



**FURNISHING DESIRE: ISSUES OF RACIAL IDENTITY
AND CONSUMPTION IN IKEA'S ADVERTISING**

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Figure 1
Courtesy of Crispin, Porter, and Bogusky, 2002

The essay that follows is an excerpt from an ongoing project titled *Furnishing Desire: Issues of Racial Identity and Consumption in IKEA's Advertising*. This project will interpret visual representations of the fleeting nature of desire seen in advertising. More specifically, this essay investigates three aspects of the larger project: the historically indoctrinated Jezebel stereotype, the sterility of interracial sex, and the commodification of domestic space in an upwardly mobile society. All of these deeper cultural narratives are embodied by the interracial couple featured in the IKEA commercial titled *Moo Cow Milker*.

Furnishing Desire: Issues of Racial Identity and Consumption in IKEA's Advertising

From this derive the phantasmagorias of the interior—which, for the private individual, represents the universe. In this interior, he brings together remote locales and memories of the past. His living room is a box in the theater of the world.

—Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*¹

With these ads we tapped in to the feelings and emotions that many of us have about our furniture. We wanted to show in a clever way that many of us often have somewhat irrational reasons for holding on to furnishings, which we secretly want to get rid of and replace with something that corresponds more closely with our personality, style and taste.

—Christian Mathieu, External Marketing Manager IKEA US/Canada, IKEA press release²

Introduction

One evening not too long ago, I was sitting on my velvet upholstered oak futon watching the show *Cribs* on MTV, cable's "music television" station. *Cribs*, a half-hour television show in a format similar to the 1980s show *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, follows celebrities on guided tours through their extravagant homes. A show meant to entertain teens and early twenties audiences, it also serves as an advertisement for young-American ideas of consumption. The "M" in MTV may technically stand for music, but the station has evolved into a multimedia giant. While its main focus remains musical, shows like *Cribs* feature celebrities from film, television, and even sports. On *Cribs*, wealth is part and parcel of success, and these superstars show no modesty when revealing their bathrooms complete with multiple widescreen televisions or entire warehouses devoted to exotic car collections.

This particular episode of *Cribs* featured the quintessential spendthrifts of the music world, the rap label/group Cash Money Millionaires, a collaborative label hosting a number of guest rap artists and singers. One of the label's artists, B.G. (formerly Baby Gangsta), coined the phrase, "bling bling" in his track of the same name, which soon became the Cash Money Millionaires' anthem and a mainstream catchphrase in American popular culture. "Bling bling" refers to the excessive use of diamonds and platinum in rings, watches, and necklaces as well as other excessive accoutrements. To quote the song, "Diamonds worn by everyone that's in my clique, Man I got the price of a mansion 'round my neck and wrist."³

The song dates back to 1999, when economic times in America were good—desire ran hot and envy was greener than ever. The gap between the fantasy lifestyle on television and reality seemed to shrink. But how is it that audiences aren't turned off by rock stars flaunting their Crystale champagne and fur coats? In a recent article in *The New York Times Magazine*, reporter Rob Walker presents this hypothesis:

The answer is that despite appearances to the contrary, deep down Americans don't really have a problem with conspicuous consumption per se. It is all in the packaging: we're OK with bling bling so long as we believe it has to be earned.⁴

According to the song, the Cash Money Millionaires earned their lifestyle. They worked their way out of the ghettos of New Orleans and are now multiplatinum rap artists. The American philosophy of hard work and diligence earns anyone the privilege of owning whatever they desire because they worked hard for it, and it would appear that the Cash Money Millionaires worked hard for the massive riches they acquired. I believe it was one of the members, Juvenile, who revealed his tenth Bentley luxury car and private jet fitted with chrome wheel rims. Yet, as I sat on my futon, feet up on my wrought iron and cherry wood

Pottery Barn coffee table, sipping Aquafina bottled water, I wondered. Am I so different from this spectacle of conspicuous consumption? *Cribs* went to a commercial, and the next five minutes filled with a sensory overload of advertising spectacle.

The first commercial was for T-Mobile® cellular telephones. The actress Catherine Zeta-Jones walks through a café, snaps her fingers, and says "freeze." In these commercials, Ms. Zeta-Jones has the ability to stop people in motion in order to facilitate potentially problematic circumstances by inserting a mobile phone into the situation. She introduces a young woman named Jen who has just taken notice of a young Italian man ordering a cappuccino behind her. Ms. Zeta-Jones plays the role of a contemporary Tyche, the Greek goddess of fortune, and uses her talent to give a T-Mobile Nokia® mobile phone to the young woman. For the woman to reach the man sitting just feet from her, she needs this cellular phone to call the Italian Institute in Chicago so she may learn how to say, "Hi, my name is Jen. Now why don't you be a good boy and come over here and sit on mama's lap?" in Italian. The woman desires the man, and must use the phone as a means to get what she needs. This scenario could represent any number of problematic circumstances experienced by audiences; indeed it seems all resolution can be achieved immediately with just a telephone call.

The next commercial is for Skittles® bite-size fruit candy. A woman runs toward a carousel in a field awash in sepia tones. In a dreamlike sequence, Skittles candy rains down from the sky as the woman walks through the spinning carousel. She caresses a zebra and leans off the edge while gripping a pole, catching the Skittles raindrops in her hand. She watches as a zebra runs off of the carousel and into a full-color rainbow. The carousel animal has come to life and the woman leaves the carousel to

follow it. The female announcer whispers "Skittles: Taste the Rainbow." The commercial invites the audience to partake in a fantasy, a dream of cross-sensual experience, in which you can taste color. I became distracted by a craving for sugar at this point and got up from my futon.

From the kitchen, I could hear the tinny electronic piano and redundant baseline of a videogame commercial soundtrack. The Xbox videogame company had released a new game called Binx. I resumed my original position on the couch and watched as a goggle-wearing cat hopped from building to building fixing errors in the space-time continuum. He collects crystals with a sort of vacuum cleaner and fights monsters almost five times his size, while the screen is constantly bathed in huge splashes of color and light.

The mixture of cacophonous sounds and visuals true to the MTV aesthetic can numb the viewer into an overstimulated stupor. I only awoke from my trance for a slightly less frenetic ad that appeared next on the screen.

The camera zoomed in on a neatly designed dining room. The table was Ocentered, with two chairs on either side, two place settings, and two lamps in the background providing an almost perfect symmetry to the scene (Figure 1). It was after dinner and the table was set for dessert and coffee. A black woman and a white man entered the frame from the left. It looked as though a romantic chase had ensued from the kitchen offscreen, leading the couple to passionately embrace on their dining room table. Though it is rare to see a black woman and white male embrace like this in an advertisement, the focus of this ad is not their interracial coupling. Instead the eye of the viewer is drawn primarily to the items that represent their lifestyle: the matching plates on the dining room table, the couple's

clothing, and the furniture. Race becomes a tertiary element used as another item of lifestyle representation—instead of controversial, the couple is cosmopolitan.

For a brief moment, the couple and their pristine, well-manicured IKEA table are the centerpiece of the shot, but then the camera cuts to a small, ceramic, black-and-white Holstein cow creamer. The creamer “watching” them on the table distracts the woman. The man leans over the woman against the table, oblivious to the fact that he is disheveling the perfectly placed items on the tabletop (Figures 2 and 3). In fact, the man is oblivious to everything but the body of the woman, who has focused her attention on the small creamer. The camera then assumes a position at the cow creamer’s level, revealing the cow’s view of the couple. It watches as the man rattles dishes and knocks over a small vase of flowers.

With the amount of passion the couple exhibits now (particularly the man), what will be the fate of the poor cow? As the couple progresses in their passion, opera music crescendos, facilitating the cow’s distressing situation. The cow looks “pleadingly” at the woman, its O-shaped mouth in an expression all too reminiscent of ceramic mammy cookie jars and other such racist memorabilia. The woman faces the cow, away from her lover. She feigns kisses, pretending to share the man’s lust while distracted by the creamer resting near the edge of the table. She finds herself in a dilemma: does she give in to her physical desire and risk shattering the cow or does she bate her passion and save the creamer? Two quick camera edits illustrate the exchange of looks between the woman and the creamer; she makes her decision. She knocks the cow and everything else to the ground, clearing a space on the table for her and the man’s overzealous libidos. We watch from the eye of the cow creamer as it falls to the ground and shatters into small ceramic pieces, splattering milk all over the floor. The cow creamer “watches” from below as the woman and man continue their lust on top of the dining table. What’s left of its milky essence gurgles out of the creamer’s

mouth. The fractured creamer’s body has been left to “die,” its function and value destroyed (Figures 4 and 5). Outside the apartment, the camera pans backward to reveal a stranger standing on the sidewalk in front of the window. The man remains visible through the window while the narrator, a sort of Swedish Rod Serling (or Peeping Tom) tells the audience the moral of this story: “You feel sad for the little creamer? That is because you’re crazy. Tacky items can easily be replaced with better IKEA” (Figure 6).

The blue and yellow IKEA logo appears on a white background as well as the new company slogan, “Unböring.” According to IKEA’s press release, holding on to old furniture is boring. It begs you to imagine how “boring” this commercial would have been without the destruction of the cow creamer. The black woman and white man establish a subtle precedent in the commercial through their passionate display. Insofar as it is “boring” to hold onto mismatched domestic items, it is “unböring” to show the cultural mismatch of a black and white couple on the screen.

This thesis will investigate the relationship between the imaged black woman, desire, and black female identity by looking closely at this IKEA commercial, called *Moo Cow Milker*. The following is a sample of my thesis text. In it, I will introduce the endless cycle of desire in relation to the representation of black women and the advertised image.



Figure 2
Courtesy of Crispin, Porter, and Bogusky, 2002

The Spectatorial Desire of the Black Female

*This was the land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South . . .
Here in this pretty world Gallantry took its last bow. . . .
Here was the last ever to be seen of Knights and their Ladies Fair, of Master and Slave. . . .
Look for it only in books for it is no more than a dream remembered. . . .
A Civilization gone with the wind . . .
—Opening epigraph to the film *Gone With the Wind**

The Wind Done Gone, “the unauthorized parody” of *Gone With the Wind*, retells the epic story through the eyes of a mulatto slave, Cynara. The mistress of Rhett Butler, she lives in an apartment he furnished for her, travels abroad to Europe, dresses in fine clothes, and has the education of a proper southern lady. While Randall’s metafiction hangs the dirty laundry of *Gone With the Wind* for all to see, it still reads in the same romantic tone. The story isn’t told for historical accuracy; it serves to present another side to an American legend and to deconstruct the myth.

Cynara's life, though riddled with emotional complexities, doesn't quite capture the harshness of the realities of slave life. Many southern slaveowners kept concubines, but most of these women lived under the threat of being sold or beaten by jealous plantation mistresses. However the lifestyle of a concubine was a vast improvement over field-slave life. Although these women were still slaves, considered less than human by law, they could achieve the image of an elevated class status, thus the image of freedom. Some black women sought this "freedom" so desperately they would flirt with the planter class on the auction block in order to achieve the image of interclass mobility. Deborah Gray White talks about this phenomenon in her book *Ar'n't I A Woman?*:

Mary Boykin Chesnut wrote that she saw a slave woman on an auction block who seemed delighted with her plight. The woman sometimes ogled the bidders, and "her mouth never relaxed from its expanded grin of excitement." . . . Undoubtedly the thought of silks and satins and jewelry lured such women. In cities like Charleston and New Orleans travelers did indeed see the mulatto and quadroon slave mistresses of wealthy merchants strolling down boulevards.⁶

Sadly enough, though, what was one woman's boon proved another's bane. Some women remained the concubines of their white lovers and eventually obtained freedom for themselves and their children, just as many, if not more, were sold off to plantations, where they shared the misery of all slaves.⁷

The planter class, rich white landowners in the Antebellum South, established a socioeconomic hierarchy in the south whereby white, male landowners were of the highest, elite class status and slaves, of course, were the lowest. Naturally, enslaved women hated their status and the raw power it granted to white men and women; however, some black women had the "opportunity" to achieve a raised class status through intimate relations with their masters. Continuing studies of female enslavement describe the horrific and excessive abuses inflicted by their masters and mistresses. The Jezebel stereotype was concocted by male slave owners, not only to justify abuses to their lovers but also to appease their wives and the abolitionist politics in the North. White theorizes a potential source of the jezebel:

Whether or not slave women desired relationships with white men was immaterial, the conventional wisdom was that black women were naturally promiscuous, and thus desired such connections. If, in order to ease the burdens of slavery, they made themselves available, they only fulfilled the prophecy of their lustfulness, which in turn made it more difficult for other black women to reject the overtures made by white men. While slave women became the easy prey of profligates, justification for their exploitation came from the lips of some of the South's leading statesmen. . . . Rather than fault themselves, some Southern spokesman blamed black women.⁸

Historically, there are three main visual representations of black women in America: the overweight grinning Mammy (see Hattie McDaniel's character in *Gone With the Wind* and Aunt Jemima), Sapphire (see Angela Bassett's character in *Waiting to Exhale*), and Jezebel (see Halle Berry's character in *Monster's Ball*). In a commercial such as IKEA's *Moo Cow Milker*, at the risk of continuing a didactic deconstructive analysis, one has to acknowledge the stereotypes subtly at play in American popular culture. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus solely on the Jezebel stereotype.

The Jezebel is the "seductive temptress."⁹ Usually thin and petite, she is simultaneously oversexualized and desexualized. The woman in *Moo Cow Milker* embodies this paradox: while she is sexualized by the white man, she is desexualized by the thought of breaking the cow creamer. A domestic item paused her sexual mood until she could decide the fate of the creamer. It could be argued that this woman merely has the problematic physical standard of beauty for all women. This standard calls for thin women; however, this thin ideal established by our society for white women does not play off of the "loose" bad-girl image so assigned to black women. It could also be argued that she is embodying a stereotype for the female gender by preoccupying herself with domestic items. I argue that yes, while all this may be true, the inescapable fact of the commercial is that she is kissing, and seemingly involved with, a white man. And while there is no direct indication that she is represented as the "bad-girl" who lured the white man away from his white wife, her role as the black feminine object of masculine desire is explicit. In *Race Matters*, Cornel West describes the simultaneous oversexualized/desexualized black body in American culture:

Black Sexuality is a taboo subject in America principally because it is a form of black power over which whites have little control—yet its visible manifestations evoke the most visceral of white responses, be it one of *seductive obsession* or downright disgust. . . . On the other hand, black sexuality between blacks and whites proceeds based on underground desires that Americans deny or ignore in public and over which laws have no effective control. In fact, the dominant sexual myths of black women and men portray whites as being "out of control"—seduced, tempted, overcome, overpowered by black bodies.¹⁰



Figure 3
Courtesy of Crispin, Porter, and Bogusky, 2002



Figure 4
Courtesy of Crispin, Porter, and Bogusky, 2002

But as strong as this imagery of black sexuality has been throughout American history, IKEA attempted to racially anaesthetize *Moo Cow Milker*. The symmetrical dining room parallels the pseudo-symmetrical relationship. IKEA fully understands the potential ramifications of racial representation in their advertising. Perhaps a little too well. This explains why the commercial was broadcast for only a month while the other commercials in the Unböring campaign continue to run three months later. This racial and class cleansing, with a precedent set over 150 years ago, is still a part of contemporary advertising. It is only the appearance, the aesthetic of the commercial, that evolves quickly, providing a constant image of newness.

The Enlightenment in nineteenth-century Great Britain launched a new trend in facilitating commodity exchange and aesthetics.¹¹ In her essay "Soft-Soaping Empire," Anne McClintock follows the use of the commodified aesthetic of racism in nineteenth-century British soap advertising. In Victorian Great Britain, soap became a cross-economic product when advertising brought it to the homes of the poor underclass. At a time when purity was the ideal, royalty and upper class bourgeoisie would hide from the sun to maintain an alabaster complexion. This ideology was fundamental to the Victorian Empire; images of soap cleansing the unwashed masses and dark savages gained broad appeal for all classes, particularly the poor.¹²

McClintock discusses the relationship between the pure white and soiled dark characters featured in soap ads. In one example of a Pear's Soap ad, a white child washes clean a black child, all except for his face. While the black child can never reach the fully enlightened white face of ethnic purity, "The magical fetish of soap promises that the commodity can regenerate the Family of Man by washing from the skin the very stigma of racial and class degeneration."¹³

This desire to cleanse race from the body is less explicit in *Moo Cow Milker*; however, the polish and organized symmetry of the room eliminate any questions of class about the couple. The matching furniture and their designer clothes describe an upwardly mobile middle-class couple, without any class tension to distract from the product, whereas the Victorian soap advertising campaigns relied on that tension and racist ideology to sell soap.

Another nostalgic commodity of domestic space was once fetishized (and some would argue still fetishized) in a similar way. Racist memorabilia depicting "coons" eating watermelon and Aunt Mammy ceramic cookie jars served to represent the domesticity of blacks during the Jim Crow era. The creamer may serve as a relic from a time when domestic items were cherished and their value was based not only on their use. It also illuminates the owner's desire to hold on to superannuated household items for the sake of nostalgia. The nostalgia imbued in this



Figure 5
Courtesy of Crispin, Porter, and Bogusky, 2002

ceramic cow creamer brings to mind reminiscences of a time when racist memorabilia was a fixture in Western society. Theorist Patricia Turner calls these items “contemptible collectibles.”¹⁴ Turner describes these items of “negrobilia,” such as mammy cookie jars, black lawn jockeys, and Sambo etched noisemakers, in her book *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies*:

They are about the ways in which even after the institution of slavery was over, American consumers found acceptable ways of buying and selling the souls of black folk.¹⁵

Are these tacky items of American kitsch the ones that can be replaced with better IKEA?

With television advertising reaching the largest audience in the history of mankind, any organized ideology is easily commodified for the passive consumer audience. The cultural system for representing cultural value is a heterogeneous ethos of the American Dream; where white people and only white people once represented the ideal lifestyle, present commercial advertising audiences constitute a new racially and ethnically diverse socioeconomic class.

Commercials: Black and White and Read All Over

At the moment when the ceramic cow falls to the ground, exploding a perfectly functional creamer into shards, a hole is punctured in Marxist theory. Suddenly this innocuous object is possessed with its own life force. As a commodity, its value does not lie in its materiality but in its immateriality—the exchange value, wherein objects are imbued with the ability to participate in a limitless network of exchangeability. Marx may provide us with thorough notions of value, but his model neglects the crucial element of consumer consumption, desire.¹⁶ In just thirty seconds, *Moo Cow Milker* explores not only the desire of the consumer but also the decadence of the affordable image. In the name of desire, the couple destroys a perfectly functional ceramic cream dispenser. Once they have satisfied their physical desire, the commercial tells the viewer, the couple can simply go to IKEA and buy a “better” creamer. The desire for domestic commodities becomes a desire for a lifestyle.

Commodity desire by its nature is insatiable, and IKEA has brilliantly accommodated this by putting forth furniture consumption paired with the culture of disposability. The consumer only has to rid him- or herself of the tendency to hold on to old furniture and other products of domesticity, as if it were a bad habit.

IKEA wants the consumer to feel liberated, even if the consumer never felt imprisoned, and to freely shatter, destroy, or abandon tacky items and replace them with better, more desirable ones. This is no longer a system of quantitative exchange value; instead IKEA proffers a replacement value. Consumers are no longer bogged down by socially defined value based on labor; value is determined by fetishization of the material. Commodities are imbued with their own life force, according to Marx, capable of social relations and hierarchical systems able to use capitalists as slaves.¹⁷ Is the woman a slave to the cow creamer? It has been imbued with life, and the commercial elicits an emotional response from the audience through the cow, but does the object realize its own subjectivity? Does it know that it is an “ugly” creamer and should be “replaced with better IKEA?” Where Marx falls short on theories of the culture of desire, Jean Baudrillard compensates.

Sitting on my couch, I feel like I’ve been absorbed by the commercialized representations of lifestyle on my television. My own desires vanish, or are replaced by the desires for cell phones, candy, and escapist video games. Baudrillard waxes postmodern on the displaced meaning of cul-



Figure 6
Courtesy of Crispin, Porter, and Bogusky, 2002

tural production. In the text *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard makes his first move away from the Marxist definition of use-value and toward the cultural production of desire. He describes how advertising is the manifestation of this cultural production of desire.

Today what we are experiencing is the absorption of all virtual modes of expression into that of advertising. All original cultural forms, all determined languages are absorbed in advertising because it has no depth, it is instantaneous and instantaneously forgotten.¹⁸

Audiences’ own desires are muted and replaced by the hundreds of thousands of thirty-second flashes of products broadcast daily.

Moo Cow Milker is the creation of the desired lifestyle for the home; disposable furniture for disposable incomes. Cheap and aesthetic designer products fill a gap in the domestic market because they display contemporary young, upwardly mobile, professional consumer aesthetics. In the name of its utopian vision, IKEA creates a sterile class and racial environment. The environment establishes a link between the commodified image of desire and the social understanding of interracial relationships.

What Makes IKEA So Successful?

IKEA is one of the few companies that successfully established a global niche market in first-world countries. With 157 stores in thirty-two countries, IKEA is the largest furniture distributor in the world.¹⁹ In the name of affordable design, IKEA appeals to the young, upwardly mobile professional consumer. In a recent edition of *The New York Times Magazine*, style critic John Leland discusses the marketing strategy of IKEA and the serendipitous American economic changes that boosted the company:

Among the many repercussions of the technology boom of the 1990s was that it flipped the compass points of American class. Suddenly new money was more dynamic, more mesmerizing than old money. It made for juicier magazine spreads and gawking television news features. . . . more important for IKEA, new money lived differently, stimulated different desires among the broader public.²⁰

The first American IKEA store opened its doors for the first time in 1985. What is now one of the leading home furnishing retailers in America²¹ got off to a shaky start. The economy slumped shortly after IKEA's opening, forcing it to raise its prices and limit profit margins.²² Worse yet, Americans did not take to the Swedish design. The beds were based on the metric system, so sheets were impossible to fit, and Americans weren't ready to buy all-new furniture. The consumer class consisted mainly of families who already owned furniture. Society was tightening its belt, and spending was at a low. IKEA's aim was to create a desire for new furniture and broaden the consumer class by providing affordable designer furniture; unfortunately, the designs didn't appeal to American palettes. Older and richer Americans could afford plush designer furniture, and young middle-class Americans either saved up for a nice couch or received hand-me-downs. The reason IKEA's furniture stays so affordable is because most of it is made from cheap materials, like particleboard.

Then the Internet boomed, drawing in young money and thus young spenders. The advertising industry easily compensated for this new generation of consumers by hiring the young and hip directly out of college to infuse their products with youthful exuberance. New,

young money took on the form of glossy magazine spreads, cleverly ironic billboards, and the crisp form of modern furniture. A new desire was born and it was affordable.

The Dot Com industry imbued items such as furniture with a new kind of magical fetish appeal. Stores like IKEA, Pottery Barn, and Restoration Hardware quickly gained popularity. But unlike Pottery Barn and Restoration Hardware, which focus on a nostalgic theme from the past, IKEA's focus is on the present. Although their materials are cheap and sometimes flimsy, IKEA's aesthetic is about achieving the whole desired image immediately. When the first Northern California IKEA opened its doors in May 2000 to record sales, IKEA-brand furniture became a significant part of the Bay Area economic zeitgeist. During the Silicon Valley Rush, a young generation of consumers flocked from all over the country and the world to share the prosperity of the technological boom. At a time when Bay Area employers were practically giving jobs away, IKEA seized the opportunity to plunge into a deep consumer pool of disposable income. Bay Area residents camped overnight to purchase unassembled sofas and wall-mounted reading lights with names like Danbo and Mesofår. Though they couldn't pronounce the names, consumer buying power amounted to record sales in the weeks following the grand opening, and the Emeryville store remains one of the highest-grossing branches in the United States.²³ At a time when

\$1,200 a month could get you a windowless closet in the sketchy Tenderloin, at least you could optimize it spatially with affordable Swedish savvy.

Although the economy has been on shaky ground since the New York and Washington, D.C. catastrophes in September 2001, IKEA has managed to remain about 5 percent above expected sales.²⁴ The Unböring ad campaign launched in the fall of 2002. It creates a new glossy finish for the saying "out with the old, in with the new." To avoid repeating the near-devastating strategy from 1985, this new campaign appeals to the consumer who, already familiar with IKEA products, won't hesitate to throw out any old furniture relics of the past. Wrapped in clever irony, the four television advertisements have been seen during prime-time slots since September 2002. The desire for affordable domestic aesthetics is a contemporary commodity fetish promoted with the social consciousness of Sweden, thus creating an old advertising technique, with new clothes. Advertisers have been telling customers for years to buy this new item, replace your old one, but never so explicitly. What seems like a new concept, told boldly in a thick Swedish accent, is really the same message regurgitated from the advertising manifesto—"buy this, replace that."

In Closing

Watching *Moo Cow Milker*, I ask myself what draws me into this commercial. The role of the black woman is simultaneously constructed and deconstructed. In looking closely at her role in this commercial, I see that her body is transformed into the body of all black women. She becomes the tragic mulatto or the plantation mistress, and her beau is of the planter class, satiating his needs and taboo desires. However, she is also the manifestation of desire for the object. The dynamic between her and the ceramic cow illustrates her role as functional object of desire and illegitimacy. Her existence, like the cow's, becomes subject to the desire of the white man. As if telling the cow "It's either you or me," she chooses to save her own sexuality with the knowledge that she too may be replaced by something new and better.

Notes

- 1 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1999.
- 2 IKEA Press Release, "New 'Unböring' Marketing Campaign Challenges People to Change the Way They Think About Their Furniture," retrieved January 3, 2003 from http://www.ikea-usa.com/about_ikea/press_release_int.asp?pr_id=696.
- 3 The B.G., *Bling Bling*, lyrics retrieved February 3, 2003 from <http://www.leoslyrics.com/listlyrics.php?sid=%8D1%91%14O%A4>.
- 4 Rob Walker, "When Diamonds and Escalades are O.K.," *The New York Times Magazine* (January 19, 2003), p. 16.
- 5 *Gone With The Wind*, dir. Victor Fleming et al., 233 min., MGM Films, 1939, DVD.
- 6 Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), pp. 34–35. Quotes within from C. Vann Woodward, ed. *Mary Chesnuts Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 15.
- 7 Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999).
- 8 Deborah Gray White, p. 38.
- 9 Cornel West, *Race Matters*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p. 119.
- 10 Cornel West, p. 125.
- 11 Anne McClintock, "Soft-Soaping Empire," in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- 12 Anne McLintock.
- 13 Anne McLintock, p. 214.
- 14 Patricia A. Turner, *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994). Turner defines "contemptible collectibles" in this passage on page 11: "Although terms such as racist collectibles or antiblack artifacts would certainly be preferable to black memorabilia or black collectibles, they don't resonate in the way that a term I first heard in the early 1980s does. Ever since I heard someone refer to them as contemptible collectibles, that is the label that comes to my mind whenever I see them. They represent one of the most deplorable and least-well-documented impulses in American consumer history."
- 15 Patricia A. Turner, p. 11.
- 16 Karl Marx, "Capital," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976).
- 17 Karl Marx.
- 18 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).
- 19 Jennifer Barrios, "IKEA and the Future of East Bay Retail," *East Bay Express* (July 18, 2001).
- 20 John Leland, "How the Disposable Sofa Conquered America," *New York Times Magazine* (December 1, 2002), p. 86. Headnote: "Ikea had a hard time making it in the United States until downwardly mobile, upwardly aspiring Americans realized the store could provide them a cheap way to live well."
- 21 IKEA homepage, retrieved January 12, 2003 from <http://www.ikea.com>.
- 22 IKEA homepage.
- 23 Jennifer Barrios.
- 24 John Leland, p. 90.