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*Circulating Stuff through Second-hand,
Vintage and Retro Markets*

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Thematic Section: Circulating Stuff through Second-hand, Vintage and Retro Markets

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Introduction: Circulating Stuff through Second-hand, Vintage and Retro Markets

By Staffan Appelgren & Anna Bohlin

With modernity, the circulation of used objects through donation, selling, barter and gifting has tended to take place in the shadow of increasingly dominating forms of industrial commodity production and consumption. Progress-oriented consumer modernity in the 1950s and 1960s and deregulated global markets in the 1980s and 1990s created conditions for great leaps forward for a linear consumption practice that in Sweden was strikingly captured by the motto ‘buy, use and discard’ (Husz 2009; Löfgren 2012). Lately, however, the relatively unchallenged position of first cycle mass production and consumption has come under question, and throughout affluent countries in the Global North there is an emergent interest in various forms of circulation and reuse (Featherstone 2011). Across social fields, consumers are motivated to reduce, reuse and recycle, in order to manage precarity and lessen impact on the environment. Within this broader trend of circulation, trading trinkets, textiles, furniture and household items from days gone by have become a popular pastime as well as a significant industry (Gregson & Crewe 2003; Baker 2012; Norris 2012).



Jeans store, Gothenburg. A variation on the theme of reuse, reduce and recycle.

In Western Europe and North America the last decades have seen an unprecedented growth of the second-hand sector in the form of retro shops, vintage and antiques boutiques, flea markets as well as Internet barter and trade (Franklin 2011; Cassidy & Bennet 2012). Rather than primarily existing in the interstices and marginal spaces of consumer society (Gregson & Crewe 2003), second-hand practices have begun to move into the centre of consumption, both physically, in terms of urban space (Hetherington 2010; Palmsköld 2013); figuratively, in terms of their influence on mainstream consumption and cultural production (cf. Fredriksson 2013), and, as can be seen in the studies presented here, socially, in terms of being adopted and enjoyed by the broad middle classes. Within this commerce, the ideal of ‘newness’, commonly regarded as central to consumer culture, is side-stepped by an emphasis on values such as ‘originality’, ‘uniqueness’, ‘nostalgia’ and ‘authenticity’ (Fredriksson 1996; Gregson & Crewe 2003; Reynolds 2011). Serving as inspiration not just for a growing section of mainstream consumers, second-hand practices are increasingly influencing conventional industry, as seen in the proliferation of reproduced old designs and attempts to industrialize aging by creating patina in new commodities (Crewe, Gregson & Brooks 2003; Franklin 2011). A recent announcement from the Swedish Tax Agency, stating that the trade of second-hand goods should incur VAT, which it has so far been exempt from, is a reflection of the increasingly influential status of this commerce (Skatteverket 2014).

What, then, are the reasons for this boom? Explanations for the rapid development of second-hand markets have pointed to a range of factors, such as the playful reappraisal and aestheticization of the past as an inventory of styles for adorning homes and bodies (Franklin 2011; Cassidy & Bennett 2012); the growth and popularisation of environmental and ethical concerns (Franklin 2011; Lewis & Potter 2011; Fredriksson 2013); or recreational aspects of socializing with friends and hunting for unpredictable ‘finds’ (Crewe & Gregson 1998; Gregson & Crewe 2003; Guit & Roux 2010). Others have emphasised consumers’ need to keep up previous levels of consumption in the face of economic hardship (Williams & Paddock 2003).

The collection of articles in this thematic section¹ engage in different ways with these issues, exploring how everyday objects assume new lives through the rebranding of ‘stuff’ into vintage, retro or second-hand. That they focus on relatively wealthy countries in the Global North is no coincidence. The expansion of linear modes of consumption in affluent societies is dependent on ‘effective’ waste management systems, which with increased globalization has extended the conduits of disposal from the backyards to far away places across the globe. Discarded objects tend to travel downwards through social hierarchies, which has meant that locally, in affluent societies like Sweden, the market for reused objects have been associated with a certain social stigma, and that globally, poor countries in the Global South have increasingly become destinations for unwanted used

goods from the Global North. These global asymmetrical flows have included both objects that have ended up on second-hand markets (Tranberg Hansen 2000; Norris 2010; Brooks 2013) and discarded stuff that have fed the swelling waste mountains (Gregson et al. 2010; Alexander & Reno 2012). The well-established antique markets are a stark contrast to the mass disposal of unwanted stuff that end up in the Global South. Both deal with the circulation of used material culture, but within radically different regimes of knowledge and value production. Antique markets constitute a complex apparatus for establishing and raising aesthetic, economic and social value of certain used objects (Combs 2003). The topic at hand in this thematic issue, however, might best be located in the middle of these established forms of circulation. The scope of this emerging middle ground is wide, encompassing elements of economic necessity and trash being re-valued, on the one hand, and social status and strict provenance on the other. Its field is delineated through questions about how used stuff is being managed, valued and desired in and through circulation, and how that circulation creates socially embedded objects that potentially engage people aesthetically, morally, socially, economically and ecologically.

As an arena for circulation of used objects, second-hand markets do not necessarily follow conventional laws of commercial transaction. Rather than involving an autonomous and alienated commodity on the shelf in the store (cf. Tsing 2013), this type of exchange is grounded in things being historically, socially and narratively embedded. The different articles in this thematic section explore how such embeddedness is experienced at different stages during the circular movement of stuff; during moments of disposal and separation (Lovatt, Palmsköld), at encounters in flea markets or yard sales (Hansson & Brembeck, Debary) or in kitsch boutiques or upmarket furniture stores (Handberg), or when using or wearing sought after finds (Fischer).

The contributions show the capacity of everyday objects to evoke strong sentiments and thoughts of a peculiarly moral nature, and how normative, sensuous and affective aspects of social life are embedded in each other. Things that have outlived their owner, or their own cycle of utility, may evoke not only specific memories, or nostalgia for a given past (Handberg, Debary), but may also trigger an urge to 'do right'; to handle the items in an ethically and morally acceptable manner (Lovatt, Palmsköld). At moments of transition, when the object is about to be discarded, its entanglements are laid bare, so to speak, asserting themselves through placing limits on what is deemed acceptable ways of handling it (Debary). As noted above, these entanglements can reach back in time, such as the obligations of looking after an item that used to belong to a loved one, or reach forward, towards future generations, as when making sure something is recycled even though it has no personal meaning or value (Lovatt, Palmsköld, Appelgren & Bohlin). Even if not explicitly politicized, these contributions indicate the significance of a complex cluster of moral-affective rationalities that entail aspects of

what Denis Guiot and Dominique Roux refers to as a ‘critical’ dimension, involving distancing from the conventional market system, including ethical and environmental concerns with respect to recycling and anti-waste (2010: 368).

The circulation of objects in second-hand markets takes place in and through various stages of handling. Sorting processes form a crucial part in how the informants in Melanie Lovatt’s study deal with objects inherited when parents or relatives pass away. While most research on disposal as a phase of circulation of material culture concerns how people manage the surplus of their own stuff, Lovatt’s contribution explores strategies and affects in dealing with the stuff of other people in a British context. Her study makes clear that this is a particular situation energized by a dynamic between the affective and memorial dimensions of things embodying residuals of people that are near and dear and the impracticability of keeping it all. This sensitive situation calls for sensitive forms of handling and passing on objects carrying aspects of beloved persons in responsible ways. Lovatt shows how sorting through things meet multiple needs, both emotional and practical, and how charity shops can provide an expedient means for acting in a morally legitimate way when faced with the dilemma of neither wanting to keep or wanting to throw away.

The second-hand market is traversed by a wide range of circulating objects. One particular category is textiles and clothes. In Anneli Palmsköld’s contribution to this thematic issue we can follow the shift in attitude and practice beginning in the 1970s in the Swedish society, from mending and altering textiles out of necessity in order to make the most out of the lifespan of the items, to sorting and circulating through donations and passing on unused items. Palmsköld shows that while the practices have changed, there is an unaltered morality testifying to the value placed on textiles and clothes. For many people the pressure of fashion and speed of consumption today produces an overflow of clothes and textiles that are not yet worn out, but to resolve this by throwing away excess items is not considered an attractive option. Rather, the informants in Palmsköld’s study prefer to either downcycle textiles within the home, or to make use of the infrastructures of circulation being established by local charity organizations and second-hand shops. Continuous sorting processes at home determine what to be kept for different uses, what to be retained for nostalgic and memorial purposes and what to be passed on or donated. At the other end, sorting processes at charity organizations establish what will be available for purchase in their stores locally, what will be circulated through other conduits including being sent abroad, and what will end up in the incinerator plant. Caring for textiles over a period of forty years has transformed from mending and altering at home and across generations to making use of societal infrastructures of circulation locally, nationally and globally to ensure continued utilization.

Discussing the second-hand market in terms of classifications of objects that traverse it, such as books, furniture, textile, home electronics, etc., is one way of

approaching the phenomenon. Another is to map the various classifications of objects along lines of market and style related concepts such as second-hand, retro, vintage, kitsch, and so on. Fischer's work on the history of vintage in the United States traces the concept from its early usage, adopted from the wine industry in the 1950s, over a forty-year period of transformation. As in the case of Palmköld's article, Fischer primarily focuses on clothes and shows how the concept of vintage follows the journey of second-hand from being associated with poverty and pity to becoming an arena for profit and position. She follows this development through an analysis of the uses of the concept in American newspaper and magazine articles published in this period, ending in the late 1980s when vintage is a well-established subset of the American second-hand clothing market. This development, the author shows, is interdependent with the changes within the conventional U.S. garment industry. Rather than opposing each other, the second-hand market and the first cycle market stand in a dynamic relationship to each other, from which authenticity, aura, quality, uniqueness and nostalgia emerge as desirable experiences for vintage shoppers.

Retro is another style etiquette on the second-hand market, sometimes overlapping with vintage, sometimes standing in contrast to it. In the article by Kristian Handberg retro culture is linked to the formation of identity, and in this particular case we are shown how retro objects furnish not only the homes in Montreal, but also the collective memory and the cultural identity of the city. Modernist furniture, a globally circulating style, becomes assets in negotiating the city's modern past in contrast to a lingering image of the sinful city. In Handberg's analysis the forward-looking Montreal Expo held in 1967, with its manifestations of modernity and progress, becomes the sounding board for how the circulation of modernist second-hand furniture today provides a way to look back in time to form an understanding and a statement of the present. A second scene, explored by the author, contributing to the renegotiation of the city's cultural past and identity, concerns kitsch objects. In contrast to the global modernist style of furniture, this scene has historical roots being embedded in notions of Quebecity featuring aesthetic expressions of *québécoise*. In some contexts, *québécoise* signifies provincialism and backwardness, but by dint of a double negation the knowing consumer transforms the 'local tradition' of bad taste into an ironic connoisseurship that knows how to appreciate second-hand kitsch objects.

Placemaking is also an important feature in Hansson's and Brembeck's work. This contribution deals with the complex layers of circulation, of stuff, of people and of affects that tie together a specific second-hand market. Kommersen is a popular flea market in Gothenburg, Sweden, which the authors analyse from a circulatory perspective, suggesting that the flea market provides researchers with a unique lens for observing market and consumer practices 'in the wild', in contrast to formalized settings. A distinguishing feature of flea markets, compared to conventional stores, is that they combine retail display features from eras both

prior and subsequent to the introduction of open display practices. Circulatory flows of the market are dynamically managed and amplified through the physical layout of the premises, through display techniques, and through the sensory dimensions of the setting. These material and immaterial circulations at the flea market, Hansson and Brembeck argue, generate particular subjectivities, affects and atmospheres. Using actor-network theory, they show how a flea market such as Kommersen comprises many different networks, each with their own logic of circulation. Such networks of circulation, of social and material things, may seem local, but in fact are far wider, both geographically and chronologically.

The agency emerging in aging objects is brought forward by Octave Debary. This contribution circles around a project based on an experimental method of inviting people to become engaged in ‘photographic and narrative work’ to explore the relationship between objects and memory. This project resulted in a book and an exhibition that is discussed in Debary’s article. The focus is on the awakening occurring when dormant old objects are encountered by visitors to French yard sales, or *vide-greniers*. What is the peculiar power of the aging object to captivate and inspire the passing subject into action? New meetings between things and people are instigated, but that can only happen after a parting. Parting with an object is more an act of mourning than a matter of making money. With no set prices the *vide-greniers* open up a space for negotiation between seller and buyer that turns this commodity exchange into a social exchange. The sociality of the *vide-greniers* is further explored by Debary through asking new owners of old objects to pose with their finds as two actors in front of the camera, and through written expressions of the kind of imagined memories the objects conjure up.

Revisiting the long history within social anthropology of studying the mutual entanglement of material objects and human subjects, the contribution by Staffan Appelgren and Anna Bohlin applies classic anthropological perspectives on circulation to the field of second-hand practices. In this largely theoretical piece, growth emerges as a metaphorical and theoretical concept for understanding the transformations that objects in circulation undergo. Similar to the growth of organisms, circulating second-hand things are produced through a combination of qualities and forces both internal and external to the objects. Unlike first cycle commodities, purified of their sociality, what emerges from such circulation is a category of things that combine elements of both classic commodities and gifts, as they have been theorised within anthropology. Moving beyond the notion that things have social biographies, such a conceptualisation of second-hand objects allows for an appreciation of their agential capacities; how these are produced by their circulation, but also affecting it.

Whether perceived as a remedy to constraints and costs associated with linear forms of first cycle production and consumption, or as a means to cope with the excess of stuff confronting affluent people in contemporary consumer societies, circulation is about passing things on, but also about their returns. In various

ways, the contributions to this thematic issue highlight how these returns often are disordered and serendipitous, but increasingly desired and sought after. Things, people, sites, affects, transactions all form part of the second-hand markets where such returns are made socially and commercially valuable. This complex and fascinating field caters to many needs and desires, ranging from caring for the environment and handling overflow to decorating homes and bodies and preserving old things. We hope that this thematic issue can cast some light on these complexities, and that it will stimulate further engagement with a topic that is likely to increase in societal and scholarly significance.

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Notes

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Charity Shops and the Imagined Futures of Objects: How Second-Hand Markets Influence Disposal Decisions when Emptying a Parent's House

By Melanie Lovatt

Abstract

This article explores the processes whereby things are donated, or not donated, to charity shops. I draw on in-depth interviews conducted with adults who have sorted through the houses of older family members who have moved into residential accommodation, and in some cases subsequently died. The affective qualities of objects and the informants' responsibilities to be 'good' family members by ensuring 'safe passage' for their parents' possessions worked to ensure that many objects did not enter the second hand market, but were preserved within the family or wider social networks. Competing instincts to be 'responsible consumers' by not keeping things unnecessarily, worked to 'move things along' into charity shops, where informants believed the objects could come to be valued and singularised by other people. By providing an imagined future where goods can continue to be useful and have the opportunity to extend their biographical life, I argue that charity shops and other second-hand markets can help people to dispose of objects which they do not want to keep, but which they find difficult to throw away.

Keywords: Affect, charity shops, consumption, disposition, family, material culture, obligation, older people

Introduction

This article explores the experiences of people who have found themselves in the situation of needing to deal with and sort through the houses and contents of older relatives after they have moved into residential accommodation, and in some cases subsequently died. By analysing the narratives told by the informants about the objects, I consider how decisions of what to keep and what not to keep are made, focusing in particular on the processes by which some things are donated to charity and other second hand shops, and others are not. I explore how sometimes conflicting factors such as the affective qualities of objects, responsibilities to be good family members, and desires to be responsible consumers influenced the informants' decisions. While previous research has highlighted the factors involved in people disposing of their own possessions, less is known about how people decide what to do with possessions belonging to other people, to which they feel a sense of responsibility, and how this influences people's disposition strategies. I argue that by providing an opportunity for things to 'live on' after a person decides they do not want to keep certain objects, charity shops and other second-hand sites can help people to part with things which they do not want to keep, but which they find difficult to let go.

Reappraising and Divesting of Possessions

Through the course of a lifetime people can accumulate a vast amount of objects, and a growing literature attests to the ways in which the lives of people and objects intersect. Objects become meaningful to people by their associations with events, places and people (Rubinstein 1987; Shenk et al. 2004; Cieraad 2010), both reflect and create aspects of people's identities (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981; Belk 1988; Miller 2010), and come to act as 'material companions', acquiring 'meaning and value by sheer dint of their constancy in a life' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989). While possessions can be accumulated, they can also be discarded, and in recent years researchers have called for disposal to be considered as a crucial component of consumption (Hetherington 2004). Rather than disposal representing an endpoint in a production process conceptualised as lineal, it has been argued that disposal or 'moving things along' (Gregson 2007 et al.) can lead to an extension of an object's life within circular trajectories, where things come to be revalorised and reappropriated in different contexts, by different people (Parsons & Maclaran 2009).

The (re)appraisal and sorting through of possessions can take place at any point during the life course and for a variety of reasons. These might include during house moves (Marcoux 2001a; Ekström 2013), as part of ongoing efforts to ensure coherence between self-identity and how it is communicated through material

culture (Albinsson & Yasanthi Perera 2009; Cherrier 2009), and as part of the everyday process of being at home (Gregson 2007).

The importance of finding appropriate destinations for possessions is a key finding from research conducted on the divestment strategies of older adults who seek to dispose of objects, as a result of a specific need to downsize into smaller accommodation, or out of a desire to ensure 'safe passage' for their goods towards the end of their lives (Roster 2001). Where possible, great care is taken in deciding what should happen to particular objects, with preference often being given to family members, who are seen as the 'safest' and most appropriate recipients of possessions to ensure that valued items remain within the family (Marcoux 2001b; Roster 2001; Christian 2009; Ekerdt et al. 2012). Different disposal strategies can also reflect the morals and values of the owner. In interviews with older adults in New Zealand, Juliana Mansvelt found that through choosing different disposal strategies of gifting, ridding and passing on, older adults could perform ideals of being good parents and good consumers (Mansvelt 2012).

Inheritance, Bereavement and Relationships

Most literature on disposal concerns owners divesting of their own possessions, rather than dealing with objects which were or remain owned by other people, although some previous research offers insights into the experiences of people tasked with sorting through other people's belongings. By entering and sorting through the contents of a home which had belonged to a deceased relative, the informants in Finch and Hayes' study on inheritance felt that they were transgressing norms concerning privacy and domestic boundaries, as the home was still felt to belong to the deceased person (Finch & Hayes 1994). Objects which have been inherited are inextricably connected to the relationship one had with the original owner, and might influence decisions as to whether or not to keep or dispose of inherited items (Finch & Mason 2000).

The close association between a deceased person and their possessions means that for the surviving partner and other family members, interaction with the belongings involves interacting with the deceased person, in such a way that bereavement becomes a sensory, embodied experience (Richardson 2014). Things which belong to somebody who has died may become 'transitional objects' to the bereaved by helping them to grieve. By providing a present, material representation of a person who is now absent, 'transitional objects are both a means of holding on and letting go' (Gibson 2004: 288). In her interviews with older widows and widowers, Therese Richardson found that as well as emergent objects of mourning (Hallam & Hockey 2001) such as clothing *reminding* the bereaved spouse of their deceased partner, they also effectively came to *constitute* them, or stand in for them metonymically. Hallam and Hockey write that, '[s]ocial interaction with and through material forms tends to destabilize subject/object bounda-

ries such that material objects can become extensions of the body and therefore of personhood' (Hallam & Hockey 2001: 43), echoing arguments that there is a 'blurring of the boundaries' between objects and people (Dant 1999; Miller 2010).

The Agency and Affective Qualities of Objects

In *The Social Life of Things*, Appadurai writes that objects exist and have trajectories of their own outside of the relationships they have with particular people (Appadurai 1986). Appadurai argues that while things have no meanings without those which are ascribed or attributed to them by humans, by focusing on the human, subjective meanings alone, we miss out on understanding how the circulation of things also influences the human response to them. While Appadurai discusses groups of objects, individual objects have their own trajectories or 'biographies', and Kopytoff uses the term 'singularisation' to explain the process by which certain objects, at certain points in their biographies, come to have an individual value which outweighs their commodity or exchange value. This singular, or individual value arises from the associations and meanings formed by an individual person in relation to a thing over time, and makes separation from the singularised object 'unthinkable' (Kopytoff 1986: 80).

For both Kopytoff and Appadurai then, to understand the meanings arising from human-object relationships, attention should be paid both to the person's subjective experiences of them, as well as the 'life' or trajectory of the object. The interaction of the agency of objects, and the subjective experience of them, is inherent in the concept of 'affect'. Unlike feelings or emotions, which originate in people, affects have been described by the anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin as 'sensual intensities' which are not created within people, but which may pass through them. She argues that orientation away from affect as a feeling or emotion generated and experienced internally by humans allows for consideration of the affective qualities of non-human agents, such as objects or landscapes, but emphasises that affect is a relational phenomenon which exists between humans and non-humans, without privileging one over the other. In this paper, I argue that affect is experienced as a result of the relationship between the agency of the objects and the informants' subjective responses to them, and influences the disposition strategies of the informants.

The Study

This article draws on interviews with nine men and women in Sheffield, England,¹ who found themselves in the situation of having to sort through the contents of a parent's house following their parent's move into a residential home for older people, and in some cases, subsequent death. All but one of the interviews were conducted at the author's place of work, with one taking place in the informant's

home. While not all informants could remember exactly when they had cleared their parent's house, the time between the experience of emptying the house and taking part in the interview varied from several years to it being an on-going process. For some informants, while they had cleared their parent's house, they still had many items in their own homes or in storage which they still needed to sort through. All informants have been given pseudonyms.

The Emotional Experience of Sorting through that which is Left Behind

The process of sorting through their parent's belongings was described by many of my informants as a very emotional experience. Despite having been a frequent visitor to their parent's homes, as a visitor they did not usually have access to the 'hidden' parts of the home – the cupboards, boxes and attics where things are stored. For two of my informants in particular, when sorting through the homes of their surviving parent, it was a shock to discover the belongings of a parent who had died some years previously. Sally's mother moved into a care home as a result of dementia, depression and a recent fall. Following the move, Sally spent several months sorting through the contents of her mother's house.

It was very soul destroying and very emotional. Because you can't believe some of the things that people keep. I opened this battered old suitcase to find a pair of my dad's pyjamas, and my dad's been dead since 1986. So that were a bit of a shock to find my dad's pyjamas. And especially I was kind of closer to my dad than I was to my mum, so I did find it, kind of heart breaking.

Joanne's father had agreed to move into a residential home following a fall. While he was in hospital prior to the move, Joanne started to sort through his home.

So the other thing we found, rather movingly, I went through the kitchen cupboards thinking, well, you know, while he's in hospital I can clean up a bit and make sure that everything's ok. [Shows me photographs of ready-made packet sauces] All of these would have been ten or twelve years old. These would have been things that my mum would have bought, you know, when she was still alive...I looked at the dates, and I could see how old they were, but also he never would have bought these sorts of things. She was always the cook. He would never have bought them and he wouldn't have known how to use them really. Nor could he throw them away. So there were kitchen cupboards full of carefully, you know, all clean, all neat. You know, there was nothing problematic about it, except it was all about a decade old. So there was a bit of, for me I guess, coming to terms with, I hadn't perhaps realised, until I dug around, how little he'd thrown away since she died. And how much he'd sort of left it all as she left it, and sort of worked round it.

The pyjamas belonging to Sally's father and the cooking sauces used by Joanne's mother suggest that mundane objects, worn every night or closely associated with the everyday practices of a person can be just as valued by a bereaved spouse, as more obviously valuable or significant items such as photographs or jewellery (Richardson 2014).

Discovering items from their own childhood could also be very affecting, and brought the realisation that the process of sorting through their parent's homes entailed not only confronting their parent's life, but their own life as well.

It was kind of like quite emotional, sorting things out. I found little baby booties which were obviously mine, because I don't have any sisters or brothers, so they were mine, so they'd been kept for like, for ever and a day, hadn't they, 'cause I mean I'm 52 this year, so they'd been kept for a long time. And mother's day cards, and father's day cards [Sally].

It is a very soul-searching, very traumatic period of your life. You know, because not only are you sort of, like getting rid of things, not only are you getting rid of the person's possessions, we were also getting rid of things that had been part of *our* life [Kathy].

I think it's much more an emotional experience, I thought that, you know, sifting through somebody else's junk, you know, it wasn't going to be an emotional experience, but of course it's your junk as well, it's your life, you know you see things from your childhood, drawings you did as a child and your baby pictures and it's actually really emotional to see all those things, and I think I was a bit surprised at that [Sophie].

The ways in which family relationships and memories were embedded within the experience of sorting through the houses, and within the objects themselves, underpinned the informants' decisions over what to do with the contents. In some cases, the affective qualities of the objects and responsibilities to 'do right' by the family, competed with other influences on the informants, most notably in their desires to act responsibly by not holding onto things unnecessarily when they could be of more use to other people. In the next two sections I will draw on informants' narratives to explore the reasons by which some things ended up in charity and second hand shops, and others did not.

Processes by which Things did not end up in Charity and Second Hand Shops

Things which were not donated to charity shops were kept by the informants, retained within the family and associated networks of friends and acquaintances, or were thrown away. The affective qualities of objects were apparent when informants described their reasons for keeping certain things. Some objects were regarded as not just having *associative* connections with a person, but as actually helping to *constitute* a person. Kathy, whose mother had entered a residential home primarily as a result of epilepsy, explains this:

All the sort of trinkets and things, all personal stuff, you know. I mean, there was nothing. We got rid of everything other than the personal, that actually makes you the person you are. Do you know what I mean?

Small trinkets and photographs which exerted strong affective qualities on informants were relatively unproblematic to keep, either because they did not take

up much space, or could be displayed. More problematic were items such as clothes, or intimate, personal effects such as spectacles, which were often regarded as embodying an absent parent, making them difficult to discard, but which were seen as taking up space. In most cases, the informant *wanted* to discard the item, but found it incredibly difficult to do so. Joanne found that by taking photographs of some of her father's most personal effects, she was then able to discard them:

I think going through somebody's house and throwing away things that they've handled, you know, their pairs of glasses, their slippers, very, very personal things is actually quite hard to do. For some reason it's, perhaps it's the finality, you feel you're throwing the person away or disrespecting the person in some way, it feels very weird. And I think my compromise position was, you know, these things do have to go, but I'm not going to forget that they were there. And shoes and spectacles were probably the worst.

In some cases, the affective qualities of objects led to some things being kept by an informant, however 'irrational' they felt this was. Sally considered giving her mother's wedding dress to a charity shop, but found herself unable to do so:

Mum's wedding dress is in a box, so I mean, no point, because, you know, but somehow I just can't get me head round throwing that out, or even sending it to a charity shop or anything, so at the minute it's just in a box, taking up a bit of space.

I've also got a dress [laughs] - as well as the wedding dress that is just in this box, just sitting there, taking up space at my house, that I'm never going to do anything with, but I just can't bring myself to throw it away, or, like I say, give it to a charity shop - is a dress, that again, I'd never squeeze into it if I tried. I used to dress up in it, it was one of mum's dresses that she had, that, because there's some photos of her wearing it, when they used to go dancing, 'cause dancing was all the thing, back then, weren't it? Proper dancing, kind of thing. And it was a beautiful lilac-coloured dress, and got kind of whalebones in it and everything, and I used to dress up in it. And for some reason, I can't bring myself to throw that one out either. That's still cluttering my house up.

When describing the items which she does not *want* to keep, such as her mother's dresses, Sally uses words like 'taking up space' and 'cluttering the house up'. This contrasts with the way she says, 'I've got lots of photos that I, I mean to keep them, so that's not that they're cluttering it up, I just put them in a tin.' When items are *meant* to be kept, they do not take up space – it is only when the owner does not want them, and yet is unable to dispose of them, that they 'clutter the place up'.

While in nearly all cases affective qualities acted as a force to persuade people to keep things, rather than give them away, in one example the opposite was true. When deciding what to do with items which had belonged to her aunt, Joanne describes coming across a painting which had been painted by her aunt's mother – Joanne's grandmother. She explains why she offered to donate it to the residential home in which her aunt had lived:

The picture, none of us got on with my granny, she was a really, bloody difficult woman [laughs], and this was quite a nice picture, but there was no way that any of us wanted to live with it! [Both laugh]. And so actually, it did feel good to say, for it to be somewhere that it would be useful and enjoyed. I didn't, I would never have been able to bring myself to throw it away, that would have felt like a piece of vandalism, but nor did I want to live with it in any way. She was quite, she was cold and made my dad's life hell, I think, though in some ways he was very fond of her. But there are some things you don't want around to trigger memories off, I think, you really do, but at the same time you'd probably prefer them to be recycled than thrown away, so, yeah.

While the negative affect of the painting is such that Joanne does not want to keep it, her values as a responsible consumer mean that she would much rather the painting be recycled in another context where it can be enjoyed by others, happily unaffected by memories of the 'difficult', 'cold' woman who painted it, than it be discarded altogether. In this case, Joanne felt that the residential home would be an appropriate destination as a place where the picture could be 'useful and enjoyed'.

Informants also spoke of items which they did not necessarily want to keep themselves, but which they did not want to throw away or donate, because they felt obligated as a trusted family member to ensure that items which had been valued by their parents were looked after appropriately. For most of my informants, it was preferable to keep things within the family, or if this was not possible, identify a known person who could be trusted to look after the object. After her mother's death, Fiona and her sister went through her mother's effects and filled boxes for her siblings and all the grandchildren, based on what they thought each person would most appreciate. Other disposition strategies were more opportunistic. Joanne was able to avoid a potentially problematic decision of what to do with her father's table after his death when her father's cleaner expressed an interest in it:

We were having a chat at some point, and she did ask about the dining room table as it happens, and chairs. And I said, 'Well, we don't really have room for them, and we haven't decided what to do'. And she found a tactful way to say, 'Well, if you really don't want them, I would happily give them a home.' And these were not valuable antiques, they, nice things, but not, you know. Her making that comment wouldn't have seemed like trying to grab something that was immensely valuable. And I was actually quite grateful she did that, 'cause I wouldn't have known off the cuff, I would have wanted to give her something and not known what the best thing was. And I hadn't quite reached the point of being able to formulate the question, really. And so she did, she took this big, oval table, nice table and it was really nice for us to think that it had gone somewhere that it would be enjoyed, and that we'd done the right thing as far as she was concerned.

In this case, 'safe passage' (Roster 2001) was ensured through identifying a new owner who was known to the family, and who would enjoy the table. However, in other situations, safe passage could not be guaranteed. Sophie, who together with her siblings was responsible for the disposal of her mother's possessions after her death, recounted a situation which left her feeling uncertain about an object's future, even though the new owner had been identified through a family connection:

There was one piece of furniture that we couldn't get any family member to take, that was a very nice, it was a chest from her bedroom and it was a very nice piece. It had been in their room since, I can't remember a time it wasn't. One of the women who cared for her, her sister, she'd asked her sister and said, 'Oh yes I'll have that'. So we took it to her house and the sister didn't answer the door, we actually had to leave it outside on the sort of veranda, and I remember thinking 'If [my mother] could see that, she would just *hate* that', that, you know, one of her prized possessions sitting out on someone's veranda, that was quite upsetting for everybody.

In some cases, informants and their parents disagreed over what to do with objects. Sophie, an American woman living in the United Kingdom, travelled to America to help her mother downsize and move into a residential home. While Sophie wanted to take a lot of things to charity shops, her mother was adamant that things remain in the family:

S - For her, and I don't know if this is just in the States or her generation, giving things away was sometimes acceptable if it was to family members, but not to charity. Even if you said, you know, 'There might be a family', this was just when America was really struggling with the economic downturn, 2009/10, there were a lot of families who were desperate, and even saying to her, you know, 'There are families who would really benefit from these things', although she was a charitable person, she wasn't interested in giving anybody but family her things.

M - Why was that, do you think?

S - I think because they were special to her, and she wanted to make sure they were looked after properly, and she thought she could trust family to do that.

This reflects the importance for some people of preserving a linear continuity of possessions within the family, at the expense of practicing what could be regarded as responsible consumption by 'releasing' items back into circulation where they could perhaps be of more use and value to other people. The insistence of Sophie's mother on keeping things within the family placed obligations on her children, who found themselves in the situation of feeling obliged to keep things which they would otherwise give away. While Sophie's mother wanted things to stay within the family, her family members did not necessarily want to keep them. When I asked Sophie about how she and her siblings reacted to her mother's desires to keep everything in the family, she replied,

Some things were more difficult than others. Some things we did out of guilt. It was harder for me being here [in the UK], I couldn't take the furniture but I did take some other things and did pay a lot of money to have some things shipped. Mostly it was ok, there was always somebody, we're a pretty big family so there was always somebody who would take it. Also I'm guessing some people took some things and then, she doesn't know what happened to them, so, they maybe didn't keep them but it made her happy that they took it.

Sophie's suspicion that some family members might have discarded some things after taking them indicates that 'safe passage' might not always be as 'safe' as intended.

While some items were kept primarily out of a sense of obligation to their parents, other items were valued and kept – if space allowed it – out of a sense of

responsibility to the object itself, as an item valued for its being an antique, rather than purely out of an association with family history. Joanne stated that, '[t]here were some things that we, I had a sense of almost rescuing,' and goes on to say,

[w]e found this box, it was a little bit the worse for wear by the time we found it, it had been somewhere in the sun and it had begun to get faded. For some reason it felt important to take it to a restorer and get it restored. I don't know quite really why, but... there was some sense of, 'oh, this is a bit special, we don't just want it to decay'. And there was something for some reason quite therapeutic about salvaging one or two things like that, and bringing them back into use. I don't know whether that's about continuity within the family or what it is, but. So I guess there was a mixture.

The above example shows how influences of affect and obligation interact in ways that result in certain items not re-entering circulation through second-hand markets. Interestingly, there was some evidence to suggest that knowledge of current trends in second-hand markets – for instance vintage and 'shabby-chic' meant that some of my informants held onto things where perhaps they would otherwise have given them away. Mark referred to some drawers that his wife had 'shabby-chic'ed up', and Joanne described some old canvas suitcases of her parents, which she thinks they acquired in the 1940s.

And they're that kind of classic, canvas suitcase, leather corners - you see them in shabby-chic shop displays and things. And I've kept those, thinking, well, rather than store things in plastic boxes, I'd actually rather store things in here, because they're really nice. They're a bit battered, but they've still got British rail stickers on from decades and decades ago. And things like that I guess felt very personal. And usable actually, maybe, you know, you wouldn't take them on a journey, they're too battered, but actually quite nice to still have.

The suitcases feel 'very personal' to Joanne, are 'really nice' and would not be out of place in fashionable 'shabby chic' displays. All factors which contribute to Joanne's retention of the suitcases.

The Processes by which Things came to be Donated to Charity and Second-Hand Shops

For many of the informants, charity shops were obvious destinations of disposal for items which were not kept within the family or wider social networks. There were two main factors which influenced the donation of items to charity shops: out of convenience, and out of a sense of wanting things which were no longer wanted or needed by themselves to be of use to, or valued by, other people.² For Mark, a charity shop was seen as one of the most convenient options for disposing of a lot of items:

But we took an awful lot of stuff to the charity shop. I remember taking, my brother, he brought his trailer, and we must have taken thirty to forty bin liners full of stuff, absolutely tons of stuff....Took it to the Cats Protection League I think. That was the one that was most convenient for us to get a trailer and take that much stuff to.

When discarding items, emphasis was placed on the re-use value of objects and environmental considerations, so that things were disposed of in ‘appropriate’ ways. Informants also emphasised that they were discerning in their judgments of what was deemed to be good enough quality to donate to a charity shop, and what was ‘junk’ that needed to be thrown away. For instance, Sally stated that, ‘most of the stuff, like the books and records went off to a charity shop, didn’t throw ‘em away kind of thing,’ and, ‘a lot of stuff went to charity shops rather than, you know, if they were in good condition and that. Glasses and cups and things like that’. Similarly, Fiona said that ‘an awful lot of it went to the dump. Because an awful lot of it, a charity shop would not have thanked us for’.

While most informants emphasised the potential re-use value of the objects as being an incentive to donate items to charity shops, the case of Anne offers interesting insights into how different categories of objects, in different circumstances, could enter second-hand markets in different ways. When her husband’s parents first moved into residential accommodation, Anne said that,

I think we sold the table and chairs because it was fairly new, it was in good condition. I think we sold some of it to like, you know, some of these shops and things like that.

M - like second hand shops, you mean?

A - yes, and obviously we looked after the money and the money went in their account.

By selling the furniture to a second-hand shop, rather than donating it to a charity shop, Anne was able to give her parents-in-law the financial benefit from the sale. This contrasts with the disposal decisions Anne made after her father-in-law had died:

And I can remember when his father died, we had to go through his clothes, and I was upset... I didn’t, like some people go to car boot sales, I couldn’t sell the clothes on a car boot sale and we gave it all to charity, or if somebody we knew could use them. You know I didn’t want to make money out of things, I let the charities make money out of them.

Here Anne explicitly states that she didn’t want to make money out of her father-in-law’s clothes, but wanted the charities to benefit. It is not clear why some things ended up being sold to second-hand shops while others were donated to charity shops, but it may have something to do with the personal and intimate nature of clothing, which perhaps Anne did not want to financially profit from.

For Joanne, the donation of her parents’ dancing clothes to the charity shop Oxfam, was helped by imagining the clothes being worn by a future owner.

J - So, in their youth, my mum and dad had obviously gone out dancing some times, and this was the...ball dress, that again he had kept and, there were some things like that which I just thought, ‘We can’t keep these, we’ve got nowhere to put them, they’re not in great condition, nobody else could use them, but I don’t want to forget them’. And I suppose it’s reminders of younger times, isn’t it, and good times.

M - So what happened to those, then?

J - They went to Oxfam... 'Cause they weren't totally unusable, but we never would have, this was a dress with that kind of stiffening, you know, big skirt that flares out. I can imagine that someone would have, perhaps got it at Oxfam for some dressing up purposes probably, and if I'd, if I'd had grandchildren at this stage, I would have perhaps kept something like that for them, but I was thinking, 'Oh, you know, this is, we're going to be swamped'. [Laughs] So, yeah, I don't know, I just, it reminded me of being a small child and seeing them get dressed up to go out, which they didn't do all that often, so when they did it was a really big deal.

The possibility of a future life for the dress existed alongside competing influences of the dress's affective qualities, desires to be a responsible consumer by not keeping things for which she had no use, and awareness of the dress's relationship to her family, not only in terms of it having belonged to her parents, but also in terms of not yet having grandchildren who might be appropriate recipients of it.

Discussion

The experience of sorting through their parents' homes and encountering objects which were intimately tied not only to their parents, but also to themselves, was an emotional one for the informants in this study. As the family members who had found themselves tasked with clearing their parent's home, the informants had to negotiate between often competing influences on the decision making process of what to do with the objects left in the house. The affective qualities of the objects – which resulted from the interaction between the objects themselves and the informants' subjective experiences of them, obligations as a family member to find appropriate homes for possessions, and the desires to act responsibly by not holding onto things when they could be used by other people, acted as 'push and pull' factors on the informants' divestment strategies. Things were, or were not, donated into charity and other second hand markets, depending on the informants' negotiation of competing emotions, obligations and responsibilities.

For the informants in this study, the sorting through of things entailed not only sorting through memories (Marcoux 2001a), but also dealing with family roles and relationships (Ekström 2013). For some of the informants, the association between the objects and their parent was so connected, that the distinction between the two became blurred, such that by discarding the thing, they felt they were discarding the person or their relationship with them (Finch & Hayes 1994; Hallam & Hockey 2001). Such accounts inform claims made by Daniel Miller (2010) and Tim Dant (1999) that the distinction between people and things can be more ambiguous than 'commonsense' might suggest.

While the associations between objects and parents influenced the informants' disposition strategies, so too did the informants' awareness of their positioning as a family member who had responsibility for the items. Informants often preferred

to keep things within the family, or at least wider social networks, thus attempting to ensure 'safe passage' (Roster 2001) and 'good homes' (Christian 2009) for objects which were valued by the family, though this could not be guaranteed. In cases where their parent had died, decisions about what to do with the remaining objects largely fell to the informants. In some cases however, the sorting process was made more complicated by the parents still being alive. Informants could receive explicit instructions from their parents as to what to do with items, which were sometimes in opposition to the informants' preferences. Changes in family relationships (for example the death of parents) could also result in a change of destination for objects.

The affective qualities of certain objects, engendered by the encounters between the objects themselves and the informants' subjective experiences of them (Navaro-Yashin 2009), usually worked as 'pull' factors, keeping objects out of charity and other second-hand shops. Decisions to keep certain items for these reasons were not always easily made, and in some cases informants held on to things reluctantly, even though they felt that it might be better to donate them to charity shops to stop them taking up unnecessary space in the house. Other items such as slippers and spectacles were judged to be too intimate and bound up with the person who had owned them, to be owned or worn by other people, and so were disposed of.

Factors which influenced the donation of items to charity shops included the convenience of being able to take large amounts of objects to one accessible place (Albinsson & Yasanthi Perrera 2009), and the satisfaction derived from knowing that the things could continue to be of value to new owners. In describing items which they donated, informants emphasised how they didn't donate 'just anything', but were careful to select things which were still in good condition which would enable them to be used by other people. Donation to charity shops allowed informants to practice being 'responsible consumers' in two main ways. Firstly, by 'moving things along' (Gregson et al. 2007), they prevented an overflow of things in their home (Brembeck 2013), which might otherwise have taken up unnecessary space and been considered wasteful. Secondly, by donating objects to charity shops, they were enabling the objects to continue to be used and valued, perhaps by people who needed them more than they did themselves (Gregson & Crewe 2003). Alternatively, decisions to sell items to second-hand shops rather than donate them to charity shops could be justified by giving their parents the proceeds of the sale.

By offering the opportunity to extend the life of objects, charity shops provided informants with a convenient and 'moral' outlet for unwanted items such as books, CDs and unwanted kitchen ware. However, they did not provide a straightforward solution for informants who struggled to give away particularly affecting items. Both Sally and Joanne were aware of the option of donating their parent's clothes to a charity shop. However, while for Joanne the charity shop offered an

imagined future life for her mother's dress which ultimately enabled her to donate it, Sally found herself unable to let her mother's dresses go. Catherine Roster has written of the association between the 'alienable and inalienable' properties of possessions, and people's disposition practices. She writes that objects attain inalienable properties through our use of, and interaction with them, and that '[m]eanings and social mores associated with inalienable objects specify disposition practices that are appropriate as well as those that are not; for instance, inalienable objects should be retained by individuals or family units and not sold as marketable commodities' (Roster 2014: 10). In her study of an art project which invited people to donate cherished possessions which would then be re-used and re-interpreted by an artist, Roster found that for owners who had previously tried and failed to dispose of the meaningful possession, dispossession was made easier by the knowledge that the object would continue to be valued in a new context, thus extending its social life (Roster 2014). The findings in this study suggest that while the existence of certain disposition paths – such as charity shops – can facilitate the 'letting go' of things, it cannot guarantee it, as the contrasting examples of Sally and Joanne indicate. I suggest that what was also required for the item to be donated, was the successful imagining of a future narrative for the object, which allowed the informant to 'release it back into circulation'.

The narratives which people tell about their possessions portray different aspects of their identities (Hurdley 2006). The narratives which informants related in this study revealed them to be responsible family members who wanted to find appropriate homes for possessions in order to 'do right' by their parents and other family members, but also indicated that they were 'responsible consumers' who did not want to waste or keep anything which could be of more value to others. The narratives told about things in this study also underlined the ways in which the objects were inextricably linked to the informants' personal lives. While such narratives helped to explain why informants were reluctant to let go of certain items, there is some evidence that by imagining future narratives for the objects, it became possible to donate certain things into second-hand markets. Such insights complement previous research which suggests that the use of provenance narratives as a marketing device can increase sales in charity shops (de Jode et al. 2012). The findings from this study suggest that while narratives can encourage people to buy items, they can also encourage people to donate them.

There was some evidence in this study to suggest that knowledge of emerging forms of valorisation, such as shabby-chic trends, might have led some informants to keep certain items, rather than donate them to second-hand or charity shops. The value which her parents' old suitcases had for Joanne, resulted both from the personal connection which they had for her, and also from their shabby-chic aesthetic. This valorisation could be interpreted within the context of Appadurai and Kopytoff's concepts of the circulation and trajectory of things. As items which had belonged to her parents and bore the stickers of their journeys, these particular

suitcases had become singularised and personal to Joanne (Kopytoff 1986). However, Joanne was also aware of how her parents' suitcases fitted into broader vintage and shabby-chic trends, which have emerged out of a growing appreciation and revalorisation of similar objects which now circulate through second-hand markets. By paying attention to the trajectory or *social life* of objects, we become aware of the existence of 'vintage' as a phenomenon that values the acquisition, re-use and heritage of things such as clothes, furniture or indeed suitcases. This in turn *illuminates*, as Appadurai has it, human social life, and how our values, and the things that we value, change according to different historical, geographical and social contexts.

Conclusion

The processes by which some things come to be in charity and other second hand shops, while others do not, can be complex and inter-related. In this study, the informants who sorted the contents of their parent's homes were influenced by different responsibilities, motivations and desires, which in some cases made it very difficult for them to decide what to do with the items. The affective qualities of objects, and the desires to be both responsible family members and responsible consumers sometimes acted in opposition to each other. While narratives which draw on the singularisation of objects help to explain why giving them away might be difficult, there is evidence in this study to suggest that imagined narratives of how the lives of objects might be extended in second-hand markets can act as an incentive for people to donate things to charity shops. By contrast, this study also offers insights into how people's awareness of emerging forms of valorisation, such as vintage and shabby-chic trends, might cause potential donors to reappraise their possessions in ways that *discourage* them to donate items into second-hand markets. Further research into second-hand markets would be useful in examining the impacts which new forms of valorisation have had on people's disposition and donation practices.

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Notes

¹ While all nine of my informants were based in Sheffield, England, the houses they had cleared were not necessarily in this area. Indeed, one of my informants was American and had travelled back to America to sort through her mother's belongings.

² One of the most convenient ways of disposing of a large amount of items was to employ professional house clearance services. While it is likely that many of the contents ended up in charity and second hand shops, I do not discuss this divestment strategy in this paper, as in such cases the informants were not directly responsible for deciding which things ended up where.

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Reusing Textiles: On Material and Cultural Wear and Tear

By Anneli Palmsköld

Abstract

This article discusses contemporary practices in a Swedish context, connected to clothes and home textiles that are no longer in use, comparing them to reusing practices from the middle of the nineteenth century and onwards. The focus is on how the textiles are objects for different sorting processes in private homes as well as on a flea market, and people's ethical concerns connected to these processes. Until the early 1970s the skills of mending, altering and patching was common knowledge, to women at least. The reusing processes were about wear and tear considerations from a material point of view. Today there are many more clothing and home textiles items in circulation, which have to be taken care of. To handle and sort textiles seems, among other things, to be about coping with different feelings connected with guilt and bad conscience. To avoid these feelings people are seeking ways of letting the textiles circulate in order to be reused by others.

Keywords: Reusing textiles, material wear and tear, cultural wear and tear, sorting processes

Reusing, Recycling and Circulation

Issues concerning reusing, recycling and circulation of second hand items are widely discussed and highlighted in Sweden today. Flea markets and thrift shops owned by non-profit organizations are organizing systems for receiving things that people no longer need in order to sell them to their customers (see for example www.myrorna.se).¹ The things circulating on this market are often reused as they are, cleaned and repaired to be used again, and from a metaphorical point of view they can live a second life (www.sustainabilitydictionary.com). Another option is to recycle them, that is when waste materials are used to create new products as when on an industrial level materials such as used plastics are transformed to polyester (ibid.; McDonough & Braungart 2002). Recycling processes also take place on a craft or design level when people make new things from wasted ones. Among younger people an increasing interest in sustainability and how to live a fair life can be noticed, often connected to DIY (Do It Yourself) tips and tricks on how to reuse objects or recycle material (see for example www.365slojd.se and www.slojdhaller.se; Watson & Shove 2008; Åhlvik & von Busch 2009). To practice a fair and sustainable life means for this group to buy second hand, or newly produced quality products that will last for a long time. Professional designers are interested in creating products that are sustainable, and turning second hand and vintage objects to desired commodities by redesigning and remaking them in an upcycling process is a frequent part in developing business (Thorpe 2008, Grundström 2014, www.stadsmissionen.se/Secondhand-Remake/; www.beyondretro.se). The upcycling part means that discarded things or materials are converted to something of higher quality or value (McDonough & Braungart 2002; von Busch 2007: 82ff).

There are more things in circulation today than a few decades ago. When it comes to textiles, this is a consequence of an escalating production of clothing and textiles. At the same time consumption has increased. The concept called fast fashion, when clothes are designed, produced and displayed every sixth week and not by season as earlier, is dominating the market (Black 2010: 2f). Clothing is also relatively cheaper today (ibid.: 1). On an individual level, the more clothes one consumes, the more one has to store, and questions on what to keep and what to sort out from the wardrobe are a recurring concern in people's everyday life (Palmsköld 2010, 2012 and 2013). At the same time many find it hard to throw away textiles that could be used, and instead they are trying to find ways to make them circulate (ibid. 2013).

In this article contemporary practices connected to clothes and home textiles that are no longer in use will be discussed, and compared to reusing practices from the middle of the nineteenth century and onwards (ibid. 2013).² The focus will be on how the textiles are objects for different sorting processes in private homes as well as on the second hand market, and people's ethical concerns con-

nected to these processes will be discussed. The main questions asked are: Why do many people find it hard to throw away their used textiles? What do they instead do with their worn out clothes or home textiles? Which changes and stabilities in the textile wear and tear can be noticed from a historical perspective since the 1950s and until now?³

Sorting Processes

In the affluent parts of the world, consumers can allow themselves “to get tired of things” before they become worn out and let them recirculate to be useful to others (Åkesson 2005: 141). Many objects that are sold on the second hand market are examples of this phenomenon. When it comes to clothing, for example, one can find clothes for sale that are in good material condition and could be functional for many seasons to come, but by the previous owner defined as impossible to wear. This is an example of cultural wear and tear, a process leading objects to be considered as old, hopelessly passé or even to be abandoned (see Löfgren 2005). In addition, when objects are categorized as useful or not useful, considerations based on visual as well as functional aspects play a significant part. An old hand woven linen cloth or an embroidered curtain is one example of objects that can be defined from a functional point of view. These kinds of textiles have to be taken care of in ways that many find time consuming and demanding, and even old fashioned. They might also be considered difficult to incorporate and use as part of the home decoration. Instead of saving them, on an individual level a solution for these kinds of textiles could be to sort them out and donate them to flea markets or thrift shops. Cultural reasons for classifying or sorting out material objects such as textiles can be considered as an opposite position to material reasons, that is for example when fabrics actually are worn out or damaged in different ways.

Sorting processes are central when we manage and categorize objects. As Strasser points out, “[t]rash is created by sorting” (1999: 5). But there is a differentiated scale between opposite categories such as “useful” and “trash”, and, which the following text argues, most of the objects in sorting processes examined within the context of the study that this text is based on end up somewhere between. A typical scenario when it comes to clothes and home textiles, is that the starting point is in the private sphere, in front of the closet or linen cupboard, when people are inspecting their clothes and home textiles visually and sensorial to determine their future fate. As shown below, the textiles are sorted in different categories and some of them presumably land on one of many flea markets run by charity organizations. The sorting process continues at the flea markets that have several stations and opportunities for each individual garment, fabric or curtain. Estimation is that approximately 10 % of the textiles that are donated are actually sold, and thus the remaining 90 % are separated and have to be taken care of in some way or another (Palmsköld 2013).

Methods

When working as a volunteer on a local flea market, described in some detail below, it became clear to me that textile was a material category that stood out from the rest. First, most of the things donated were textiles. Second, as a consequence of this, among the volunteers taking care of the donations one always had to make sure one person alone was taking care of all the textiles. And third it was apparent that donors wanted their disposed things to circulate and to be useful for somebody else. This made me curious, and I wanted to learn more about the processes in action, the practices people are involved in and their concerns about their worn out clothes and home textiles. In order to study this phenomenon I continued to be a volunteer worker, but this time I was an ethnological researcher doing fieldwork by participating in all different processes of sorting things that took place on the flea market. Taking part in the work together with other volunteers made it possible to learn the practices and routines connected with handling and sorting donated things. At the same time it was possible to ask questions or to discuss issues connected to the sorting processes. During the fieldwork notes were taken in a diary, which grew to a story about what had happened during the work, which tasks that every working period included, discussions that took place, questions that were asked and analytical points that were made (Field diary 2009). The fieldwork focused on sorting processes that take place after textiles have been donated. To be able to analyze the first step, namely what happens in people's private homes when they are sorting textiles, I used a common ethnological method involving cooperation with the Archive at the Nordic Museum in Stockholm. The archive has since the 1920s sent out questionnaires to informants who have agreed to continuously, and on voluntarily basis answer the questions asked on different issues (www.nordiskamuseet.se).⁴ The questionnaires that have been sent out reflect the cultural historical interest within the museum, from curatorial as well as from collection and documentation perspectives. It also reflects changing ethnological research interests. As the informants are volunteers, they have accepted to contribute to the Nordic Museums work within the cultural historical field.

The questionnaire I had constructed on the reusing textile subject, was sent out, and 94 informants responded to the questions on how they handle their used textiles, mainly focusing on descriptions and reflections on how textiles are sorted, how the sorting processes are organized, and which reusing practices the informants are involved in (Questionnaire 239/2009). The informants were also encouraged to look back, and not only answer the questions from a contemporary perspective. Even though the questionnaire focused on textiles as a material category, information about other objects was welcomed. The material consists mainly of personal stories of every day practices and concerns clothes and home textiles, if other objects are mentioned it is for comparison reasons. The group of informants

consisted of 83 women and 11 men, and a majority of them were born in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵

The methods chosen made it possible to follow the different sorting processes connected to textiles starting in people's private homes and ending on a flea market. The questionnaire enabled me to take part of the informants' memories, and therefor to analyze changes as well as stability in the textile wear and tear from the 1950s and until now. What people do with their worn out textiles when sorting them, which they save, how and why textiles are disposed and how people connect to this object category are questions not previously studied.

Altering, Patching and Mending

Until the mid-1900s textile recycling was defined as common house hold practices of repairing, altering, patching, mending and sewing, to be able to economize with scarce resources (Grimstad Klepp 2000, Åkesson 2005: 143). The consumption of textiles was characterized by valuing the quality of the material used, to consider if it would last for a long time, and whether it would be able to be altered and reused. The practices connected to how to reuse textile materials required skill, ability and creativity to be able to use them down to the last piece of fabric or thread. These kinds of reusing practices were closely connected to moral and ethical concerns, and wasting material objects that could be used in one way or another was not an option. Patching and mending textiles was, until the 1970s, an important, and for economic reasons necessary task, occupying the everyday life for most of the women in Sweden. It was actually cheaper to mend clothes and sew new ones than to buy them in the mid-20th century in Sweden (Husz 2009: 58). According to a study made in 1961, housewives (including professional working women with families) were sewing approximately five hours per week (ibid.). To be able to understand the historical situation, one has to add that the industrial production of children's and teenagers' clothes was still not developed. Also bed linen had to be sewn on a household level, as they could not be bought on the market.

To be able to provide for all the textiles in a household, knowledge about materials and fibers were needed as well as different skills in patching and mending. Young girls learned these skills from their mothers, grandmothers, aunts or other female members of the household. The schools provided education in needlework for the girls and they were taught different techniques useful for future housewife duties. A frequent pedagogic task was to make samplers that could be saved as memories of technical possibilities when the girls later would be mending and patching by themselves. The samplers showed techniques required for darning stockings, for patching bed linens, tricot underwear, woven woolen fabrics used for costumes and outerwear and fabric used for blouses, shirts, dresses, skirts and pants, and much more. These kinds of skills were taught to schoolgirls in Sweden

until about 1970. At this time many women started working professionally instead of being housewives, and at the same time the production and consumption of clothes and home textiles increased. Children's clothes as well as bed linen could be found on the market, and the home production of these and similar textiles were no longer a necessity. At the same time the previously desired skills in how to practice altering, patching and mending clothing and home textiles became of less importance.

The questionnaire provides a lot of information on this matter. Some informants remember the World War II and the rationing of clothing and textiles that lasted in Sweden, as well as the rest of Europe, for some years after the war. The authorities promoted reusing and recycling activities and courses in how to – in a broader sense – take care of textiles were held for housewives. A common practice was to transform the materials and turn clothes for grownups into clothing for children. As one informant puts it:

I remember well the procedure during that time: old men's suits and overcoats were unstitched using razor blades, put in special holders. The pieces were washed, and eventually dyed. Left to a local tailor, who measured me. When later visiting him, one had to undergo a detailed trying on. (Questionnaire 239: 516).

Clothes and home textiles were highly valued materials that could be used and transformed over and over again. The material quality had to be very high, to sustain a long life and a circulation process including different transformations. Textiles produced today are of lower material quality, often not suitable for this kind of reusing processes, which many informants as well as the voluntary workers in the flea market notices and are concerned of.

At Home

Returning to contemporary society, most of the informants who answered the questionnaire have in detail described the sorting processes that take place in their homes today. To conclude, many say sorting takes place by season, or when moving to new homes, as their bodies have changed sizes, or when the wardrobes are too crowded. One principle mentioned, is sorting out clothes that have not been used for a set period of time, for example for one, three or five years. In fact this is a popular advice given in books about wardrobes and clothing as well as in magazines (see for example von Sydow 2006). A common sorting method is to place the clothes in different piles, for example one for keeping, one for donations, and one for patching and mending. There is another pile that many refer to as the "maybe pile". The content of this pile represent the owner's doubts – will these clothes be used or not, if kept?

During the sorting process lots of decisions has to be made. The clothes, for example, have to be thoroughly assessed. In reusing processes that take place in people's home, clothes are eventually "downgraded", as some informants express

it. At first the clothes are used as formal wear, secondly they are used as everyday clothing, and in the last phase they become work wear for gardening or home renovation. Not until when really worn out, most of the informants think it possible to throw them away in the trash bin. Other forms of circulation mentioned are when worn out textiles are torn to pieces in order to be used as cloths. These are useful when taking care of cars and bikes, cleaning windows, working in the garage, doing trimming and refurbishing, doing painting work, oiling, cleaning, drying, or wiping of wet pets. When the cloths have been used for one of these purposes, the informants allow themselves to throw them away.

Although most of the informants express reluctance to throw away textile objects, there are some exceptions. Categories such as shoes, socks, T-shirts, jeans, scarves, hats and underwear often end up in the trash bin. Clothes that are materially worn out, faded or washed-out can join them. As one informant puts it: "I never throw a complete and usable garment in the trash." (Questionnaire 239: 613). But after sorting out, clothes that have lost their shape, are soiled, ragged or full of holes, to throw them away is a possibility. The examples of clothes mentioned are considered too intimate and personal to give away, as they are worn near the body and close to the skin.

To conclude the informants' stories: from a moral point of view many express that it feels wrong to throw away clothes and home textiles that could be used. When explaining these feelings some express guilt and moral concerns due to the fact that they on one hand want textile objects to circulate, to use and reuse them. On the other hand, there are items they really do not want to keep and use any more. The feelings of guilt are however less troubling if the clothes and textiles on a household level have been circulating in several steps before they are sorted. Donating textiles to charity organizations helps to reduce the feeling of guilty conscience. When choosing this alternative, the decisions of the future fate of the textiles are carried forward to the receiving organization. The informants mention different kind of organizations that they benefit with donations. Trust is an important factor when they choose which one to give to. The preferred ones have to fulfill their promises to help people in need. By donating textiles the informants think they have contributed to the circulation process, and they are satisfied by the thought that someone else will reuse the sorted textiles.

What to Save

One aspect of the sorting process is what people are saving. When analyzing the informants stories on this matter, some categories connected to clothing appears:

1. Small children's clothing (the first and smallest ones)
2. Handmade clothes, especially those made by the informants or older relatives, mainly mothers and grandmothers

3. Clothes used for certain occasions or representing different styles such as the wedding dress or the mini dress from the late 1960s
4. Expensive formal wear such as evening dresses and tailcoats
5. Clothes connected to their former user, no longer alive, such as “dad’s worn out sweater” or “mum’s night linen”
6. Textiles that could be reused for creative purposes, such as clothes made of beautiful fabric

When explaining why they are saving this kind of clothing, the informants mention words such as memory, nostalgia, security and sentimentality. Many of them believe that things like textiles help us to remember various events and eras in life. Dear persons are associated with the clothes they have worn; their fragrance can remain, just as the patching’s and repairs they ones made. To put the clothes on, like another skin, is to come closer to the loved ones and to remember them. Experiences connected to the senses are important, how the clothes feel, how they smell and look, and how they sound when moving. The reusing practices are, in this case, about a desire to remember people, occasions or one’s own life history.

Apart from people’s desire to remember, other aspects connected to ideological considerations and economic conditions can be seen in the informant’s stories. One informant says (s)he saves a lot of things, not only textiles, building up resource depots for future use. This way of living is a very conscious decision based on an individual political ideology and desire to care for the planet and its limited resources. Saving and reusing things is for this informant a way of practicing her/his ideological point of view.

Buttons, zippers, embroideries and large pieces of fabric are examples of resources kept by many in order to use them for making new clothes or patching old ones. Before getting rid of discarded textiles, they are examined by their owners to see if parts and details could be saved. Sometimes altering is a possibility in order to be able to use the actual clothing a bit longer. A common practice among elderly informants is for example to turn worn out collars and cuffs on shirts and blouses. When telling about these practices, they also bear witness of previous economic conditions forcing people not to waste anything that could be useful. As one informant put it: “You did not throw away clothes that were useful when I was a child. You patched and repaired, or you may be made something else from them.” (Questionnaire 239: 613). The idea of reusing textiles is for this generation connected with these specific skills and practices in altering, patching and mending. It is also connected with an economical practice, which is based on the ability to avoid costs in the household by making material objects (including food) last as long as possible.

At the Flea Market

The flea market in focus for the study is located in a medium-sized community in southern Sweden and it is run by a non-profit organization that is politically and religiously independent. When the fieldwork was conducted in 2009 there were not many competitors to the business, and many of the residents living in the central parts of the community frequently made donations of things they had sorted out from their homes. Since 2009 the second hand market has come into fashion, and more organizations have started up new businesses in the community. The location of the flea market is in a building previously used for small-scale industrial purposes. It is an example of the fact that sales of used goods earlier took place in the outskirts of a town, near industries, dumps and railway stations (Straw 2010: 211). In the last decade, however, the central part of the city has expanded and apartment blocks have been built near to the flea market. Instead of being located outside the town, it has become a part of and incorporated into the urban city. As there has been a general increasing interest in the second hand market, one can notice a geographical movement connected with how the large charity organizations relocate their thrift shops and second hand stores to more central parts of the urban city (ibid.: 211).

People who want to make donations to the flea market can leave the things in a special room near to one of the entrances. The first sorting process starts in this room when the donations are taken care of. Most of the donated things are textiles, and at least one person handles all the textiles and sorts them before they enter into further sorting processes in the flea market. The sorting opportunities are many; the volunteers working here want to take care of everything, even the textiles that cannot be sold. They make an effort to avoid throwing textiles away. Instead they cooperate with other organizations that work with charity and aid. Possibilities for future reuse, which the volunteers have to know when sorting, include net curtains becoming malaria mosquito nets in Africa, sheets and towels donated to homeless people, whole pieces of fabric and threads donated to a municipality's sewing activity for unemployed, and finally dirty and really torn fabrics are thrown away.

Another possibility is to select textiles that are to be donated people in need in Belarus. Transparent plastic sacks are used to contain the textiles that a few times a year are being transported to a religious organization located in the city of Borås, about 150 km away. This organization sorts through the textiles once again, before transporting them to Belarus. In the plastic sacks go warm jackets, blankets, children's clothes and a lot of clothes in dark colors like grey, black, brown and green. The choice of what to put in these sacks follows each volunteer's idea of what people in Belarus need, based on presumed aesthetical preferences, and on the climate.

The sorting process described continues in the textile department located in a room containing shelves and a large table. On one side of the table, home textiles are taken care of, and on the other side clothing. Every textile item is inspected before decisions are made regarding what will happen to them, and as a consequence, where they are going to be placed. As mentioned earlier, it has been estimated that 10 % of the donations of clothing and textiles can be sold. Therefore an important aim when sorting is to identify possible commodities, textiles that the customers will be interested in purchasing. Many of the volunteers have a long experience working on the flea market and “know” who the regular customers are and what they desire. Regular customers sometimes ask them to look for certain things, such as hand woven linen clothes or tailcoats. Textiles that are to be sold get a price tag. When purchased, the volunteers who are working in the shop cut off the tags, and put them in boxes for later reuse.

Material and Cultural Wear and Tear - Discussion

Even though the two studies were conducted separately of one another, and do not refer to the same individuals or even geographic regions, the similarities and differences between the results can be used to highlight some significant dimensions of the sentiments evoked by textiles. A general result is that, on the one hand, there seems to be a change over time when it comes to motives for handling textiles with care and not simply throwing them in the bin. Until the early 1970s the skills of mending, altering and patching was common knowledge, to women at least, and these skills were even taught girls in schools in Sweden. Prior to contemporary consumer society, fabrics were expensive and well worth taking good care of. The same can be said of other commodities (and food leftovers) that were taken care of, altered and reused within a common household practice guided by the idea of avoiding costs. The economic situation in most of the households required people not to waste anything that could be useful. The reusing processes were thus mainly about wear and tear considerations from a material point of view.

Today, on the other hand, previous household skills are not common knowledge anymore and expanding wardrobes and cupboards is a consequence of the contemporary increasing textile production, and consumption. There are many more clothing and home textiles items in circulation, which have to be taken care of. This means people in their everyday life have more textiles to manage and to sort. According to the informants, handling and sorting textiles is partly about coping with different feelings connected with guilt and bad conscience. From a moral and ethical point of view it seems to be easier for people to dispose of worn out textiles, especially if they have been worn near the body, such as socks, T-shirts, scarves and underwear. But even if worn out, many informants say they are trying to make the textiles circulate in different ways. Clothes can for example be

downgraded and end up as working clothes (cf Hetherington 2004; Norris 2012). Buttons and zippers can be saved for future altering practices, and pieces of fabrics can turn to cloths used for different purposes. Textiles no longer in use can be donated to non-profit organizations that are considered to be trustworthy.

The volunteers on the flea market have the same approach towards the donated textiles as the informants have towards their private items; they are to be circulated and reused and not to be thrown away. The sorting processes on the flea market are organized in such a way that most of the items are taken care of and will be reused. Since only 10 % are sold, 90 % have to be handled in another way. The options are many, and every textile object has to be examined in at least two processes before their future fate is decided. Collaborations with other organizations are necessary in order to get the textiles into further circulation, to people in need in Sweden, various African countries and in Belarus, for instance. The informants as well as the volunteers are involved in processes of cultural, rather than material wear and tear. If a textile is culturally worn out, in good condition but in some way or another impossible to use, it is from a moral and ethical point of view difficult to dispose of it. Instead informants as well as volunteers on the flea market are trying to make the textile object to circulate. In that way it can be useful for others.

To conclude, reusing practices connected to textiles have changed since the 1950s. For informants in the study who had experienced and were raised during a previous era, the idea of reusing textiles by altering, patching and mending continue to be important. In comparison, younger generations seem more interested in the idea of creating a sustainable society by reusing objects and recycling material. For them, the second hand market is an opportunity to contribute to this by making clothing and home textiles circulate, instead of buying new ones.

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Notes

¹ Examples of Swedish organizations working in this field are the Salvation Army, Stadsmissionen, Erikshjälpen, Emmaus and The Red Cross.

² The article is based on a research project titled *Reusing Textiles: on Material and Cultural Tear* (Palmsköld 2013).

³ The questions asked in the project were:

What happens to the clothing and home textiles that by owners and users are considered unusable and ready to be sorted out?

What is the everyday practice when you sort, discard, reuse, give away, sell, trade or donate textiles to charity?

Why do many feel reluctance to throw away clothing and household linen into the trash bin?

⁴ The method is used by other Swedish Ethnology based archives, such as DAG in Gothenburg, DAUM in Umeå, ULMA in Uppsala and LUF in Lund.

⁵ Two of the informants were born in the 1970s, 3 in the 1960s, 11 in the 1950s, 34 in the 1940s, 21 in the 1930s, 13 in the 1920s and 3 in the 1920s (Palmsköld 2013:55).

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Vintage, the First 40 Years: The Emergence and Persistence of Vintage Style in the United States

By Nancy L. Fischer

Abstract

This paper historicizes when wearing vintage clothing first became fashionable in the United States. I trace when the trend emerges in the U.S. and explore various ways the press framed secondhand/vintage clothes and anachronistic dressing. I contend that the emergence of vintage occurs as a form of alternative consumption alongside changes that occurred in the U.S. garment industry such as outsourcing and product licensing. These changes led many consumers to seek more authentic consumption experiences. Consumers with cultural capital found in vintage an alternative market for sourcing fashionable street style. Consumers attribute characteristics to vintage clothing that are typically part of authenticity discourse such as it being of exceptional quality, original, handcrafted, made from natural fibers, and providing continuity with the past. The authenticity of vintage is symbolically deployed in opposition to contemporary mass-produced clothing and standardized retail shopping experiences.

Keywords: Vintage, vintage clothing, retro, secondhand clothing, authenticity, fashion trends, garment industry

I'm gonna take your grandpa style
I'm gonna take your grandpa style.
No, for real, ask your grandpa,
Can I have his hand-me-downs?

- Lyrics, "Thrift Shop" by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis, 2013

Introduction

In early 2014, rap duo Macklemore and Ryan Lewis won two Grammys for best rap song and best rap performance for "Thrift Shop," an exuberant celebration of thrift store culture. The music video of "Thrift Shop" features the rapper Macklemore walking through a thrift store, trying different outfits, and receiving accolades for grandpa's style in clubs. This is not the first time thrift stores have been highlighted as a place to get retro clothes at bargain prices. Nor is the song "Thrift Shop" the only cultural expression celebrating secondhand clothing. Contemporary fashion magazines often feature celebrity photos whose dress is captioned "vintage." For example, in the December 2011 *Elle* magazine, actress Jessica Biel models as many garments described as vintage as from a current designer. *Lucky* magazine has a monthly "City Guide" featuring local boutiques – including vintage – from cities around the world. Many cities have vintage-themed events such as *Mad Men* parties, Roaring 20s parties or 80s nights at clubs. Moreover, the ubiquity of street style blogs like "The Sartorialist" have made wearing vintage *de rigueur* for demonstrating sartorial savvy whether one is in London, Manhattan or Tokyo (Woodward 2009).

Fashion usually connotes fast change and up-to-the minute trendiness, yet sporting "retro" by wearing decades-old clothing is "in." In fact, vintage dressing has been fashionable for over 40 years. The aim of this paper is to provide a history of when and how vintage style emerged as a trend in the United States. Previous historical studies on retro/vintage have focused on its emergence in the United Kingdom; there is an absence of a similar history in the United States. Providing a U.S. history of vintage is important given that the country represents an enormous consumer market for both new and secondhand clothing. Moreover, New York and Los Angeles are global centers of fashion and media production – films, television shows and fashion sites create depictions of retro/vintage style that circulate globally. Due to the considerable volume of its media exports, the U.S. has had more opportunities than many other nations to influence global vintage style.

As I trace the rising popularity of vintage style in the U.S., the various ways the popular press framed vintage dressing are described. The emergence of vintage occurs as a form of alternative consumption alongside changes in the garment industry that led many American consumers to seek more "authentic" consumption experiences. Rebranding used clothing as scarce and desirable through the moniker "vintage" is wrapped up in cultural constructions of authenticity and is

symbolically deployed in opposition to mass production and standardized shopping experiences.

Anachronistic Dressing, Retro and Vintage

Scholars employ different terms to describe old clothing with a look that is anachronistic compared to current styles. Angela McRobbie (1988) refers to wearing recognizable decades-old looks as “anachronistic dressing.” This is a useful phrase that I also occasionally employ to highlight when press references to vintage mean wearing used-clothing that noticeably displays iconic styles of the past.

Anachronistic dressing can be achieved with actual antique clothing or with new clothing made to look old. While press references to “retro” could encompass genuinely old garments and new reproductions of old looks, retro usually refers to the latter. Heike Jenss (2005: 179) characterizes retro as, “an all-encompassing catchword” that involves:

...the construction of past images and historical looks which can be achieved with original objects as well as with new ones that look historic. It uses the potential of dress as a cultural signal of time and an important component of cultural memory, historic consciousness and imagery.

The ability of “retro” to encompass both old and new has led some to characterize “retrochic” as inauthentic and messy, blurring clear distinctions between past and present (Samuel 1994).

In a sense, the term “vintage” represents a semantic attempt to claim authenticity for genuinely old clothing and objects, distinguishing them from “retro” reproductions, as well as serving as a marker of distinction from contemporary secondhand clothes. When specifically referring to genuine decades-old clothing, the term “vintage” tends to be preferred in the United States. “Vintage” is a concept that has undergone a shift in meaning when it was applied to clothing. In origin, the term refers to “wine age,” the specific year and place of origin, such as with “Bordeaux wine of a 1965 vintage.” When “vintage” was first applied as a descriptor of clothing in the 1960s, it was employed in a way that suggested new clothing was akin to a particularly good year for grapes, something that must be purchased now as an investment (see analysis below). However, “vintage” quickly morphed into an abstract category describing old clothing generally, and no longer necessarily referred to purchasing new clothes as an investment in the future. DeLong, Heinemann and Reiley (2005: 23) describe the abstract category vintage as follows:

When used to refer to clothing, vintage is differentiated from historical, antique, second-hand, consignment, reused or resale clothing. In clothing, vintage usually involves the recognition of a special type or model, and knowing and appreciating such specifics as year or period when produced or worn. Wearing vintage is primarily about being involved in a change of status and a revaluing of clothing beyond the

original time period or setting, and only secondarily about markets for resale of clothing.

In this study, the American press seemed to use a simpler definition of vintage: clothing that is 20 years old or more, with a recognizable decades-old look.

Researching Vintage and Retro Style

Previous studies on the emergence of retro style in clothing and household objects have focused on the United Kingdom, and usually, 1960s London (e.g. McRobbie 1988; Samuel 1994; Gregson & Crewe 2003; Baker 2013). According to Raphael Samuel (1994), “retrochic” in fashion appears not long after Britain undergoes retrospective taste shifts for the home. Architectural historic preservation and appreciation of period styles arose in reaction to the stark clean lines of 1950s-1960s modernist home design. Samuel connects British popular taste for eclectic home interiors, vintage clothing and retro aesthetics with the development of “alternative consumerism” that emphasized “natural” products such as organic food and “green” consumer goods. Alternative consumerism arose in the 1960s but gained popularity in the 1970s and 1980s. Notes Samuel (1995: 100):

Retrochic in the 1970s and 1980s was one of those fields where enterprise culture came into its own, ministering not only to the tourist trade but also to the ‘alternative’ consumerism of the counter-culture; to teenage ‘outlaw’ fashions (notably punk); and to the new narcissism of health, epitomized by the Body Shop.

Samuel’s reference to retrochic as “outlaw fashion” relates to post-war youth sub-cultures employing anachronistic dress as anti-fashion. Sociologist Fred Davis (1994) and cultural studies scholar Elizabeth Wilson (1985) describe anti-fashion as styles of dress that are explicitly contrary to fashions of the day, worn to symbolize rebellion and signal belonging. Beatniks in secondhand 30s skirts, hippies in Edwardian long coats, punks in ripped and dyed 50s tulle petticoats all sartorially expressed opposition to capitalist materialist values (Polhemus 1994). However, these groups’ subcultural styles operated as spectacle from the perspective of mainstream culture rather than a mode to be emulated.

While part of the allure of vintage dressing is its association as a form of alternative consumption (Gregson, Brooks & Crewe 2001), wearing vintage has lost its explicit anti-fashion meaning. According to Sophie Woodward (2009: 92), “The possession, or the wearing, or [sic] second-hand items along with high street ones, has become a key marker of fashionability, with the emphasis falling upon how the items are sourced, and not just on the look.”

The original association of “retrochic” with anti-fashion and subcultural street style raises questions. When did anachronistic dressing become fashionable, not anti-fashion? Why did it become part of the fashion mainstream known as vintage style? (I employ the term “mainstream” similar to Woodward’s use of “fashiona-

bility” to describe how wearing decades-old clothing has become an accepted street style.) And finally, why has vintage remained popular over many decades?

Angela McRobbie dates the mainstreaming of anachronistic dressing to 1967 London, when “...it was Peter Blake’s sleeve for the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper* album which marked the entrance of anachronistic dressing into the mainstream of the pop and fashion business” (1988:24-25). McRobbie makes the case that young people of the 1970s and 1980s engaged the fashion scene (and ran small businesses in the form of used-clothing stalls) during a recession economy by adopting vintage style. The popularity of “rag markets” like London’s Camden Market or Portobello Road ultimately blurred the boundaries between high fashion and street style (McRobbie 1988).

There are a number of reasons why vintage dressing became accepted street style. Some point to the impact of popular culture in the form of retro-themed films, television and books. German 1960s enthusiasts interviewed by Jenss (2004, 2005) and Australians interviewed by Sarah Baker (2013) describe being influenced by movies from the 1970s and 1980s. Elizaebth Guffey (2006: 14) notes that in France, early 1970s literature and films set in World War Two such as Louis Malle’s *Lacombe Lucien* were described as “la mode retro” and influenced Paris fashion design and street style. In the United States, 1970s films like *American Graffiti*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Annie Hall* and *The China Syndrome* contributed to the popularity of vintage style.

Simon Reynolds (2011) contends that through television, film and the Internet, yesteryear’s images and music have come to dominate popular culture. In the 1970s old television shows returned as re-runs, and films from the 1930s-1950s also became available. Teens and adults listened to music of past decades, sorting through album covers, taking note of the fashion. The Internet greatly multiplied the amount of imagery from the recent past. In fact, past imagery is now more available than ever in human history. In this cultural context, the past – represented by retro – is a key component of *present* popular culture (Reynolds 2011).

Other authors explain the popularity of vintage as relating to the experience of vintage shopping itself. Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe (2003) describe how secondhand shopping – whether at car boot (rummage) sales, charity shops or retro stores – carries an air of spontaneity and discovery. Secondhand shoppers utilize cultural capital to engage in “clever consumerism” as they seek the “diamond in the rough” and to “capture a bargain.” Interviewees shared stories of finds at charity shops or car boot sales deemed valuable for a low price – the bragging rights associated with stories are a powerful incentive to continue secondhand shopping. Fleura Bardhi (2003) also found that thrift shopping is characterized by a “thrill of the hunt.”

Finally, the persistence of vintage style can be attributed to particular meanings vintage consumers have of old clothing in terms of qualities they bring to the wearer. Marilyn DeLong, Barbara Heinemann and Kathryn Reiley (2006) found

that vintage consumers want originality as a way to express individuality or some degree of standing out from the crowd. Moreover, vintage buyers claim that antique garments have superior quality and provide better fit. Marie-Cecile Cervellon, Linsey Carey and Trine Harms (2011: 968) concluded that desire for originality, nostalgic expression, and having an interest in fashion best predicted purchasing vintage clothing in comparison to consumers who purchase contemporary secondhand clothing. Additionally, Tracy Cassidy and Hannah Bennett (2012: 252) found that vintage consumers preferred old clothing because of lifestyle preferences and ethical concerns such as recycling.

Expressing ethical concerns about shopping, having leisure time to hunt for bargains, and knowing how to create unique looks are indicators that vintage consumption requires cultural capital (Franklin 2002; Gregson & Crewe 2003; DeLong, Heinemann & Reiley 2006; Baker 2013). Vintage shopping and dressing necessitates knowing how to mix and match old items with new for a fashionable look (Woodward 2009). It also may require the ability to correctly match garment to time period and distinguish between retro reproductions and “authentic” vintage (Jenss 2005). According to Nicky Gregson, Kate Brooks and Louise Crewe (2001: 5), “[R]etro consumers mobilize ‘the authentic’: as a means of demonstrating individuality, knowingness, knowledgeability and discernment, as an expression of their cultural capital, and as a way of constructing difference from others...”

Vintage enthusiasts – whether retailers or consumers – designate when clothing becomes vintage and desirable rather than dated and out of style. Using Thompson’s rubbish theory, Marcia Morgado (2003) describes how Hawaiian rayon shirts faded from style after the 1950s and were regarded as tacky. As original Hawaiian shirts were discarded, they became rare. Clothing collectors rediscovered Hawaiian shirts as scarce and worth preserving; books were published featuring colorful examples, and the market in Hawaiian shirts took off. The generally accepted standard that vintage clothing is 20 years old or more may be related to the time it takes for a style to pass through the cycle of being characterized as “rubbish” and subsequently being rediscovered by taste-makers with the necessary cultural capital to revalorize it (Gregson & Crewe 2003; Morgado 2003; Baker 2013).

What follows is a description of when and how anachronistic secondhand clothing transforms from rubbish into a new fashionable look known as “vintage style” in American press accounts written between 1950 and 1990.

Method

A qualitative analysis of American newspaper and magazine articles published between 1950 and 1990 was conducted, tracing the emergence of the vintage trend and how vintage clothing was framed for the American public. The aim of

this study is to specifically account for how the vintage clothing trend emerges as a subset of the secondhand clothing market and how the American press made sense of this sartorial practice.

The analysis begins in 1950 (before anachronistic secondhand clothing is acceptable street wear) and ends in 1989 when vintage style is well established. Newspaper and magazine articles were sought from a combination of on-line research databases and *The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*. Before 1980 (the year Proquest Newspapers database has consistent full-text holdings), I searched *The New York Times* Archive (on the *New York Times* website), the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times* using Proquest Historical Newspapers database. New York City was chosen because it is a global fashion center where many clothing manufacturers were located and corporate fashion headquarters remain. *The Chicago Tribune* represents the Midwest, and *The Los Angeles Times* represented the west coast. *The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, an annual index of periodicals, was used to research magazine articles published between 1950 and 1982 (when hard copies of the *Guide* ceased to be published). For articles published from January 1, 1980 to December 31, 1989, the Proquest Newspaper database was also utilized. Both Proquest Newspapers and *The Readers' Guide* included articles from the entire United States. Canadian newspapers from Proquest Newspapers were eliminated from the final results since comparable Canadian data before 1980 was not available.

The following search phrases were used for all databases: "second hand clothing" (389 articles); "second hand clothes" (310 articles); "vintage clothing" (888 articles); and "vintage clothes" (254 articles). There was some degree of overlap between categories within articles; in other words, those that mention "vintage clothing" likely also refer to "vintage clothes." For example, from 1950 – 1980, I read every article from the *New York Times* archive that specifically referred to "vintage clothing" (10 articles) and "vintage clothes" (16 articles), which totaled 24 articles since two articles appeared in both searches. For the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, I searched under the heading "clothing" for articles with "used" "secondhand" "antique" or "vintage" as a descriptor. By looking at the "clothing" category writ large, I also noted changes occurring within the U.S. clothing industry. Thirty-seven articles published between 1950 and 1989 that pertained to secondhand or vintage clothing were included from the *Readers' Guide*. In total across all databases and the *Readers' Guide*, I evaluated over 1,000 news and magazine items about vintage and secondhand clothing.

The articles specifically referenced below represent longer articles where journalists sought to explain the meaning of secondhand and vintage clothing and/or describe its consumers. News articles not included are those merely quoting individuals who coincidentally were vintage shop owners (such as when a vintage shop owner witnessed a crime), or those reporting vintage clothing sold at flea

markets, antique shows or worn at vintage-themed events where the mention of vintage is quite brief.

In the section that follows, I describe how the meaning of decades-old secondhand clothing shifts from being associated with charity to gaining middle-class acceptability as vintage style.

The Emergence of Vintage: An Analysis of Popular Press 1950 – 1989

1950s: Secondhand as Charity

When factory-made clothing became widely available, wearing used clothing became associated with poverty; those who wore it were regarded with pity as charity recipients (Crane 2000). Apparel that looked dated in comparison to current fashions marked one as being of low social status. This association of used clothing with poverty and charity is how secondhand clothes are generally regarded from the 1890s through the 1950s.

The 1950s United States was relishing its post-war abundance; there was a celebration of all things new in clothing, architecture, interior design and product design (Franklin 2002). Although economic prosperity creates the conditions for used goods to become available in alternative economic markets (such as flea markets, charity shops, etc.), during 1950s America, few wanted the barely-used cast-offs of the growing middle-class.

Correspondingly, 1950s references in newspapers and periodicals to “secondhand” or “used” clothing concerned charity. News items included poor people’s need for used clothing and drives for donated clothes. There were three exceptions to this charity rule. In 1951, the *Times* reported on Paris’s Marché des Puces as a tourist destination where antique furniture, housewares, period garments (described as being purchased for display in designers’ shop windows) and army surplus clothing were sold (Barry 1951). In a *Los Angeles Times* column called “The Lighter Side,” Henry McLemore (1951) playfully describes wearing a favorite antique suit “having been bought from a secondhand store that buys from other secondhand stores,” whose seams threaten to split if he sits down; here wearing old secondhand clothing serves as a joke. The third article from the 1958 *New York Times* reports on a consignment store called “Henri” in Washington, DC that sold secondhand upscale dresses. Notes the reporter, Gloria Emerson, “It is a consignment shop called Henri that bears as much resemblance to an ordinary second-hand store as a Wedgewood cup does to a beer bottle.” The reporter’s characterization draws a sharp distinction between ordinary secondhand shops and the consignment shop, which reveals how secondhand clothing was normally regarded in the 1950s – as on the same cultural level as a “beer bottle.”

Interestingly, in 1957, the use of the phrase “vintage clothes” first appeared in *The Chicago Tribune*. In a fashion feature with sketches and a one-paragraph description, Mary Lou Luther (1957) describes how the latest styles display a 1930s influence based on the Broadway play “Auntie Mame.” The phrase, “The 1930 vintage clothes sketched are at Saks Fifth Avenue” reveals that vintage does not yet mean authentically old clothes. Instead, vintage is used similarly to describing wine from a particular time where the time period – the 1930s – is central. Vintage is not yet a way of abstractly categorizing clothing or style.

1960s: From Resale Shops to New Youth Style

In the 1960s, newspapers and periodicals continued associating used clothing with charity, although some reveal the meaning of secondhand clothing is changing. A 1963 article, “Resale shops are a source of good buys” in the *New York Times*’s “Shop Talk” section associates resale shops with luxury bargain hunting:

A Givenchy suit for \$89, a Dior coat for \$100 and even a vintage but still attractive Norell dress for \$10. Bargains like these can be found on Madison Avenue. Tucked above store level...there flourish a number of emporiums known as resale shops. They eagerly buy the wardrobes of fashionable women who cannot afford to be seen in the same dress too often.

Like the consignment shop Henri, resale shops are presented here as a place where it is acceptable to purchase secondhand clothing. Clear distinctions are made between resale shops and thrift shops through invoking fashion designers’ names. The use of the word “vintage” (to describe the Norell dress) contributes to this distinction. Vintage does not yet connote anachronistic dressing since the article reports how shops refuse dresses more than two years old. “Vintage” denotes something of high quality, indicating that the secondhand clothing of the resale shop is more valuable than ordinary used clothing.

In 1965, Harriet Love opened her well-known vintage clothing shop in New York. In her 1982 guidebook, Love (1982: 1) characterized the mid-1960s vintage fashion scene:

When I began this business in 1965, the only thing that could be said about vintage clothing was that it was old and used and that you had to be a little weird or theatrical to buy it, let alone wear it on days other than Halloween. Today every fashion-conscious woman and man has probably bought at least one old piece and worn it as evening or everyday clothing.

In 1966, the *Times* publishes “Thrift Shops: a Small Boom in Big Bargains.” Here, it is *thrift* stores (rather than resale or consignment shops) portrayed as places to find designer clothes; the article mentions a thrift store where actress Barbra Streisand shops. In comparison to the 1958 article that likened a thrift shop to a beer bottle, the association with designer clothing and celebrity suggests the distinction between thrift shops and consignment/resale shops is blurring. While secondhand clothing is being framed more positively as slightly-dated luxury

clothing for bargain prices, anachronistic dressing is not yet mentioned. But this is about to change.

In January 1967, the meaning of vintage (and secondhand fashion generally) shifts to encompass dressing in decades-old clothing. *New York Times* fashion writer Angela Taylor reported in “Searching the Ragman’s Pack and Finding Fashion”:

It’s not so much beggars who are in rags and tags these days as the most fashion-conscious youths of an affluent generation. They are searching for the oldest garments in the ragman’s pack and coming up with moth-eaten furs, doormens’ uniforms and German Luftwaffe braided jackets....The fancy-dress craze, begun in London last year, branches off in several directions locally. Uniforms—worn like old clothes, with a minimum of alteration – are still in demand, and the more esoteric the better.

Taylor’s article is accompanied by two photos – one of a group photo of five young people, dressed in double-breasted trench coats and hats of various sorts, and one woman decked out in a high-necked Edwardian coat. The second photo is of a couple dressed in 1920s and 30s woolen suits. The clothing is described as “old,” “vintage” and even “laughable.” Taylor’s tone is one of amusement towards this fashion trend and the youth who wear it.

The New York Times Magazine’s May 1967 photo shoot “The Style that Was Is,” took a less patronizing tone. Penned by *Times* fashion editor Patricia Peterson, the shoot featured models dressed in floor-length vintage skirts and white cotton dresses (most likely 19th century petticoats) purchased from Harriet Love’s stall at the New York flea market. Peterson also refers to London as where such anachronistic dressing began: “When England’s young began swooping down on Portobello Road to buy antique military jackets and delicately handmade Edwardian dresses, and, what’s more, wearing them in public, it marked the beginning of a new fashion era.” Peterson featured retro reproductions and vintage fashion in 1968 with sketches of a collection of blouses dating from the 1880s-1940s, with one Victorian blouse explicitly labeled as “vintage.” Later, in 1969, the *Chicago Tribune* reports on a church flea market with a photo of ladies dressed in “vintage clothing” from the early 1900s on sale at the event. This suggests that the meaning of “vintage clothing” has shifted to now connote a separate category of clothing that is decades old rather than a specific time period such as when the *Chicago Tribune* first used the phrase in 1957.

1970s: The Mainstreaming of Vintage Dressing

Early 1970s – Rising Popularity

New York Times fashion editor Patricia Peterson’s 1967 characterization of the popularity of old-clothing styles as “the beginning of a new fashion era” was highly prescient. In the 1970s, anachronistic dressing becomes a clear mainstream fashion trend in press coverage. Angela Taylor reports in 1970 “There’s Some-

thing New at Altman's: Shop that Has Authentic Old Clothes" that the New York department store opened a vintage boutique on its sixth floor. Taylor quips, "One thing that's been missing in department stores is the thrift shop. That breach has been filled by Altman's with a cozy lamp-lighted room on the sixth floor called 'Yesterday's News.'" Two photos accompany the text showing young women dressed in 1930s – 1940s clothing. The article characterizes the garments as "vintage" and "authentically old." The vintage trend seems to have spread across coasts by 1971. Sandra Haggarty (1970) in a *Los Angeles Times*'s column "On Being Black" noted, "Recently I observed some young people shopping in a local second-hand clothing store. As is chic today, they were junkin' to dress themselves as *unlike* the Establishment as possible." While Haggarty refers to junking as anti-Establishment, at the end of the column she observes that the new middle-class popularity of secondhand is leading to higher prices in Los Angeles used-clothing stores.

After 1970, the *New York Times* regularly reported on vintage shop locations around the metropolitan region. Some articles were in the Real Estate section describing particular neighborhoods and their shopping attractions. Other *Times* articles on vintage were part of a regular feature called "Shop Talk" that discussed new stores of interest. For example, a 1973 article by Barbara Delatiner is about Rag Garden, a shop in East Hampton. The owner, Mrs. Frank, describes why vintage is becoming popular.

Mrs. Frank believes that the popularity of her merchandise stems from two factors. "The fabrics are soft and flowing. Sensuous and marvelous to feel," she said. "Maybe the women's lib girls will yell at me, but these old things are so much more feminine. So many of the things, too, are handmade as opposed to the machine-made mass-produced clothes today. And the colors are so vibrant, so alive. I love them." Her customers, most of whom are in the 20s and 30s (the teen-agers buy denim because they can't afford the antiques) are also interested in being different, in dressing uniquely. "It's not nostalgia," she said. "They haven't spent their youth in the thirties and forties and I don't have many fifties pieces here."

In July 1973, *Time Magazine*'s "Rags to riches (really)," described how secondhand Levi's denim jeans, adorned with embroidery, are being sold at "designer prices" by department stores Lord & Taylor and Saks Fifth Avenue. "The highest prices are tagged to genuine used denim tempered by years of wear and spruced up with colorful embroidery. Many of the old jeans are acquired by scrap-clothes dealers and sold to boutiques" (*Time* 1973: 52).

1970s: Peak Vintage?

As the vintage trend builds, in 1975, Catherine Milinaire and Carol Troy publish *Cheap Chic*, perhaps the first consumer guidebook to thrift store shopping and vintage style. It featured individuals with unique sartorial sense who incorporate thrifted garments into their looks. Milinaire and Troy (1975: 79-80) devoted a chapter to "Antiques: Shopping the Thrift Stores," which they began by saying:

Up until a few years ago, wearing some stranger's old clothes was something only the poorest people did when forced to. Can you imagine your mother buying used clothes, except in an almost-new shop with prices to match? But as everyone is discovering, it feels good to wear expensive clothes, especially when someone else paid for them the first time out....Old clothes give you a sense of continuity with the past – an elegant way of life lived in luxurious fabrics of strict tailoring, a life of fluttering afternoon rituals and evening formalities. Solid old clothes give you a feeling that in this throwaway world there are still some things around that can last ten, twenty, thirty, forty years, or more, and remain beautiful.

By 1977 vintage clothing was so popular in New York that it raises alarms amongst sellers of used clothing. Harriet Shapiro (1977) for the *New York Times* reports, "The capes and camisoles hippies paid dimes and quarters for at Salvation Army sales back in the 60s are now getting gold bullion prices at the best little shops in town." She continues, "Dealers, who tend to be sphinxlike about their sources, also worry about the dwindling supply." In 1978, *Times* business reporter Anne Colamosca reports that the demand for vintage clothing is beginning to outstrip supply. Department stores such as Macy's, Abraham & Straus and Bamberg-er's are getting into the used clothing market to attract the middle-class shoppers who have "fueled the boom." They opened vintage shops that sold 1940s dresses, 1950s clothing, and men's tuxedo shirts. Alberta Wright, owner of a well-known New York vintage shop, Jezebel, is quoted, "There are fewer places to get good [vintage] merchandise all the time...If the department stores begin mass-merchandising secondhand clothes, buying it up in huge lots rather than selecting it individually the way we do now, prices will go sky-high." Concludes Colamosca, "The spiraling prices of used garments have disconcerted those traditional buyers of secondhand clothing, the poor," as charity shops like the Salvation Army hike prices to meet growing demand. Rag dealers in the New York are also quoted, saying their business is at a peak, though some grumble that the vintage shops are their least favorite customers because of their choosiness.

Late 1970s: The Vintage Trend Reaches the Fashion Press

1970s fears over peak demand and dwindling supply occur *ten years* after the *New York Times* first announced in 1967 that vintage dressing is a year-old trend emanating from London. Remarkably, it is at this point that *fashion magazines* introduced vintage to their audiences. The February 1978 issue of *Seventeen* was first, featuring a photo spread titled "California Girl: Her Fashion Style: Dressing in Antique Clothes" (Aldridge 1978). The article features a modeling contest winner dressed in various antique petticoats-worn-as-dresses, and menswear inspired by the Woody Allen film *Annie Hall* (released in 1977, featuring Diane Keaton costumed in vintage menswear). *Seventeen* included tips for buying, caring for and altering antique garments.

Vogue magazine – headquartered in New York City where the vintage trend was first publicized to American audiences in 1967 – finally announces a "Boom in Vintage Clothes" in April 1979. Anne Hollander (1979: 273) somewhat dis-

missively speculates on why “la mode retro” has become popular, citing that perhaps it was the influence of:

...The Great Sixties Costume Party. Included then among possible getups...were clothes that looked as if they had long been imprisoned in the attic, or maybe in the grave....Today what remains from the frantic sixties is a youthful vogue for tired old lace and muslin underwear, which are now worn on the outside for romantically sordid effects – suggesting Bellocq and Brooke Shields.

Essence, a monthly magazine for African-American women, followed in November (1979: 89) with an article titled “Retro Dressing:”

For the woman with style and budget in mind, Retro is a natural. The quality fabrics, lines and details of decades past are only to be had today if you can afford couture fashions. But these old treasures are affordable and available everywhere – perhaps in mama’s trunk, grandma’s attic or your local thrift shop. In many cities, boutiques (for all price ranges) are springing up that only carry old and antique clothing.

Essence’s “Retro Dressing” shows there was not yet a consensus on how to describe the new style of dressing old. Vintage is referred to within the same piece as “retro dressing,” “antique dressing,” “vintage dressing” and “past perfect dressing.” The *Essence* article has tips for readers on how to wear the new style by mixing and matching vintage and contemporary garments. The women of *Essence* provide personal reasons for wearing vintage, including: affordability; clothing made of natural fibers; being reminded of family members; having a personal signature style; femininity; quality fabrics; and a better cut for one’s figure.

As the tone of Hollander’s *Vogue* introduction to vintage suggests, the elite fashion world did not exactly embrace the vintage trend. Kennedy Fraser, a well-known fashion writer for both *Vogue* and *The New Yorker*, viewed retro as disingenuous in her essay “Retro: A Reprise:”

Clothes came to be worn and seen as an assemblage of thought-out paradoxes, as irony, whimsy or deliberate disguise. Thrift shop dressing carried it all to its ultimate. We took to clothes for which we had spent little money, which didn’t necessarily fit us, and which had belonged in the past in some dead stranger’s life. Behind the bravado of what came to be known as “style,” there may have lurked a fear of being part of our time, of being locked into our own personalities, and of revealing too much about our own lives. (Fraser 1981: 238).

1980s: The Establishment and Diffusion of Vintage Style

Critics like Fraser and Hollander aside, the popularity of vintage grew in the 1980s. In December 1980, *Money Magazine* reports U.S. sales of secondhand clothing were up 100 percent. The *New York Times* shifted to mundane reporting on vintage which suggested that readers already knew what vintage was and merely needed to know where to find it and which decades’ styles were currently fashionable. Mundane reporting consisted of numerous mentions of vintage clothing being sold at flea markets, antique shows and shops, publicizing events where it was worn, and celebrities wearing vintage.

Simultaneously, other publications first introduce vintage to 1980s readers. In 1981 *Mademoiselle* publishes “How to Buy and Care for Antique Whites,” “How to Shop the Secondhand Shops,” and in 1985, “The Zing of Things Past.” Other periodicals publish secondhand shopping guides including the *Boston Globe*, *Ebony*, *People Magazine*, and *50-Plus Magazine*.

A 1982 *Boston Globe* article, “Fashions for the Classes of ’82; What’s Happening in College? A Look That’s Vintage-Chic,” illustrates how popular vintage had become. Julie Hatfield reports that Saks Fifth Avenue’s University Shop in Harvard Square – a store that traditionally sells preppy new clothes to college coeds – is in trouble due to “worn clothes” becoming “de rigeur for college students.” Hatfield notes that the local Salvation Army is doing brisk business with college students, who “buy their old tuxedos, oxford shoes, suspenders, and big old winter coats there.”

That same year *Harriet Love’s Guide to Vintage Chic* is published, and in 1983 Trina Irick-Nauer publishes *First Price Guide to Vintage and Antique Clothes*. According to Morgado (2003) the publishing of guidebooks is a key way that outmoded styles are newly marketed as collectable and no longer are “rubbish.”

Journalists Ask: Why Wear Vintage?

As newspapers and periodicals introduced vintage style to readers across the United States, reporters sought to explain why the trend was occurring. What is the basis of people’s attraction to this new trend of wearing old clothes? Journalists uncover a variety of answers, implicitly juxtaposing characteristics of old clothing with the new clothing one could purchase in a shopping mall.

Interviewees – both vintage shop owners and their customers – often mention the quality of garments from decades past compared to new clothing. Vintage clothes are characterized as hand-made, with special details like embroidery or lace. They are better constructed, made from “luxurious fabrics of strict tailoring” or of natural fibers as opposed to synthetics, and as having the potential for longer wear than new clothing. For example, *Boston Globe* reporter Julie Hatfield (1985) concludes in “Clothes that Get Better with Age,”

Customers like these are obviously not looking for the savings they make by shopping for used clothes. They want what, in many cases, mass production has denied them at any price: fabrics and workmanship that are the best, and the certainty that you will not meet the very same outfit on scores of other people.

As the above quotation suggests, vintage offers originality and individuality to its wearers. Those interviewed said vintage helps them to stand out rather than blend in, so they can be confident that no one at an event will be wearing the same dress. Notes one 1987 Minneapolis vintage wearer, “I don’t want to blend into the woodwork...I don’t consider myself dressing different [*sic*]. It’s really more an attitude, a way for me to say who I am. I like being recognized for what I wear” (Younger 1987). Comments about vintage clothing as a marker of individuality

anticipate what vintage consumers of the 2000s reported in studies of vintage shoppers (e.g. DeLong, Heinemann & Reiley 2005; Cervellon, Carey & Harms 2011; Cassidy & Bennett 2012). The belief that clothing should reflect one's individuality rather than a style trend is part of a larger cultural discourse of expressing one's "authentic self" through consumption (Gilmore & Pine 2007).

Another common theme for why 1980s vintage consumers buy vintage is value in comparison to the price paid. If one cannot afford contemporary designers, then vintage offers high quality at more affordable prices. One store proprietor points out that vintage garments are an investment because the wearer can sell them again.

Some interviewees in the 1980s still see wearing vintage as a type of anti-fashion statement critiquing conspicuous consumption and the materialism. Notes a student in a 1987 *New York Times* article, "In Schools, Fashion is Whatever is Fresh," "Vintage clothing is hot, but it's just reverse materialism. If you're wearing a \$50 sweater, it wouldn't be as proper as if you're wearing a \$2 sweater."

Similarly, the *Christian Science Monitor*, when introducing the trend to its readers in 1980 sees vintage as a move towards more eco-consciousness. Betty Taylor (1980) observes:

There's something sentimental as well as ecological about the awakened interest here in garments made of vintage fabric....The recycling aspect is a satisfaction to most buyers. Furthermore, buyers realize they couldn't duplicate the handiwork they are getting at anywhere near the price they are paying...

Finally, journalists note that some consumers are attracted to the history materially represented in vintage apparel. For example, Milinaire and Troy (1975: 79) refer to old clothes providing "a sense of continuity with the past." Scholars have characterized nostalgia as a key factor driving vintage purchases, that vintage consumers look fondly on the past (e.g. Lyon & Colquhoun 1999; DeLong, Heinemann & Reiley 2005 Cervellon, Carey & Harms 2011; Cassidy & Bennett 2012). In the press accounts, some vintage clothing aficionados imagined who once wore their clothes. Marc Silver's (1987) praise of old overcoats for *The Washington Post* is exemplary of the nostalgia associated with vintage attire:

There is something reassuring about putting on a coat of a past era. The coat has wooed women and witnessed history. It has a mysterious past that can be imagined but never be known. Did the lapel once boast an "I like Ike" button, or was this an Adlai Stevenson supporter?

In summary, the vintage clothing trend emerged in 1960s London and migrated to New York City, where, over the next two decades it spread across the U.S. In its wake, vintage boutiques opened in many cities, and anachronistic dressing became an acceptable street style. Vintage style remained popular for over forty years as a form of "alternative" consumption, with consumers reportedly appreciating its economic value, quality, originality, ecological ethics and historicity.

What is striking about 1980s explanations for why vintage was becoming a popular alternative to new clothing is that compared to contemporary research on what vintage consumers seek from old clothing, there has been little change. The qualities mentioned by 1980s consumers such as high quality at a low price, originality, eco-consciousness and nostalgia are the same qualities mentioned by those interviewed and/or surveyed by scholars in the 2000s (e.g. DeLong, Heineman & Reiley 2005; Cervellon, Carey & Harms 2011; Cassidy & Bennett 2012). The implications of this parallel are discussed below.

Vintage as Authentic Alternative Market to Mass-Produced First-Cycle Market

According to Gregson and Crewe (2003) new (or first-cycle) and secondhand clothing must be understood relationally rather than as separate markets. This holds true for vintage as a subset of secondhand. The secondhand market is socially constructed as “alternative” to the first-cycle market in a number of ways. Secondhand is seen as removed from contemporary production (Gregson & Crewe 2003: 5). The urban commercial districts where vintage shops and antique stores thrive are symbolically coded as alternative spaces to the mall. Vintage and first-cycle clothing mutually reinforce one another’s appeal. Young people create street styles by mixing vintage and contemporary garments, with their vintage items symbolically defining their style as unique and alternative (Woodward 2009). Reciprocally, current fashionable silhouettes that are “in” influence which decades are also popular in vintage boutiques. The consumer landscape of vintage thus depends on what is occurring in the first-cycle clothing market. Therefore, in order to understand the emergence of the vintage trend and its longevity, it is useful to view it in relation to the consumer landscape of the first-cycle clothing market during the same time period when the vintage trend emerged. The relational dynamic between first-cycle and secondhand market provides a more plausible explanation for the persistence of vintage style than economic changes during the same time period. For example, while the 1970s economic recession witnessed a boom in vintage clothing’s popularity (secondhand sales typically rise in recessions), vintage style also remained trendy during the economic prosperity of the 1980s and 1990s.

I contend that changes in the garment industry produced more homogenized, monotonous shopping experiences, leading some American consumers to explore alternatives that could provide more “authentic” options for dressing fashionably. In the following section, I explain how vintage style becomes part of authenticity discourse because vintage clothing is perceived as distanced from mass production, possessing qualities typically associated with handcrafted material goods and experiences deemed “authentic.”

Garment Industry Changes 1960s – 1990s

During the 1960s-1990s, the U.S. garment industry became increasingly corporatized, dominated by big industry players. The industry contracted from once having a large number of small companies making ready-to-wear clothing, all staffed by designers who hoped to get good sales from this year's "hot little number" (Vecchio & Riley 1968). The first-cycle clothing market that consumers encountered in the 1950s and early 1960s was more diverse than today in terms of the number of producers and potential styles; starting in the late 1960s, consumers gradually found fewer style choices due a number of changes.

In the late 1960s, garment-industry companies took their stock public and designers began to license their names to products not produced in-house. Clothing corporations sought cheaper labor overseas in order to cut costs and gain wider profit margins for shareholders (Agins 2000; Vecchio & Riley 1968). From the late 1960s onward, the U.S. clothing industry globalized. By the 1980s, the first-cycle clothing market was characterized by a relatively small number of large producers. Moreover, with licensing and outsourcing, quality control became a problem and diminished consumer confidence about whether it is worth paying more for a designer label (Agins 2000). During the 1970s recession economy, an American obsession with bargain hunting arose as consumers learned they could find clothing of similar quality for lower prices at discount retailers (Zukin 2004). Simultaneously, during the 1970s, the market for secondhand and particularly vintage clothing in the U.S. expands to the degree that the *New York Times* reports vintage clothing demand is outstripping supply.

According to Sharon Zukin (2004) standardization and dull shopping experiences become the norm. In the 1980s, corporations develop "lifestyle marketing" where the brand image is emphasized over the product's intrinsic qualities (Klein 2000). This homogenizes every department store's floors into a collection of the same brand boutiques – Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, Donna Karen, Nautica, Eileen Fisher. Formerly, consumers could easily see a diversity of styles and comparison-shop in departments like Coats, Dresses and Formalwear (Zukin 2004). This change drains a sense of spontaneity and discovery from the department store experience.

The trend in vintage clothing becomes established during the 1960s – 1980s as U.S. clothing industry changes led to relative standardization of clothing styles, garment quality, and shopping itself. While Cassidy and Bennett (2012) proposed that consumers sought vintage clothing as a reaction to fast fashion of the 1990s, garment industry conditions that homogenized clothing and consumption experiences were present well before. Fast fashion merely accelerated these tendencies, giving consumers with an interest in vintage and secondhand clothing little reason to solely purchase new clothing.

Vintage Clothing's Authenticity versus Mass Production

In journalists' 1980s quotations of what vintage consumers want, their answers included natural fibers, quality, craftsmanship, uniqueness and the historicity embedded in vintage garments. These qualities are typically invoked in authenticity discourse. Macdonald (2013: 119) characterizes "authenticity" as a "stretchy" term that encompasses many meanings. Objects and experiences deemed authentic are often associated with nature, tradition, heritage, the past, craft, originality, and/or reflecting one's core identity (Jenss 2004; Peterson 2005; Gilmore & Pine 2007; MacDonald 2013). Consumer desire for authenticity is a central feature of what Gilmore and Pine (2007) describe as the "experience economy," where consumers are no longer satisfied with goods and services in and of themselves, but are interested in cultivating compelling experiences and particular symbolic associations through their consumption practices.

Walter Benjamin (1969) describes how during the industrial age, authenticity – in the form of originality – becomes a quality to be prized (Peterson 2005). The ease of endlessly reproducing art through photography leads to loss of aura. Authenticity is thus symbolically constructed in opposition to mass consumption and the market (Peterson 2005; Macdonald 2013). Consumers who seek authentic goods and experiences picture themselves engaging a market separate from standardization and its associated social and labor relations (Macdonald 2013). In fact, this symbolic opposition is so strong that authenticity claims are often used to obscure the industrial processes involved in manufacturing material goods such as when wine-makers emphasize family tradition or grapes from old vines (Peterson 2005: 1084).

Moreover, it is often the qualities of production methods "that make them especially amendable to becoming part of authenticity discourse. What is at work here is a contrasting of different kinds of *things* carrying different kinds of histories and social relations – and an attendant relativity of authenticity" (MacDonald 2013: 124). By attributing authentic qualities to vintage clothing, consumers implicitly draw boundaries between old clothing and mass-manufactured apparel. These boundaries may be based on a false distinction. It is highly likely that when 1970s and 80s consumers celebrated the qualities of vintage clothing that had first been sold between 1940 and 1960, they were actually appreciating design and garment construction from earlier forms of mass production. As Elizabeth Cline (2013) notes, almost all clothing, whether home-sewn or factory-made, is produced by the hands of individuals (usually women) sitting at sewing machines. However, older techniques were more labor intense and geared towards pleasing customers, such as constructing garments that were lined or fitted with darts.

Adrian Franklin (2002) makes the case that when an object is re-cycled as retro (or in this case, "vintage"), it takes on different meanings than what probably led to its initial purchase. Those who first acquire a garment purchase it because its

qualities mark it as novel or “in style.” When an object is revalorized as retro in the secondhand market, Franklin argues it is likely because of its original aesthetic qualities. Attention to design was part of the post-war production process, part of an “aestheticization of everyday life” and a “democratization of art” that characterized the post-war period (Franklin 2002). This echoes anthropologist Lionel Tiger’s (1987: A1) observation that

Industrial societies have exaggerated the pompous and finally fruitless difference between high and low art. We have failed to see that industrial designers are really the folk artists of our civilization. The work they do, which we may possess innocently in our homes, is as vital and reflective of our life and times as the ceremonial treasures we line up on museum walls.

Both Franklin and Tiger are making the case that there are intrinsic qualities about older consumer goods that lead to revalorization. Contemporary retro consumers observe these qualities, and have the cultural capital to recognize the cultural accumulation of meaning in older goods. Notes Franklin (2002: 100), “Retro consumers are experienced in their total immersion in the world of goods and are reflexively interested in them and the contexts of their production. In this sense, retro consumers are tourists consuming a form of cultural heritage.” Moreover, it is vintage consumers who ultimately determine which past looks are revalorized. Jeness (2004: 395) observes that the authenticity of vintage clothing is socially constructed by vintage clothing wearers who determine which styles of the past constitute “genuine” looks that sartorially signify a particular decade. This selectivity in regard to which styles represent the fashion of a decade parallels Macdonald’s (2013: 119-120) observation that, “[D]isputes [about authenticity] variously mobilise ideas about origins....which past – and whose – will endure?”

The meanings consumers associate with vintage clothing resemble those of handcrafted or artisanal products. The consumers quoted above often assumed vintage clothing is “handmade,” with a high degree of “integrity” and “craftsmanship” in its construction. Likewise, Susan Terrio (1996: 71) argues that craft products:

...make visible both a particular form of production (linking the conception of a product to its execution) and its attendant social relations...Produced in limited quantities, using traditional methods and/or materials, they evoke uninterrupted continuity with the past.

Vintage appears to be “craft,” displayed in today’s boutiques in small quantities and thus implying they were limited in production. Today’s vintage dress seems unique rather than standardized because the garment’s copies that once hung next to it on a store rack are long gone.

Moreover, vintage clothing carries an “aura of pastness” (Samuel 1994) that evokes a sense of historical continuity. This is most clear in consumers’ quotations that imagine the previous lives of their vintage garments. It is also present in accounts by those who describe vintage clothing as higher quality because current

apparel is not made in the same way or from the same type of fabric. This “nostalgia” associated with vintage clothing includes different meanings that can encompass both idealizations of the past as well as justifiable appreciation of qualities from yesterday’s production methods (Pickering & Keightley 2006). Material objects such as vintage clothing symbolically become part of a “timescape of authenticity” (Grasseni 2005), embedded with history, which allows consumers to imbue them with aura and value and wear them with a sense of distinction.

Since the late 1960s, the first-cycle clothing market in the U.S. has offered less to consumers in terms of style diversity, garment quality and an engaging shopping experience. Thus consumers with cultural capital found in vintage an alternative market and source of fashionable street style. Authentic characteristics are attributed to vintage such as it being of exceptional quality, handcrafted, made from natural fibers, providing continuity with the past and being unique. Thus, categorizing clothing as “vintage” symbolically marks it with authenticity, distinguishing it from both the larger secondhand market and the first-cycle market that features new clothes with retro looks. Revalorizing secondhand clothing as rare, authentic and desirable through the category “vintage” is symbolically deployed to mark boundaries between vintage and today’s mass-produced goods.

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Montreal Modern: Retro Culture and the Modern Past in Montreal

By Kristian Handberg

Abstract

Through analyses of the retro scenes in Montreal, Canada, the article discusses retro culture's role as cultural memory. It is shown how Montreal's cultural identity is formed by memories of modern culture such as the Red-light and Sin City reputation of the illicit nightlife of the 1940s and 1950s, and the space age modernism of the 1960s following the Expo 67 and Quebec's Quiet Revolution. This is reflected in the city's thriving retro culture through the study of two groups of retro shops. In circulating specific memories and objects in a specific context, retro is an important negotiation of the past in the present. Especially, it is stated that the retro culture displays "local accents" and a new focus on the specificities of modern culture giving a revaluation to a previously overlooked identity such as the *Quebecité*.

Keywords: Retro, cultural memory, material culture, second-hand culture, Canadian culture, kitsch, subculture, popular culture

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century modernity as past has captured our fascination through the popularity of *retro*: the dedicated revival of the 20th century in looks and things, most often from the period between 1950 and 1980. Being grounded in popular culture and the recent past, retro differs from previous revivals and historicisms with their focus on distant, idealized pasts through high culture. When “retro” was first encountered in the 1970s and 1980s (according to design historian Elizabeth Guffey the term retro was first used in the early 1970s in connection with the controversial French fashion inspired by the World War II years known as *mode retro* (Guffey 2006)), it was associated with a postmodern lack of historical meaning as a play of surface and rootless cannibalism of all things past, expressed by Fredric Jameson (1984) and Jean Baudrillard (1981). While retro often involves a play of surfaces and its popularity often leads to some degree of commercial consumption as approach to history, I will state that retro is also an elaborate work of cultural memory creating a common past and a cultural identity. And it should be noted that retro is based on specific objects from a specific past, *Visst. Men vill du* and is always practiced in a specific context.

In this article, I will show how retro culture in Montreal contributes to the consciousness of the city’s cultural identity and history, and how regional specificity interacts with international influence in the formation of contemporary cultural identity via retro. In particular I will focus on how two conceptions of the “20th century modern” are present in the retro culture in Montreal: the raw and seedy red light past of the city’s notorious “wide-open” years of the 1940s and 1950s and the forward-looking space age modernism of the following period with the Expo 67 World Exposition as a key symbol. These mythical epochs work as symbolic universes for the current retro culture - referred to in a number of things and practices working with history through affects in the way described by Pierre Nora in his *Lieu de Mémoire* thinking. Furthermore, I will refer to Swedish ethnographer Orvar Löfgren’s research in the regional and national specificity in modern material culture as a productive understanding of the current retro culture. As retro is becoming an accessible and widely distributed fashion, it is simultaneously developing more specialized and dedicated forms that play a greater role in the collective and individual identity formation.

I return to these theories in the final discussion after presenting the context of Montreal and going through the case of the retro culture here with a study of two scenes of retro shops based on research conducted in 2012. I should underline that my study is not an anthropological field study, a sociological analysis, or, a business study of the retro trade. Instead it is a cultural study of retro based on observations of the contemporary cultural practices and studies of the cultural historical background.

Montreal's Modern Past

Even though Montreal is an old city by North American standards, founded by French settlers in the 17th century, its identity as “Quebec’s Metropolis” and the capital of culture and nightlife in Canada is defined by its modern history with a prominent modern mythology in both the daylight and nightlife side of 20th century modernity. Contrasting the flexibility (or “emptiness”) of the Canadian cultural identity as such (i.e. Keohane 1997), Quebec identity is highly contested, with independence being on the political agenda, as it is the stated goal of the Parti Québécois, which has governed the province at several times. Following centuries of colonial and English dominance of the French, the recent past contains a dramatic struggle for political and cultural autonomy and recognition, and a late and abrupt way into modernity.

Québécois culture was secluded until far into the 20th century, generally considered as closed around tradition and rural life with the Catholic Church as the only center of intellectual and cultural affairs, which promoted an anti-modern and morally strict worldview. The backwardness and conservatism continued under the strict and regressive rule of Premier Minister Maurice Duplessis (1890-1959), who governed the province from 1936-1939 and 1944-1959. This period is even known as “Le Grand Noirceur” (*The Great Darkness*), with limited social rights, political corruption and the persecution of unions and alternative forms of thought or political organization.

Paradoxically, Montreal was, in these very years in the middle of the 20th century, known as a notorious, wide-open city of vice, as vividly described in William Weintraub’s *City Unique: Montreal Days and Nights in the 1940s and 1950s* (1996/2004). Fuelled by events such as the US prohibition era (1920-33) and the many soldiers serving in the WWII, drinking, gambling and prostitution were a dominating force in the city’s life and reputation (together with a scene of nightclubs, music and entertainment) supported by a notoriously corrupt police force and city government. Thus, the 1950s in Montreal has conventionally been inscribed in the collective memory as a dark, pre-modern era, but also with an undercurrent of modern vices and entertainment giving it a certain attraction. The 1950s is also associated with the introduction of American consumption objects and popular culture, which were looked upon with concern both by the Anglophone urban cultural elite and Francophone religious authorities.

Against this background, the 1960s became a “familiar narrative of Montreal’s modernization” (Straw 1992: 6), which saw an active self-reimagining as “a serious self-conscious city so different from the jaunty, rakish church-and-nightclub town it used to be” (Weintraub 2004: 273), moving from chaos and corruption to modern cosmopolitanism through urban renewal and replacing rural traditionalism with urban modernism.



Montreal as a neon-lit “wide-open city”. Postcard from 1952.
Expo 67, Postcard. Picture: Kristian Handberg with thanks to Johanne Sloan.

The Category One World Exposition Expo 67 in Montreal 1967 contained most of these themes being a successful and utterly forward-looking world’s fair. It had monorails and multi-screen projections and presented Canada’s provinces and the rest of the world in cool modernist pavilions, with Buckminster Fuller’s dome for the American pavilion as a landmark (see illustrations). As Rhona Richman Kenneally and Johanne Sloan write in their recent anthology on the event, “Expo brought art, architecture, design, fashion and technology together into a glittering, modern package”, where “almost every pavilion was striking for its modern-looking appearance”, with “modernism itself as a lingua franca of Expo 67 seemingly capable of traversing borders, nationalities and even ideologies” (Kenneally & Sloan 2010: 11). Expo was a successful operation for its Canadian, Quebecois and Montreal organizers as a manifestation of the modernity and progress of the 1960s (“So much of it avowedly, almost giddisly, futuristic” (Lownsborough 2012: 7)) even though, according to Lownsborough, there is indeed “something slightly ‘square’ of the earnestness of Expo” (ibid.) and its giddy futurism from the point of view of a more critically-minded present generation. But in the 1960s it was an ideal *materialization* of the modern, also for the troubled city of Montreal for which it worked as a “glorified alter-ego” (ibid.) built on new artificial islands in the St. Lawrence River. Expo 67ave the city a new identity manifestly modern and in opposition to its previous reputation. Kenneally and Sloan suggest that: “Expo 67 can be seen as a kind of utopic urban satellite in opposition to the wider municipality that fed and sustained it – a municipality that, despite the intentions of Mayor Jean Drapeau to sanitize Montreal’s street scene by sweeping its detritus (human and otherwise) under the rug for the visitors, maintained a seamy side commensurate with its reputation for the hedonistic activities” (Kenneally & Sloan 2010: 17).

According to this widely circulated collective memory, we can see Expo as expressing one modern myth, the Apollonian, in contrast to the seedy Dionysian night-life mythology of red light Montreal. Both are cornerstones in conceptions of popular modernity and its special meanings in and for Montreal. They appear as strong poles in the city’s cultural memory, and they also have a significant

presence in the retro culture as the following analysis will show. Like elsewhere in the Western world, the post-war decades were an important and formative period in Montreal and Quebec, but in a spectacular way the epoch was here framed by the eye-catching images of the Red-lights Fifties and the Expo Sixties.

Quebecité in Modern Culture

For Quebec, Expo was an entrance into the modern world, catching up with the modern world in a cosmopolitan and universal modernist style that was removed from the inferiority, lowness and provincialism often associated with the *Quebecité*. In her study *National Performance: Representing Quebec from Expo 67 to Céline Dion* (2011), theatre and performance historian Erin Hurley writes about the cultural performances of a Quebec identity that at the time of the Expo was marked by an “urgent construction of a Quebec national project” (Hurley 2011). Cultural manifestations were especially important for Quebec, since it “[l]ike other nations without a state ... relies upon cultural production to vouch its national status” (Hurley 2011: 18). But determining what defines and matters as Quebecois culture is often difficult in an affluent postcolonial society that is heavily influenced by the high culture of the Old World and the popular culture of the USA. This is also the case for Canadian culture in general, as “Canada is one of those mid-sized countries, like Australia, which, while developed and prosperous, nevertheless devote their cultural life to artefacts which they do not produce” in the words of media scholar Will Straw (1999: 4-5).

With no celebrated authentic tradition and a modernity that has for long been in the shadows, Quebecois culture concerns “finely grained attributions of quebecité” (Hurley 2011) in translations of other cultures (Simon 2006), in accents, in hybrids and combinations often in ordinary, vernacular material far away from appraisal from official institutions. One example is the distinctly local *Joual* dialect, an “English-infected sociolect” of “Quebecois French with urban influences” (Hurley 2011: 74) spoken in Montreal working-class neighbourhoods. Another Quebecois notion is the term *quétaïne* (sometimes *kétaïne*) – a negatively laden statement applied to tasteless objects emblematic of cultural poverty, such as a flower-covered shower cap or the Elvis imitating protagonist in the popular Quebecois comedies *Elvis Gratton* (1981-). According to Bill Marshall, “*Le quétaïne* is the visual and iconographic equivalent of joual, culturally delegitimized Anglo-French hybrid of borrowings and copies.” (Marshall 2001: 189). It is a recent concept dating from the 1960s with various myths of origin.¹ Bad taste and backwardness are the main features of *quétaïne*, though it is still (like kitsch in the Greenbergian understanding) a product of modernity and mass-production. During my study of the kitsch-cultivating spheres of retro culture, nobody wanted to associate their practice with *quétaïne*. This indicates that embarrassment and negative connotations are still associated with the term: *Quétaïne* is the negative

twin of retro's knowing distinction with its failed backwardness and bad taste without forgiving irony and, maybe, with a too local flavour.

The presence of these concepts is important for understanding the character of modern Quebecité. Quebec is in an active process of national manifestation, for example with a new national library in Montreal, a national art museum in Quebec, and countless festivals and events. At the same time, however, a feeling of inferiority clings to Quebecité: that of being a dominated lower class majority with (or characterised by) cultural poverty, and not even in possession of an "authentic" identity in Montreal, against (or "given"?) the constant preference for the high culture of the Old World and the popular culture of the USA.

In my analysis I will suggest understanding retro as a response to this status by recognising it as a modern local identity, made of popular culture and its objects, and including its imports and accents. Works of high culture, such as contemporary art, sometimes take in objects of québécoise as an ironic celebration of kitsch or as symbols of the cultural underbelly. Breaking somewhat with these ironic and distanced depictions, retro, through its connoisseurship and its aesthetic and historicizing investment, offers a way of rehabilitating and revaluing the past. This of course also includes a vast degree of selection and myth-making, and it has the incentive of aesthetics and lifestyle rather than of a historiographical inquiry. Still, retro is a thorough investigation of the recent past often recognizing the finely grained attributions of Quebecité and giving a consistent reinterpretation of the local identity.

To conclude, Quebecité, and to a certain degree Canadianness as such, are conventionally undefined and lowly valued cultural identities. Even though the Quebec identity has been given a new political focus in recent years, it is still contested and surrounded by uncertainty. And not everybody agrees with the promoted images of Quebecité. This is the case especially in a big city like Montreal, which contains many identities and a complex cultural memory. Expo 67 offered a cosmopolitan identity in its universal modernism that was promoted, was successful for a number of years, and stands as a positive memory for many. However, similar aspirations for a unifying event with the 1976 Summer Olympics turned out as a financial disaster bringing the city to face constant debts and a state of disrepair to many of the prestige buildings from the 1960s. Political and cultural divisions have also characterized the city and made a uniform identity difficult. My analysis discusses how retro reacts to this complex status constructing a Montreal identity by using the specificity of material things and memories.

Retro Scenes and Circulations

Retro's multilayered character going beyond conventional cultural forms and genre borders calls for specific concepts to describe it. One such concept is that of *scene*. A "scene" can be something very local as well as describing a specific

phenomenon of global extent and can generally be defined as “particular clusters of social and cultural activity” (Straw 2005: 412). Scenes are “elusive, hugely attractive, accessible only to those who have qualifications to find it and describe it” (Allan Blum in Simon 2006: 34). Scenes come and go, are “volatile and ephemeral” and “strongly imbricated with urban life” (ibid.). For the study of retro culture, the scene ties together different places and practices such as the shops and markets where retro objects are purchased, the events where they are shown, and the knowledge and aesthetic preferences that unite the practitioners. As a concept it is less fixed and theoretically troubled than the notions of subculture or popular culture and contains different levels of participation and commitment. The scene also includes the “non-human actors” such as material objects and the geographical setting and the human interactions with these, rather than the sole human-based agency sometimes associated with the concepts of culture.

Some retro scenes form a coherent whole, like the one devoted to 1950s rockabilly culture, which, apart from the music, involves clothing, styling, cars and body culture, such as tattoos and burlesque dancing (see *Rockabilly 514*, a documentary on the rockabilly scene in Montreal). Others concentrate on a specific genre (collecting Quebec 1960s Yé-yé records, for example) or casual retro references in fashion and pop culture. Montreal has a proportionally big and conspicuous system of scenes for retro culture, corresponding to the city’s status as a centre for arts, creative industries and education. For this study, I have chosen to focus on some easily identifiable and accessible sites in the form of two groups of retro shops. These are obvious centers in the circulation of retro and demonstrate the current demand for, and valuation of, retro objects. Their abundant presence shows the popularity of retro and an availability that reaches beyond small, exclusive scenes and the scavenging of cheap objects.

Another important concept is circulation. Retro implies a new status for its objects, for instance when an old thing is used in a new way, or, when an old image is applied to a newly produced thing. Retro is a phase in an object’s circulation and in its biography (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986) and not an end station. The image of the door used by Kevin Hetherington in his discussion of disposal ritual is useful (2005). Things might go in and out of the door as retro, and the room of retro may be experienced as open or as closed. Similarly, the rubbish theory of Michael Thompson (1979) illustrates the life-cycles and circulations of things notably observing that the material life cycle of things typically endures their economic value.

The city is often associated with the accelerated circulation of contemporary life and the distribution of new things. But, as Straw shows in the article “Spectacles of Waste” (2009), the city is also characterized by the accumulation and circulation of the past and its artifacts giving it a character of “slowness”, as “a space in which artifacts and other historical residues are stored, and in which movement is blocked” (Straw 2009: 195). “The city is a machine for delay in part through its

capacities for storage, through the spaces for accumulation (like pawnshops and used book stores) that take shape and proliferate within it” (ibid.). Retro takes shape and proliferate from the city’s delay and accumulation of past. This happens through material objects being kept in the archive status of bargain shops and attics, as well as through narratives and memories circulating in the city such as the stories and the cultural memory of Montreal’s red light district in the 1950s, or, the memory of a particular used-record store such as the one Straw himself remembers in “Spectacles of Waste”. Thus, I will claim that retro can be productively understood as a circulation of things as well as of memory.

The Retro Shops on the Main

Two remarkable clusters of retro shops are located in the Eastern part of Montreal, forming visible scenes of retro culture: Retro clothing and objects on the hip “alternative main street” of Boulevard St-Laurent and furniture and design in the more retracted Rue Amherst. These two groups show different kinds of retro practice, responding to different imagined pasts, corresponding with the aforementioned mythologies of the Montreal past.

St. Laurent Boulevard (“The Main”) hosts many retro-related shops along its length, with a concentration of the most pronounced shops door to door in the middle of the trendy Plateau area such as Kitsch’n Swell, Rokokonut, Friperie St-Laurent and Cul-de-Sac Vintage, and the design shop Montrealité. St. Laurent is a lively “party street” with a historical multicultural flavour and a contemporary hipness associated with it. Thus it is not surprising that these shops are colourful, eye-catching, and accessible in their well-ordered display of goods, thereby aiming at an outgoing and casual audience, as well as the dedicated connoisseurs. Some of the shops are mainly selling clothing (and are locally called *Friperies*), whereas others are focused on design objects, accessories and all kinds of period pieces.

As an example of the retro clothing shops, Friperie St. Laurent is a boutique offering men’s and women’s clothing in about the same amount. The oldest object, a black smoking jacket, dates from 1908, but the main supply obviously dates from the 1940s to the 1980s. The shop’s owner refers to 1950s clothes as the most popular even if they are hard to obtain from store houses and markets in Montreal and Quebec, where they pick their supplies (they underline that they find all things themselves – and do not get it from third-party sellers).² The customers are collectors as well as casual *fashionistas* often coming to the St. Laurent-street for the vintage shops. A Montreal guide describes the Friperie St. Laurent as “one of Montreal’s better known shopping destinations”,³ and according to the owners, it was the first of the St. Laurent vintage clothing shops to open (in 1994). The market is described as being especially hot in the last five years as the number of shops in the street has increased. This has made the street come to be associated

with retro and thus assume the character of a scene. The displays of clothes are accompanied by period piece decorations like an entire display of kitschy Canadian souvenirs. This is the typical aesthetics of the retro boutique, putting equal focus on fashion and connoisseurship. The decoration also expresses a local character in which *Quebecité* is an advantage rather than a disadvantage. A remarkable presence is several men's shirts still in factory packaging from the textile factories that dominated this very area until a few decades ago. A more exaggerated regional symbol is a robe (possibly from the 1950s) with the red and white maple leaves of the Canadian flag. In this manner, the shop seems characteristic of the retro demand in general, but locally coloured pieces are conspicuous.

Rokokonut is a prominent retro object shop which offers a highly staged form of display starting with the colourful facade. All kinds of objects, from clothing via lamps, glasses and souvenirs to vintage Playboy magazines are for sale with no clear borders between the decorations and the commodities. Leopard patterned tapestry and red lights provide the background for campy objects such as exotic fans, ballerina dolls, cocktail glasses, leather boots, handbags and flowered dresses. The shop highlights the spectacular and exaggerated with the exotic as a common denominator, highlighting the contrasts between local rural kitsch and Far-East or Polynesian exotic, the sexualized erotica of playboy magazines and religious kitsch such as Jesus pictures, boudoir kitsch belonging in a feminine universe and macho "stag" material. Here we are in the realm of a campy ironic retro that nevertheless cares for the individual objects which are all marked with a label of origin and decade (i.e. "Montreal, 1950s").



Kitsch'n Swell.

Photo: <http://inthemoodfortrend.blogspot.dk/2011/05/taste-of-vintage-kitsch.html>

A similar approach is taken by the neighbouring Kitsch'n Swell shop run by the same owners. It opened five years ago, and added Rokokonut two years later meeting a current rising demand for their retro supply – and possibly for creating

another retro universe. Kitsch'n Swell has an interior of wood panelling and a more conventional, homely kitsch style than the queer camp of Rokokonut. This universe is given a distinctively local character through objects such as a characteristic sign from Montreal beer Molson (which is described as very recognizable for Montreallers), Quebec number-plates, souvenirs from local sights, a wooden silhouette of Quebec, and more implicitly through locally popular fake-Indian woodcarvings, silk-paintings and Elvis-objects. Elvis has a notorious popularity in Quebec already recognized in the *Elvis Gratton* TV and film series (1981-) about the eponymous and definitively *québécoise* Elvis impersonator (Marshall 2001). Reflecting this, Kitsch'n Swell offers Elvis as silk-painting, original 70s busts and as especially emblematic in fake wood, uniting many features of Quebec kitsch.



Elvis á la Quebec in fake wood in the Kitsch'n Swell shop. Photo: Kristian Handberg.

The owners (a couple who are dressed in retro clothing and obviously participate in the rockabilly scene as seen in the *Rockabilly 514* movie) refer to the 1950s as the current trend, and the shop has seemingly visualized the current version of Fiftiesness. According to FASHION Magazine writer Ashley Joseph, the shop “feels like entering a 1950s time capsule, or maybe your grandparents’ Florida condo. The vibe is Rockabilly meets 50s housewife, filled with Elvis memorabilia, rotary phones, fringe lamps, religious wall art, suitcases and old Mad Magazines”.⁴ Similarly, the sister store Rokokonut “satisfies more feminine sensibilities with delicate lace gloves, gilded cigarette cases, vintage lingerie, and fur stoles aplenty – basically everything to make a Mad Men maniac go, well, mad”. This expresses the careful selection of components in the construction of a Fiftiesness

image (even though *Mad Men* is set in the 1960s it is popularly associated with Fiftiness), but also the presence of local objects and specific meanings in such a dedicatedly collected retro image. Accordingly, Kitsch and Swell has the slogan “Not made in China” on its façade to emphasize the provenance of its objects.

A different presence of local symbols in a retro discourse becomes evident in the neighbouring design boutique *Montrealité*. It offers a selection of clothing, bags, and badges with motifs of modern Montreal icons, such as the Farine Five Roses sign (from the abandoned but still iconic flour factory of that name by Montreal’s harbour), the Place Ville-Marie skyscraper, the Habitat 67 and Buckminster-Fuller’s American pavilion from Expo 67. Another design is the downward-pointing arrow logo of the Montreal metro turned 90 degrees to the left, now pointing backwards with ‘Metro’ changed to ‘Retro’! *Montrealité* is run by five designers who started out by selling these things in other shops and at fairs but due to a great demand, they have now been able to open this shop. The newly produced objects here are of course not old, authentic objects like in the neighbouring shops. Whereas these offer pieces from the actual past, *Montrealité* constructs idealized retro: what the past cannot actually offer. The badges and t-shirts recirculate images and collective memories of Montreal, making them symbols of distinction and a knowing alternative to banal souvenirs or megabrands.



Badges from *Montrealité*, Boulevard St. Laurent. Photo: Kristian Handberg.

Of course, *Montrealité*’s products to some degree possess a souvenir character being accessible to the casual visitor (to the retro scene as well as to the city). And indeed the whole group of shops express accessibility and humour, making them available for a broader and casual audience. In addition, there are no signs of the shops being excluded from connoisseur or subcultural circles, as the presence of stalls from the shops on the rockabilly scene and at vintage collector events, and posters in the shops testify. Instead they seem to be the most visible flagships of a

larger scene, which count many smaller fripperies and retro shops, especially in the Plateau area (one example being Retrocité set up by a new distributor in a smaller, distantly located street). This indicates a resonance for retro circulation that fits well with the status of this area as a self-styled “alternative” quarter, “inscribing the alternative into location”, as Gregson and Crewe describe the preferred settings of retro boutiques (Gregson & Crewe 2003: 34). It is also in this geography that many retro-related events take place such as concerts and fairs showing the imbrication of the scene into the local urban life.

With respect to the actual retro objects (that are carefully selected and displayed) on sale in the shops, I will conclude with two observations. The first concerns the presence of the exotic, kinky, quirky and kitschy elements of the past, connoting an ironic connoisseurship today – associated with a younger outgoing audience, compared to the more restrained and expensive retro, closer to conventional good taste described in the following case on the Amherst Street shops. The second concerns the presence of local and regional connotations, from mass-produced woodcarvings to Farine Five Roses, as retro icons. This can be seen as an expression of the “cultural thickenings of belonging” in the regional differences in materialities of everyday life commodities described by Löfgren further discussed below. It gives meaning to the retro object when it connotes a Montreal or Quebec 1950s identity compared to simply *Fiftiesness* in a general, often more American way. This is, of course, also a way for the retro connoisseur to perform his or her distinction and knowingness with a conscious accent claiming some kind of cultural belonging, or at least historical consciousness, in the ironic retro quoting.

Furthermore, I would argue that the choice of 1950s objects – with in one category a kitschy, rural homeliness (wooden tree objects, flowery dresses, religious objects), and in another a queer, burlesque seediness (old Playboy magazines, bar glasses, leopard-skin tapestry) – could be seen as setting up a symbolic universe corresponding to certain ideas of Montreal and Quebec’s past: the anti-modern rural Quebec and the vice city Montreal. Both these symbolic universes possess a definite otherness from the late modern present, making up a temporal district of exotic entertainment. In other words, the Montreal Fiftiesness contains the special elements of the kitschy homeliness of rural Quebec and the seedy vice of pre-modernization Montreal.

Selling Montreal Modern in Rue Amherst

Rue Amherst is a street well into the Eastern part of town, an old working-class district that is still not considered gentrified, and located far away from the usual shopping and sightseeing districts. During the last decade, this street has become a remarkable centre for expensive vintage furniture with around a dozen shops dedicated to selling second-hand 20th century objects. The first shops opened around

20 years ago, and in the last five years, the market has been particularly hot for these modern antiquities, especially Scandinavian Modern-inspired design from the 1940s to the 1960s, often labelled “Mid-century modern”.

The little boutique Mtlmodern is typical of the aesthetics of this scene. Mtlmodern was founded in 2001 by a retro collector and presents itself as a “Montreal based resource of classic mid-20th century design”. The small shop is packed with pieces of furniture that are restored in the workshop in the back. The shop’s focus is obviously classic wooden mid-century furniture: Vintage fashion, where *The Chair* by Hans Wegner is dealt at the expensive price of \$ 1750. The teak craze is even mirrored in the shop’s emblem on its business cards, which is a teak surface, and the name of the shop indicates a special cohesion between Montreal and the ‘modern style’ that is proclaimed several times in the street.

A similar supply is found in PEI Mobilier Moderne 20e Siècle just around the corner, which was also started by a young retro design collector. The shop is set up in a carefully restored workshop with brick walls and a concrete floor. Antiques and Curiosa, which opened 12 years ago, presents a wide selection of teak furniture on its floor and a complimentary selection of lamps hanging from its ceiling. Its owner confirms the interest in Danish Modern, and he is able to show original 1960s brochures from several Danish manufacturers. Next door, Cité Déco was among the first in the street, opening 20 years ago. It presents a smaller selection of pieces accompanied by artworks from the same period. According to its presentation, Cité Déco offers “vintage furniture from the 20s to the 80s”: a period that frames popular modernism with an emphasis on mid-century Modern. Contrary to the cave-like darkness and colored lights in the St.Laurent shops, these shops are bright and spacious, creating a more exclusive focus on the objects.



Scandinavian Modern at PEI. Photo: Kristian Handberg.”

Hans J. Wegner chair sold for 1750 \$ at Mtl Modern in rue Amherst. Photo: Kristian Handberg.

The biggest among the shops is Jack's Objects et Mobiliers Modernes du XXe Siécle. The typography of the logo is grossly 1970s, and its supply accordingly involves more 1970s chrome and plastic, and less 1950s teak, including kitsch objects that could also be encountered in Kitsch'n Swell. When asked about popular objects, the shop's owner says that people often like to combine Scandinavian Modern pieces with other objects, like a 1970s lamp or an exotica object. Other shops indicate that retro furniture can be combined with contemporary elements far from cheap kitsch, for example in Re Design (co-operated with Cité Déco). Here, vintage furniture is displayed together with exclusive contemporary design and art expressing a conventional, cultivated taste rather than a bohemian alternative style.

And generally, the scene of shops in Rue Amherst express a reinterpretation of retro, from an ironic anti-fashion into a smooth and affluent fashion for a more well-off audience of connoisseurs. The connection to a subcultural scene and an alternative, oppositional self-understanding is subdued here, compared to the shops at St-Laurent. As such, Rue Amherst states the new popularity of retro.

Besides this general tendency, however, the shops also display some specific characteristics oriented towards the local context. For example, the Expo 67 has a remarkable presence in Rue Amherst. At *Seconde Chance*, a big selection of Expo 67 related objects even forms a special exhibition in the window display. The owner refers to all things Expo-related as garnering huge interest from specialist collectors as well as a general retro audience, and quickly goes on to talk about the general importance of the Expo for Montreal and the vintage things to be found here: "Expo meant everything. The world came to Montreal and stayed there. Montrealers got a taste for foreign food and for modern design that instantly got popular. National retailers had to run a different selection of furniture in Quebec than in the rest of Canada because of the demand for modern design with bright orange shapes, and so on".⁵ There is also a selection of Expo 67 materials in the store *le 1863*, and here the owner also refers to it as a key event. The modern designers came to Montreal, and the demand for the new look corresponded with the Quiet Revolution⁶ and the general feeling of the new in the 1960s with rock and counter-culture. The Expo featured a popular concert programme, which brought countercultural idols like Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead to Montreal, even though some student groups also protested against the exhibition. The other distributors in Rue Amherst also refer to Expo 67 often and put any related objects on prominent display. It is obvious that Expo is a living and attractive memory site, nurtured by many kinds of objects in established collector fields like postcards and coins, as well as fashionable vintage objects like a boomerang shaped ashtray. In the collective memory, Expo 67 stands as a pinnacle of the generally popular post-war modernity, even bridging the restrained Scandinavian Modern high modernism of the 1950s and early 1960s, with the psychedelic style

of the youth rebellion of the late 1960s and the colourful style of the late 1960s and 1970s in the popular cultural association that feeds retro interest.

Expo is a symbol of the modern, cosmopolitan aspirations of Montreal and Quebec. The style for this modernization was consciously imported with Scandinavian Modern furniture. The owner of le 1863 claims Montreal to be one of the places in the world with the most Scandinavian Modern furniture around, gathering interest from buyers all over the world, dating from the popularity of the style in the Expo years. A furniture shop named “Danish House” sold Danish design in a number of years after the Expo, and the Scandinavian furniture producers opened special facilities in Quebec. The Scandinavian Modern style was generally popular in North America in the 1950s and 1960s, being a more restrained alternative to the futuristic “populuxe” style. It was popular among the “upper-middle-class part of the market”, allowing its buyers to “feel that they were modern and respectful of the achievements of their own time and were purchasing honest, well-made furniture” (Hine 1986, 80). But its extraordinary success in Quebec could maybe be seen as enshrining the small Northern European countries as role models, with the purpose of creating a brand of modernity for a smaller country. The Scandinavian Modern style also offered an alternative to Americanness that was seen as a threat and as a vulgar and aggressive modernity. In any case it is a distinct feature of the Montreal Sixtiesness that forms the symbolic universe for the shops in Rue Amherst.

The retro shops on Rue Amherst form a distinct cluster. With their aesthetic presentation and supply, the Rue Amherst shops can be identified as part of a scene of retro culture different to that of the St. Laurent shops. The scene here is centered and formed around popular modernist design mainly from the 1950s and the 1960s. A specific relation between Montreal and modern design, especially Scandinavian Modern, is often expressed here with Expo 67 in particular and the liberation of the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s in general (including Montreal meeting the world, affluence, humanistic ideals expressed in modernist design). This forms a symbolic universe, present in the individual objects for sale in the shops, which is remarkably different from the selection in the St-Laurent shops, which are more likely to point



Expo memorabilia at Second Chance, rue Amherst. Photo: Kristian Handberg.

back to the more primitive sides of the past in the rural kitsch and the red light city of vice.

Retro between Market and Memory

These visible presences bear witness to the current popularity of retro, which reaches beyond a small cult audience and an exchange of cheap anti-commodities. The shops in Rue Amherst in particular bear witness to retro's popularity among a new affluent audience and to the bigger investment in, and availability of, retro culture. This implies a different circulation of the retro objects, bringing them into affluent homes and the more established categories of fashion and taste. In this



Flyer for Marina Vintage Style. Montreal 2012.

way, they get closer to their original destination when they were newly-produced furniture in the 1960s aimed at the modern-oriented Quebec middle class. This is obviously a reorientation from the alternative cultural stance associated with retro.

Elsewhere in Montreal, the retro culture orients itself towards a rough, working-class inspired Fiftiesness. Marina Vintage Style, a new shop in the east of town not far away from Rue Amherst, not only sells newly produced 1940s and 1950s inspired dresses, but also offers styling and photographs in

this image. The offered styles are “Vintage Classic (40s or 50s chic), Pinup (pencil skirt or short with high heels), Vintage style swimsuit, Sexy Retro Lingerie, etc!” (www.marinavintagestyle.com), and the prices are high (300 \$ + for dresses and for photo sets). This creates a combination of availability and dedication. This retro is ready-to-wear, far from the D.I.Y. practice previously associated with the retro style. But at the same time, Marina Vintage Style expresses a demand to be retro in a thorough and knowing way: not just wearing any dress connoting the 1950s, but exactly the right one – and to be professionally styled to wear it as well.

Marina Vintage Style is associated with the subcultural scene of rockabilly culture, which has a strong and dedicated following in Montreal. This scene makes itself visible in the city’s cultural landscape through regular events and festivals such as the Red, Hot and Blue Rockabilly Weekend, and is portrayed in the feature documentary *Rockabilly 514* (2008). This movie follows the musicians, festival organizers, car enthusiasts, burlesque dancers, and retro dealers through the scene’s events (most notably, the annual Red, Hot and Blue Rockabilly Weekend festival in the Montreal area), and their daily civil life. Through this, it portrays the “work” invested in the subculture (as Hebdige noted (1979)), and the many kinds of objects and practices involved. The scene is not just formed around one cultural practice such as rockabilly music, but also around the circulation of objects such as 1950s collectibles from cars to postcards, clothing self-sewn, vintage, or bought at the Marina Vintage Style – bodily practices such as tattoos, dancing, and styling and make-up, and the preference for special 1950s connoting places in the city’s geography such as the Tiki bar Jardin Tiki and the Orange Julep diner. A scene event will typically involve stalls with retro objects and clothing, styling and make-up sessions, 1950s themed food and drinks, dancing lessons and burlesque performances, besides the music.

Accordingly, one typical event “Rock around the Broc” (October 2012) offers a day-time section of retro market, photography, styling, vintage car show and dancing lessons, and evening section of concerts and dancing. The majority of the audience are dressed in 1950s and/or rockabilly style, clearly identifying with the subculture. Several of the St. Laurent retro shops such as Kitsch’n Swell are present with stalls, as well as the Marina Vintage shop, which offers styling and photo sessions. Like in the Kitsch’n Swell shop’s supply, markedly feminine and masculine objects dominate. There are flowered dresses and accessories such as costumed jewelry for the women, and vintage car merchandise, playboy magazines and leather jackets for the men. There are even “vintage Playboy photos” on offer. The rockabilly subculture is known for staging these gender images but mainly in a stylized manner, not intending any affiliation to the gender roles of the 1950s (see the interviews with Swedish rockabillics in Ekman 2007). The event is located in an old church hall deep in the Eastern Francophone part of town. Similarly, a concert with rockabilly artist Bloodshot Bill takes place in La Sala Rossa,

an old Hispanic community center in the same area. As such, the events are inscribed into a local geography, resonant with the images of the ruggish night club and church town of the 1950s.

These are multiple materializations of Fiftiesness, all contributing to a symbolic universe and an image of the past. Like Pierre Nora's *Lieux de mémoire*, the material things, symbols, icons and stories, and practices, rituals and functions make up a unity "where memory crystallizes and secretes itself" (Nora 1989: 7). This is a desired image, "magical and affective", as Nora says (Nora 1989: 9), like the kinds of *Fiftiesness* developed through the revival culture as a specific mythical, nostalgic construction opposed to the historical time from 1950 to 1959 with all its social, political and cultural complexities (Sprengler 2009: 39). But it is not just a thought image: It does indeed involve a lot of *things* and other physicalities, like practices and places. Of course, these configurations of things are pieced together and selective, but they still do reflect certain specific conditions and ties to the cultural historical background of a place such as Montreal.

The retro shops in Montreal clearly do this through their location in the eastern part of town, i.e. in the Francophone working-class districts, as opposed to the wealthy Anglophone western part of town, or other parts of town dominated by other immigrant groups. These areas are laden with modern history, and in the remaining areas they connote something of the old working-class Montreal, even its colorful red-light nightlife. Retro fairs and festivals, and retro styled bars and cafes also inscribe themselves into this historically-laden context of Montrealité. Whether it is fully intentional or not, retro brings the recent past into current circulation with an amount of locality. This happens not least on a material level: There are local things in circulation and the culture is practiced in a specific geography. Thus retro culture expresses the local modern culture and its distribution and translations of global signs.

In this manner, the retro practices correspond to Orvar Löfgren's observations on modern material culture. Löfgren points to how national and cultural specificities in modern culture are felt not in indigenous traditions, but in variations in the globally distributed culture. These differences create identity as "cultural thickenings of belonging", "embedded in the materialities of everyday life" and "in the national trajectories of commodities" (Löfgren 1997: 106). This is not a static condition, but develops through the distribution, import and translation of things. As a result, "nationalization and internationalization are not polarized developments but parallel and interdependent ones" (Löfgren 1997: 109). I would argue that retro reflects this very well: The cultural thickenings of belonging in the regional variations of the modern culture are an important and overlooked aspect of retro, and this may be seen in the examples from Montreal. The constellation of retro objects found here would be different from the constellation of objects seen in Scandinavia or Great Britain, for instance.

Foreign influences are able to generate special local meanings and consequently to constitute modern identity. One example of a more exaggerated meaning of influence is the invasion of American popular culture in 1950s Montreal. According to sociologist Diane Pacom, “[a]cceptance of American influence by the urban working class doubled because of rejection of the rural masses and their traditional elites. The urban masses saw America’s influence as a tool of emancipation from the conservative ideological hold of that past. The rural masses and their elites, on the other hand, saw this as a negative, regressive influence that was evil, morally corrupt and, overall, dangerous to Quebec’s identity and cultural survivability”. (Pacom 2009: 441). Consciously or not, we may see the outspoken Americanté of the rockabilly universe as allied with the working-class Québécois, and both as opposing the officially promoted Québécois identity today that is still dominated by rural authenticity.

By expressing Americanté and urban Québécois, the retro culture breaks with the officially promoted history and memory of Montreal. In *The City of Collective Memory* (1996) urban historian M. Christine Boyer marks a difference between the cultural memory and official musealization, and asks “how does the city become the locus of collective memory and not just simply an outdoor museum or a collection of historical districts?” (Boyer 1996: 16). According to Boyer, the contemporary “postmodern” city is dominated by the unidirectional focus of “the art of selling [which] now dominates urban space, turning it into a new marketplace for architectural styles and fashionable lives” (Boyer 1996: 65). The spectacle is the dominating image of this cityscape, offering a continuous stream of “fatuous images and marvelous scenes” (ibid.). This also involves the past, which is turned into the contemporary consumption and the booming musealization, as Andreas Huyssen also has analyzed (Huyssen 2003). The collective memory, however, is still “an antimuseum” here and “not localizable, certainly not appealed to through revisionary historic and popular landscapes proposed in the City of Spectacle”, (Boyer 1996: 68). The collective memory has the position of a counter memory to the governing culture. It has the ability to go against the tide of ruling visions, and keep other things present. While this distinction might not be without its uncertainties and problems (such as the static counter positioning of history and memory) it gives an understanding of retro as alternative memories not identifiable with the popular landscapes of the City of Spectacle.

Concerning the city’s memory-scape, it is important to note that the described retro practices coexist with a wide range of other historicizing and musealizing practices spanning from official museums and governmental cultural manifestations to private memories and commemorations, and from mass media representations and commercial marketing to artistic representations of the past in an age that has been labelled the “memory boom”, where the “present pasts” have taken over from the “present futures” dominating modernist culture (Huyssen 2003). Retro contributes to this by reflecting on what is remembered as modern and at-

tracts the present imagination as a founding background for our present condition and a historical Other to our present selves. Retro oscillates between these poles of connecting identification and distancing exoticism with a fitting combination of nostalgia as well as irony.

Conclusion: Retro's Accents in Montreal

The study of retro culture in Montreal shows a visible resonance with the mythologies of the modern past of Montreal and a presence of local connotations that create a special accent in the retro specific to this place. The Boulevard St.-Laurent shops and practices like the rockabilly culture tie themselves to the mythology of the 1950s past with its red lights, working-class neighborhoods, and local versions of *Americanité*, and the Amherst shops' use of 1960s modernism in the style of Scandinavian Modern creates an image of the more middle-class based modernity of the Expo 67 and Quiet Revolution years. These are obviously formative and important stages in Montreal's history, present and actively circulated in the city's collective memory. This modern era, however, is not the primary object of the official history and museum culture, which rather focuses on events of the distant past, like the 1812 war, and does not, for instance, feature an Expo museum. In this way, this historical phase belongs to collective memory rather than to the museum, according to Boyer's distinction. Retro practices include the lowly regarded modern *Quebecité* and recognizes its artifacts such as *Yé-yé* records as authentic and distinct works. The previous "wrongness" attached to Quebec's cultural products, seen as having neither the high cultural status of Europe, nor the popular appeal of the USA, is turned into distinction, making them sought-after and valuable. I am suggesting that this happens in an understanding of modern culture that corresponds to Löfgren's identification of cultural belonging as created in variations in the globally distributed modern culture rather than in indigenous traditions. This includes material objects as well as memories that get circulated at different levels of scenes – some local and others more far-reaching.

The presence of retro culture in Montreal confirms the general popularity of retro in contemporary Western culture, and expresses its recent developments such as popular accessibility and thorough specialization. This implies a challenge of the borders between cultural categories such as subculture and commercial culture, and levels of value such as that between cheap anti-commodities and valuable prestige objects. The expensive retro furniture sold in Rue Amherst and the newly sewn 1950s dresses sold in Marina Vintage Style are examples of this.

But at the same time the case shows retro as the primary representation of the postwar decades in contemporary culture, and as a main objective in the search for the hard-to-identify yet heavily debated *Quebecité*. This should modify the perception of retro as a random and superficial re-selling of the past not sensible to

specific contexts. Instead, retro reflects the combination of foreign and local provenance that characterizes the modern world, and how identity is created by its thing-world.

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Notes

¹ One version says that is derived from a Scottish family "Keating" in Sainte-Hyacinthe for their impoverishment. Later it was popularized in the Radio Canada sitcom *Moi et l'autre* from 1966-1971 (Marshall 2001: 189).

² Interviews carried out during research in Montreal November 2012.

³ About Montreal vintage shopping guide: <http://montreal.about.com/od/montreal-vintage/a/friperie-st-laurent-vintage-montreal.htm> (visited February 2014).

⁴ Evelyn Reid: "Montreal Vintage. Shopping the scene", http://montreal.about.com/od/montreal-vintage/ss/montreal-vintage-shopping-shops-stores-clothing-friperies_4.htm (accessed February 2014).

⁵ During my research I interviewed shop owners from all the mentioned shops in Rue Amherst, October and November 2012.

⁶ The Quiet Revolution (révolution tranquille) refers to the changes in the 1960 in Quebec. Rather than being a specific event or a full-scale political revolution the "quiet revolution" contains several political and cultural developments bringing radical change to the province and its political and cultural status and self-understanding.

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Cul-de-Sac, 3966 Boulevard Saint-Laurent, Montreal, Quebec.
Friperie St-Laurent, 3976 Boulevard Saint-Laurent, Montreal, Quebec.
Kitsch 'n' Swell, 3972 Boulevard Saint-Laurent, Montreal, Quebec
(<http://kitschnswell.ca/en.html>).

Montrealité, 3960 Boulevard Saint-Laurent, Montreal, Quebec (<http://www.montrealite-tshirts.com/>)
Rokokonut, 3972, Boulevard Saint-Laurent, Montreal, Quebec.
Cité Déco Meubles, 1761 Rue Amherst, Montreal, Quebec (<http://www.redesignmobilier.com>)
Jack's Objets et Mobiliers Moderne de XXe Siècle, 1883 Rue Amherst, Montreal, Quebec.
(<http://www.jacks70.com>)
Le 1863, 1863 Rue Amherst, Montreal, Quebec.
Mtlmodern, 1851 Rue Amherst, Montreal, Quebec.
PEI Mobilier Moderne 20e Siècle, 1023 Rue Ontario Est, Montreal Quebec.
Re Design 1699 Rue Amherst, Montreal, Quebec.
Seconde Chance, 1691 Rue Amherst, Montreal, Quebec.
Marina Vintage Style Boutique & Pinup Photography 1331 Rue Ontario Est, Montreal Quebec
(<http://vintagestylephoto.com/>).

Events

Old Wig Vintage Fair October 4th-6th 2012, Bain Mathieu, 2915 Rue Ontario Est, Montreal Quebec.
Rock around the Broc (Rockabilly concert and fashion fair) October 27th 2012, 425 Beaubien, Montreal Quebec.
Concert: Bloodshot Bill + Capitol Tease Burlesque + Lyse and the Hot Kitchen, La Salla Rossa, November 23th, 4848 Boulevard St. Laurent.

Market Hydraulics and Subjectivities in the “Wild”: Circulations of the Flea Market

By Niklas Hansson & Helene Brembeck

Abstract

Since consumer researchers started paying attention to flea markets they represent common consumer and market research objects. Arguably, in the “natural laboratory” of the flea market, researchers can observe and theorize market and consumer processes “in the wild”, as forms of direct marketing and consumption. We build on existing flea market research through adopting a circulatory approach, inspired by actor-network theory (ANT). Rather than presenting a theory of (flea) markets, ANT is useful for studying markets from the perspective of grounded market-making processes. Consumption is understood as the interplay of consumers, marketers, retailers, and a wide array of artifacts and market mediators like products, economic theories and ideas, packaging, market space (in the physical sense) and furniture, etc. Our results point out that not only does such an approach enable analysis of features commonly studied within consumer research such as calculative action and social interaction, but also issues more rarely in focus in such research, such as cognitive patterns of consumer curiosity, emotions, senses, and affect. Furthermore, even though flea markets foremost are places of commerce and exchange of second hand goods, there is a large variety of other forms of flows or circulations going on “backstage” that enable the surface phenomena of second hand consumption to come into being. Many of these circulations, we argue, are material rather than immaterial. Vendor and buyer subjectivities are thus understood as outcomes of circulatory dynamism that involves a range of material and immaterial flows.

Keywords: Flea markets, actor-network theory, circulation, consumption, second-hand, subjectivity, Cochoy

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present an ethnographic case study of *Kommersen*, a local flea market in Gothenburg, Sweden, and discuss the results within the framework of circulation as part of an actor-network theory (ANT) approach. More generally, the text discusses the role of circulation for understanding flea markets and flea market consumption. Presenting an ANT approach to our study of flea markets is important because it is not really a (flea) market theory but more interested in grounded market(s) making processes. In other words, an ANT approach to consumption research of flea markets is the analysis of “outdoor” or “wild” actions, rather than taking its cue from formalised market or consumer behaviour terminology (Callon & Rabeharisoa 2003).

Consumer research on flea markets has been limited, (cf. Sherry 1990; Crewe & Gregson 1997), perhaps because of their character as a “functional anachronisms” (Belk, Sherry & Wallendorf 1988) or historic leftovers of an “archaic marketplace” (Abrahams 1986). Arguably, in the “natural laboratory” (Sherry 1990: 13) of the flea market, researchers can observe and theorize market and consumer processes in the “wild”, as forms of direct marketing and consumption. However, flea markets are not only characterized by specific market or exchange mechanisms, but also by the particular forms of subjectivity that they encapsulate; for example the explorer who travels flea markets as intensified places where things are re-enchanted and become bargains, and where the seeking consumer finds pleasure in cluttered market displays (e.g. Ottoson 2008; Parsons 2010; Duffy, Hewer & Wilson 2012). We build on these two strands of flea market research by adopting a circulatory approach, highlighting essential *display mechanisms* and *consumer flow logics* inside flea markets and propose flea market spatiality and consumer-seller-thing interaction as deeply embodied and affective in nature.

With the metaphor of “market hydraulics” we introduce an approach towards flea markets that focuses on the fluid character of consumption and the circulatory essence of (flea) markets. With a view of markets as spaces with hydraulic characteristics, we include “hardware” like technologies and logistics in order to understand some of its basic circulatory mechanisms. Not only desks but also for example wheeled devices or ails contribute to shape circulation of goods and people (cf. Ottoson 2008: 106).

A circulatory approach towards markets also means that we are studying flea markets through disclosing *the many different forms of circulation* that undergird them. We know for example that in entering a market place circulation might be restricted and different from the public space outside (we cannot bring anything along when we enter without for example wrapping it in paper or placing it in a private bag). We might also leave with a bag or shopping cart full of purchases, if

we have paid for them. But, circulation means not only *flows of goods and people* in (side) and out of market spaces, or the attribution of particular tools to control and amplify particular *circulations inside market places* (cf. market stands, shelves or aisles), but also the *circulations (conduits) that afford particular subjectivities, affects, atmospheres and agencies to emerge*. Not only do particular movements (moving consumers) add to the fluid character of markets, but also *affective and cognitive motions*. Affective arousals (intensified states caused by for example sensations, perceptions and feelings) may emerge from the sheer presence of bodies being pulled and pushed together in a room bumping in to each other.

Theoretical Framework

From an actor-network theory (ANT) perspective, consumption is understood as the interplay of consumers, marketers, retailers, and a wide array of artifacts and market mediators like products, economic theories and ideas, packaging, carts, market space (in the physical sense) and furniture, etc. (Brembeck et al 2007; Cochoy 2007). ANT is basically about circulating entities; “the *summing up* of interactions through various kinds of devices, inscriptions, forma and formulae, into a very local, very practical, very tiny locus” (Latour 1999: 17). Circulating and emerging patterns of actions are therefore its home terrain and fits the wild nature of flea markets as an alternative market network complementing conventional retail operations (cf. Sherry 1990). The ways that available devices and objects, space and goods intervene and control flows of goods, choices, identities and the manner in which commercial or economic action depends on the material setting has not been thoroughly researched. The fact that the form of “market devices” (Cochoy 2007) and furniture available in a regular supermarket space and at a periodic flea market are different in many ways affect the way that customers and goods circulate as well as the construction of identities inside those places. Through analyses of the supermarket and material market devices – trolleys, aisles, signs, gondolas, desks and shelving – Cochoy has proven the importance of paying attention to seemingly mundane material devices inside market places and exposed the way that local, material devices make consumers do and think things without doing very much at all (Cochoy 2007). Furthermore, according to Latour actor-networks are what “provide actants with their actions, with their subjectivity, with their intentionality, with their morality” (Latour 1999: 18). In a similar fashion Daniel Miller (2002) argues that the sale of a car can be understood by references to the entangled web of its purchaser’s lifestyle, finances, projected use of the car, as well as the salesperson’s commissions, the franchised dealership to the manufacturer, and his or her quota, etc. The resultant action repertoire; calculations, judgments, comparisons etc. on part of the purchaser, is partly the effect of his or her social network and the circulation of preferences that aid in format-

ting a consumer's choice before entering the market space (and while inside the market).

Previous Research on Flea Markets

From a consumer research perspective on city places, there is an abundance of work with an empirical focus on the department store and in particular shopping malls while market places like flea markets have been less studied (cf. Jackson et al 1998; for exceptions see Sherry 1990; Fredriksson 1996; Crewe & Gregson 1997). Even though consumption theorists like Baudrillard quite early in the history of consumption theory developed his theory of a "system of objects" as a contribution to the understanding of consumption as a fleeting and circulating phenomenon, these objects were immaterial; they were first and foremost signs standing in for the objects that circulated. In previous studies we argue that consumption is not just about brands, marketing, sentiments, experiences, trends, fashions and retail spaces (Hansson & Brembeck 2012; Hansson 2014), and not only supports things moving within the global culture industry (Lash & Lury 2007). The process of moving cargo and goods is often hidden from public view and, importantly, hidden from consumers by what Raymond Williams described as "the magic system of marketing" (Williams 1993; see also Cochoy 2007 on "hidden" processes inside supermarkets). Research on retail spaces as well as studies on alternative geographies of consumption has tended to neglect this system, thus obscuring the fact that products actually need to be moved through space to reach consumers.

While research on marketing and circulation of signs (Lash & Urry 1994; du Gay 2004) abound, less focus is directed to what we elsewhere termed "consumer logistics" as an important feature of circulatory systems (Hansson & Brembeck 2012; Hansson 2014; see also Birtchnell & Urry 2014 for a global approach towards professional and commercial "cargo logistics"). Thus, how market places – as the result of circulation processes – rely on material objects for their everyday functioning, and the fact that mundane objects like streets, shopping carts and urban environments writ large contribute to the circulatory logics of markets and their sign values (i.e. the system of objects made available for (immaterial) consumption) has been less emphasized (cf. McGrath 1993; Cochoy 2008; Hansson & Brembeck 2012; Brembeck, Cochoy & Moisaner 2014; Hansson 2014).

In his study of flea markets, sellers and buyers as well as spatial and material configurations specific to flea markets are discussed by Ottoson in terms of how they made particular forms of exchange relations emerge (2008: 85-85). Market stands, for example, provided particular places inside the markets which afforded particular temporalities as well as body movement among visitors (*ibid.*: 97, 106). Consumer subjectivities like for example Ottoson's (2008) "explorer" is arguably the result of people entering a "state of flow" in terms of search behavior. But

impressions might overwhelm a visitor and affect them, thus causing internal motion while for example paying attention to an object. Or the interaction with goods triggers calculative- and estimate action in terms of moving things into quality categories based on commodity attributes (cf. “sustainable” or “bargain”), and price differentiation while bargaining with a seller. *Cognitive circulation* (of for example “judgment devices”, cf. Karpik 2010) is therefore also a potential feature to be recognized. But, such circulations are dependent on specific conduits or what Karpik calls a ‘practioner network’ that ensures the circulation of credible knowledge about objects, thus actualizing circulation in terms of transmission of goods and information. Buyer and seller could thus be said to engage in forms of interactive consumption- and market circulations (flows of information, communication, estimation, verification) with the purpose of for example price formation (cf. Karpik 2010).

Bitner (1992) states that nowadays, when sales encounters are frequently de-humanised, mechanised, digitalised and formalised, local flea markets hold the potential to generate a servicescape metaphorically similar to a retail theatre: the dialectic between informal-formal, economic-festive is characteristic of flea market cultures (cf. Belk, Sherry & Wallendorf 1988). Previous consumer research studies are, however, mostly interested in how consumers singularize commodities after purchase, and not the circulation of meanings extending from moments when such commodities are being re-introduced into the market space; i.e. the sales interaction when for example goods collected from an attic is back on display in the second hand market and ready for re-sale. Important exceptions are the works of Elizabeth Parsons (2006; 2010) on antiquities and Duffy, Hewer and Wilson (2012) on vintage connoisseurship. Duffy, Hewer and Wilson study the vintage marketplace as an intimate, personalized, lived experience, and hunting for vintage as a social practice. Parsons examines the ways in which market exchanges in the world of antique dealing offer dealers resources for the creation and expression of identity. As such, Parsons presents a view of identity as discursively produced through interaction. Analyses of UK antique dealers show that they typically drew on discourses of taste and aesthetics, and of morality and care, to manage their identities. In doing so they mobilized different constructions of customers, fellow dealers, second hand and antique markets and objects. Importantly, Parsons’ studies reveal that the antiques world as a marketplace institution is a space within which particular sets of meanings and practices circulate constitutive of dealer and visitor agencies.

Methodology and Data

The research about the flea market Kommersen was conducted during a five-month period in late 2012 in collaboration between the authors and colleagues from Gothenburg City Museum (note). A broad variety of ethnography-inspired

multi-methods were used by the project group. The approach can be said to be typical of qualitatively oriented studies, which aims to collect a rich material for the study of market culture (Cochoy 2007; Sunderland & Denny 2007; Ehn & Löfgren 2012). Fieldwork on site was conducted during the whole project period using field notes covering themes such as exchange and social interaction, customer and vendor movement, material detail and products assortments. Also, pictures were taken of the interior and exterior to provide details of the flea market activities in- and outside of the building. During fieldwork we conducted all in all 106 long and short semi-structured interviews with dealers and visitors to the market. We also interviewed the current and previous owners/managers of the market, the current café manager, real estate owners, and graffiti artists who had decorated the outside of the building. Moreover the members of the project group acted as dealers themselves during a weekend openly announcing the affiliation to the university and City Museum of Gothenburg and informing about the project. In addition to the project group selling gadgets and trying the position as dealers, visitors were invited to report their views about Kommersen using paper and pencil in return for a bun and a cup of coffee. During this event we also made a semi-quantitative survey of demographic data of visitors and vendors that specific day. Two films were produced by The City Museum during the project which provided extra layers of detail and liveliness to the ethnographic data. In sum, the data collection resulted in a rich and multi-faceted material of life inside and around the building and market, focused on the experiential, sociocultural and material dimensions of consumption at the flea market.

Infrastructures and Amateur Logistics

Cities might, from a larger scale perspective, be considered as composed of different forms of circulation; for example rhythms of traffic, commerce, transport, power, information, signs, and people (Allen et al 1999). In dualistic terms the flows connected to commercial places in a city might be framed as “mainstream” and “alternative” in terms of goods (new vs. second hand), retailers or sellers (professional vs. amateur), and means of transportation/logistics (professional logistics systems vs. amateur logistics). In this sense, flea market logistical flows arguably are dependent on access and distance to the market place as planned and made available on part of the city.

Although consumer transport modes at periodic (and outdoor) markets are described by McGrath et al (1993: 299), they focused on consumers’ logistics and their symbolic value among customers, but left out the issue of “amateur logistics” among vendors. However, retailers’ logistical systems for collecting goods for later distribution inside the store space are prominent features of the circulatory logics contributing to enacting market places as spaces for consumer choice. So are the “hidden” processes of attending to inside contexts of department stores and

supermarkets (Cochoy 2007). While for example mainstream supermarkets develop their own systems of long-distance transportation of goods, goods at the Kommersen flea market were mostly transported by local private people, families, semi-professional vendors and the like.



Upon arrival vendors at Kommersen flea market had to transport their goods to their stalls and employed a variety of innovative solutions for this purpose. This woman, arriving by car, collected her goods in private plastic bags and extended her carrying capacity by using a two-wheeled carrier. A common example of an amateur logistics system for selecting and transporting what ends up inside the market. Obviously, there is a remarkable difference from professional commercial logistics systems where products come packaged in neat boxes/cargo and transported in bulk by company trucks and lifts by professional staff (cf. Birtchnell & Urry 2014). Photo: Lasse Lindeberg, GSM

That tram stops were located close to the flea market and that the space surrounding the market building basically was a large parking space enabled a large quantity of people easy access to the market and a convenient distance in terms of carrying and loading stuff to and from the market. This enabled and/or seduced a varied crowd of people to become amateur vendors at Kommersen at a “low” cost. Distance is a major factor for understanding the flow of goods and people to and from the market; not only distance from the market in terms of visitors actually going to the market space, but also distance as a space to conquer in order to

move stuff across from tram station or parking lot into the market (cf. Brembeck & Hansson 2013; Hansson 2014).



A tram passes outside Kommersen. The tram station was placed ca 50 meters from the Kommersen entrance. Photo: Property of authors



Dealers unloading their goods outside Kommersen from the conveniently located car park with a steel cart borrowed from the market. At approximately 20 meters' distance from the entrance this parking lot was precious to the vendors of the flea market and considered cheap for 2 Swedish Crowns per hour. Photo: Lasse Lindeberg, GSM

During our observations at the flea market we noted how common it was among both visitors and vendors to go to the market by public transportation. The owner of the café inside Kommersen, Afsane, a woman in her mid 40s, described to us how she and many of the long-term as well as short-term vendors she regularly

spoke to during opening hours arrived early in the morning by tram with their merchandise. She used to her home-baked merchandise and considered it convenient to use public transportation for this purpose even though she usually had quite a lot to carry. Distance from the tram station was unsurprisingly important for her as carrying goods is costly on the body.

Of course, the location of the market impacts on how people chose to get there. The fact that infrastructures like car parks and public transportation functioned to move people to the flea market points towards the importance of how material things like cars, trams and infrastructure contribute to market cultures and the circulation of goods and people to the market. But not only was it a question of how people made their way to the market; also issues of *who* (age, gender, ethnicity, class) visited Kommersen revealed themselves by looking at flows of transport. The blend of public transportation- and car-mobile dealers and shoppers contributed to a diversified audience of visitors; i.e. by not disabling or excluding people through closing off access by for example relying on car-mobile visitors, multiple access opportunities seemed to favor a diversified crowd (cf. McGrath et al. 1993; Cregson & Crewe 1997). Infrastructures thus played an integrative role in contributing to the particular patterns of second hand dealing and shopping at Kommersen (cf. Straw 2010: 196-200 for a discussion on socio-demographic differences according to second hand site location within cities).



A younger woman loads a cargo-carrier with goods before entering the flea market. Notice how she uses the whole car for transporting stuff to the market; an example of “semi-professional” logistics systems enacted from collaboration with parking space close to the market and a steel cart borrowed from the Kommersen managers. Photo: Lasse Lindeberg, GSM



An elderly woman equipped with a carrier to transport goods from the flea market upon leaving. Access to public transport and walkable pavements afforded elderly people to visit the market without much aid. Photo: *The Magic of a Local Flea Market* by Hilda Holmdahl.



Caption Figure 3c: Families with children, young people and elderly co-habited the market and arrived by different modes of mobility. Down in the right hand corner a biking market visitor locks his bike before entering the market and in the left corner another bike rests while its owner visits the market. Photo: Property of authors

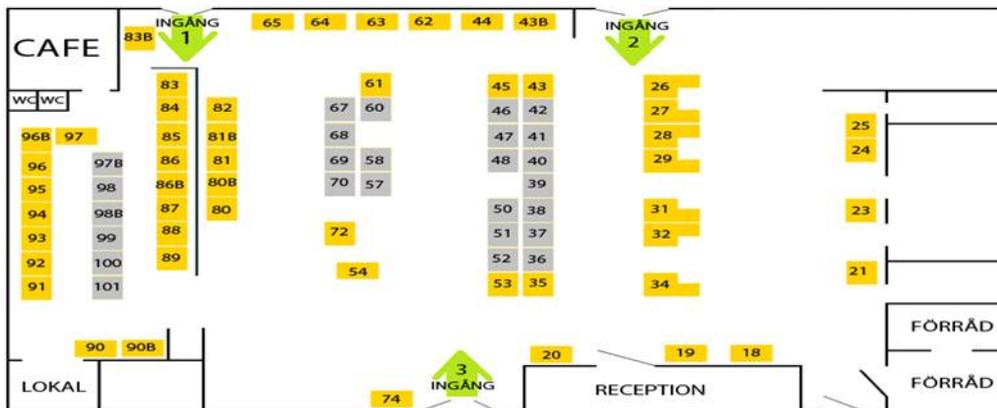
From our observations at the market we could conclude that the presence of infrastructural resources allowed for a wide audience to visit the market: elderly and young people without access to a car; people with scarce economic resources; people from different areas of the city; bikers, walkers, car-users and tram-riders

etc. Our semi-quantitative counts on visitors to Kommersen revealed the presence of an audience with diverse ethnic, geographic, age and class backgrounds moving inside the market, but also multiplicity in terms of mobility. In comparison with previous studies of open air markets, second hand outlets, farmer's markets and other alternative "geographies of consumption" (Crewe & Gregson 1997; Mansvelt 2005; Watson 2009) our results are similar in terms of how the markets represent a diverse space of people. They also reveal the impact that infrastructural resources had on the participation of for example young people and elderly at Kommersen, something that might dovetail with previous results but also strengthens the argument that the city environment, locality, and location of markets affect who travels to it and who chose to visit it (cf. McGrath et al. 1993: 295 for a similar but different argument about the role of parking lots for market interaction but in the context of outdoor periodic markets.)

Spatial Lay-out and Display

One factor that often differentiates flea markets from stores, supermarkets and other forms of retailing is the nature of real estate of such markets. Based on the size, location and form of the flea market they are traditionally not cooped up in the urban space such as stores that are located in the bottom of buildings or along "mainstreets" where space is precious. Flea markets need spacious places in order to provide room for market stalls and a large number of vendors. Although not always placed inside buildings (some are open-air flea markets), flea market places are recognized by their particular arrangement including set-ups of furniture, stalls and other market objects as well as their spatial lay-out, exchange patterns and circulatory logics. Merchants or vendors at flea markets are traditionally placed behind private stalls handling their own merchandise, something that differentiates the flea market space from modern stores, shops, supermarkets and malls (du Gay 2004; Dubuisson-Quellier 2007).

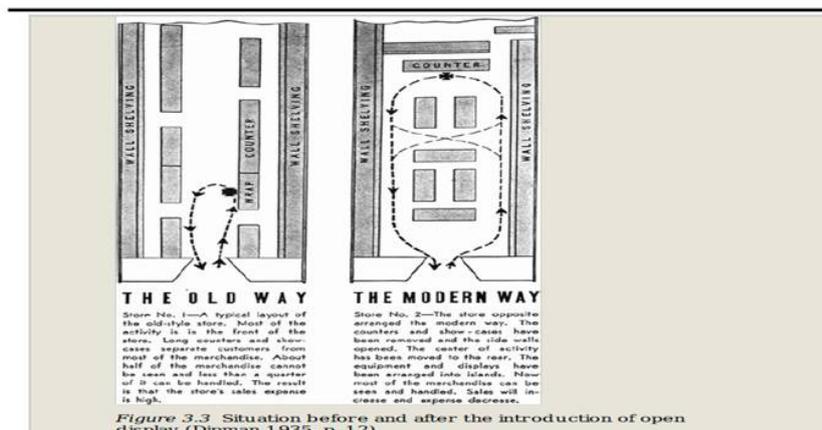
Kommersen was open every weekend, Saturday and Sunday, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and consisted of a 1,400 square meter space with a little more than 100 stalls plus a small number of permanent installations (a hairdresser, a café, some semi-permanent vendor stalls).



Overview of Kommersen flea market (www.kommersenloppmarknad.se)

In terms of vending, the market was open to private persons, companies, school classes, handicrafts and associations etc. (www.kommersenloppmarknad.se, 13/02/11). The building which housed the market provided a clearly defined rectangular space, in effect a large in-door room with a ceiling with a lot of visible material such as plumbing, pipes and so on. The floor of the building was occupied by a cafe, a toilet and market stalls. During weekends the market stalls anchored the physical space of the market. The market stalls were dedicated to goods like clothing items, antiques, vintage objects, food, and toys. As can be seen in Figure 4, each market stall, represented by a number ranging from 1 – 100, had one vendor.

As customers interact with goods and vendors inside the market a particular form of spatial movement across space is revealed. Different from traditional store or supermarket spatial lay-out, where most of the activity either is in the front of the store (old-school style with merchants behind counters and in control of products) or in the rear end (modern style with counters at the exit of the store and products on public display in “gondolas”); inside the flea market space customer activity is everywhere! (cf. Cochoy 2011a).



Old-school and modern store lay-out presented in Cochoy (2011: 11) (28)

The different customer journeys, or spatial circulation patterns, presented above show characteristics typical of both the eras prior and subsequent to before and after the introduction of “open display” (Cochoy 2011a) and are related to use of equipment for display and sell of goods and actor roles inside the market space. Cochoy (2011a) has written about the relationship between the introduction of open display and self-service, where both techniques introduced direct access to commodities, but staged different arrangements or “agencements” (Caliskan & Callon 2010: 8-9; Cochoy 2011a) considering vendor activity, sales encounter, customer circulation and material elements of the physical market space. Open display, where the goods for sale are not anymore kept hidden in drawers but openly displayed on shelves and counters, afforded customers direct sight of goods – thus enacting/“agencing” (attributing consumers particular action repertoires; i.e. “agency”) consumers with *self-sight* – but confirmed the “circular” or “back-and-forth” activity of the merchant grabbing for products. The introduction of *self-service* arranged for another role and circulatory logic for customers where they themselves moved around the store for products (Cochoy *ibid.* 9-13). Prior to the two arrangements, grocery business consisted of organizing exchange between inhabitants of two territories; the grocers’ and the customers’ territories clearly separated through objects like counters and other display equipment. These territories merged with the introduction of self-service and customers shared the same space as merchants interacting through “gondolas” rather than facing each other over the counter. The interesting aspect considered from the point of view of the organization of flea market business is how two logics are present that differ from these orders: the open display of goods affording “*self-sight*” on behalf of consumers (and the possibility to touch and feel the goods) *and* the ceaseless back and forth movement encouraged by the collection of an order of a large number of counters or market stalls (cf. the discussion of open-air grocery markets in Brembeck, Hansson, Lalanne & Vayre 2015). In contradistinction to the constant moving around of the merchant collecting goods in old-school style kind of grocery business; however, at the flea market it is the customers who perform the circulation and collection, only now without the self-service order because every market stall is its own “counter” as well as display.

Market Stalls as Curiosity Devices and Wild Display: Mental, Perceptive and Affective Circulations

Flea market spaces thrive on consumer dispositions like curiosity, pleasure and surprise (Fredriksson 1996; see also Cochoy 2011b). Market and consumer researcher John F Sherry (1990a, 1990b) has called this phenomenon “ambience”. He discusses the immediacy and semiotic intensity of flea markets as examples of such ambience (Sherry 1990a). From another perspective, ethnologist Cecilia Fredriksson (1996) writes of flea markets’ inherent aesthetic powers in terms of

alluring *and* disgusting potentials, depending on visitors' different dispositions upon encountering the flea markets and the goods for sale there (1996: 22).



A cluttered market stall.

Photo from the film *The Magic of a Local Flea Market* by Hilda Holmdahl.

Arguably, cluttered market stalls can act as *curiosity arousal devices* (Cochoy 2011b) for some customers and were used to create a playful and interesting product environment. The presentation of merchandise at Kommersen seemed to follow the logic of semiotic intensity as described by Sherry (1990a). The chance to be surprised – a consumer disposition drawn on by many vendors – by finding special goods and the explorative part of flea market consumption were well represented in our collection of consumer experiences in this study:

You can find gold here. It is absolutely perfect. You can find the best stuff from October until Christmas. We have bought new designer clothes here. New Eton shirts to my husband for pennies. Even Ikea stuff that is almost new. Our entire home is built by stuff from Kommersen, things as good as new. It is the highlight of the week to go here. Lots of people do not know how fantastic it is. One can find archaeological finds here and all sorts of stuff. [...] We usually write wish lists of things to marvel at. What you'll find here has feeling and is unique. Even Ikea stuff gets a connoisseur feeling (26-year-old woman)

This young woman is an expert. She knows what to buy but also thrives on the expectation to be surprised. In similar ways other customers shared this disposition towards the market:

I look for interesting stuff: books, DVDs, food and technical things. Interesting stuff. It's like a hunt in the woods; anything might end up in front of my gun (male, mid-60s).
Check out this bargain! A jacket from Sisley for just 20 crowns! Now that's Kommersen! (female, 17 years old).

The impact of market stall presentations as small scale commercial architectures of seduction (cf. Vernet and de Vit 2007) are powerful enough to trigger cognitive arousal and flea market-specific consumer dispositions (exploring, curiosity, surprise), and gives evidence to the mental circulation at the flea market (inside of customers' heads) but also affective arousal related to the thrills of visual perception of cluttered product environments inside customers' bodies in the form of feelings (cf. Ottoson 2008: 88-93 for similar results). Similar actions and responses have been discussed in the field of "visitor studies" and for example research about "visitor attention" during museum exhibitions (see for example Bitgood 1988; 2002).

Flea markets, of course, have their own set of gears (for example tables and other display materials) for marketing and displaying of goods, making them available for customer inspection. Different from contemporary "open display" logics with shelves made, sorted and placed with the purpose of best intention towards a particular customer journey inside a self-service market; display patterns inside the flea market are "wild" (in the sense of "amateur economic" ideas; cf. Callon & Rabeheriosa 2003). At the flea market we observed such "wild" display, with goods and display furniture (shelves, baskets, paths, stalls) placed in ways that seem to circumscribe any professionalised economic discourse or rationale for display of merchandise.



Market stalls, shelves, rack for hangers, and paths were arranged before opening hours. In comparison to supermarkets, stores or other market spaces the flea market has its own organizational logic contributing to the character of movement of customers and goods. The number and variety of goods available for visitor inspection as well as the display equipments used for consumer and vendor support (shelves, stalls, tables, hangers etc.) enact the flea market as different from professionally managed market spaces. The overall "blue print" for the layout and display of goods expresses itself according to a "wild" market form. Photo: Lasse Lindeberg, GSM



Wild display is something altogether different than “open” display. It might even downplay the idea of “self-sight” from a consumer’s or visitor’s perspective as for example discussed by Cochoy in his studies of indoor markets’ display logics. It limits direct access through customer sight as in this image where goods are placed in front of each other, being piled up without transparency and in no obvious order but to use the space and equipment at hand. Photos: Lasse Lindeberg, GSM

Inhabitation, Intercorporeal Practices and Sensibilities in Labyrinth Organizational Logics

Upon observation, the market was a crowded, bustling, confusing urban space, serving a diverse group of urban and suburban customers. This diversity comprised Russians, Eastern Europeans, Scandinavians, Vietnamese, South Asian, Somalis, and East Africans. Besides semiotic values and economic exchange (as examples of circulation of value and money), the flea market was also a physical container of differentiated bodies (aged, young, disabled, strong, weak, tall and short, baby stroller-, bag-, shopping- and luggage trolley equipped) and materials, that contributes to give form to inter-corporeal activities and affects.



When the doors pushed open at 10 o’clock on Saturday mornings the anticipating crowd squeezed inside the market; compressed like a herd or flock of bodies moving into a “market fold” that soon was full of enticed customers moving around the stalls. Photo: Lasse Lindeberg, GSM

Unlike commercial store or retail spaces, which constrain movement to a single bi-directional circuit – from entrance to counter and clerk/merchant/cashier and then towards the exit – the flea market had numerous flows with little predictability of customer movement. A circuit, as we use it here, has little possibilities for change and move in a uniform direction, whereas flows might go off in any direction. One second people were moving along the path set up between the cafe and the market stalls, the next second they were cutting a diagonal trajectory through gaps that would be off-limits in a regular store or shop (getting too close to where the money was kept...). The opposition between circuit (linear) and flows (non-linear) is useful as an illustration. If we consider professionalized market circuits being more bi-directional and quite easy to start and stop, block and redirect (through the work of store staff and market things like aisles and shelves); working through a predetermined channel when certain conditions are met; flows at the flea market, on the contrary, tended to push through blockages or find creative ways around them by creating new spaces, dependent upon the placement of conductive material. That different areas of flea markets tend to differentiate according to its temporal intensity is confirmed by Ottoson's study of three flea markets (2008: 106) where the non-linearity of consumer trajectories is also highlighted as a particular feature of the spatial configuration of flea markets.



The volatility of crowd behavior also contributed to the atmosphere of the Kommersen market. The soundscape, too, qualified its character; a buzzing and at times soaring but fleeting noise level from vendors dealing and shouting, but also gentle talking among people socializing and customers' continuous voicing of questions about prices. Photo: Daniel Gillberg

During opening hours the flows kept changing. Restricted by the physical presence of the market stalls, the customer flows retained their adaptive quality similar to inside a supermarket among shelves and aisles. The space retained a feeling of dynamism, a sense that strange encounters could and would happen. In this sense Kommersen flea market was a remarkably dynamic space. During field

work we arrived early enough to witness the market set-up. Stalls were erected every weekend, products laid out, and the weekend's business began. The stalls provided some physical constraints, as people squeezed themselves between stalls or blocked the major paths by trying on clothes or stopped to talk to one another or vendors. Thus, the market space was a fold of circulating bodies, things, movements and clustering that are necessary to grasp to understand its character.



Moving around the market space between stalls, goods and fellow visitors while pushing a baby stroller engaged severe attention from its pusher. Here a woman is trying to zigzag her way through the crowd of customers obviously engaged in looking at the stalls with products rather than avoiding bumping into a stroller. Photo: Lasse Lindeberg, GSM

Bodies presented themselves differently at the flea market. Few shoppers charged through the market intent on getting through in minimum time; the experience tended to be more exploratory. Children were also brought to Kommersen as part of a shopping experience. Strollers pushed around by men and women tended to have bags slung over the handles or were otherwise used for transporting stuff.

Body circulations also produced *a sensual space* where connections among particular goods are more deeply valorized. Flea markets are spaces of intimacy. Considering intimacy between the human and “more than human” brings the materiality of both into focus. From a similar corporeal context, Sarah Whatmore writes:

the rhythms and motions of [...] intercorporeal practices [growing, provisioning, shopping, cooking and eating] configure spaces of connectivity between more-than-human life worlds; topologies of intimacy and affectivity that confound conventional cartographies of distance and proximity, and local and global scales. (Whatmore 2002: 162)

This kind of circulatory-based arousal and intensification of affective encounters engaged not only cognitive action but also perceptive and embodied engagement as part of the enactment of the Kommersen flea market. Sensory exchange as a mode of circulation constituted much of the sense of place. Different bodies brushed against one another, the smell of old stuff being pulled from attics and storage rooms blended with home-baked dishes and coffee, exclamations of curiosity and bodies leaning with heavy bags. Bodies responded differently to the properties of the flea market — its smell, colors, ruggedness, temperature, and content.



The smell and feel of old stuff is different from new ones. Photo: Daniel Gillberg

The intimacy present at Kommersen was one of contact, for example connecting people's lives outside the market to this market moment through small talk, questions asked about merchandise, sharing a smile, seeing the same vendor, the smell of and touching products. Pleasure was part of the sensuousness of bodies. People walked the aisles meeting the eyes of people passing by. They smiled, they looked interested or their faces were blank because they were guided forward, circulating without effort, by the swell of the crowd.



Vendor sharing a smile.

Photo: The Magic of a Local Flea Market by Hilda Holmdahl.

Pleasure, in this context, was not in particular an individual experience; it emerged among bodies and things in place. Rubbing shoulders with strangers was a common feature in this crowded market and worked as a source of public intimacy out of circulating bodies (cf. Ottoson 2008: 103-107)



Rubbing shoulders with strangers between the market stalls were evidently part of the flea market experience and several visitors described to us how they enjoyed the chance encounters with strangers while attending the crowded market. "Nowhere but at Kommersen", as one elderly man accounted for his experience of moving around and bumping into and talking to people at the flea market. Photo: Lasse Lindeberg, GSM

Arguably, the flea market space actualized the labyrinth as an organizational element of space. It was realized among customers and visitors as a game of discovery (being thrifty and looking for bargains; hunting for precious vintage; bumping into strangers by chance; rubbing shoulders while shopping) and as a mechanism that attracted the customers in order to first read the space and then experience it. The labyrinth arrangement enacted a market space of chance and flow rather than prediction, planning and circulation; a quality that emerged from unintended chance encounters as well as the sheer number and variety of things assembled inside Kommersen.

Circulating Goods for Fun or out of Necessity: Entrepreneurs and the Shamed Poor

It has been argued that vendors and visitors at flea markets are part of networks with different relations to the objects on offer in terms of for example aesthetics, care, apprenticeship and vintage connoisseurship (Parsons 2010; Duffy, Hewer & Wilson 2012). It was obvious that inside Kommersen the vendors and visitors were part of different networks ensuring the circulation of objects of different kinds and that their motives to engage in the circulation, what we, following Latour (1999), call the logics of circulation, were different. Sometimes these networks were homogenous, covering both vendors and buyers, and the stalls acted as nodes for likeminded, with the objects retaining the same position after purchase. Sometimes, and perhaps more frequently, buyers and sellers belonged to different networks, and the status of the objects for sale was transformed as they changed hands. With respect to the vendors, the networks and the logics of circulation differed for the more or less permanent vendors renting their table for the whole season and the temporary vendors who spent only a weekend, or maybe only one day, at Kommersen. These made up about half of all the vendors. Among the permanent vendors there was an emphasis on the commercial aspects, profit, mostly as a way to manage a precarious economic situation and eke out a living, but also with the dream of their own little shop if only they had the money and opportunity: a combination of dreams of becoming a professional retailer and an economy of scarcity. This agrees with studies of motives to engage in second-hand shopping that generally reveal that those are seldom clear-cut; they can occur out of necessity or out of choice, sustainability might be one motive but not necessarily so (e.g. Bardhi & Arnould 2003; Guiot & Roux 2010). One example of a scarcity motive came from an elderly lady who had been a shop owner in her homeland Venezuela and who had for the last several years rented a relatively large stall in a corner of the building, primarily to supplement a meager pension. Like several others of the permanent sellers she lamented the fact that it was difficult to get the business to go around and that the temporary vendors were dumping prices. Typical for the permanent vendors was a very slow circulation of

goods. The same objects seemed to appear at their tables week after week, making their stalls less attractive for bargain-hunting visitors who were recurrent guests. A close-up reveals two circulation logics in her story: a logic of entrepreneurship and a logic of scarcity.

Generally, there was, however, a noticeable/significant difference between dealers who sold items in order to get money for food and other life necessities, and the cheerful entrepreneurs who sold stuff for a profit, but also as a nice leisure time activity and for social benefits in terms of a friendly atmosphere and the enjoyment of a chat or laugh with fellow dealers. Some typical comments from this latter group were the following:

It's an exciting experience and a good but small income opportunity (a girl in her 20s, first-time seller).

I make some money, but I do it mostly for fun. It is exciting and fun to chat with the visitors, and I enjoy selling at Kommersen with my friend (a woman in her mid-30s, first-time seller).

Typical examples of entrepreneurs were those vendors selling off bankruptcy stock. There was for example a couple touring markets with this kind of goods. At their weekend at Kommersen they had brought a stock of wool caps. Customers flocked around their table, and profit was good. Another example was a young woman selling gadgets from her mother's bankrupt jewelry business. Other types of entrepreneurial circulation was provided by two girls in their late teens who were selling personal care and make-up products on commission for a company, two sisters who sold homemade garlands to hang on the front door for Christmas as a way to earn some extra money, and the school class selling homemade buns to earn money for a school trip. They all belonged to different networks of semi-professional circulation for a profit, and appreciated their role as sellers at Kommersen.

Several of the returning vendors did not, however, sell things at the flea market for fun, but out of necessity and the need for money for living. For this category of dealers, the social connections with other dealers offered social support; the flea market was a space where the poor and excluded could make some money. Three groups of people for whom Kommersen seemed reasonably significant in this respect were the elderly, people outside labour markets and ethnic minorities. Among them there was obviously a circulation logic of scarcity both on the side of buyers and on the vendors, giving rise to quite different subject positions than the cheerful entrepreneur. Selling stuff out of necessity was sometimes considered shameful and something to be hidden. For example, a female dealer, a woman in her 50s, told us that she did not want anyone she knew, or her former colleagues, to know that she disposed of belongings at Kommersen. "It's embarrassing to have to sell things at Kommersen". She had been doing this for several years now. It was a way to supplement her income and to maintain a social life. "It can generate money for a bag of groceries", she said. She had been employed by the hour

at a hospital and was an educated nurse, but it had been difficult for her to find a permanent job. Likewise, for some of the visitors, buying stuff at Kommersen was a way to make ends meet: “Kommersen suits my wallet”, “We cannot afford to shop elsewhere”. Especially for single mothers, Kommersen was the place to buy cheap things for their children.

Kommersen was obviously a place with a “low socioeconomic threshold” and a place where almost anyone, could start selling things without strong financial resources. There was no overseer or control mechanism that would interfere with business or ask difficult questions about legal or economic viability as in regular commercial settings.

Circulating Overflow and a Changed set of Sustainable Consumption Discourses

By far the most common type of circulation among the temporary vendors, however, was recycling: the selling of leftover stuff from home, residual of wind clearances and removals. If the reason in many cases for the permanent dealers was economic scarcity, for temporary, often middle-class vendors, it was more or less a case of “dumping”; Kommersen was seen a sensible place to dump excess stuff and possibly earn some money in the process. So the problem for this group was rather one of overflow than one of scarcity, which perhaps was one of the reasons why the two groups sometimes looked suspiciously at each other (or rather the permanent dealers were not entirely satisfied with the way the temporary dealers were “selling stuff for one Swedish Crown”).

How strong the economic motive was varied within this group. Some had cleared the closet specifically to get some Christmas money. But for most of them, it seemed to be a case of thinking that “recycling is good”; a pleasant way to do well, plus that one could earn some money and “that’s never wrong”. There was also a group of female friends who shared an apartment and simply sold excess clothing to make room for new stuff (and money to buy them), and two sisters who told us that they nurtured the principle “one in one out”. For them, circulating stuff was simply a necessity in order to be able to acquire more, a finding that agrees with previous studies advocating that for example car-boot sales (Gregson & Rose 2000) and second-hand shopping (Brembeck 2013) may simply be a way for consumers to be able to buy more; to keep the flow going. Several visitors, however, stressed issues of sustainability: “Recycling is good,” “This is good consumer mindset.” “Half of my life and my whole wardrobe are from Kommersen” were some of the comments, revealing how circulating discourses and practices (shopping, recycling) afforded particular consumer dispositions to stabilize around the practices of flea market consumption. The idea of secondhand shopping as something ugly, shameful and almost indecent from the 1950s and 60s (cf. Fredriksson 1996), was for this category of vendors gone, and instead the

visitors appreciated the uniqueness and the social and environmental values of secondhand shopping.

It's environmentally conscious shopping; it's an effective way to reduce one's shopping cravings. If we get tired of our old stuff we just sell it here again after a couple of months. It's a good way to think about consumption (a couple in their 50s).

In sum, looking at the activities at Kommersen from a circulatory approach allowed us to analyze how different circulatory logics afforded vendor and consumer subjectivities like "the recycler" and "the sustainable consumer" to be performed at the flea market through a continuous flow of recycled goods and discourse around what (goods and practices) and who is sustainable.

Obviously, these people drew on discourses of sustainability to legitimate their consumer practices at Kommersen.

Circulating Curiosities: Networks of Connoisseurs and Collectors

As argued by Parsons (2006) dealers frequently mobilize discourses of taste and aesthetics in developing their identities as both experts and discerning businessmen and women, especially in regard to antiques, and, referring to Duffy, Hewer and Wilson (2012) to vintage. Flea markets are places where one learns a shared aesthetics, a similar world view, style preferences and appreciation, especially of objects that have been upgraded to collectibles, vintage or even antiques. It was obvious that Kommersen provided a space for this kind of apprenticeship both among dealers and customers. Expressions of secondhand connoisseurship, expert knowledge and a flare for the used and re-used – things with patina, history and usage – were frequently expressed among the visitors (see Ottoson 2008 for more examples).

I know a thing or two about stuff. My home is full of it. I just saw a Boda Nova over there for 10 crowns but I'm not allowed buying it for my wife. We already have three of them at home. I tend to look at this as part of my retirement savings (elderly man).

Looking for vintage was especially emphasized by some visitors, like the woman who said that she had "a nose for vintage" and bargained "cool stuff" for herself and her children. There were even examples of visitors who redesigned clothes and textiles bought at Kommersen and sold them at other markets. Sometimes environmentally aware middle class consumers, thinking that recycling is good and second-hand and vintage is cool, simply exchanged objects with each other's. Other times tattered and worn objects were recruited or "enrolled" (Callon 1986) to networks of coolness and vintage, and thus acquired quite a new status. Collectors, hobbyists and antique dealers generally are recurrent visitors at flea markets, and this was the case also at Kommersen. This can be regarded as an example of circulation of goods in networks of like-minded, and also of the effects of nostalgia and the attraction of things with a history. Examples are the man who was

looking for parts from old radios and the lady who collected teacups. Feelings of nostalgia “switching between the general and the personal” (Ottoson 2008) were especially common among collectors with an interest in stuff with an air of old Gothenburg and heritage value. “It is fantastic with this last remnant of the old harbor sheds”, a man exclaimed whose hobby it was to build Art Deco lamps of parts from old lamps, telling us about his childhood walks with his father in the quarters where Kommersen is now situated.

Among the vendors, Conny, an elderly man, occupied a unique position. On his neat table in the middle of the building there was a lot of stuff: antique zippo lighters, hand crafted wooden piggy banks, old brochures on technical innovation and craft, paper clips from England, small figurines related to life at sea, and so on. Conny told us that he sold some expensive things and antiques that could not be found anywhere else, “not even on the internet”. His sale at Kommersen had given him an international network of collectors from Norway, Estonia and Russia. His permanent location on Kommersen was the prerequisite. This was where collectors could find him and he collected artifacts and information on curiosities from his friends in the network that ended up on his stall. Conny’s business is an example of circulation of things with various origins on an international scale



Conny behind his market stall at Kommersen.
Photo: Lasse Lindeberg, GSM

connected to antiques and collecting, that was “summed up” at his stall, acting as a node in a network bridging time and space. Conny was not only moving his things to Kommersen but was also moved by their histories and his wider network of memorabilia associates to perform his particular mode of local vendorhood at Kommersen as the only “real collector” and a fancy one at that.

Activities at Conny’s stall can be regarded as a form of ‘collective witnessing’ (Jarvenpa 2003) that involves shared knowledge about circulating valuables, validation of their connection to known places and social construction of their value by knowledgeable specialists or *cognoscenti* (ibid: 575). This is also an example of how the agency of vendors is wedded to the structure of the flea

market and second-hand culture writ large, “providing actors with their actions, with their subjectivity, with their intentionality, with their morality (Latour 1999: 18).

Turning back to ANT circulation appears as a fundamental process – things, as well as networks, must circulate to exist. “Local” agency such as the one at Kommersen can only emerge through circulation of social and material things that seem local but in fact are spread out in time and space. Subjectivities as visitors and vendors are made possible through specific networks of circulation. One example is Conny where “the circulation of time (in the sense of old, vintage, memories of other eras, etc..)” enabled the localized entity/agent characteristic of Conny and rendered the vintage-, antiques- and collectors aura to the Zippo lighters, figurines and paper clips at his table. According to Latour (1999), actor-networks are the formations of relations between elements circulating and stabilizing at particular points that provide agents with their actions. Consumer action and behavior is the outcome of such circulations; i.e. there were no ex-ante consumers or vendors without the necessary assembling of a network of flows (of goods, meanings, practices, knowledge, preferences) that shaped their formatting of becoming full-fledged (and well equipped) participators in the flea market (cf. Miller 2002). This means that in order to understand consumer- and vendor subjectivities at Kommersen, we analyzed them as outcomes of particular circulations and “equipped” with intentionality or motives, and moralities and practices. For example, by certain goods and practices being viewed as imbued with values and meaning of sustainability, the sustainable consumer emerged from interacting with things circulating at the flea market. This also agrees with Parson’s claim (2006) that market place institutions, such as antique dealing, are spaces where particular sets of discourses circulate constituting dealer identities, as well as with a number of studies of the emergence of consumer subjectivities at flea markets (e.g. Sherry 1990a; McGrath 1993; Ottoson 2008). Also, such circulation is endowed with specific power asymmetries, like for example the flows of goods at the market emerging from necessity (i.e. shortage of money/cash flow) and the ones that are the result of other forms of supply operations, like for example forms of handling overflow among semi-professional vendors.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to disclose the many different forms of circulation that are at work at a local flea market. Through ethnographic observation, interviews, document analysis and video- and photo observation at Kommersen, we argue that a circulatory approach towards flea market consumption is not about dictating a single cycle, rhythm or flow that over-determines the logics and meanings of flea markets. It is also not only about the symbolic and subjective dimensions of markets. Rather, to perform a circulatory analysis of flea markets means

to engage in disclosing the relationship between various forms of circulation and their logics that serve to ground an analysis of flea market hydraulics. Therefore, we highlighted not only meaning dimensions in terms of what and why people were at Kommersen, or the forms of exchange flows that characterized seller-buyer interaction. We also contributed with an analysis of bodily, affective and material flows. Paying attention to those disclose the myriads of embodied and inter-objective processes of circulation that contributed to flea market consumption configuration; inter-corporeal flows affected consumer movement and consumer subjectivities; affective intensities contributed to the atmosphere and interactive context of the market; stalls, goods, visitors and sellers were all engaged in a sensory, perceptive and affective participation that was analyzed as part of Kommersen's circulatory logics. Due to its "wild" marketing logics, the flea market analysis revealed important distinctions between alternative market spaces and professional markets. Wild display and the cluttered and specific assortment of goods contributed to give shape to circulations that differentiate consumer choice and calculative action as well as seller behavior and exchange interaction from regular apartment stores. Also, seller networks, flows of expertise and consumption discourses about for example coolness or thrift were circulating differently at the flea market due to its informal and alternative nature, sometimes homogeneous and sometimes not, giving the objects for sale a shifting status.

Obviously we have not been able to trace every flow in any direction that contributes to the existence and meanings of Kommersen. And we have actively analyzed a specific period in time; maybe there are important seasonal changes in terms of social, economic and thing circulations that we could not detect due to temporal limits? A hydraulic system might very well have many exits and engage in overflows not necessarily within the range of researchers' limited means of observation. To detect circulations is also a time consuming effort. Where did goods go after their purchase? Were they re-introduced into other market contexts? Did their circulation end or start again at the end of the exchange? Did flows of people in and out of this particular flea market connect into a circulation in terms of shopping routes where second hand connoisseurs went from vintage shop to vintage shop? Were there socio-demographic flows connected to the city we did not detect because of inadequate research tools? The circulatory approach proposed here provides answers to some questions but raises others.

In regular supermarkets or grocery stores consumers are guided, and thus choice and circulation are aided, or "edited", by well-known "choice devices"; furniture such as aisles, signs, prices, products and shelves are arranged according to professional management and organizational logics thus "equipping" or "agencing" particular forms of market action and behavior among consumers and merchants (Cochoy 2011a). The peculiarity that in many economic and management theories, objects and tools for "choice editing" are sometimes missing from or very different in alternative market space contexts like the local flea market

that we have analyzed in this article make the material assets that we have found particularly interesting. Therefore, in this article, we addressed the circulation logic or the “hydraulics” at the flea market, and the many ways that market things (stalls, objects, bodies, building, and furniture) contribute to this circulation, or “hydraulics” that turned out to be dynamic and non-deterministic rather than mechanistically linear and calculable. In this article we show the way that logics of circulation constitute particular and localized second hand markets and we argue that an approach towards second hand markets based on ontologies of flows and circulation grounded in actor-network and non-representational (including non human materials and embodied senses and affects) theories contribute to an albeit different view of such markets. Not only does such an approach enable analysis of commonly studied features like calculative action and social interaction at flea markets, but also some rarer issues like cognitive patterns of consumer curiosity, emotions, senses and affect as outcomes of circulatory dynamism.

The ANT approach to flea market consumption research revealed the strength of this theory in that the material performance of things and bodies disclosed through close observation of consumer and seller practices and various market devices cannot be adequately theorized by perspectives that primarily rely on peoples’ talk and discourse about their consumption (see Arnould & Thompson 2005). Harrison (2000) argues that “embodiment” incorporates the significance of all the senses in the bodily practices of mobility and enactment of spaces. This, we argue, form an important part of subjectivities enacting flea market space while handling goods and people. The attention paid to the interaction between visitor bodies and market-things (space, displays, etc.) is a contribution to studies often focused on cognitive action (calculating) or semiotic interpretations. Differently-circulating consumers disclosed affective dispositions and sensibilities towards the way they moved among goods and things inside the market.

Even though flea markets arguably are places of commerce and exchange of second hand goods, there is a large variety of other forms of flows or circulations going on “backstage” that afford the surface phenomena of second hand consumption to come into being. Many of these circulations, we argue, are material rather than immaterial and form the “technological unconsciousness” of such market places. We have addressed these circulatory aspects and discussed how irregular issues such as flows of infrastructure, means of transport, food, energy, temperature, smells, affects, clutter, cognitions, display equipments, and human bodies matter. We have also introduced more common topics of circulation related to second hand spaces and flea markets; those of interactions between sellers and buyers, circulation of goods, and flows of money (or prices), but we have done so with the help of actor-network theory in terms of networks and logics of circulation. From this perspective the activities at Kommersen included many different types of circulation and stuff of different kinds and origins dependent on the mix of people of different ages, genders and sociocultural and ethnic backgrounds.

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Yard Sales: A Book and an Exhibition: From Selling Off Objects to Redeeming Memory

By Octave Debary

Abstract

The fate of everyday objects, when they reach the end of their lives – worn out, and sometimes even broken – varies a great deal. In some cases, their remains are exhibited in museums as instances of our heritage; in others, they end up in garages and attics, or are simply disposed of. This paper focuses on the social operations surrounding the redefinition of their status as second-hand objects. We pay special attention to what happens when they are requalified as objects of memory in yard sales. Over the past thirty years, such markets – where personal stories change hands – have become favoured destinations for Sunday outings in France. They are open-air museums, where new memories are cobbled together from old objects. We attempt to show what is at stake in these transactions and transitions through a presentation of a book and an exhibition (2011-2012) devoted to French yard sales.

Keywords: Yard sales (*vide-greniers*), objects, memory, exhibition, second-hand, France

Introduction

The purpose of this text is to cross-reference the thoughts on second-hand culture I have developed over the years, against the findings from my latest work on the subject. This research gave rise to a book – a collaboration with photographer Philippe Gabel that also included a contribution from sociologist Howard S. Becker – as well as an exhibition.¹ The present article will draw on both projects (the book and the exhibition) in order to explore how working at the intersection between anthropology and art has enabled me to develop a particular approach to the relation between used objects and memory. The purpose therefore is not so much to present yard sales as fields for ethnographic study as to show how these spaces led in this instance to encounters with bargain-hunters and other visitors to the site, whom we invited to participate in our photographic and narrative work.

I studied what people in France call “vide-greniers” (literally “attic clearances”), a phenomenon that is very similar to American yard sales or British car-boot sales. My general project, which the present text fits into, aims to develop an anthropological approach to memory, based on the circulation of objects in thrift stores, museums, and even the art world. Of particular interest to me are those objects which bear the scars of their past. Ethnographically, my research on yard sales involved participant observations and interviews in fifteen villages in France (essentially in the central and northern regions). I focus on the circulation of these relics – their recycling – in an attempt to understand the kind of future that is open to objects that have reached the end of their intended lifespan. An object reaches the end of its shelf life when it is deemed obsolete, when its initial use value has come to an end. The fate of such objects is varied. In some cases, they become part of our official heritage, ending up as museum exhibits. Some are stored away in attics and garages, when they are not simply disposed of. All these practices question the power of objects; the power they display and the questions they ask us – what are we going to do with them, and how? – when their use value has almost been entirely used up. It is at the moment of disposal that the power of objects, and used objects in particular, becomes particularly clear: on the one hand there is a definite will to remove the object, and yet on the other, we do not really want to throw it out or destroy it. “Something” remains in it, something continues “to matter”, and this explains why we cannot simply move on from the object without some sort of process of transfer (Hetherington 2004). The moment when one parts with an object gives rise to various forms of reinvestment and requalification which all imply that it continues to be endowed with a certain value, that one still recognises its potentiality to continue to exist.

My work situates itself within the broader context of interest in objects as “social actors”. In recent years there has been a strong trend to “repopulate” the social sciences with collectives that are not composed only of (human) subjects. According to this trend, objects have too often been relegated to the background

as mere accessories in the social scenery we perceive. The development of anthropological study of the sciences and technology, led in particular by Bruno Latour in France, has opened up the importance of considering human subjects and non-human objects in symmetrical relation. Beyond the different cultural and historical forms that each category takes, both subjects and objects are actors in social situations. It is therefore essential to consider how objects effect action, and how they exert their power to affect the world (Stewart 2007). This approach prompts us to go beyond a conception that forces us to choose between the power of human beings and that of objects, between antifetishism (social interpretations) and fetishism (object-based interpretations). This dualism – according to which “the cause is either in the object, or in the human beings who project it onto the object” (Hennion & Latour 1993: 9) leads to aporia. Instead the aim must be to understand how every action and every social situation involves objects. In this respect, and if we follow the work of Daniel Miller, the notion of “objectivation” points as much to the materialisation of social processes as does that of subjectivation. As Miller reminds us, up until the middle of the 1970s, the study of material culture, accused of “fetishism” (Miller 1998: 5), was devalued by mainstream social science. This was the age of suspicion of the object, relayed in France through a Marxist critique of fetishism and extended by Jean Baudrillard. The object was reduced to its status as commodity and presumed to be responsible for the diminishing of human possibility, as if all objects were the place of usurpation or destruction of social relations (Baudrillard 1968). However, this tendency is no longer dominant and my own work, particularly in its approach to the object as *reste*, or remainder, intends to be part of the increasing realisation that there is more to objects than was previously acknowledged. In this respect, the perspectives opened up by Alfred Gell have been important for me. Gell’s essay on art (1998) highlights not only the power of objects, but also the inscrutability of the source of this power. By reflecting on art’s agency – its power to fascinate, to grab our attention, and prompt us to action – Gell gives equal treatment to people and objects. In so doing, he reverses Durkheimian object-orientation (“*chosisme*”) – artworks, images, and icons should be treated as people, even though we are often dealing with non-utilitarian objects:

The immediate “other” in a social relationship does not have to be another “human being”. [...] Social agency can be exercised relative to “things” and social agency can be exercised by “things” (and also animals). The concept of social agency has to be formulated in this very permissive manner for empirical as well as theoretical reasons. It just happens to be patently the case that persons form what are evidently social relations with “thing” (1998: 17-18).²

The key research question for the project that this text is based on was: What is the fate of objects that people decide have reached the end of their productive lives? Parting company with an object is a biographical moment which endows it with a new and future value. As Igor Kopytoff put it, “How does the thing’s use

change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?" (1986: 67). The notion of "objects' biographical trajectory" aims to express the link between humans and the non-humans with whom they share their lives. Following the lives or careers of objects implies to understand how objects are social agents like any other. This social investment – this moral delegation – endows objects with history, especially in the case of everyday objects: those that accompany our existence. This investment is at the root of a process that gives objects a history, a life. When they are about to disappear – on the very threshold of their passing away – it is this history that seems to resist finitude and announce the expectation of a return.

Yard Sales

People do not part with their objects any old how at yard sales, and it is precisely the way in which these partings take place that interests me. My research deals with the social operations surrounding these moments of separation and reappropriation, which, in some cases, appear to be fuelled by a desire to offer a future to objects with a past – to make them "second-hand" objects. This raises the question of the requalification of their initial use value: what, and through this, what meaning, is created or expected by the person parting with them?

Over the last thirty years, French yard sales have become places where people go on Sundays in order to swap objects and stories. Having relegated to the attic all sorts of things that once shared our lives, there comes a day when people resolve to clear out this limbo space that with time, has become all cluttered up. Although stored away, these objects are not deemed totally worthless. Often, people cannot bring themselves to throw them away, to dispose of them just any old how. They would much rather accompany them out of our home and onto the pavement, where they await a new owner. Throughout the year members of the general public gather to sell off their unwanted clutter in their local area or village. French law authorises individuals and local not-for-profit groups to hold occasional sales in this manner up to three times a year. On one of the village or neighbourhood squares, sometimes outside their own homes, people line up dozens or hundreds of objects on the pavement or on makeshift tables. Passers-by – potential new owners – file by, assessing these objects' vestigial utility.

This is a means of mourning, of passing on, in one's own lifetime, objects that have accompanied one's existence. Historically, the appearance of yard sales in rural Europe was usually linked to the disappearance of the last family member in a household. Whatever remained, once the deceased's belongings had been shared out among relatives, could not be destroyed. Throwing away these unwanted objects was strictly taboo, since they were considered as an extension of the dead person's body. Trying to second-guess the meaning and value they had had for their late owner would also have been deemed an insult to his/her memory³. Such

sales represented a specific stage in the mourning process. In French villages, the objects would be displayed outside the deceased's home and sold to the villagers, who were the sole judges of their worth. The same sort of practice continued in France, for example in the Yonne (Burgundy) where public auctions were held after someone's death up until the 1970s. A local solicitor would organize the public sale of a person's entire possessions or simply what his or her inheritors did not wish to keep. The sale generally took place in the yard of the person's home or in the main square⁴.

In literary circles, there has been a recent revival of interest in the links between objects and mourning. French author François Bon, for instance, has written an autobiography through remembrances of objects past (2012). For him, remembering means attempting to uncover the history they bear and which links us to them. Objects have a historical and memorial value. The passage of time is inscribed in them, which is why passing on objects can be such an important aspect of mourning. In this way grieving can be seen to happen in part through the recognition of the value of a particular object in the very act of giving it up, as in a form of rite of passage, or separation. The Belgian novelist and psychoanalyst Lydia Flem describes this moment of mourning, of separation, in *The Final Reminder: How I Emptied My Parents' House* (2004). The fate of the deceased's belongings is bound up with the experience of human mourning. How do you say farewell to such objects? "To keep, give away, sell off or throw away. Each time my gaze or hand considered something, a choice had to be made", "every single object spoke of their absence, revived the feelings of loss, solitude" (2004: 42-43 and 45). The difficulty to part with these objects is a testament to their power to record and preserve the stories of their former owners. We grieve for the departed through their relics: "No doubt were there ways of bidding adieu to the deceased's objects just as there were ways of bidding adieu to the deceased themselves" (ibid.: 118). Letting go of such objects also means letting go of the stories they conjure up. "Emptying". This "harrowing and liberating" process is "the work of emptiness". It is the work of mourning.⁵

As this background account indicates, yard sales have never been primarily about making money: their function is to assist us in passing on those objects we wish to part with. It is in this respect that yard sales are distinct from jumble sales or antiques fairs. Unlike within the professional retail trade, the aim in yard sales is primarily to get rid of things, not to make money out of them. Similar to yard sales in the USA; it is customary not to set prices: people are left free to set them themselves, thereby opening up a space of negotiation requiring a verbal exchange: "In contrast to formal economic systems of fixed prices and passive consumption, shoppers can alter prices in a more personalized form of trade" (Herrmann 2004: 55). The final price is to be understood as an agreement on the transmission of the object, "the price is mutually created" (ibid.: 75). Typically, this means that the object is sold at a very low price to someone who appreciates

it. This appreciation is expressed through the way the object is talked about and handled. More generally, the setting of low prices is meant to introduce another, non-financial exchange value. This trend can be associated with the desire to give away what could be sold. Objects are sometimes given away as “gifts”, or sold at “mates’ rates” or “slashed prices”. In these instances, a verbal exchange frequently replaces the usual financial exchange. Gretchen Herrmann explains that “sellers can often price things in terms of the perceived needs of the shoppers and notions of a fair price (i.e. not what stores charge)” (2006: 132). Contrary to traditional commercial transactions, “sellers pass on something of themselves along with the things they sell, sometimes even personal stories and feelings about the items” (ibid.: 135).

Yard sales are highly theatrical affairs – people consciously *play* at being buyers and sellers – where the rule of exchange is based on a symmetry between the state of the goods on sale and the manner in which they are sold. We are dealing here with an alternative way of consuming objects that have already been consumed: “junk” sold by “junk dealers”. These objects bear the marks of decay, but they also harbour the possibility of a future. It is this very alterity – this transformation – which the expression “second-hand” refers to. When the objects change hands, a second acquisition takes place, as well as the possibility of a redefinition of their initial value. They retain a certain value in relation to both what they no longer are (first-hand) and what they could become (second-hand). “Second-hand”, the desire to keep in order to exchange despite the uncertainty of financial value (does it still work, and for how long?) raises the possibility of an alternative reference value. Mary and James Maxwell have thus put forward the idea that second-hand markets are places where the authority of history replaces commercial value, because “Second-hand goods permit a tangible relationship to the past as a source of displaced meaning” (1993: 61). At once material (tangible) and debased (junk), these objects enable a passing of the baton whose very lack of definition (since they are debased and come from a stranger) opens up the possibility of a redefinition of the past. They act as “bridges” between collective and individual memory.⁶

A Book and an Exhibition

For the book *Vide-Greniers*, Philippe Gabel and I started with the question of the *value* of used objects. We began with the idea that yard-sale objects provide an opportunity to tell a story – a story that the objects themselves seem to contain, or that we project onto them. They act as props for our own memories. It is precisely on this point that Philippe Gabel’s work met mine: the idea that people are able to project a story onto these objects, these remnants of objects, with their traces and their past. People recognise that these objects have a past and that from this past, they can imagine a future for them.

Second-hand objects allow us to interpret their wear and tear; their adulterations, lacks, cracks and breaks. What has happened to them? What have they witnessed? It is often impossible to say for sure.



Paris, 2006. Photo: P. Gabel



Lille, 1986. Photo: P. Gabel

Having acknowledged this strange power of objects, Philippe Gabel and I decided to lay the foundations for the book, and an accompanying exhibition, by handing out an invitation to bargain-hunters at yard sales (in the cites of Paris and Lille and in some villages in central France). Our approach was to offer them something of a game:

The Rules of the Game

You will be photographed with your object of choice: the object you have just bought from this yard sale.

You will then have to imagine this object's story, explain what you see in it, tell its tale.

Sometimes, both of you will pose in front of a projection screen or a wall.

You will stand there like two actors – an acting duo.

We thus invited customers to have their picture taken with an object they had just purchased from a yard sale, before asking them to write a text in which they would imagine the object's history. We gave people several weeks to write their texts that they then sent to us. Out of roughly a hundred people's pictures, eighty sent us a text (we published thirty-four of them in the book). Sometimes they wrote no more than one line, sometimes fifteen.

The descriptions, as well as the names given to objects, led to discrepancies of meaning; to fictions. While most of the objects they found at the yard sales were plain, ordinary things (often utilitarian objects), they were described by the people who purchased them as singular and extraordinary. The imaginative projections stimulated by the objects had less to do with the initial function of the object, which was generally banal, and more to do with the fact that the object had a prior life. When listing the objects, they added up to what appeared to be a sort of surreal grocery list – a cabinet of curiosities, or mere hallucinations. Here is a list of objects that people claim to have found in yard sales:

Quicksand
Fantasies
A Future Memory
A Cat Armchair
A Mystical Trance
A Famous Posture
A Little Ray of Sunshine
A Sesame
An Arrival in Venice
The Armistice
A Lady's Secret
A Module Used by Swiss Astronauts
Fear in its Belly
Far-Off Climes
A Passing Fancy
A Dream Come True
... and many more other weird and wonderful objects.

What do they tell us, these encounters with yard-sale objects? Objects that their proud new owners hold in their hands – by the hand. Often proffered in the direction of the camera. These objects – tangible figments of the imagination – are similar to the knickknacks which Pierre Sansot (1992) describes as being endowed with the power to produce dreams and transform reality.



Christophe Giolito, Paris, 2006. Photo: P. Gabel

*My future memories
I will take them all
I will fill them up
Then they will carry me away
My mind is made up
I'm settling down
Into perpetual motion
With my luggage
As sole weapon
I'll put them down here
For now,
Then, it will be here or there
Here and there
And everywhere*



Bruno Vasseur, Montrouge, 2006. Photo: P. Gabel

*A module used by Swiss spacemen during
their first mission to Uranus in 1959 and a half.*



Pascal Caillibot, Pantin, 2006. Photo: P. Gabel

*The Orient Express. The arrival in Venice.
Italy's most luxurious hotels.
In those days, people still knew how to take
it easy...*

Commonplace objects (with no redeeming features), quotidian, antiquated, clapped-out and even broken; objects reduced to almost nothing, which have finally “passed away” – such objects have the power to pass on something about what once came to pass. In these objects whose time has passed, whose outdatedness is the space of loss of their former use value or history, loss opens up the possibility of redemption through theatricality. Such objects seem to harbour reserves of meaning. The objects one finds in yard sales share the poverty of a present or a future destined to come to an end. They are subjected to displacements – customisations/requalifications – of their initial use, and therefore meaning. Yard sales cultivate an art of recycling, an appropriative practice whereby displaced objects acquire a second meaning, allowing the introduction of a poetic practice where utilitarian concerns once prevailed. Yard-sale objects are endowed with a transformative power: the power to become something else, to tell *a new story*. We cannot but try to imagine the object’s history – by observing and manipulating it. The tentative nature of our reading is compounded by the sheer weirdness of some yard-sale objects.

Having said that, the strangest objects are usually to be found in flea markets. I often visit the Porte de Clignancourt market which attracts 120 000 visitors every weekend, making it the 4th most popular destination for tourists in France ahead of the Louvre museum. These field visits provide me with ample opportunity to draw up lists of curios. Useless objects, out of time, out of place: a pair of airline seats, for instance. In some cases, one is led to wonder not only “What is it for?” but also “What on earth is it?”: a whale’s eardrum, a “foldable cake stand”. You can even find things that do not exist: a space dog, a stuffed unicorn’s head...



A pair of airline seats, Paris, 2012. Photo: O. Debary



A space dog, Paris, 2012. Photo: O. Debary

The uncertainty of our reading – “What is it?”, “What is it for?”, “Real or fake?” – is reminiscent of the uncertainty of memory itself, full of holes and absences that the present conjures up from the past. From this point of view, the past is always chosen by the present – “authentically remade”, as James Clifford puts it (2004: 20). For art historian Carl Einstein, this new history is a space of creativity and freedom: “Our slim chance of freedom lies precisely in the dissonance between the hallucinatory and the structure of objects – the possibility of changing the order of things” (1929: 98). The power of objects to become something else goes back to the meaning “dreaming” took on at the end of the 12th century: “...to be a prey to a nocturnal vision because the objects we saw clearly during the day return all confused and mixed up in our inner vision” (Godefroy 1982). Second-hand objects, objects which have a back-story – a history – place us in a dreamlike state.⁶

To conclude, I would like to return to one of the first experiences that led Philippe Gabel and I, in April 2011, to exhibit our work in a temple devoted to objects: *Leroy Merlin*, the largest D.I.Y. store in France.



Paris, Leroy-Merlin, 2011. Photo: P. Gabel



Paris, Leroy-Merlin, 2011: Photo: P. Gabel

In addition to the book, we conceived our exhibition as a means of prolonging the work, thanks to the financial backing of the store, which found something of an echo of its own past in our project. Shops of this type are present the world over nowadays, but the first Leroy Merlin was opened by Adolphe Leroy and Rose Merlin in the wake of the First World War to sell off some US Army surplus. Developing the same approach of selling what they had managed to “retrieve”, they expanded with kit homes and other construction materials. They switched the shop name from “Stock Américain” to “Leroy Merlin” in 1960.

Our exhibition was set up in a corridor, at one of the entrances to the store situated in the southern part of Paris. Our aim was to appeal to shoppers in this Mecca for D.I.Y. enthusiasts – in the very heart of the consumer society – and invite them to think about the power of objects, their power to spark dreams, and more particularly the power of the used object to generate new creation.



Paris, Leroy-Merlin, 2011: Photo: P. Gabel



Paris, Leroy-Merlin, 2011: Photo: T. Wendling

The main problem we faced was how to attract the attention of punters rushing by in pursuit of their own D.I.Y. dream. We saw all these people flooding in, holding shopping lists of things to buy and build. So we thought, we are going to offer consumers another list of objects, albeit a slightly more unusual one: an alternative shopping list made up of objects found in yard sales: *A Future Memory*, *Quicksand*, *A Few Fantasies*, *An Armchair for Cats*, *A Mystical Trance*, *A Famous Posture*, *A Woman's Secret*, *Faraway Climes...*

The names of all these enigmatic objects were posted on the escalators leading up to the store. Loudspeaker announcements were made of this list, explaining that the objects could be found in the hall. Posters were also hung in the aisles.



Paris, Leroy-Merlin, 2011: Photo: P. Gabel



Paris, Leroy-Merlin, 2011: Photo: P. Gabel



Paris, Leroy-Merlin, 2011: Photo: P. Gabel



Paris, Leroy-Merlin, 2011: Photo: P. Gabel

Pictures of all the yard-sale objects were on show in our exhibition. This appeal to shoppers – which was, among other things, an appeal to stop shopping – found its limits, on the fifth day, when all our posters were taken down by the store manager. The posters in the aisles (figures 14, 15) which invited the customers to see the exhibition, were considered by him as an incitement to get out of the space of shopping. The opening of the exhibition, on a late-shopping evening, offered us the chance to explain our work and why we had chosen to install it in this location. While the posters were rapidly removed, the photos remained in place for two months and the names of the objects on the escalators were left for several more weeks. Our aim was to encourage D.I.Y. enthusiasts to draw a parallel between their passion for making and transforming things – in other words, for creation – and the power of old yard-sale objects to trigger daydreams, to become dreamt objects found in broad daylight.

When time-worn objects exchange hands in yard sales the point is not simply to recycle them, or save them from oblivion. Some do, of course, find new owners because they are still “good for something”, but others open up to different kind of fate where they will serve no purpose beyond decoration. In all cases, these second-hand markets give objects a reprieve by extending their lifespans, by keeping alive something that buyers see in them: a reserve value, an opportunity to seize passing time; an opportunity to remember.

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Notes

¹ See *Vide-greniers*, Paris, Créaphis, 2012, O. Debary and H.S Becker (text) and P. Gabel (photographs). The exhibition showcasing our work was held in unusual locations like a writer's residency (Maison Jules-Roy, Vézelay, June 2010), an art gallery (Espace Beaufort, Paris, November 2010), universities (University of Chicago Center in Paris, October 2011; Université Paris Descartes, Galerie Saint-Germain, November 2012), a library, a bookshop, as well as a huge Parisian DIY store, *Leroy Merlin* — France's answer to America's *The Home Depot* or Sweden's *Clas Ohlson*. More on this at the end of the article.

² Gell's thesis should not be restricted to a theory of art: it opens up onto wider considerations of the power and life of objects. See, for instance, Janet Hoskins's work on the importance of objects for the Kodi in eastern Indonesia, particularly during the mourning process (1998).

³ These separated moments of the mourning process have been analysed by Robert Hertz in his study "The double obsequies" (1928).

⁴ There are still some instances of this practice, particularly in the north of Europe and in Sweden. The *gårdsauktioner* (or *sommarauktioner*) are auctions that take place in rural contexts either in the town or village hall, or directly in the home of the deceased (the house is also sometimes sold in this manner). More unusually, people are invited in some towns to enter the apartment of the deceased and buy which ever objects they fancy. The point can be to resolve any problems in the split of an inheritance. And if the inheritors choose not to hold an auction, the split can be made by an antiques dealer who is invited to establish the value of and potentially buy the possessions.

⁵ This work has to involve a process of forgetting, as Freud has taught us, or at least a process of repression as a means of suppressing a painful memory. There are two forms of forgetting in Freud's account: forgetting that is linked to repression and the difficulty of remembering (screen memories) and forgetting that is the work of grief, that is, the process of recomposition and expression of something that has happened, leading to the production of a new memory. In this sense, grief serves to replace absence, to represent it and, to some extent, to accompany the loss by representing it with another object. These lost memories are never fully lost, but rather transformed or replaced. In the same way, the "lost" object, the one that is the object of our grief, is found again in another form after separation. It becomes another object, or a "remainder". See Freud (1985).

⁶ Markets of this type are often regarded as alternative spaces. It would be a mistake, however, to depict them as centers of an underground economy or as spaces of pure (non-financial) sociability. As Michèle de La Pradelle points out, "We must defeat this kind of hasty resistance which leads us

to assume that social relations are diluted or erased whenever economic stakes are high, and that a gratuitous sociability flourishes freely as soon as they are limited” (1996: 13-14).

⁶ This power held by the used object is of great interest to the surrealists. From the 1920s on, surrealism drew on the idea of the object as dream, reusing it, adapting it, transforming it. Flea markets were key hunting grounds for André Breton who amassed a vast collection of strange objects, seemingly devoid of use or aesthetic value. This passion for useless objects gave them back their freedom (the absence of any end) and unhitched them from their commercial destiny (their exchange value). As Emmanuel Guignon stresses, this type of objects is “freed from its utilitarian servitudes; every object can be made to change meaning and use” (2005: 11).

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Growing in Motion: The Circulation of Used Things on Second-hand Markets¹

By Staffan Appelgren & Anna Bohlin

Abstract

From having been associated with poverty and low status, the commerce with second-hand goods in retro shops, flea markets, vintage boutiques and trade via Internet is expanding in Sweden as in many countries in the Global North. This article argues that a significant aspect of the recent interest in second-hand and reuse concerns the meaningfulness of circulation in social life. Using classic anthropological theory on how the circulation of material culture generates sociality, it focuses on how second-hand things are transformed by their circulation. Rather than merely having cultural biographies, second-hand things are reconfigured through their shifts between different social contexts in a process that here is understood as a form of growing. Similar to that of an organism, this growth is continuous, irreversible and dependent on forces both internal and external to it. What emerges is a category of things that combine elements of both commodities and gifts, as these have been theorized within anthropology. While first cycle commodities are purified of their sociality, the hybrid second-hand thing derives its ontological status as well as social and commercial value precisely from retaining 'gift qualities', produced by its circulation.

Keywords: Second-hand, circulation, material culture, retro, vintage, growing, gifts, commodities

Thus, one of the most important and unusual features of the Kula is the existence of the Kula vaygu'a, the incessantly circulating and ever exchangeable valuables, owing their value to this very circulation and its character.

Bronislaw Malinowski 1922: 511

Introduction

Commercial markets² for retro-, vintage and second-hand objects have undergone a dramatic expansion in the last decade across the globe (Franklin 2011: 157). Factors contributing to this expansion have been described in the introduction as well as in some of the contributions to this thematic issue (notably Fischer). In this article we suggest that a significant aspect of the new importance of second-hand and reuse concerns the meaningfulness of circulation in social life. Revisiting the long history within social anthropology of studying the mutual entanglement of material objects and human subjects, we explore circulation as an analytical tool. Circulation does things to people and objects, particularly within the field of second-hand, and we suggest that it can be seen as a culturally generative force that reconfigures objects into objects-in-motion, enabling particular forms of subjectivity. Indeed, circulation seems to be a defining aspect of second-hand objects, distinguishing them from other classic categories of objects in anthropological thinking about person-thing relationships, such as gifts, commodities, sacrifices or art objects. We hope to show that classic anthropological insights, drawn from ethnographic fieldwork there and then, married with recent anthropological contributions on people-thing relationships, have much to offer when making sense of the socio-economic significance of circulation here and now. We are intrigued by how recent writing on the concept of growing, as distinct from making (Ingold & Hallam 2014), can elucidate how circulation transforms things in motion within second-hand worlds. Developing the idea that objects have cultural biographies (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986), we propose a theoretical perspective that sees the circulation of used and second-hand things as involving a form of growth, akin to that of a living organism, in that it results from the interaction between qualities and forces both internal and external to the object. Doing this allows a view of the circulating objects not merely as things that events happen to, but as having agential capacities (cf. Gell 1998), actively contributing to shaping their fate.

Rather than providing an exhaustive account of the different ways that notions and practices of circulation shape second-hand exchange and consumption, our aim is to sketch out some analytical directions that needs to be further developed and empirically examined. Given this aim, the arguments are not tied to a precise geographical or ethnographic context, but are rather informed by observations and insights from multiple sources, mostly describing contemporary societies in the Global North. The article is also inspired by a pilot study conducted in Sweden in 2012-2013, which involved an analysis of media articles, posters, blogs, websites

and various social media related to second-hand shops and consumption, as well as interviews with retailers and shoppers at second-hand shops in Gothenburg. Using a deliberately explorative approach, the article uses these empirical observations as inspiration for some theoretical reflections regarding how second-hand objects in circulation acquire their specific meanings and values.³

‘Second-hand’ is here used as a broad label loosely referring to all kinds of used objects exchanged within commercial contexts. This group of objects can be divided into subcategories, in terms of functionality, time period or aesthetics, for example vintage (Cassidy & Bennet 2012; Fischer this issue), retro (Jenss 2004; Reynolds 2011; Baker 2013) and kitsch (Binkley 2000), each requiring their own theoretical and analytical approaches (see McRobbie 1988; cf. Handberg, this issue, for a discussion of both retro and kitsch in the context of Montreal). Similarly, the contexts and venues for commercial exchange of such objects, and the ways that they are reused, recycled and upcycled also constitute several distinct fields of research (see Gregson & Crewe 2003 for an overview). For the purpose of the argument presented here, however, they are treated as instances of the circulation of material culture that raises a set of common questions, explored below.

Unpacking Circulation

Before turning to the ways that contemporary exchange and consumption of used material culture can be approached from the perspective of circulation, we will unpack the concept of circulation through some of its uses within social anthropology and social sciences in general.

Already the study that laid the foundation of the ethnographic method – investigating social life as it unfolds – dealt with the social and political intricacies of circulation of material culture. In his research on the ceremonial exchange of valuables between islands in the Massim archipelago off New Guinea, Malinowski described the *Kula* ring (1922). Right from the outset, the integrative, embedding and territorializing capacity of material culture in circulation caught the attention of the ethnographer. For Malinowski, the circulation of armshells and necklaces, in alternative directions along the *Kula* ring, calibrated the political economy of the islands involved. The circulation of objects, involving a complex system of exchange among partners, was tied to status, alliances, commodity exchange, and morality. Skilful exchange created fame and renown for the men (sic) participating in the circulation of objects.⁴

The objects themselves, Malinowski noted, were desirable ‘articles of high value, but of no real use’ (Malinowski 1920: 97), and were not kept for any duration of time, but swiftly passed on. In this way the objects circulating became the mediators of social power and prestige and the circulation itself functioned as the engine of this prestige building apparatus. The most coveted *Kula* valuables were known by name and their particular history (Malinowski 1920: 99), a form of ver-

nacular provenance. Comparing them to the crown jewels in Europe, however, Malinowski maintains that a crucial difference lies in that ‘...the Kula goods are only in possession for a time, whereas the European treasure must be permanently owned in order to have full value’ (1922: 89). Given that these objects can confer prestige on their owners only by being in circulation they seem more akin to sporting trophies that the winner only keeps for a limited period of time (ibid. : 95).

Circulation thus played an important role in Malinowski’s analysis. Regarded as important primarily for how it functioned to integrate and organise society, circulation was studied in terms of the negotiation of its political, social and economic dimensions. As a theoretical phenomenon in its own right, however, circulation and, more specifically, what it does to the objects, remained somewhat in the background.

Since Malinowski, ethnography and theory dealing with the exchange of material objects and the organization of relationships between people and things have developed into one of anthropology’s prime fields of research. Scholars have expanded the understanding of gender dynamics of the Kula (Weiner 1976; 1992; Strathern 1988), the extent and nature of the interactions (Weiner 1976; Munn 1986; Strathern 1988) and the nature of the gift (Marcel Mauss 1950/1990). The assumption that circulation integrates society has encouraged the analytical breaking down of circulatory phenomena into finer and more distinct forms, such as commodity exchange, gift-giving, reciprocity and barter, in order to study their social significance and cultural diversity. Along with such specialisation, debates about the theoretical importance of these modes of transaction have been intensive (see Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992 for an overview, and Graeber 2001), but the idea of circulation has continued to receive relatively limited analytic attention. The concern with the typology of transactions has prompted defining the performative locus of circulation in terms of specific stages along such circuits, at the moment when objects changed hands, during which status and relationships between things and people were negotiated within the specific cultural logics of various forms of exchange (cf. Appadurai 1986 and Myers 2001).

Circulation has gained new relevance in the study of globalisation, but is within this context associated with a slightly different set of issues, especially outside anthropology. Retaining its analytically imprecise character it has focused on the state of flux between the nodes of the circuit, concerned with the flows of people, objects and capital across the globe, thought to constitute a deterritorialized global condition. Circulation in the globalization discourse is thus associated with a set of rather vague analytical notions of transience, such as flows, fluidity, intensity, extensity and velocity (Scholte 2005). Embedded in this shift of focus lies the essentially liberal idea of circulation as the setting loose of natural forces of human activity through political deregulation, especially the erasure of ‘unnatural’ political constraints on markets. Circulation in the anthropology of exchange cen-

tred on the moments of transaction and was regarded as integrating society and reproducing social order and hierarchy. The usage of circulation in the broad field of social scientific analysis of the globalized world predominantly seems to denote disruption, disembedding and disassociation of people, objects and capital from their social and territorial contexts.

In her influential article on ‘the global situation’, Anna Tsing directs our attention to the charisma of globalism, seductively engendering imaginations of ‘interconnection, travel, and sudden transformation’, but leaving much of the institutional and material foundations of a world of flows unexamined (2000: 330). An emphasis on the transience of circulation easily lends itself to ignoring infrastructure and imagining friction-free social, economic and political projects through the unleashed power of movement and flow. Tsing’s call to also scrutinize ‘hidden relations of production’ and ‘channel making’ in the context of globalization (2000: 337) is an important counterweight to this tendency, exemplified for example by attending to the material forms that allow the trafficking of things and people (Larkin 2013). Circulation is things in motion, but also the infrastructural framework facilitating, or obstructing that motion.

Traveling along circuits through shifting social contexts also impacts the object in question. A special issue in *Cultural Anthropology* (2002) devoted to the topic of ‘Value in Circulation’ argues that ‘value must be understood from a *circulatory* perspective’ (italics in the original, Eiss & Pedersen 2002: 286). The volume contains theoretical and empirical explorations of the notion of value as a shifting dimension of objects in motion. However, as circulation primarily comes to denote a mode of tracing ‘the continual metamorphoses of value in diverse social contexts’ (Eiss & Pedersen 2002: 286), the transformative role of circulation itself is somewhat downplayed. Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, on the other hand, give circulation a greater theoretical gravity (2002). Their notion of a ‘culture of circulation’ echoes Tsing’s approach when they state that ‘more than simply the movement of people, ideas, and commodities...circulation is a cultural process’ (Lee & LiPuma 2002: 192). Their point is that circulation of people, capital, commodities and media messages in a global world do things to the societies and the markets they circulate through, performatively reconstituting them (Lee & LiPuma 2002:192-195). While this perspective is useful for understanding how the infrastructure of the second-hand market is recreated through circulation it has less to say about how circulation is constitutive of the objects themselves. Circulation acts performatively – ‘extrovertly’ – on the social contexts they circle through, as is argued by Lee and LiPuma, but it also reconfigures the inherently mutable object of circulation, acting ‘introvertly’⁵.

The following text is inspired by a wish to continue the long anthropological inquiry into how circulation of things create and negotiate sociality, and to examine how such processes can be understood within the context of modern capitalist society. Doing this, we build on the contributions already made for example with

respect to material culture and consumption (e.g. Miller 1987; 1998; 2008) and global travel of commodities (e.g. Foster 2006, 2008a; 2008b). However, these contributions primarily operate with objects that may or may not change as they circulate, encountering and becoming embedded within new contexts. The distinctive aspect of the field of second-hand practices is that it concerns objects that are defined by their continued circulation – objects-in-motion. Applying perspectives from classic anthropology we also take up Tsing’s call for a theoretical interest in the pathways and passage-points between nodes in circuits, as much as the nodes themselves. Following Lee and LiPuma in regarding circulation as a generative process that entails negotiation at the nodes as well as the performative channel making that enables flows, our focus in the following is on how circulation reconfigures the objects in motion.

Returning to the field of second-hand consumption and practices, we wish to develop our thinking about what kinds of objects figure on this market, and how their peculiar forms of production and reconfiguration draw on circulatory practices. Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff were the first to break away from the previous focus on the actual exchanges to study objects not as things being traded, gifted or sacrificed, but as ‘things-in-motion’ (Appadurai 1986: 5). They thereby detached themselves from the human-centred perspective of exchange-focused anthropology and suggested that objects, with their social life (Appadurai 1986) and cultural biographies (Kopytoff 1986), actually are somewhat similar to human beings.⁶

The view of objects as shifting through different use- and value regimes during their life history has inspired a number of different approaches to material culture across the social sciences. Within consumption studies, Kopytoff’s term singularization has been used to describe the process whereby commodities are ascribed personal meaning through social embedding (Miller 1987; Epp & Price 2010).⁷ In the field of waste and disposal studies, various contributions explore the social and cultural processes involved when a thing ceases to be of any value and moves into the category of the discarded, but also how it may reverse an expected process of aging and find new life in novel contexts of consumption (e.g. Hetherington 2004; Gregson 2007; Straw 2010; Gregson, Crang, Ahamed, Akhtar & Ferdous 2010).⁸ Within the field of second-hand studies, the most comprehensive study of how commodities acquire distinct values due to their circulation in different regimes of value in space and time is the contribution by Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe (2003). Using empirical data from the United Kingdom, they show how the circuits of value that second-hand commodities move through are non-linear and unpredictable, with ‘the potential at least to question, if not undermine, those conceptualizations of commodity value to be found in conventional retail environment’ (ibid.: 142).

Even though Kopytoff’s idea of things having cultural biographies have proved immensely influential and fruitful, and has sensitised scholars to the variable and

socially embedded nature of the value and meaning of objects through their different life phases, more work needs to be done in terms of theorising the process through which the thing becomes transformed by its trajectories. As has been pointed out (Graeber 2001: 33; Foster 2006: 292), Kopytoff's and Appadurai's attention to how objects shift between different value regimes – much like Eiss and Pedersen's focus on how value is transformed through shifting contexts, discussed above – is useful primarily as method. It encourages us to track things through shifting social contexts rather than simply establishing criteria for the commodity as a thing, but leaves largely untheorised precisely how this history produces the value of the object. Why should the circulation of a thing, through different contexts, enhance its value?

Another question raised in the accounts by Appadurai and Kopytoff concerns the agential capacities of the objects in motion. In their accounts, objects tend to remain passive, being shaped by the events they encounter, accumulating history and forming biographies. As has been pointed out by Amber Epp and Linda Price in their study of household objects within an American family, Kopytoff fails to directly theorise the role of object agency (2010: 882). While Epp and Price primarily explore the agency of a household object from an actor-network theory perspective, as 'granted by its place and history in a network' (ibid.: 832), we follow a different route in theorising how circulation produces agential capacities within the object itself.⁹ Before presenting this argument, however, we will outline some observations of a more empirical kind.

Keeping Things Moving

And yesterday's junk is tomorrow's heirloom.

Arjun Appadurai 2006: 15

From having been associated with poverty and low status, the trade with second-hand goods, as distinct from authorised and institutionalised market for antiques, has recently undergone fundamental changes around the world (Norris 2010, 2012; Franklin 2011; Fredriksson 2013). In the Global North, objects are increasingly marketed and consumed as 'things with a past' in the expanding sector of retro shops, flea markets and upmarket vintage boutiques. The rapid growth of information technology has enabled Internet-based trade and auction sites, as well as instant formation of groups, networks and communities through various forms of social media, creating 'a boundless marketplace for connecting pre-owned or secondary goods from where they are not wanted to somewhere or someone where they are' (Botsman & Rogers 2010: 27).¹⁰ Such technological infrastructure has created an increasing number of surfaces between people and things, and have facilitated and sped up the setting in motion of objects through different contexts and constellations. In addition, a growing range of other, more traditional spaces

function similarly as conduits for used material culture, organised with various levels of formality. In the Swedish context, there has been an upsurge in interest in informal clothes swapping days as well as car boot sales. In the countryside, a common sight is signs announcing flea markets that have sprung up in addition to the more traditional rural auctions. Some cities arrange mega flea markets, one example being what is advertised as the biggest flea market in Sweden, since 2013 held in the stronghold of commerce in Gothenburg, a congress centre. Around municipal recycling stations, containers for used clothes have been gradually added to the regular range of recycling bins for cardboard, plastic, metal and glass, and operate in a similar manner, although on a slower timescale. Mainstream first cycle shops offer rebates for customers bringing in their used items, particularly within the electronic and clothing sectors, but examples are emerging within other sectors too. Finally, the traditional charity and second-hand shops have not only increased in numbers, but have also tended to move into prime locations in urban centres (cf. Straw 2010), where retro- and vintage boutiques can be found next to shops selling newly produced reproductions in retro-style. Taken together, these technologies, channels, containers and venues offer a formidable, and growing, infrastructure for the swapping, reuse and recycling of vast quantities of material culture. On a global scale, asymmetrical flows of used items, particularly clothes, are implicated in trade paths and networks that involve countries and regions, a rapidly growing economic sector (Tranberg Hansen 2000; Norris 2010; Alexander & Reno 2012).

How, then, can we make sense of the flows of things moving between homes and second-hand venues? From a practical point of view, the circulation of stuff offers solutions to a number of contemporary dilemmas. The sheer amount of goods produced in global commodity chains based on outsourcing and subcontracting, and consumed at an increasingly rapid pace in the Global North, causes increasing concerns for its management. A comparison between contemporary catalogues from the furniture store IKEA with those of the 1960s shows that the section focusing on storage furniture has significantly increased (Löfgren 2012: 115). Private renting of external storage space has rapidly increased in the last five years, a tendency that attests to the growing amount of things that needs to be handled within private homes (Lastovicka & Fernandez 2005; Cheetham 2009; Brace-Govan & Binay 2010; Arnold 2013; Czarniawska & Löfgren 2012, 2013; Türe 2014). According to Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, the increased consumption of mass-produced commodities is closely linked to the emergence of a specific consumer subjectivity predicated on rapidly shifting tastes and trends (2007). While stuff accumulates in cupboards, garages and attics, consumerism works by 'shortening the time distance between the sprouting and the fading of desire' in the subject, requiring regular visits to the market place in order for new commodities to be obtained (ibid.: 21). Against this background, it is not surprising that various practices related to second-hand exchange, reuse and sharing have

emerged as increasingly significant social phenomena in the last few years (Botsman & Rogers 2010; Alexander & Reno 2012). Clothes or tools ‘libraries’, clothes swapping days, car pools or kitchen interiors for rent from furniture chain stores are all examples of practices which enable continued access to and right of usage of things, but which reduce or circumvent the challenges and inconveniences of ownership. Second-hand use and exchange can be regarded as social practices similarly facilitating access to things while minimizing the trappings of long-term ownership. On the one hand, donating to charity or selling things through Internet barter and trading serves the need for de-cluttering and creating space for the inflow of new purchases. On the other hand, buying second-hand, as opposed to newly produced commodities, enables access to new (albeit used) goods in forms of consumption that, generally, require less capital (Ekström, Gustafsson, Hjelmgren & Salomonson 2012). The lesser financial investment required also means that consumption of second-hand objects may involve a quicker turnover of purchases, allowing spontaneous acts of shopping and the indulgence of temporary and fleeting fads and interests (ibid.; Liimatainen 2014:62).

Yet, the popularity of second-hand, vintage and retro that can be witnessed in the empirical studies presented in this issue (see in particular Debary, Fischer, Handberg and Hansson and Brembeck) cannot be explained solely in terms of how the circulation of used material culture enables handling the ‘overflow’ of commodities generated by capitalism (Gregson, Metcalf & Crewe 2007, Czarniawska & Löfgren 2012), or allows inexpensive access to such items. In order to understand the distinctive appeals associated with this market, we need to explore more complex ways in which circulation comes into play, shaping desires and aspirations as it acts on objects and subjects as a generative force.

The Narrative Sociality of Second-hand Practices

[T]he temporary ownership allows [the receiver] to draw a great deal of renown, to exhibit his article, to tell how he obtained it, and to plan to whom he is going to give it. And all this forms one of the favourite subjects of tribal conversation and gossip, in which the feats and the glory in Kula of chiefs or commoners are constantly discussed and rediscussed.

Bronislaw Malinowski 1920: 100.

Second-hand things offer a narrative richness that becomes a currency in the wider social environment in different ways. At one end, circulating second-hand things constitute frequent topics of conversation in the social networks people are already involved in. Previous studies on second-hand practices have drawn attention to how, besides being motivated by pragmatic needs or economic necessity, this form of consumption often involve particular enjoyment and pleasures, such as the thrill of the hunt, and the joy of unexpected finds (Gregson & Crewe 2003, Ottosson 2008; Guit & Roux 2010), which then become topics in social exchange-

es of different kinds. Internet-based trade and barter involve similar experiences, such as the thrill of ‘clicking’ a bid at an auction in the final seconds before its close (Fredriksson 2010). Private sales via Internet sites are often richly socially embedded, involving verbal or written exchanges regarding the quality and history of the thing being sold, sometimes involving personal anecdotes as well as meetings between buyer and seller (ibid.). While different in character, various forms of second-hand exchange thus have in common that they typically involve irregular and unpredictable qualities that are less common in first cycle shopping experiences. Such qualities lend themselves particularly well to stories and recounting, which may partly be motivated by a wish to display one’s ability to be a ‘clever consumer’ (Gregson & Crewe, 2003: 11, see also Fischer, this issue).

Our pilot study showed how socially embedded knowledge about specific second-hand objects were frequent in various printed media, notably lifestyle magazines featuring articles about home decoration or fashion. A common example were owners describing their second-hand finds by actively drawing attention to their history, such as ‘The stove was designed by SJ [Swedish Rail] during the war, intended to heat rail cars in case of an invasion, and found on the Internet’ (Wennberg 2012: 116) or anecdotal information about how they acquired them: ‘The baby chair was picked up in the garbage room after a tip-off from the neighbour’ (Wrede 2012:120). It is noteworthy that items bought second-hand often retain the generic label ‘second-hand’ long after the purchase, a tendency that could be observed in such magazines. This suggests that the second-hand object (as well as the related Swedish term *loppisfynd*, flea market find) has emerged as a distinct category, different from objects in circulation that have been obtained through inheritance and gifting.

At the other end, new communities are emerging around the circulation of used things. Circulating objects pass through dense social contexts where layers of events, memories and meanings motivate people to interact, narrate stories and form relationships. Clothes swapping events where exchange is based on first establishing social relations of mutual recognition is an example of this (Albinsson & Perera 2009). In Sweden, clothes swapping has become so frequent that a web page has been established gathering information about clothes-swapping events throughout the country (Klädbytdag 2015). Our pilot study also showed a vast number of new groups and communities forming around second-hand-related activities in various social media, notably blogs and through the mobile application Instagram (cf. Wiman 2014). The latter, organised around photographic images that are uploaded and supplemented with text, is particularly well suited as a medium for communicating about second-hand consumption. Typically, second-hand objects, photographed in a still-life manner arrangement in private homes, are displayed along with stories about how they were acquired, where they are from, dreams of what to do with them in the future, or simply feelings or thoughts that

they evoke. Occasionally they simultaneously serve as advertisements for private sales of the items in question.

In other words, while the narrative potential and sociality of second-hand practices can be related to the ambience, characteristics and practices of the shopping experiences, it also seems to be triggered by the things themselves. When interviewing a shop owner in Gothenburg, he described how he places an old wooden sledge from the first half of the twentieth century outside his shop front in the winter season. Asked why he did this, he responded that the sledge ‘makes people stop and talk’; about similar sledges that they suddenly remembered, or about how its old-fashioned steering mechanisms might work. Another example is a blog by a woman writing about the joy of encountering an old rocking chair in a charity shop: ‘It was as if it was standing there, looking up bashfully at us. Somewhat ashamed of its ugly fabric, but at the same time rather proud of the fact that its cushion was worn-down and well used’ (Secondhandguide.se).

We also noticed how within the Swedish context, many retailers foreground the qualities and properties of used and second-hand things described above as part of marketing and sale strategies. Previous literature has focused on how certain categories of retailers have emulated the commerce of mainstream shops by mystifying or downplaying the fact that much of what is for sale is the rejected and discarded stuff from other people or institutions. Typically, in such shops, a few contemporary-looking items are on display in the shop windows, while traces and reminders of previous owners and phases of use are carefully hidden or removed (Crewe, Gregson & Brooks 2003; Gregson & Crewe 2003:77, Straw 2010: 199). However, rather than downplaying the circuits and trajectories of the things for sale second hand, certain Swedish traders and retailers, from private entrepreneurs to non-profit organisations, draw attention to precisely the ‘second-handedness’ of the objects – where they come from, whom previous owners might have been, where they might end up in the future.



A window in a charity second-hand shop, Gothenburg. The sign translates: ‘Share with others! Granny’s waffle iron wants to find a new home’.

Instead of being selected for their contemporary ‘new’ look, or, in the case of the more specialist vintage- and retro stores, for their intrinsic qualities or specific collectors’ value (cf. Straw 2010: 199), items on display are presented in playful and creative mixes where the used and worn ‘second-hand look’ is deliberately emphasised.¹¹ The itineraries, as much as the objects themselves, are foregrounded and serve as inspiration for the presentation and organising of stock. A suggestive example comes from a Swedish jeans company. Their downtown Gothenburg store mainly sells newly produced jeans but is situated in an area particularly rich in second-hand shops. In 2013, the shop display included both used jeans, deemed to be particularly attractively worn, hung on the walls as decoration, as well as a few used jeans for sale, equipped with tags detailing information about their previous owner¹². In a similar example from a British initiative, customers in charity shops could listen to recordings of narratives about individual pieces of clothing and their previous biographies as they browsed through the shop by scanning QR codes attached to the items. The stories had been collected by asking donators to answer questions such as: Who used to own the item? Where was it acquired? What memories does it bring back and why is it being sold? The charity chain reported an increase in fifty percent in sales in relation to this one-off event, which was tried in two stores (de Jode, Barthel, Rogers, Karpovich, Hudson-Smith, Quigley, & Speed 2012. See also Lovatt, this thematic issue).

Another example is an initiative by Swedish company, entitled ‘swapstories’. Under the slogan of ‘Let your old Haglöfs products live on’, used branded pieces of clothing are handed in to the store in return for a discount, and then sold again along with information about its previous owner and use, with all profits going to charity (Haglöfs 2014). In this way the company seeks to enrich the brand through drawing on values created by the circulation of the used items. While the cases above concern clothes, there are also examples of how such retail strategies are used in the trade of used objects, such as the shop in Haga, a historical district of Gothenburg, which sells home decoration trinkets and are gathering information about the objects’ histories to present on their blog and Instagram account (Fåfångans Antik 2015).

The above testifies to a growing interest in how used things are socially and historically embedded. How, then, can we make sense of this interest? More specifically, how can we theorise the value-creating process of circulating second-hand objects? In order to explore the nature of objects growing in motion, we will first revisit anthropological debates on value in relation to gift and commodities and examine how second-hand objects come to embody ‘gift qualities’.

Gifts, Commodities and the Hybrid Second-hand Thing

Within anthropology, there is a long tradition of conceptually separating two main forms of exchange of objects, that of gifts and that of commodities, each thought

to follow its own logic (Gregory 1982; Appadurai 1986: 3-16; Graeber 2001: 23-47; Tsing 2013).

While problematic, as discussed below, this classic dichotomy contains some key insights that can help us conceptualise the kinds of dynamics involved when used things circulate on second-hand markets. Drawing on such theory we suggest that second-hand objects constitute a specific type of thing, which differs from the traditional categories of commodities, gifts, sacrifices, or art objects, and which requires its own theoretical and analytical apparatus. The following sketches out the contours of such an argument.

Various anthropological approaches have built on the Marxian idea that the social complexities of relations, labour and skills are veiled in the practices of valuing, marketing and trading commodities. Things become commodities by being divested of their history and context, and exchanged for other things, or more commonly for money. The gift, on the other hand, as Mauss (1950/1990) and later generations of anthropologists have argued, derives its value and purpose from the social entanglements that it carries and initiates. Gift objects, as embodiments or extensions of persons, are transacted to mediate social relations. To reduce a long conversation to its core, there has been a tendency in anthropology, best exemplified by Chris Gregory (1982: 41), to counterpoise the thing form as the sovereign substance of the commodity economy with the person form as the sovereign substance of the gift economy.

In the last few decades, scholars have highlighted how such a dichotomisation is problematic, since the two types of objects often blur into each other. Rather than seeing them as opposed, Appadurai for example, points out that 'commodity' is a phase in the social life of an object, defined by its exchangeability, and not a specific type of thing (1986: 13). He highlights how everything has a 'commodity potential' that can be initiated as it shifts in and out of various social contexts and value regimes (*ibid.*). Geertz, similarly, criticises rigid dichotomies of social gifts and calculative commodities, showing that the scarcity and unreliability of information in 'the bazaar economy' fosters commodity exchange that is thoroughly dependent on developing and maintaining patron-client type of social relations since that is the only way for a consumer to 'determin[e] the realities of the particular case' (1978: 31). At the other end, the calculative dimension of gifts has been explored by Pierre Bourdieu, who reinvigorated the classic insights of Mauss by adding the temporal dimension to gift exchanges (1977). He showed that not only are gifts entrenched in social obligations, but to be socially effective they were also exposed to the calculative skills of tempo and timing. Lastly, and of specific interest to the subject being dealt with here, Tsing has recently shown how capitalism relentlessly renews itself by incorporating what she calls gift aspects – 'all objects of exchange in which parts of the giver are embedded, extending social relations beyond the transaction' – into the creation of commodities and the making of new markets (2013: 23). Taking the example of global production

of Matsutake mushrooms, she shows how social relations, including non-human social relations, form a crucial part in creating this particular form of exclusive mushrooms as a commodity. Significantly, however, these aspects are subsequently ‘forgotten’ in sorting and assessment work ‘designed to block gift-like social relations’ (ibid.). This is of interest in the context of how second-hand objects achieve their social and commercial meaningfulness, a process which is similar to those outlined by Tsing, and Geertz in his example of the bazaar economy. The difference, however, lies in how the value of second-hand objects is dependent on procedures of remembering, rather than of techniques of forgetting, something we will explore below.

First cycle commodities are, ideally, disembedded from the production process and the people involved in it, drawing only on the relationships to other commodities on the market place for their value. They typically enable a solitary and unrestricted object-subject-relationship between the thing and the owner. In contrast, second-hand objects are defined by having a prior history. Like gifts, they are already to some extent embedded into social networks, and implicate their buyers in a potentially more open and porous form of ownership than that of first cycle commodities. Acquiring their defining characteristics through their prior circulation and social entanglement, they form a hybrid category, combining elements of both the commodity form and the gift form. Whereas ‘pure’ commodities are contingent on techniques of social forgetting and veiling (commodity fetishism), second-hand objects, like gifts, are dependent on energies of social remembering and disclosure. In other words, how the social history and cultural biography of the object is remembered may affect not only its value, but transform its ontological status, as will be explored below.

Making and Growing Things

The *vaygu’a* – the Kula valuables – in one of their aspects are overgrown objects of use

Bronislaw Malinowski 1922: 90

...objects are not what they were made to be but what they have become.

Nicholas Thomas 1991: 4

In Malinowski’s functionalist approach, ‘overgrown’ denotes qualities of the circulating Kula objects that make them ‘too well decorated and too clumsy for use’ (ibid.: 89). For our purposes, however, the concept of growth is a suggestive entryway into thinking about the nature of second-hand objects. This is inspired by Annette Weiner’s dynamic and processual view of the inalienability of objects as an animating property defined by their ‘cumulative identity with a particular series of owners through time’ (Weiner 1992: 32-33), and seeing ‘materialisation [as] an ongoing lived process’ (Bell & Geismar 2009: 4). We suggest, however,

that this processual aspect does not necessarily result in a symbolic density of objects causing slower circulation and eventually leading to ‘keeping’, as suggested by Weiner (1993), but rather, along with Ferry (2002), that commodities may retain inalienable aspects while circulating.

A fruitful theoretical framework for exploring the dynamics involved when prior phases of circulation become a source of value of an object can be found in recent writings on the difference between ‘growing’ and ‘making’ (Ingold & Hallam 2014).¹³ According to Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam, ‘making’ typically describes a process in which something is deliberately created out of other things. The constitutive parts that are to be assembled each have their prior history (for example, the raw materials come from somewhere), but the process of making has a distinct beginning as it starts, and an ending when the making is finished and the object has achieved its new status. Making thus embodies the same kind of dynamics as the traditional rites of passage, which transforms a thing or person from one status to another through ritual disembedding and reembedding (ibid. 2014:4). ‘Growing’, in contrast, is a continuous and evolving process, taking place in ways and forms of everyday life that are largely unnoticed. If making starts with a number of parts to be assembled to form an object, growth departs from internal forces that are then dependent on the complex interweaving with forces that are external to the thing.

Applied to the field of second-hand consumption, this perspective brings out an interesting difference between first and second cycle commodities. A typical artefact commodity is made by assembling parts into a whole designed for a specific purpose. This making is a process of interventions with a distinct beginning and end, and, in contemporary society, is often rationalized and standardized through an effective and streamlined industrial production apparatus. The making of the object ends with the ‘forgetting’ of all the social labour that went into the production and it being placed on the store shelf. Thereafter a different process commences, in which the objects is bought, used and starts aging. However, rather than simply ‘consumed’, in the sense of being devoured or destroyed, many goods in fact enter an intensely productive phase during which the object is actively embedded in everyday contexts of use, becoming entangled in various social relationships and practices (Douglas & Isherwood 1979; Miller 1987; 1998; 2008; Hoskins 1998; Epp & Price 2010).

While consumption and aging in a linear perspective is understood as a devaluating process of wear, decay and breakage, from an alternative perspective this can be seen as a process governed by a different regime of value in which the object undergoes a second productive phase more akin to growing, gradually accumulating qualities, and changing into something different. Like the growth of a plant or a fruit, this process of transformation is governed by forces that are internal to the object (intrinsic qualities in terms of design, character, material affordances and responses to its handling and the passage of time) as well as exter-

nal (social, physical and affective entanglements and constellations), together constituting a process of becoming and forming a continuously evolving whole. Since time and aging is how the second-hand object accumulates events and histories through which it slowly transforms, this process shares yet another characteristic of growing, in distinction to making. As Ingold and Hallam point out, the process is not reversible (2014: 7).

The example of an aged second-hand chair might illustrate this. The process of making the chair is likely to have had a clearly defined beginning and end. Once assembled, it would be possible, theoretically, to reverse much of the process of making it in the sense that it can be unmade, and once again become separate pieces of wood, plugs, leather, nails or whatever materials it was made out of. As the chair ages, however, it becomes affected by the events it lives through. Qualities intrinsic to the chair – the way in which the wood darkens and yields to or resists scratches and bumps, its specific design and artistic expression, the stiffening or softening of the leather, its degree of comfort, to name a few – interacts with social, cultural and affective contexts and orientations towards it, such as memories attached to it or historical shifts in preferred styles and trends, forming an accumulating whole that is more than its parts. In other words, just like with the growth of a plant, factors both internal and external to it co-produce its ontological status at any stage in its aging, whether as ‘second-hand’, ‘antique’, ‘kitsch’ or ‘rubbish’. Regardless of what the particular outcome of this growing may be throughout its different stages, it is not possible to ungrow the qualities of the aging chair in the way that one can unmake the parts that make up a newly made chair. It can be restored and redesigned, but it cannot shed its status as used.

The metaphor of growing also highlights a distinction between the phenomenon of provenance, in which verified information about the history of an object raises its commercial value according to relatively set criteria and expectations (Feigenbaum & Reist 2013), and the ways that things are appreciated because they are ‘second-hand’. The praxis of attaching formal provenance to a treasured object can be regarded an extension of the paradigm of making, since it continues to make the object beyond the moment of its initial completion. The function of provenance is to continue to assemble the object and thereby raise its value. Only the most outstanding objects are endowed with provenance, and only certain kinds of attributes are noted as verified facts of the object’s history (cf. Appadurai 1986 and Kopytoff 1986). These specific types of used objects – art works, craft or museum objects – are continuously being assembled by an authorized apparatus of institutions, experts, methods, criteria and knowledge. This ‘apparatus of provenance’ has been formed over a long period of time and is an established form of recognizing history as having aesthetic, artistic and economic value. In contrast, used objects with no formal provenance attached to them can only rely on how their growth is socially sensed, recognized and valued. While formal provenance can be likened to ‘thin’ scientific knowledge, the recognition of the growth of

used objects can be compared with how anthropologists adopt the analytical strategy of ‘thick description’ to go beyond factual accounts in order to capture the complex layers of meanings and interpretations, of details and contexts, of social relations and affective states (Geertz 1973). Much like thick description is aimed at grasping social life in denser textures of contexts and interpretations, we can think of second-hand objects as being ‘thickly inscribed’ by the layers of histories, events and relationships they come into contact with.

Above we saw examples of how an old sledge ‘stopped people in the street’, while a rocking chair was both ‘bashful’ and ‘proud’ of its history. These comments draw attention to a specific dimension of the ‘grown’ character of used and second-hand things, namely their agency. In discussing art objects, Alfred Gell suggests that such objects embody a mediated form of agency, originating with the artist’s intent to influence peoples’ emotions, actions and thoughts (1998: 16-24, see also Hoskins 2006). In contrast to art objects, a significant factor of second-hand things is often not how they are creatively made, but rather their process of becoming through growth. Although originally assembled with specific human intention, their second-hand character is produced through subsequent phases of growing, involving interior as well as exterior forces. As described above, their agential capacities partly reside in their intrinsic qualities, exerting influence on what happens to them. However, such capacities also result from, and may be enhanced precisely by the particular trajectory of the thing. Originally, as newly assembled, an object may have blended into its contemporary context, but after having circulated, it may stand out as anachronic, quaint, old-fashioned, different because of its aging and transformation, but also by virtue of its sheer existence within a different context. The circulating object thus has the capacity to connect distant places and times, and make present layers of accumulated histories, events and memories. Similar to the art objects discussed by Gell, they are social agents, endowed with the agency to influence and affect those who engage with them. Rather than involving any human intention however, it is often the unintentional and even unexpected survival or endurance of a thing that enhances such agential capacities.

When ‘thickly inscribed’ objects are sold on second-hand markets, this is not simply a matter of an exchange of objectified commodities, but transactions that, as we saw above, often involve recognition of their history and sociality. Mauss, discussing the gift, referred to how residuals of the giver always remain in the object; the gift is in this respect inalienable from the giver. It cannot shed its sociality, but is partly constituted by its existence within a web of reciprocal relations (Mauss 1950/1990). Clearly, second-hand things are not inalienable in the same direct way that a gift might be, given that the purchase of it is settled with money rather than in terms of reciprocal social bonds. It can be said to retain inalienable qualities, however, in so far as it is regarded not as a pure commodity, but rather as an object defined and valued in terms of its prior ‘growth’ and sociality.



An exchange of photographs and stories taking place after an Internet sale, Gothenburg One the left, a picture depicting two armchairs in their new home, taken by the woman who just bought them. Since the seller had told her how he had grown up with the chairs, she sent him the picture. He responded by sending her a photograph of himself as a boy, playing in front of one of the chairs in its original fabric (right). Photographs contributed by Maria Sandström (left) Janne Olsson (right) during our pilot study.

The object's status as used may be appreciated in terms of detailed and specific knowledge akin to that of the provenance of art and collectors' items; it may be sensed as more of a generic 'pastness', as 'having a history', regardless of what this history might be; or the appreciation may be formed from a third position, appropriating aspects of both. A 'thick description reading' of the object would entail provenance type facts and elements of generic 'pastness', but also wider and finer contextualizations of the object's actual and fictional social and historical embeddedness. These forms of appreciations are likely to blend into each other. Even when having precise, factual knowledge of the biographic details of an object, such information is likely to be perceived through a more generalised notion of a given era, place, or type of object, involving imagination and fantasy. Conversely, if the specific information is missing, and guesswork and imagination provides a replacement history, this is likely to contain elements informed by actual knowledge of similar classes of items.

How the accumulated growth of a particular object will be perceived and evaluated is an empirical question. In certain contexts, marks and signs of previous histories may increase the appreciation of the thing, while in other contexts the

same traces may do the opposite. Previous literature has discussed how bodily traces of previous owners typically are regarded as problematic and something that should be removed, such as stains and smells (Fredriksson 1996: 37; Gregson & Crewe 2003: ch. 6; Ottosson 2008: 96). To increase their attractiveness, objects with such traces often require extensive divestment and cleansing rituals (Lastovicka & Fernandez 2005). If appropriately distant, however, either from the body, or for example through temporal remoteness, such traces may play less of a negative role (Gregson & Crewe 2003:171). One could surmise that with the increasing interest in the 'second-handedness' of used things discussed above, and the observation that consumers in affluent countries increasingly cultivate an 'authentic corporeality' against the sterile commodifying logic of the mass market (Binkley 2009: 106), the notion of traces of previous owners as repulsive and threatening may be weakening, at least among certain groups of consumers (cf. Ekström et al. 2012). Again, on a speculative note, the widespread popularity of second-hand trade and barter on the Internet, which, as discussed above, often enables a detailed and socially embedded knowledge about items being sold, particularly in sales between individuals, might have contributed to stimulating a more general interest in such information.

To think of use as growing continues the line of thinking, beginning with Appadurai and Kopytoff, of 'persons and things... not [as] radically distinct categories' (Appadurai 2006: 15). On the one hand, this perspective decentres dominant understandings of objects as primarily made by assembling (or through the attachment of provenance), by capturing how they are reconfigured through circulation, acquiring thick layers of inscriptions through their growth. On the other, it complements more general theories of things as being in a state of perpetual becoming, due to how their material properties interact with their surroundings (Ingold 2007, cf. Gregson & Crang 2010: 1030). While the latter insight applies to most artefacts, the above discussion is an attempt to capture how a particular form of becoming results in the creation of specific kinds of objects that are increasingly assuming the status of sought-after commodities.

Conclusion

This article has argued that recent interest in second-hand practices and objects in post-industrial societies in the Global North is related to the particular significance and value attached to things that have a history. Differing from the kinds of objects traditionally considered by anthropologists, second-hand things form a hybrid category, combining the commodity and the gift form, as opposed to a commodity purified of its sociality. This is due to how they become transformed by their circulation, understood here as a continuous process of evolution or growth, including shifts through different social contexts. Developing the notion by Appadurai and Kopytoff that objects have a cultural biography, we have been

inspired by the distinction between ‘making’ and ‘growing’, and theorise how such biographies transform the thing, or ‘...how form, rather than being applied to the material, is emergent within the field of human relations.’ (Ingold & Hallam 2014: 5). Unlike provenance, which captures a ‘thin’ verified history of the object, thus continuing the ‘making’ of it, phases of growing transforms the object, which becomes ‘thickly inscribed’ with layers of history. Such thickly inscribed objects-in-motion affect subjects in particular ways, engendering narrative richness and sociality, and inviting considerations not just of past histories of the thing, but also of its present and future trajectories. Once on the market place, it is often the thick inscriptions of its prior circulation and social entanglement that become its primary source of value. This can be contrasted with the disembedded and solitary object-subject-relationship that characterises first cycle commodities.

While this article has sketched out some explorative perspectives on circulation as an analytical tool within the specific field of second-hand things, one can note that the broader topic of circulation deserves further attention. The analytical and theoretical affordances of the concept of circulation need to be refined and clarified. The handling of second-hand objects is a promising arena for further developing the notion of circulation and its generative capacities. Another fruitful area of research concerns the recent popularity of the term in contemporary society. Circulatory ideals and practice play an increasingly important role across a number of different social fields, reflected in discourses on circular economies and circular strategies for sustainability, from waste recycling to emerging sharing cultures and sustainable consumption. Notions of circularity seem ‘good to think with’ and operate as powerful idioms, promising solutions to a range of pressing social issues. From the need to de-clutter over-filled homes, while keeping consumption levels intact, to challenges of social inequalities and environmental degradation, circulation seems to offer solutions. It also interlocks with powerful moral conceptions of fitness in an ever changing world, where not only objects are in motion, but also subjects, who should never embrace anything firmly, but be prepared to swiftly engage in and disengage from social and material constellations (cf. Bauman 1998/ 2005:25). Associated with modern Enlightenment ideas of movement, change, progress and freedom, circulation is also related to non-modern forms of societal organization in which things and people are thoroughly embedded in time and place by the rationalities of connections, returns and reuses. Perhaps the current interest in circulation, and circulating things, rests on precisely the elasticity of the term, with its capacity to conjure up modern hopes and fantasies of change and progress by reawakening non-modern sensibilities of reuse, return and reappearance.

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Notes

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² The focus is on the circulation of used objects within a market setting, even if the phenomenon extends beyond the market, including circulation that does not involve economic compensation. As noted in the Introduction of this thematic issue, global waste circuits, largely invisible to consumers in affluent countries, underpin and make possible some of the processes of circulation that take place within second-hand contexts in the Global North, and which are in focus in the following discussion (cf. Tranberg Hansen 2000; Gregson & Crang 2010; Norris 2010). While important as contexts for the processes discussed here, such global flows are not primarily in focus in this article.

³ These perspectives are further explored within the research project ‘Re:heritage. Circulation and Marketization of Things with History’, funded by the Swedish Research Council 2014-2017.

⁴ As pointed out subsequently by Annette Weiner, however, Malinowski misunderstood aspects of the Kula, failing to realise the central role played by women as well as by valuables other than those made of shell in the generation of sociality (1976).

⁵ Within the Melanesian context, Nicholas Thomas takes a similar view, discussing how objects are transformed by their movement in a colonial setting (1991: 7-34).

⁶ While early anthropologists were thing-focused in the sense that ethnographic objects played a central role in the exploration of other cultures (Bell & Geismar: 2009), their theorising of objects rested on the idea that things are stable and passive entities attributed meaning to by persons in social interactions and transactions.

⁷ However, in its original use, the term denoted that which was held out of commercial circulation because of its unique and irreplaceable values (Kopytoff 1986).

⁸ While predating Kopytoff, Michael Thompson's work on rubbish theory is another influential contribution (1979).

⁹ According to Law and Mol, actor-network theory struggles to account for how objects become transformed by circulation, since its main focus is on how configurations are stabilised and retain their shape even while travelling ('immutable mobiles'), rather than exploring how objects change as they travel between contexts (2001: 611).

¹⁰ E.g. 'Ontheflea', an application for mobile telephones, created in 2013, which enables instant and free advertisements created by taking a photograph of the item to be sold (www.ontheflea.se/app/).

¹¹ Creatively mixing old and new is a well-explored theme in studies of second hand consumption, particularly in relation to fashion (e.g. Gregson & Crewe 2003, Fredriksson 2013). Here we wish to draw attention not to the mixing per se, but to the foregrounding of the used character of the goods.

¹² We are grateful to Niklas Hansson for sharing this observation, as well as that concerning Fåfången, see below.

¹³ Ingold and Hallam are careful to point out that they do not view making and growing as opposing processes, but prefer to explore the 'making in growing' and the 'growing in making' (2014: 3).

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