and circulate images en masse. Imaginative reconfiguration and repurposing of images often turn users' collections of commercially produced images into powerful tools through which they engage in pleasurable imagination not simply about products but also about deeply enchanting and transformative experiences. At the same time, Pinterest's social dimension means that when adding an image to one's collection, that image is instantly broadcasted to one's social circle, thereby conveying taste. Such structural flexibility encouraged formation of a malleable, product-centered female community that could engage in collective fantasies such as the one we see with Quinoa.

Perhaps what we are witnessing on Pinterest confirms Baudrillard's prophesy from forty years ago about the death of material value. Writing in the 1970s, Baudrillard projected that there would be a total disaggregation between the symbolic and material value of objects in a late capitalist society. Throughout history, the object has become increasingly detached from its original (or signified) meaning and becomes a "simulation." In Baudrillard's recent works he proposes a final stage, the fractal stage, where symbolic value eclipses use value, and an object becomes a fetish whose value is solely symbolic:

Commodities are no longer defined by their use, but rather by what they signify. And what they signify is defined not by what they do, but by their relationship to the entire system of commodities and signs.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, 1 edition (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1998), 7

Not only do objects take on a symbolic value, the transformation can be so complete that the only value left is that of the symbolic value. In the fractal stage, object as sign emerges as an object again, but not as an object in a real sense. The object emerges as an object as fetish.¹⁷¹ The commodity is a fetish whose value is purely symbolic. The commodity, which once contained elements of use value and exchange value, now has been transformed in to pure symbolic value:

So initially, the real object becomes sign: this is the stage of simulation. But in a subsequent stage the sign becomes an object again, but not a real object: an object much further removed from the real than the sign itself – and object . . . outside representation: a fetish.¹⁷²

The shift to the object as sign is “a revolution which has put an end to [the] ‘classical’ economics of value”¹⁷³ and marks the literal end of use value: “The system of reference for production, signification, the affect, substance and history, all this equivalence to ‘real’ content, loading the sign with the burden of ‘utility,’ with gravity . . . all this is over with.”¹⁷⁴ This is the total dissociation of reference, the “emancipation of sign” in Baudrillard’s words. This is when an object becomes a fetish, as a fetish is a commodity whose value is solely symbolic.

Baudrillard’s theory on the eventual triumph of objects’ symbolic value and the obliteration of their material value can be read partially as capitalism’s response to the excess in supply in modern economy. Because symbolic value can circulate at a rate much faster than use value, the consumption of symbolic value helps to absorb excess production. It is no longer enough for consumers to stay fed, warm, and clean; they have to stay on top of the latest fashion to be “correct” and to participate in a modern consumerist culture that emphasizes cultural capital as expressed through one’s taste. Baudrillard’s theory seems particularly apt in our era of fast fashion and pursuit of brand logos. The increasing emphasis placed on logos in contemporary consumer culture serves as a sobering reminder that the status symbol frequently takes precedence over craftsmanship. Marc Jacobs, an American fashion designer, boasts a central design feature on its classic wallet—a gold tone logo plaque that reads, “Marc by Marc Jacobs.” Jewelry designer Tiffany makes its signature pendant with the message “please return to Tiffany Co. New York” inscribed. While the material

¹⁷¹ Baudrillard, Jean. *Impossible exchange*. (London: VERSO, 2001) 129.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Jean Baudrillard and Iain Hamilton Grant, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London ; Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1993), 6

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 6-7

value of these objects is certainly a driving force behind their purchase, the brand's emphasis on logos and consumers' acquiescence through the act of buying indicates an increasingly central role of logos as a sign, over the material.

Fast fashion, a contemporary fashion retailer strategy, also demonstrates the consumerist obsession with the symbolic value of clothing. Brands such as Zara, H&M, Uniqlo and Forever 21 churn out new designs immediately after they appear in high-end fashion catwalks, sometimes designing, manufacturing and distributing new styles within a few weeks.¹⁷⁵ These objects are not purchased predominantly for their use value—for their quality or longevity—but rather purchased as a gesture of participating in the latest fashion trends. Consumers' urge to purchase the newest, latest fashion items will likely be inevitably frustrated because the turnover is so fast that clothing items can become obsolete almost immediately after they were bought. If that is the case, then Pinterest emerges as a partial solution because one can collect and display a virtual image of latest fashion much faster than acquiring the actual product.

Perhaps, then, we are entering an era where the symbolic takes precedence over the material. Middle class American women have been consuming advertisements, catalogs, and trade cards—representation of products reduced—and now Pinterest allows women to consume and share the image of products for its symbolic value in taste-based communities. Meanwhile, acquisition and consumption of the actual product becomes marginalized.

A recent debate between Joy Cho, an influential tastemaker on Pinterest, and her followers demonstrates that the community has been actively pushing back on promotional content. A visual designer and blogger, Cho is well-known for her massive Pinterest collections that boost whimsical, colorful palette and an effortlessly elegant and feminine style. She has accrued 13 million followers on Pinterest and is known as the "Pinterest Queen."¹⁷⁶ In March of 2014, she debuted a line of party supplies with Target, which marks the first time the retailer has worked with top pinners on Pinterest to create a collection inspired by pinners. As Target launched a series of marketing

¹⁷⁵ Pankaj Ghemawat and Jose Luis Nueno, *Zara: Fast Fashion* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2003), 1-4

¹⁷⁶ Jane Buckingham, "Job Advice from Oh Joy Blogger Joy Cho," *Glamour*, accessed May 19, 2014, <http://www.glamour.com/inspired/2014/03/job-advice-from-oh-joy-blogger-joy-cho>; and "Top 10 Pinterest Users And The Queen Of Pinterest," *Social News Daily*, accessed May 19, 2014, <http://socialnewsdaily.com/5756/top-10-pinterest-users/>.

campaigns, Cho started a board named “Party with Pinners,”¹⁷⁷ in which she collected roughly 110 images pertaining to her new line. The board bears her longstanding taste for clean background, vibrant colors, and joyful vibe. Similar to the Lowe’s “Build it!” board or Nordstrom’s “SJP: A Day in Her Shoes,” Cho embeds almost all of the products in carefully constructed tips and suggestions on how to throw a party. She included twenty-six images, each bearing a textual message starting with a letter of the alphabet: “A is for Amuse: delight your guests with a 3-D table runner that ‘grows’ onto your table.” “B is for Bring It: When hosting a potluck, be sure to have extra serveware handy so everyone’s contribution look great together. Replate everyone’s dishes so they match,” etc. Each of the tips is accompanied by a careful arrangement that features one of her products.



Figure 5.1 Screen capture from Joy Cho’s board, Oh Joy for Target

While many of Cho’s followers expressed support for her new partnership, there was also a strong pushback against the board. Because Cho was accepted as a tastemaker and an important figure in the community, the fact that she collaborated with Target and pinned images of Target products was a breach of basic community etiquette. The blame was directly pointed at the pins’

¹⁷⁷ Interestingly, as this thesis is written in May 2014, the name of the board changed from “Party with Pinners” to “Oh Joy for Target,” probably because of followers’ protest. It could also be because Joy Cho had another collaboration with the Land of Nod, a children’s furniture retailer, and created a board called “Oh Joy for Nod,” for consistency. “Oh Joy for Target,” *Pinterest*, accessed May 19, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com/ohjoy/oh-joy-for-target/>.

commercial undertone. Users expressed their extreme disappointment with seeing images that were blatantly promotional: “Why is this on my feed ??? Pinterest please Do Not turn into Facebook.” “How do I erase all of these ugly pins I didn’t ask for?” One woman left an expose-like comment under one of these images: “it’s an ad,” implying that advertisements have not appeared in Cho’s feed before, and that the image needs to be flagged and brought to the attention of other unsuspecting fellow pinners. The posting of advertisements by J.Crew or Nordstrom was viewed as natural, since they are brands that have explicitly stated their commercial purposes. Cho’s actions were unacceptable, however, because of the unspoken pact between Cho and her followers that her images should have been inspirational, colorful, and most importantly, promotion-free.

Cho soon realized the havoc that her pin had wreaked, and quickly came to address it. She tagged the user who called her post out as an “ad” and explained,

@Jennephyr Meier @Caroline Barth hello! this is a joint board between me and Target for my Oh Joy for Target party collection. It's not an ad, it's a grouping of images and pieces we created for the collection. Please feel free to unfollow if you don't want to follow along. But I hope you'll stay! (Joy Cho)

Even after her explanation, however, many of her followers were still deeply disillusioned and chose to un-follow this particular board. As to May 18th of 2014, this particular board has only 800 thousand followers, versus the 13 million followers that Cho’s other boards enjoyed. Not only did people choose to un-follow the board, their frustration was so intense that some engaged in explicit debate. Some users came to Cho’s defense: “Can’t believe people are so unnecessarily negative. Just because it’s not your style doesn’t make it ‘ugly.’ All you have to do is click on it and ‘unfollow.’” One of the board’s opponents, however, explained that the issue was rather about Joy introducing a commercial element into a space that was supposedly commerce-free:

It is more [that] Target having a profile that people are negative about...takes away from the individual community of pinners and just makes Pinterest another advertising machine.

Many followers, it seems, had considered Pinterest to be exactly the opposite of an advertising machine. Rather, it is an “individual” community of pinners who collect images, share ideas, and encourage each other in the creative use of non-commercial objects. Our opening quote by Julie Kucinski really brings this point home: “Hopefully, brands can have the guts to stay out of it and it let it be an organic, legit form of word-of-mouth. Commercializing everything is becoming

incredibly boring.”¹⁷⁸ These female communities have evolved from the conveyance of personal taste to forming malleable, global and product-centered communities that ultimately turned themselves against blatant consumption of actual products. Instead what they consume are these pleasurable imaginative play, both personal and communal. These aspirations possess a metamorphic power, turning users into better versions of themselves.

¹⁷⁸ Julie Kucinski, interview by Arik Hansen.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Andrus, Miriam Jay Wurts, 1909-2000. *Papers of Miriam Jay Wurts Andrus, 1833-2001.*, n.d.
- Bailey, Carolyn Sherwin. "A Doll's House," *Harper's Bazaar* (July 1910): 474.
- Beard, Lina and Beard, Adelia B. *How to Amuse Yourself and Others : The American Girl's Handy Book*
New York : Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887
- Cooke, Anne Kirk. *Papers of Anne Kirk Cooke, 1860-2004 (inclusive), 1970-1997 (bulk).*, n.d.
- Davidson, Ellis A. *The Happy Nursery: A Book for Mothers, Governesses, and Nurses, Containing Games, Amusements, and Employments for Boys and Girls.* Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1870.
- Hoffman, Emily. "Homes for Paper dolls," *Harper's Bazaar* (January 1904): 84-87
- Jackson, James Caleb. *The Training of Children, Or, How to Have Them Healthy, Handsome and Happy.*
Austin, Jackson & Company, 1872.
- Ringwalt, Jessie E. "Fun for the Fireside: A Help to Mothers—The Paper-doll's House," *Godey's Lady's Book* 20 (August 1880): 160-62
- Sears, Roebuck and Company. *Catalog No. 124.* Sears, Roebuck & Co., Chicago, 1912.
<http://archive.org/details/catalogno12400sear>.
- Wells, Carolyn. "A Paper Doll's House," *The Puritan* 9 (1901): 273-75

Secondary Sources

- Anderson, Benedict. "Introduction." In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* 1—8. Verso, 1991
- Baudrillard, Jean. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign.* Telos Press Publishing, 1981.

- . *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. 1 edition. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1998.
- Benedict, James. *The System of Objects (Radical Thinkers)*. Verso, 2006.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986.
- Campbell, Colin. *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1987.
- Cardinal, Roger. *Cultures of Collecting*. Reaktion Books, 2004.
- Durost, Walter N. *Children's Collecting Activity Related to Social Factors*. New York: AMS Press, n.d.
- Galbraith, John Kenneth. *The Affluent Society*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998.
- Garvey, Ellen Gruber. *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s*. Oxford University Press, 1996.
- *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Ghemawat, Pankaj, and Jose Luis Nueno. *Zara: Fast Fashion*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2003.
- Gordon, Beverly. *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives, 1890-1940*. University of TENNESSEE Press, 2006.
- Kron, Joan. *Home-Psych: The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration*. Potter, 1983.
- Laird, Pamela Walker. *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- Norris, James D. *Advertising and the Transformation of American Society, 1865-1920: First Edition, First Printing edition*. New York: Praeger, 1990.

- Peiss, Kathy. *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- Roth, Rodris. "Scrapbook Houses: A Late Nineteenth-Century Children's View of the American Home." in *The American Home: Material Culture, Domestic Space, and Family Life*, edited by Eleanor McD Thompson, 304-317. Winterthur, DE : Hanover, NH: Winterthur, 1998.
- Saisselin, Rémy Gilbert. *The Bourgeois and the Bibelot*. Rutgers University Press, 1984.
- Schor, Juliet. "What's Wrong with Consumer Society?: Competitive Spending and the 'New Consumerism.'" in *Consuming Desires: Consumption, Culture, and the Pursuit of Happiness*, edited by Roger Rosenblatt, 40-45. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1999.
- Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Strasser, Susan. *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*. 1st edition. New York: Pantheon, 1989.
- Tucker, Susan, Katherine Ott, and Patricia Buckler. *The Scrapbook in American Life*. Temple University Press, 2006.
- Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. B. W. Huebsch, 1912.

Recent Studies on Pinterest

- Castro-Lewandowski, Athena. "Pinterest in the Writing Classroom: How Digital Curation and Collaboration Promotes Critical Thinking." *The Common Good: A SUNY Plattsburgh Journal on Teaching and Learning* 1, no. 1 (October 18, 2013).
<http://digitalcommons.plattsburgh.edu/commongood/vol1/iss1/3>.

- Chang, Shuo, Vikas Kumar, Eric Gilbert, and Loren G. Terveen. "Specialization, Homophily, and Gender in a Social Curation Site: Findings from Pinterest." In *Proceedings of the 17th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing*, 674–86. CSCW '14. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2014. doi:10.1145/2531602.2531660.
- Gilbert, Eric, Saeideh Bakhshi, Shuo Chang, and Loren Terveen. "I Need to Try This?: A Statistical Overview of Pinterest." In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 2427–36. CHI '13. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2013. doi:10.1145/2470654.2481336.
- Hall, Catherine, and Michael Zarro. "Social Curation on the Website Pinterest.com." *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 49, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 1–9. doi:10.1002/meet.14504901189.
- Kamath, Krishina, Popescu, Ana-Maria and Caverlee James. "Board coherence in Pinterest: non-visual aspects of a visual site." *Proceedings of the 22nd international conference on World Wide Web companion. International World Wide Web Conferences Steering Committee*, 2013.
- Kimura, Akisato, Katsuhiko Ishiguro, Makoto Yamada, Alejandro Marcos Alvarez, Kaori Kataoka, and Kazuhiko Murasaki. "Image Context Discovery from Socially Curated Contents." In *Proceedings of the 21st ACM International Conference on Multimedia*, 565–68. MM '13. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2013. doi:10.1145/2502081.2502149.
- Otoni, Raphael, João Paulo Pesce, Diego Las Casas, Geraldo Franciscani Jr., Wagner Meira Jr., Ponnurangam Kumaraguru, and Virgilio Almeida. "Ladies First: Analyzing Gender Roles and Behaviors in Pinterest." In *Seventh International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 2013. <http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM13/paper/view/6133>.
- Popescu, Ana-Maria. "Pinteresting: Towards a Better Understanding of User Interests." In *Proceedings of the 2012 Workshop on Data-Driven User Behavioral Modelling and Mining from Social Media*, 11–12. DUBMMSM '12. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2012. doi:10.1145/2390131.2390136.

- Singh, Shantanu, Yan Wang, and Lei Ding. "Who Is Repinning?: Predicting a Brand's User Interactions Using Social Media Retrieval." In *Proceedings of the Thirteenth International Workshop on Multimedia Data Mining*, 1:1–1:9. MDMKDD '13. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2013. doi:10.1145/2501217.2501218.
- Zarro, Michael, and Catherine Hall. "Pinterest: Social Collecting for #Linking #Using #Sharing." In *Proceedings of the 12th ACM/IEEE-CS Joint Conference on Digital Libraries*, 417–18. JCDL '12. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2012. doi:10.1145/2232817.2232919.
- Zarro, Michael, Catherine Hall, and Andrea Forte. "Wedding Dresses and Wanted Criminals: Pinterest.com as an Infrastructure for Repository Building." In *Seventh International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 2013. <http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM13/paper/view/6101>.
- Zhong, Changtao, Mostafa Salehi, Sunil Shah, Marius Cobzarenco, Nishanth Sastry, and Meeyoung Cha. "Social Bootstrapping: How Pinterest and Last.Fm Social Communities Benefit by Borrowing Links from Facebook." In *Proceedings of the 23rd International Conference on World Wide Web*, 305–14. WWW '14. Republic and Canton of Geneva, Switzerland: International World Wide Web Conferences Steering Committee, 2014. doi:10.1145/2566486.2568031.
- Zoghbi, Susana, Ivan Vulić, and Marie-Francine Moens. "Are Words Enough?: A Study on Text-Based Representations and Retrieval Models for Linking Pins to Online Shops." In *Proceedings of the 2013 International Workshop on Mining Unstructured Big Data Using Natural Language Processing*, 45–52. UnstructureNLP '13. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2013. doi:10.1145/2513549.2513557.
- . "I Pinned It. Where Can I Buy One Like It?: Automatically Linking Pinterest Pins to Online Webshops." In *Proceedings of the 2013 Workshop on Data-Driven User Behavioral Modelling and Mining from Social Media*, 9–12. DUBMOD '13. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2013. doi:10.1145/2513577.2513581.

Online Sources

“10 Brilliant Pinterest Board Ideas From Real Brands.” Accessed May 19, 2014.

<http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/pinterest-brand-board-examples-li>.

“10 Tips to Get More Followers on Pinterest.” *Search Engine Journal*. Accessed May 18, 2014.

<http://www.searchenginejournal.com/10-tips-get-followers-pinterest/88071/>.

“65 Amazing Pinterest Stats (April 2014).” *DMR*. Accessed May 16, 2014.

<http://expandeddrablings.com/index.php/pinterest-stats/>.

“A Brief History of Mail Order Catalogs.” History of Mail Order Catalogs. <http://www.imagineinc-usa.com/articles/historyofmailorde.html> (accessed May 19, 2014).

“Baker Library Historical Collections.” Harvard Business School.

<http://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/artadv/scrapbooks.html> (accessed May 19, 2014).

Bosker, Bianca. “The Secret To Pinterest’s Success: We’re Sick Of Each Other.” *Huffington Post*,

February 14, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/14/pinterest-success_n_1274797.html.

Brint, Steven. “Gemeinschaft Revisited: A Critique and Reconstruction of the Community

Concept.” *Sociological Theory* 19, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 1–23. doi:10.1111/0735-2751.00125.

British Museum - Edward Burne-Jones (1833-98).” British Museum - Edward Burne-Jones (1833-

98). http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/articles/e/edward_burne-jones_1833-98.aspx (accessed May 19, 2014).

Buckingham, Jane. “Job Advice from Oh Joy Blogger Joy Cho.” *Glamour*. Accessed May 19, 2014.

<http://www.glamour.com/inspired/2014/03/job-advice-from-oh-joy-blogger-joy-cho>.

“Build It!” *Pinterest*. Accessed May 19, 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/lowes/build-it/>.

- Chang, Shuo, Vikas Kumar, Eric Gilbert, and Loren G. Terveen. "Specialization, Homophily, and Gender in a Social Curation Site: Findings from Pinterest." In *Proceedings of the 17th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing*, 674–86. CSCW '14. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2014. doi:10.1145/2531602.2531660.
- "Chobani (chobani)." *Pinterest*. Accessed May 19, 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/chobani/>.
- Chocano, Carina. "Pinterest, Tumblr and the Trouble With 'Curation.'" *The New York Times*, July 20, 2012, sec. Magazine. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/magazine/pinterest-tumblr-and-the-trouble-with-curation.html>.
- Constine, Josh. "Pinterest Hits 10 Million U.S. Monthly Uniques Faster Than Any Standalone Site Ever -comScore." *TechCrunch*. Accessed May 11, 2014. <http://techcrunch.com/2012/02/07/pinterest-monthly-uniques/>.
- "Delicious." *Pinterest*. Accessed May 18, 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/janew/delicious/>.
- "Doors!" *Pinterest*. Accessed May 19, 2014. http://www.pinterest.com/benjamin_moore/doors/.
- "Etsy (etsy)." *Pinterest*. Accessed May 19, 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/etsy/>.
- Fitzgerald, Britney. "Jennifer Chong, Pinterest's 2nd Most Popular User, On What Puts Pinners In A Tizzy." *Huffington Post*, July 9, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/09/jennifer-chong-pinterest_n_1652328.html.
- Fox, Zoe. "Pinterest Drives More Traffic Than Google+, YouTube and LinkedIn Combined [STUDY]." *Mashable*, February 1, 2012. <http://mashable.com/2012/02/01/pinterest-traffic-study/>.
- Gilbert, Eric, Saeideh Bakhshi, Shuo Chang, and Loren Terveen. "“I Need to Try This?": A Statistical Overview of Pinterest." In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 2427–36. CHI '13. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2013. doi:10.1145/2470654.2481336.

Hall, Catherine, and Michael Zarro. "Social Curation on the Website Pinterest.com." *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 49, no. 1 (2012): 1–9.

doi:10.1002/meet.14504901189.

Honigman, Brian. "100 Fascinating Social Media Statistics and Figures From 2012." *Huffington Post*, November 29, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brian-honigman/100-fascinating-social-me_b_2185281.html.

"How Facebook, Pinterest Compare In Social Commerce." *Forbes*. Accessed May 17, 2014.

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/davefeinleib/2012/05/22/how-facebook-pinterest-compare-in-social-commerce/>.

Indvik, Lauren. "10 Most-Followed Users on Pinterest." *Mashable*, February 19, 2012.

<http://mashable.com/2012/02/19/pinterest-most-followed/>.

Jordan, Alexander H., Benoît Monin, Carol S. Dweck, Benjamin J. Lovett, Oliver P. John, and James J. Gross. "Misery Has More Company Than People Think: Underestimating the Prevalence of Others' Negative Emotions." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 120–35. doi:10.1177/0146167210390822.

"Katja Anderson (katja2511)." *Pinterest*. Accessed May 18, 2014.

<http://www.pinterest.com/katja2511/>.

Koch, Andrew M., and Rick Elmore. "Simulation and Symbolic Exchange: Jean Baudrillard's Augmentation of Marx's Theory of Value." *Politics & Policy* 34, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 556–75. doi:10.1111/j.1747-1346.2006.00028.x.

Krupnick, Ellie. "Imaginary Well-Dressed Toddler Meets Real-Life Well-Dressed Toddler For Brunch (PHOTOS)." *Huffington Post*, June 25, 2013.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/25/imaginary-well-dressed-toddler_n_3496790.html.

———. “Imaginary Well-Dressed Toddler Meets Real-Life Well-Dressed Toddler For Brunch (PHOTOS).” *Huffington Post*, June 25, 2013.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/25/imaginary-well-dressed-toddler_n_3496790.html.

“Lauren Santo Domingo (thelsd).” *Pinterest*. Accessed May 17, 2014.

<http://www.pinterest.com/thelsd/>.

“Lauren Santo Domingo | The Coveteur.” Accessed May 18, 2014.

<http://www.thecoveteur.com/lauren-santo-domingo/>.

“Lifestyle Branding: The New Frontier of Competitive Differentiation.” *Marketing Science Institute*.

Accessed May 19, 2014. <http://www.msi.org/articles/lifestyle-branding-the-new-frontier-of-competitive-differentiation/>.

Lodge, Hillary Manton. “Hillary on Writing: The Adventures of Quinoa: An Interview with Tiffany Beveridge.” *Hillary on Writing*, June 23, 2013.

<http://hillaryonwriting.blogspot.com/2013/06/the-adventures-of-quinoa-interview-with.html>.

“March 2014 Style Guide.” *Pinterest*. Accessed May 19, 2014.

<http://www.pinterest.com/jcrew/march-2014-style-guide/>.

“‘My Imaginary Well Dressed Toddler Daughter’ Is The Definitive Best Pinterest Board.” *BuzzFeed*.

Accessed May 18, 2014. <http://www.buzzfeed.com/aibhemalone/my-imaginary-well-dressed-toddler-daughter-is-the-definitive>.

“My Imaginary Well-Dressed Toddler: Little Quinoa Is the Star of a Spoof Pinterest Page

Lampooning Overstyled Children.” *Mail Online*. Accessed May 18, 2014.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2348372/My-Imaginary-Well-Dressed-Toddler-Little-Quinoa-star-spoof-Pinterest-page-lampooning-overstyled-children.html>.

“My Top Pinterest Tips.” *Amy Lynn Andrews*. Accessed May 19, 2014.

<http://amylynnandrews.com/pinterest-tips/>.

“Nailspotting.” *Pinterest*. Accessed May 19, 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/sephora/nailspotting/>.

“Nina Garcia (ninagarcia).” *Pinterest*. Accessed May 18, 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/ninagarcia/>.

“Oh Joy for Target.” *Pinterest*. Accessed May 19, 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/ohjoy/oh-joy-for-target/>.

Ottoni, Raphael, João Paulo Pesce, Diego Las Casas, Geraldo Franciscani Jr., Wagner Meira Jr., Ponnurangam Kumaraguru, and Virgilio Almeida. “Ladies First: Analyzing Gender Roles and Behaviors in Pinterest.” In *Seventh International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 2013. <http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM13/paper/view/6133>.

“Pin like a pro.” *For Business*. Accessed May 17, 2014. <http://business.pinterest.com/en/pinning-principles>.

“Pinterest Confirms Raising Another \$200M At \$5B Valuation.” *Forbes*. Accessed May 17, 2014. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffbercovici/2014/05/15/pinterest-confirms-raising-200m-at-5b-valuation/>.

“Pinterest Now Lets You Create As Many Secret Boards As You Want.” *The Next Web*. Accessed May 18, 2014. <http://thenextweb.com/insider/2014/02/28/pinterest-now-lets-create-many-secret-boards-want/>.

“SJP: A Day in Her Shoes.” *Pinterest*. Accessed May 19, 2014.

<http://www.pinterest.com/nordstrom/sjp-a-day-in-her-shoes/>.

“Social Media Marketing, News, & Tools for Business.” *Entrepreneur*. Accessed May 17, 2014.

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/video/embed/233658>.

- Star, Susan Leigh, and James R. Griesemer. "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39." *Social Studies of Science* 19, no. 3 (August 1, 1989): 387–420. doi:10.1177/030631289019003001.
- "The History of Pinterest." Accessed May 17, 2014. <http://thehistoryofpinterest.blogspot.com/>.
- "These 5 Brands and Nailing It on Pinterest." *HootSuite Social Media Management*. Accessed May 17, 2014. <http://blog.hootsuite.com/5-brands-pinterest/>.
- Tiffany Beveridge, interview by Hilary Manton Lodge, published online at Hilary Manton Lodge, "Hillary on Writing: The Adventures of Quinoa: An Interview with Tiffany Beveridge," Hillary on Writing, June 23, 2013, <http://hillaryonwriting.blogspot.com/2013/06/the-adventures-of-quinoa-interview-with.html>.
- "THINGS I WANT.. (or Will Get)." *Pinterest*. Accessed May 16, 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/margaritank/things-i-want-or-will-get/>.
- "Wanderlust." *Pinterest*. Accessed May 17, 2014. <http://www.pinterest.com/nicolesong/wanderlust/>.
- "What's behind the Pinterest Craze? 15 Super-Users Share Their Thoughts." *Communications Conversations*. Accessed May 16, 2014. <http://www.arikhanson.com/2011/12/13/whats-behind-the-pinterest-craze-15-super-users-share-their-thoughts/>.
- Zarro, Michael, and Catherine Hall. "Pinterest: Social Collecting for #Linking #Using #Sharing." In *Proceedings of the 12th ACM/IEEE-CS Joint Conference on Digital Libraries*, 417–18. JCDL '12. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2012. doi:10.1145/2232817.2232919.
- Zarro, Michael, Catherine Hall, and Andrea Forte. "Wedding Dresses and Wanted Criminals: Pinterest.com as an Infrastructure for Repository Building." In *Seventh International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 2013. <http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM13/paper/view/6101>.

Zhong, Changtao, Mostafa Salehi, Sunil Shah, Marius Cobzarencu, Nishanth Sastry, and Meeyoung Cha. "Social Bootstrapping: How Pinterest and Last.Fm Social Communities Benefit by Borrowing Links from Facebook." In *Proceedings of the 23rd International Conference on World Wide Web*, 305–14. WWW '14. Republic and Canton of Geneva, Switzerland: International World Wide Web Conferences Steering Committee, 2014. doi:10.1145/2566486.2568031.