2005 Issue No. 11 — Edges and Centres

Scandinavian Dreams: DIY, Democratisation and IKEA
By *Buck Clifford Rosenberg*

Introduction

There is a scene in *Fight Club* where the protagonist played by Ed Norton vividly discusses how he, and presumably society, consumes IKEA furnishings. He describes the consumption of IKEA furnishings as part of a bid to reproduce the lifestyles laid down in the magazine-style phone catalogues—a mode of domestic consumption by no means incidental to the privatised consumer society discussed in this article. Through the practices of consumption and arrangement of IKEA furnishings, he genuflects to this consumer lifestyle, which he would soon attempt to bring down. The film works on two levels, highlighting the perceived commodification of our lives, and one man's attempt to break free from the anodyne consumer society, the film tracking his psychological journey. It simultaneously parodies such attempts at breaking free by emphasising not just the protagonist's extreme denial of consumption and commodification, but also his extreme phantasmagorical attempts to destroy consumer capitalism. The film inspires revolution, but revolution as fantasy. In its attempts to simultaneously advocate and parody extreme anarchistic forms of anti-capitalism via an individual search for the "real," it denies quotidian and mundane forms of non-capitalist anti-commodifying actions and lifestyles, such as the growth of slow food movements. I use this scene from *Fight Club* by way of introduction, to highlight not just the visibility of IKEA as a global commodity lifestyle brand, but also its use as a metaphor. Just as the film uses IKEA as a metaphor for our so-called sterile, depthless and "unreal" consumer society, I seek to use IKEA as a metaphor for other recent socio-cultural changes or intensifications. IKEA, as *Fight Club* correctly points out, does indeed represent an anodyne new-middle-class consumption-focused lifestylisation, but that is not all. I seek to map the significance of IKEA's role in the blurring of class and class-cultures, witnessed in its ability to blur notions of high and mass or popular culture. I situate such shifts in class-cultural structures within a general lifestylisation of everyday life which is interconnected with the postmodern consumer society. I also seek to explore IKEA as a metaphor for a DIY society by examining the nature of its self-assembly furniture, placing such privatised and individualised practices within the broader theoretical debates surrounding the so-called declining public sphere. I will also explore the self-assembly furniture as part of the cultural practice of domestic DIY, its role in fostering a sense of "physical home construction," its classification as "productive leisure," and their role in the construction of the self.

Class and Modernism

IKEA acts as a useful metaphor for explaining recent socio-cultural changes. One important change within the Western world, and notably Australia, is the shifting nature of class. Class stratification has become far less rigid due to class-cultural practices operating on an increasingly fluid plane. In Australia whilst the extreme class poles remain firmly in place, the plane from working to upper-middle-classes has become blurred. The complexities require different

approaches to those provided by traditional Marxism (see Connell) and need to extend or update Bourdieu's work on distinction (Bourdieu). The post-war consumer society (see Baudrillard) has had a paradoxical impact upon how class operates, notably its presentation. Class divisions still exist, yet become overshadowed by consumer culture's ability to break them down, creating what would appear to be a society driven by the same goals. In Australia the hegemonic goals are home, family and consumption. Whilst the majority of Australians have the ability to achieve such goals, the consumer culture also drives citizens to construct their own identities and lifestyles from the mass-produced, standardized goods, signs and images available.

The Frankfurt School and its followers (see Adorno, Marcuse) saw only part of the picture when they regarded the emergence of mass culture as homogenizing and de-humanizing. For mass culture and mass consumption offer the potential for individuality and difference. The new consumer society has impacted upon class in a unique way. Whilst much of the mass-class in Australia is aspirational in terms of aspiring to certain consumer lifestyles and other classed based goals, aspiration is no longer just about achieving parity. For as the advertising industry write, "Lifestyle advertising is about differentiating oneself from the Jones's, not as in previous decades, keeping up with them" (advertising industry publication titled *Campaign*, qtd. in Jackson and Thrift 227). Lifestylisation has become a major component of identity production, whereby individuals seek to produce themselves through particular lifestyle practices. This lifestylisation and individualisation process may be in response to the fragmentation of formerly distinct identities, for example class or national identity. Such mass identifications seemingly no longer suffice in our newly individualising world. Consumers then, seek to use specific goods to differentiate themselves from others, including the mass-culture at large, a process which is driven by the desire for individuality, status and distinction. Alternatively one could argue that the consumption of mass objects is evidence of an attempt to make connections with a wider citizenry, be it informed by class, culture or the conflation of the two. What is useful about IKEA as a metaphor for social change is that IKEA functions along both planes. As a global commodity brand, it is intimately connected to—indeed constitutive of—the contemporary global mass culture. Therefore it functions as a mass cultural sign, a brand that can sit side by side with others like Nike or Coca-Cola. However it has its own unique yet manifold signs. It operates as a lifestyle brand, allowing it to be used most productively in the construction of individual selves. Its manifold signs are of especial importance in relation to class. It has the ability to shift between various forms of class-associated signs. It can be considered as a lower-class thrift store due to its cheap self-assembly furniture. It exists as a sign of middle-class consumption, driven by its image as a high-street brand. And most importantly it carries signs of elite or high culture due to its repeated emphasis on design—formerly the reserve of elites, but now, I will argue, in transition. In Australia it carries additional elite signs, for example the "sign of Europe," which historically doubles as high or legitimate culture.

In the postmodern world, the division between the formerly separate spheres of high and mass or popular culture has become increasingly blurred. I wish to focus upon IKEA's practice in the blurring of these spheres, by analyzing its fusion of the elitism of design with its mass cultural branded image. For IKEA is an example of a modernist-design furnishings company, which adheres to the philosophies, theories and aesthetic stylings of modernism, including the famous maxim "form follows function." Modernism is grounded in the enlightenment principles of rationality and progress and is naturally part of modernity. Jürgen Habermas states that "modernity expresses the conviction that the future has already begun: It is the epoch that lives for the future" (5). Modernists and modernism sought (and seek) to break away from the past and tradition, to create something new, to *create its normativity out of itself*" (Habermas 7, original emphasis). Central then, to modernism, is the notion of distinction, a distinction of temporalities between the past and the present-future. But there is also a distinction centred on class.

Deborah Leslie and Suzanne Reimer talk of modernism as an intentional reaction against the elitism of 19 th century bourgeois culture, and a movement which sought to aim at the poorest classes through the use of new materials and more modern mass-production techniques. They

state that "Throughout the twentieth century, furniture designers working within a modernist tradition turned to new construction materials such as steel, plastic, laminated wood, fibreglass, and canvas as replacements for traditional (and often more expensive) wood and fabric" (Leslie and Reimer, "Gender, Modern" 296). Modernism is antagonistic towards ornament and rapid stylistic changes, therefore it seeks to be immune from fashion (Leslie and Reimer, "Gender, Modern"; see also Leslie and Reimer, "Fashioning Furniture"). Consequently it persists with minimalist stylings, derived from their utilitarian maxim, exemplified by sleek, austere designs, with hard angles and the preference of tones rather than colours. The modernist par excellence, Le Corbusier, exemplifies this minimal use of colour when he writes, "the white of whitewash is absolute … It is the eye of truth" (qtd. in Leslie and Reimer, "Gender, Modern" 296). This anti-fashion stance and the desire to remain true to central tenets can be viewed in part to be anti-capitalistic to the degree that design should not be dictated by fashion changes instigated by the profit-driven capitalist mode of production and obsolescence. Modernism in design, could even paradoxically appear to be anti-modern in the sense outlined by Habermas. In its stance against fashion-induced rapid stylistic change, it no longer seeks to create something new. It in fact defends its own tradition, denying its very own modernism. Modernism also professed its commitment to a progressive democratisation of society, through its design and intention to produce for the masses, yet modernism has historically been clouded by elitism. There is an abhorrence of ordinary decoration and its role in hiding "inferior materials" and construction. For as Le Corbusier again states: "Trash is always abundantly decorated; the luxury object is well made, neat and clean, pure and healthy, and its bareness reveals the quality of its manufacture" (qtd. in Leslie and Reimer, "Gender, Modern" 297).

IKEA is in many ways a modernist-design company par excellence. It obeys many of modernism's central tenets. It places a great deal of emphasis upon innovative but functional design, mass production, the use of new, cheaper materials, and offers its products to all social classes, particularly an ever-expanding mass-middle-class. By the mid-1950's IKEA had developed its central concept, which is "to combine design, function, and price" (IKEA founder Ingvar Kamprad, qtd. in Torekull 53). IKEA operates on the concept of "democratic design." Such a concept was derived from a trip taken by IKEA founder Ingvar Kamprad, to the Milan design fair in the 1950's. There he saw inside the homes of "ordinary" Italians with their "heavy, dark furniture," a marked contrast to the contemporary furniture on display at the fair. From this developed the concept of "democratic design": "a design that was not just good but also from the start adapted to machine production and thus cheap to produce. With a design of that kind, and the innovation of self-assembly, we could save a great deal of money in the factories and on transport, as well as keep down the price to the customer" (Kamprad, qtd. in Torekull 53).

Hence IKEA's democratic design runs a trajectory from design through production to consumption. Good, innovative and functional design is essential to their brand image. The production process must be based on mass machine production which will lower the overall cost to the company. Such cost-savings are passed on to the consumer through cheaper products. This is where the democratic element comes into the process. It makes modern-design furniture available for the masses, for those formerly denied access. "Democratic design" I argue works to generate a democratisation of design, allowing it to spread to virtually all social strata. Indeed Kamprad goes so far as to locate IKEA's "democratic design" within the framework of a more widespread democratisation of modern societies. For he states "our business philosophy contributes to the democratizing process. It makes good, handsome, and cheap everyday articles available to a great many people at a price they can afford. That seems to me to have something to do with down-to-earth democracy" (Kamprad, qtd. in Torekull 153). Democracy as we know it, this clearly isn't. However as society becomes evermore consumer-driven, where consumption is central to politics and identities, such comments may very well foreshadow what a consumer-democracy might comprise. IKEA has achieved many of the tenets of modernism through its business practices such as democratic design. Whilst modernists may advocate ideas of democracy and the rights of the masses, there remains an ever-present elitism, as we saw briefly

with Le Corbusier. Such contradictory sentiments are evident in another statement by Kamprad. Whilst espousing the modernist desire to produce affordable design for the masses, he suggests that poor people, when left to their own devices, must suffer for their "ugly" decoration and design choices. He writes: "I asked myself, why do poor people have to put up with such ugly things? … Was it necessary that what was beautiful could be bought only by an elite for large sums" (qtd. in Torekull 153). IKEA's self-assembly furniture is another element of democratic design through which the "masses" get a say in the production of the design piece. This self-assembly nature will be discussed later.

The relationships between class and design are paramount. Good design until recently has been considered the reserve of the elite, and at a stretch, a part of middle-class pretensions. With the fading of a Hoggartian working-class (see Hoggart)—especially in Australia —into a vast generalized lower middle-class, the trend towards design has increased. Or to put it into the framework of the burgeoning consumer citizenship, there have been increased calls for the democratic "rights" of consumer-citizens for access to design. Such a declaration of rights is connected to the aestheticisation of everyday life that Mike Featherstone discusses (*Consumer Culture*; *Undoing Culture*). Yet this aestheticisation process, as Wolfgang Welsch writes is not part of an avant-garde program of extending and breaking down the limits of art. It can be seen as an extension of art into the everyday, for when

> traditionally artistic attributes are carried over into reality, daily life is being pumped full of artistic character.... In this surface aestheticisation the most superficial aesthetic value dominates: desire, amusement, enjoyment without consequence. This animatory trend today reaches far beyond the aesthetic enshroudment of everyday items, from the styling of objects and experience-loaded ambiences. It is increasingly determining the form of our culture as a whole (Welsch 3).

Within the aestheticisation of the everyday, aesthetics, and its elite connotations, become available to a vast number of social classes, specifically the "masses." Such groups were never "aesthetics free;" rather they were denied access to the high-cultural connotations and associations of such a formerly high-class specific term. Most notable among those in society recently given access to "aesthetics" is the mass lower middle-class. The suburban home is the central organizing structure for this class, and becomes a prime focus for the democratic aestheticisation practices, primarily evident in the spread of DIY culture. And through this (re-)aestheticisation of the home, including the consumption of modern furniture such as IKEA, one can witness the democratisation of modernism.

Whilst the lower-classes were denied access to elite modernist aesthetics, such groups still interacted with modernism. For modernism was in a sense, "done to them" for the best part of a century. It has impacted upon their lives in the form of high-rise state-owned mass housing projects (see Harvey), and in the form of motor(super)highways (see Berman), which would soon link them to their new suburban and mobile existence. Their relationship to modernism did not always end in depressive/oppressive council estates or suburban boredom/isolation. Modernism is evident in our transforming cities, in architecture, on film and television, in advertising and art galleries. Whilst signs are by nature simply products of language, ownership of material manifestations of signs is important to identities. Due to the relatively high cost of modernist-design furniture, ownership has traditionally been the reserve of elites. Yet IKEA's "democratic design" offers cheap, mass-produced modernist-design furniture. Consequently, modernism as an aesthetic style and a sign of distinction becomes democratised, available to the majority of society. Through its material manifestations such as furniture, modernism offers signs of the modern which are currently used in the pursuit of social distinction. The "modern" is also connected to signs of the city or metropolis (see Simmel; also Williams), in order to produce a contemporary cosmopolitan identity.

Self-Assembly Furniture, DIY and the Production of the Self

In addition to blurring high and mass/low culture with its democratic design principle, IKEA also operates as a metaphor for, and plays its own role in, other social-cultural transformations. Through its self-assembly furniture, IKEA operates as a very visible manifestation of the "DIYization" of society, which is essentially a combinatory process of privatisation and individualisation, a society which demands self-production and self-sufficiency.

Many people have humorous anecdotes regarding the self-assembly nature of IKEA furniture. What with the missing screws, the splintering particleboard or the sections which just don't seem to match. This self-assembly can too easily be passed-off as a labour-saving device on behalf of the producers/suppliers, and as a money saving process for the consumer, happy to expend their labour in lieu of higher prices. It would appear on the surface to be a pragmatic cost saving provision. Yet I believe that a lot more significance should be placed upon self-assembly furniture. For it is both a producer and consequence of numerous highly significant social and cultural processes which are occurring today and in recent memory.

The first issue I would like to focus upon, however briefly, is the business practices which are adding their own weight to a widespread social and political trend. Through not only technological innovations, businesses like IKEA are developing numerous practices which have resulted in the reduction of employee labour. Self-assembly furniture, self-service petrol-stations, ATM's and internet banking, all serve the transference of labour from a paid employee to the (paying) consumer. This I contend is part of the DIYization of modern society, driven by individualisation and privatisation. Increasing numbers of tasks once formerly in the realm of the "public" or a public collective, have become privatised and individualised. IKEA's self-assembly furniture is emblematic of a neo-liberal society which sees the public realm, which includes both state and corporate institutions, as merely providing raw materials for the individual to piece together in order to produce one's life. Individualism becomes evermore important in a world which is based less on notions of community and more on jungle and evolutionary metaphors about survival of the fittest. The worth of citizens has been reconfigured into forms of activity which are undertaken on the basis of self-sufficiency, such as the ability to solve their own problems, be they problems of shelter, food or entertainment. With the privatisation of government institutions, a public collectivity has been de-materialised, reduced to the pure symbol of the nation, or it has been re-materialised into a consumer public realm. Such processes of privatisation have resulted in a physical, but more importantly a symbolic, retreat to the domestic realm. Subsequently, the home itself has become the central icon of contemporary Australian culture.

With the home so central to Australian everyday culture, IKEA's self-assembly furniture acquires a special significance for it offers an important opportunity for people to engage in a form of physical "home-construction." For up until the 1960's, many people, especially the working-class, built their own homes in stages, small at first, followed by extensions (Davison 11-13; see also Boyd). Today, most citizens leave construction to construction companies. Houses *and* homes can now be consumed like any other product. One simply ventures to a display suburb and selects a house-design (see Dovey), which will usually be built in a new suburban housing estate (see Richards). These commodified "model houses," are by no means denied a "home status" because they are not individually constructed. The cliché "turning houses into homes," though trite, highlights the necessary processes of transformation and personalisation indicating that "homes" require their own forms of production. The architectural structure of the house is transmogrified into a home through specific practices which imbue the structure with the identity of the householder. Interior decoration schemes are chosen, furniture laid-out, art-works hung, and the display of objects of meaning, be they signifiers of class or repositories of memory, are strategically positioned. This comprises part of what I term "domestic production" which is inclusive of, but more expansive than housework such as cooking and cleaning, or child-rearing— long seen as the domain of women and critiqued by feminists and sociologists (see Oakley). I extend it to include all forms of domestic practices, including leisure practices such as watching television or gardening, which assist in the production of "homes."

The IKEA self-assembly furniture also falls into this category. Domestic production includes consumption for the home, producing a sense of "value-adding" to the domestic. IKEA's self-assembly furniture, constitutes two forms of domestic production. First it is consumed to add to the domestic. Secondly and more importantly, the self-assembly furniture offers the opportunity for a directly experienced sense of physical home construction. Whilst small in scale, and reasonably uncomplicated, it allows for a sense that someone has helped "build" their home (not their house). Whilst the production of such furnishings often only requires the famed "allen-key" or a screw-driver, it offers the opportunity to physically construct with the hands a piece of "home." It is an embodied experience of home-making. Consumer goods carry a variety of signs, and may be used in manners different from those intended by manufacturers. The self-assembly process can transform the meanings of an IKEA mass-consumer object. It becomes inscribed with personalised meaning, giving it an additional narrative which exists outside of its status as a commodity. It becomes domesticated in both senses of the term. The object, I would argue, may also sit differently in relation to the home or domestic space, when compared to other objects. The narrative of building, or construction, is constantly there, which works to complexify the particular object, making it different to whole-made commodities. Hence such goods stand out as highly domesticated goods, perhaps even extra-domestic because of the individual domestic labour. They represent the personalised domestic, objects that serve to transform houses into homes.

The process of constructing the self-assembly furniture can also be included within the wider cultural practice gaining significant momentum over the last decade: DIY culture. DIY, or do-it-yourself culture constitutes a range of material cultural practices, which are focused upon the material and symbolic transformation of the domestic home. Or as John Hartley suggests "installing the material basis for the ideology of domesticity in the form of particle-board, paint and a patio" (178). It also plays a major role in the (re)construction of the self, helping to shape a modern subjectivity which is centred around a commodified domestic sphere. The backbone of DIY home culture, as a constitutive part of DIY society, would have to be the renovation. DIY renovations must be carried out, by and large, by individuals, who must use their own labour to build a new kitchen, replace old carpet with polished floorboards, or transform the backyard into a "designer-style" garden. Contemporary DIY culture has transformed the home from a domestic dwelling—a place of security, comfort, rest and self-exploration—into a place of "the modern" and "metropolitan." The new focus on modern-design aesthetics is increasingly bound to the construction and presentation of upward mobility. Leslie and Reimer describe this as interior decoration giving way to interior design (Leslie and Reimer "Gender, Modern").

The DIY culture informs and is informed by the recent mushrooming of primetime television programmes dedicated to the home, specifically house and garden makeover shows. These include long running programmes on broadcast television such as *Burke's Backyard* (now defunct), *Better Homes and Gardens,* and more recent programmes such as *Auction Squad* and *Renovation Rescue.* All these programmes promote the use of modern-design, saturated in themes of elite metropolitanism and the contemporary. The pay-television services have a channel called *The Lifestyle Channel* which airs home and makeover shows from across the Anglo-world, and produces one of its own, *Home* —the most unapologetically modernist-design programme produced in Australia.

DIY culture is part of a wider home culture, which increasingly positions the home as a place of leisure. Historically, the modern home has been discussed as a space of non-work, a haven where someone, usually a man, can retreat to and rest in away from the public eye, and engage in activities which define or express the self, or the household unit (see Rojek; Chapman and Hockey). As work and home became separated by industrialisation, leisure began to stake a firmer position in the domestic space. Victorian campaigners against the dangers of idle leisure claimed that free time spent at home was superior to public amusements such as public houses or carnivals. This Victorian period was a golden age for domestic entertainment among the middle classes, who promoted family-based domestic activities such as amateur music, singing and

parlor games. The Victorians created a separate ideology of the home based on the "cult of domesticity." Hobbies too were part of this surge in home-based leisure, which functioned also to reintegrate work and leisure into the home via their status as productive leisure (Gelber). Hobbies function to express individual skill, creativity and ultimately the self. Gelber writes that by and large hobbies are "indisputably solitary pastimes. Hobbyists could, and to some extent did, form clubs where they could trade techniques or objects, but the primary activity took place at home" (Gelber 49). The home looks set to continue this trajectory as society proceeds with its privatisation, reducing public participation to short-term tribal events such as football games or pop-concerts (see Maffesoli). The public sphere has been reconfigured by telecommunications technologies connecting the public and the private. Whilst certainly having these possibilities, telecommunications such as radio and especially television, have in recent history come to dominate domestic leisure (see Silverstone; Moores; Tomlinson). Indeed such domestic leisure technologies have increased in number in recent decades with the expansion of satellite and cable television, stereos, DVD and video, as well as personal computers, the internet and gaming technologies. These technologies function to domesticate leisure, by bringing it inside the private space. The home then increasingly takes on the appearance of not just a space for leisure but *the* modern leisure space.

Leisure has never been a stable entity, able to be pinned down as the opposite of work, although it was not from a lack of looking (see Roberts). There are forms of leisure that take on the appearance of work. Rojek discusses the importance of the "Rational Recreation Movement" of the second half of the nineteenth century. This movement sought to transform and rationalise working-class public leisure in order to improve social morality. It worked in conjunction with the aforementioned Victorian promotion of recreation within the home. Seeking to clean up public leisure the movement sought to get the working-classes out of the pubs and into the open air of the new public parks which were springing up across the West. It also included what became the forerunner to adult education, fostering literacy and art programmes. Such leisure activities were based around self-improvement, involving some necessary manner of work-activity, but all the while maintaining its essential leisure status of not being actual paid-work. A century later, Rojek talks of postmodern leisure as the process whereby the divisions between work and leisure disappear or are more significantly obscured (Rojek).

I regard DIY culture as postmodernist leisure. For whilst much of the DIY process actually constitutes forms of labour, the notion of leisure is constantly present, if only as a guiding theme. DIY work is centred within a leisure and lifestyle project, a project of home-improvement which seeks to produce a home-lifestyle. DIY culture, I argue, constitutes a form of domestic "productive leisure" or what David Bell calls "leisure-work" (Bell). Productive leisure is a fusion of specific types of labour and leisure. DIY as productive leisure can also be considered a hobby. For whilst task completion is a fundamental aim, it is not the only significant element of this hobbyist productive leisure. It is the work as process which is essential in and of itself. For such a process functions as a project for the production of the self. It is through the particular DIY activity that identity can be constructed, and this identity may be individual or even of the entire household. DIY culture as productive leisure can then be thought of as the hobby-culture *par excellence.* For in addition to the production of the self, the goal oriented tasks, and the unpaid leisure time spent doing the tasks, the DIY home-culture can draw on numerous other signs related to the home, for example security, class, comfort and domesticity. The home we could then argue is Australia 's greatest hobby. And it is essential to remember that this DIY culture as a form of "productive leisure" is inherently based within the larger cultural practice of home-production, which as stated above includes everything from arranging furniture, mowing the lawn and eating meals, to renovating a kitchen.

IKEA's self-assembly furniture is an integral element of its "democratic design." The democratisation occurs through the individual becoming more intimately connected to the designer furniture, because they are involved in the production process. This does not occur with more elite, designer furniture firms. Thus it is democratising in the sense that design as an elite

function and object, becomes available to all through the individualisation process of the self-assembly. The democratic design allows for this individualisation. IKEA's self-assembly furniture allows for individuality to develop in relation to the mass commodity culture of which IKEA itself is a major representative. Yet the IKEA mass commodity object is individualised through the self-productive work of the individuals who simultaneously and paradoxically carve their selves into, and separate from, the global consumer society.

Processes of individualisation and the promotion of the home-based DIY culture, in response to and in connection with broader economic and socio-political transformations, have seen an increasing trend towards a retreat to and championing of the home-lifestyle. Society itself is as I said earlier, becoming increasingly DIY (see also Tomlinson). Individuals must do ever-increasing amounts of tasks previously done by the state, business, families and servants. The social democratic state has steadily withdrawn its guiding parental hand over the last two decades. This withdrawal has seen the state increasingly foist the responsibility of attaining important services such as health-care and education upon individuals through the implementation of a user-pays system, under the guise of consumer choice. Whilst this may indeed promote an increasing freedom of choice, it simultaneously fosters anxiety surrounding one's decision-making abilities which can lead to what Anthony Giddens terms "ontological insecurity" (Giddens). DIY culture and the emerging DIY society then, present a real challenge to the social democratic gains of the post-war period.

As DIYization rests upon the abilities of individuals to care for themselves, the danger lies in the sections of society who have limited abilities to do so, such as the disabled, the unskilled, and the elderly. Business too has initiated its own withdrawal of services in its drive for cost-cutting efficiency. In order to cut costs, businesses have employed a system of outsourcing tasks to "cheaper" service-providers. They have even employed a strategy of outsourcing work to the consumers themselves. Petrol stations initiated this self-service model, quickly followed by banks which installed ATMs, phone and internet banking, in order to reduce their high-cost labour force. There are now DIY shopping stores, where consumers do the point-of-sale work, scanning items and paying, for themselves.

Throughout modernity family networks have become increasingly fragmented globally, nationally and locally. Individuals are increasingly in situations where family networks are no longer available for assistance. David Morley writes that modern familial fragmentation has an impact upon actual family households. He discusses how our busy lives have forced a decline in family meal times, resulting in a process of individual "grazing," notably on microwave meals, at various times (Morley). This last example is also connected to the decline in domestic servants among middle class households during the twentieth century, which resulted in part from changing socio-economic conditions such as the depression and rising wages, but also from changes to the technologies of and within the home. Alongside electrification, new labour-saving technologies such as washing machines, gas and electrical stoves, and vacuum cleaners all produced a decline in the need for domestic servants (see Tomlinson; Boyd).

There is however a positive side to DIYization. It allows an individual to perform an active and even playful role in the construction of the self. John Hartley describes a particular citizen of this consumer society. He refers to the Do-It-Yourself citizen as one engaged in

> the practice of putting together an identity from the available choices, patterns and opportunities on offer in the semio-sphere and the mediasphere. Whether it's a full "fitted" identity, expensive, integrated and in a recognizable off-the-shelf style, or an identity more creatively put together from bits and pieces bought, found or purloined separately, is a matter of individual difference. (178)

Such a process of identity construction has much to do with postmodern notions of fluid and multiple selves, whereby we construct our identities rather than being given a single identity. This

postmodernisation of the self allows for the element of play to come into the construction of identities, most especially using resources from popular and consumer culture (see Hall; Kellner). Hartley continues:

> "citizenship" is no longer simply a matter of a social contract between state and subject, no longer even a matter of acculturation to the heritage of a given community; DIY citizenship is a choice people can make for themselves. Further, they can change a given identity, or move into or out of a repertoire of identities. And although no one is "sovereign" in the sense that they can command others, there's an increasing emphasis on *self* -determination as the foundation of citizenship (178).

Hartley writes that television offers the training ground for this new form of citizenship. This DIY citizenship is no longer simply based on notions of civic, political or social citizenship, or even authentic cultural identity, "but on a radically decontextualized network of meanings which locate identity in the mediasphere, not the public sphere" (179). This DIY citizenship then reflects the recent trend towards a home-centred lifestyle, away from a rapidly deflating public sphere.

What IKEA offers then, is a profitable case study through which to examine recent socio-cultural trends produced within the unstable climate of the consumer society. An analysis of IKEA can bring to light issues of immense social, cultural and political importance. One can use it to examine processes of privatisation, individualisation, and the blurring of class cultures. This article has focused upon IKEA's postmodern ability to blur the class associations of its commodity-signs. Through a practice known as "democratic design," IKEA makes available elite, and modernist-design furniture, for mass cultural consumption. The article positioned this blurring of high and mass culture within the broader processes of cultural democratisation. Also explored was the often over-looked importance of the self-assembly nature of IKEA's furniture, and its usefulness for discussing the DIYization of society. It is also useful to connect it to the practices of the DIY home renovation culture and its classification as a form of "productive leisure." Finally the article discussed the opportunities DIYization offers the individual to actively engage in the production of the self.

Buck Clifford Rosenberg is a doctoral candidate at The University of Melbourne. His thesis is examining recent trends in Australian home cultures.

Buck Clifford Rosenberg
SAGES
Faculty of Arts
The University of Melbourne
Parkville , Victoria , Australia 3010
b.rosenberg@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor, W. "The Schema of Mass Culture." *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture.* Ed. J.M. Bernstein. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. 53-84.

Baudrillard, Jean. *The Consumer Society.* London: Sage, 1996.

Bell, David. "From Writing at the Kitchen Table to TV Dinners: Food Media, Lifestylization and

European Eating." *Eat Drink and Be Merry? Cultural Meanings of Food in the 21st Century Conference.* Amsterdam, 2002.

Berman, Marshall. *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity.* London: Verso, 1982.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* Trans. Richard Nice. London: Routledge, 1984.

Boyd, Robin. *Australia 's Home: Its Origins, Builders and Occupiers.* Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1987.

Chapman, Tony and Jenny Hockey. "The Ideal Home as it is Imagined and as it is Lived." *Ideal Homes? Social Change and Domestic Life.* Eds. Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. 1-13.

Connell, Robert.W. *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture: Studies of Conflict, Power and Hegemony in Australian Life.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Davison, Graeme. "The Past and Future of the Australian Suburb." *Urban Research Program: Working Paper No. 33.* Canberra: Australian National University, 1993.

Dovey, Kim. "Dreams on Display: Suburban Ideology in the Model Home." *Beasts of Suburbia: Reinterpreting Cultures in Australian Suburbs.* Eds. Sarah Ferber, Chris Healy and Chris McAuliffe. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994. 127-47.

Featherstone, Mike. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism.* London: Sage, 1991.

Featherstone, Mike. *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity.* London: Sage, 1995.

Gelber, Steven M. *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity.* London: Polity Press, 1990.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures.* Trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987.

Hall, Stuart. "The Question of Cultural Identity." *Modernity and Its Futures.* Eds. Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

Hartley, John. *Uses of Television.* London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity.* Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990.

Hoggart, Richard. *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957.

Jackson, Peter, and Nigel Thrift. "Geographies of Consumption." *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies.* Ed. Daniel Miller. London: Routledge, 1995. 204-37.

Kellner, Douglas. "Popular Culture and the Construction of Postmodern Identities." *Modernity and Identity.* Eds. Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. 141-77.

Leslie, Deborah, and Suzanne Reimer. "Gender, Modern Design, and Home Consumption." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21.3 (2003): 293-316.

Leslie, Deborah, and Suzanne Reimer. "Fashioning Furniture: Restructuring the Furniture

Commodity Chain." *Area* 35.4 (2003): 427-37.

Maffesoli, Michel. *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society.* London: Sage, 1996.

Marcuse, Herbert. *One Dimensional Man.* London: Abacus, 1964.

Moores, Shaun. *Media and Everyday Life in Modern Society.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

Morley, David. "What's 'Home' Got To Do With It? Contradictory Dynamics in the Domestication of Technology and the Dislocation of Domesticity." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 6.4 (2003): 435-458.

Oakley, Ann. *The Sociology of Housework.* London: Robertson, 1974.

Richards, Lyn. *Nobody's Home: Dreams and Realities in a New Suburb.* Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Roberts, Kenneth. *Leisure.* 2nd ed. Burnt Mill, Essex: Longman, 1981.

Rojek, Chris. *Decentring Leisure: Rethinking Leisure Theory.* London: Sage, 1995.

Silverstone, Roger. *Television and Everyday Life.* London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Simmel, Georg. "The Metropolis and Mental Life." Trans. Kurt H. Wolff. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel.* Ed. Kurt H. Wolff. New York: The Free Press, 1950. 409-24.

Tomlinson, Alan. "Home Fixtures: Doing-It-Yourself in a Privatized World." *Consumption, Identity, and Style: Marketings, Meanings, and the Packaging of Pleasure.* Ed. Alan Tomlinson. London: Routledge, 1990. 57-73.

Torekull, Bertil. *Leading by Design: The Ikea Story.* Trans. Joan Tate. New York: Harper Collins, 1999.

Welsch, Wolfgang. "Aestheticisation Processes: Phenomena, Distinctions and Prospects." *Theory, Culture & Society* 13.1 (1996): 1-24.

Williams, Raymond. *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists.* London: Verso, 1989.