



Self-reliance and the accessorised self

Description

Self-reliance has become a catchword for living off grid, and an inspiration for USA 2nd amendment gun lobbyists. It is also a catchword for healthy leisure, sports, fitness, and education for leadership, and sustainability.



The term [self-reliance](#)• of course comes with qualification. Individuals need family, support communities and institutions to survive and thrive, and everyone deploys tools and technologies. In fact, myths of self-reliance frequently place the heroically independent individual in the company of at least one iconic accessory: the lone troubadour with lute, the samurai with sword, the cowboy with a six shooter, the shepherd with her crook.

To carry a smartphone is not alien to the independent spirit, though its utility as multi-functional communicative •Swiss army pocket knife• clearly amplifies the capabilities of the accessorized self-reliant in ways that are new and of consequence.

Fetish

Clothes and other wearables are obvious accessories. In her investigation into women, shoes, purses, and other fetishes cultural theorist Elizabeth Halsted concludes, •These particular items of clothing have rich symbolic meaning, metaphorical powers, and serve important defensive functions which ward off painful or fragmented thoughts, contain affects and sensations, or connect their wearers to powerful

or positive self-states?• (110).

I would add that whatever Freudian or Marxist reading one wishes to place on clothing applies also to other symbolic and functional accessories: guns, staffs, utility belts, capes, wands, sonic screwdrivers, whips, and Rotring pens, (the accessories of Wyatt Earp, Gandalf, Batman, Superman, Harry Potter, Dr Who, Wonder Woman, architects and other fictional characters).

Be prepared

On the subject of down-to-earth conservative self-reliance hereâ??s some folksy and family-friendly advice from [Self-Reliance Magazine](#) for the accessorised â??prepperâ?•:

â??One of the best forms of personal protection is living where you probably wonâ??t need it! We live three hours north of the largest urban area, in a remote, off-the-beaten-path location, separated from the road by 1.3 miles of dirt trail. We have large dogs, weapons, and the experience to use them. Do you? Again, check out the information in the Emergency Preparedness and Survival Guide for gun-related tips and hints. They may save your life or the life of one of your family members. Be sure you have adequate ammunition for each of your guns on hand, stored in airtight, waterproof containers. Damp ammunition or the wrong ammunition is dangerous â?? itâ??s worse than no ammunition! Donâ??t brag around how much â??stuffâ?? you have. Itâ??s like an invitation for an attempted robbery.â?•

If you canâ??t live in splendid and remote isolation then be prepared in case you need to hunker down or beat others in the rush to escape after a tsunami, earthquake or terrorist attack. In any event, â??Have a good pocket knife in your pocket at all times (everyone in our family carries one) and a lighter, as well. And have a couple of quality kitchen knives and a pack of a dozen lighters in your kitchen gear, as well. Add a sharpening stone, a little dry tinder (just in case), and your kit is in good shape!â?•

It need hardly be said that such self-justificatory steps towards self-reliance are parasitic on infrastructures, institutions, systems, industrial production, networks, economic realities and society in general. This kind of self-reliance really doesnâ??t scale up as a social model.

Breakdown

I take the accessory of the mythic self-reliant as metonymic for the equipmental whole, the techno-social sphere on which the individual depends â?? and that made the individual who she is.

A [metonym](#) is a smaller part of something larger used in language to represent the whole, as when â??the crownâ?• stands for the legal system or the state in the UK, or â??penâ?• stands for literary prowess as in â??the pen is mightier than the swordâ?• â?? and where â??swordâ?• stands for something bigger and more complicated than a single weapon, specifically war and conflict.

So whatever a good penknife means to a prepper the accessory also speaks of its manufacture, the cultural practices in which it is situated (whittling, repairing, hunting, and self-defence). If such [thingly](#) connectedness applies to objects with limited functional entailments, then how much more can be said for the self-reliantâ??s smartphone. It renders obvious, and in a *literal* way, just how connected we are, especially when it breaks down or goes missing.

The breakdown, loss or inadequacy of the self-reliant's iconic accessory is not just a loss of function, but a breach in the web of connections. As Heidegger suggested in the case of the carpenter with the malfunctioning hammer, breakdown brings the object into awareness as a thing, and brings to light the network of dependencies, the reality of the interdependent social and technological whole, and the importance of resilience in the face of potential loss. See [On being unbalanced](#), and [What happens when the machine stops](#).

References

- Clay-Atkinson. 2014. A beginner's guide to preparedness. *Self-Reliance*, (<http://www.self-reliance.com/2014/10/a-beginners-guide-to-preparedness/>) October 2.
- Halsted, Elizabeth. 2006. A shoe is rarely just a shoe: Women's accessories and their psyches. In Jean Petrucelli (ed.), *Longing: Psychoanalytic Musings on Desire*: 101-111. London: Karnac.

Note

- The Farmopolis Jetty at London's North Greenwich (pictured above) showcases an approach to sustainability and urban agriculture.
- See 1951 instructional film on how to become self-reliant: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQ6EwJFLJ34> Assume responsibility; be informed; know where you are going; make your own decisions; read R.W. Emerson's essay on self-reliance.
- Here's a 20 second video about self-reliance, apropos the last post on [DIY](#).

Category

1. Nature

Tags

1. Heidegger
2. metonymy
3. self-reliance
4. things

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