GARAGE SALE STANDARD

THE META / MONUMENTAL

FREE!

IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE META-MONUMENTAL GARAGE SALE

November 17–30, 2012

The Museum of Modern Art

WORK, VALUE, AND WASTE

ISSUE 2

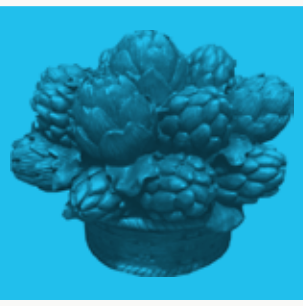
Everything that the big city has thrown away, everything it has lost, everything it has scorned, everything it has crushed underfoot [the ragpicker] catalogues and collects. [She] collates the annals of intemperance, the capharnaum of waste. [She] sorts things out and selects judiciously: [she] collects [as if she is] guarding a treasure, refuse which will assume the shape of useful or gratifying objects between the jaws of the goddess of Industry."

—WALTER BENJAMIN

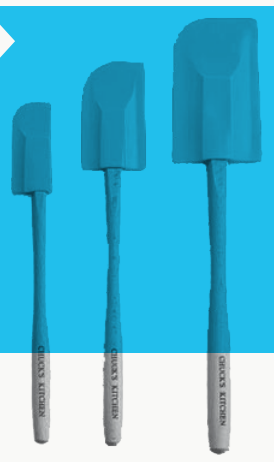
COME NEGOTIATE WITH THE ARTIST AND LEAVE MoMA WITH TONS OF GREAT STUFF!

A Mercedes-Benz 300 Turbo Diesel

Lacy Lingerie



Ceramic Artichokes



Spatulas

A NEWSPAPER PROJECT BY MARTHA ROSLER

Illustrations, Photography, and Games *in* **ISSUE 2**

Andrew Ries
Lisa Congdon
Kelli Anderson
Sara Cwynar
Kate Bingaman-Burt

Issue 2 of 2 / Published by Martha Rosler on the occasion of the—

Meta-Monumental Garage Sale

GARAGE SALE STANDARD

At MoMA from November 17 through 30, 2012 • Additional information available at www.moma.org/garagesale

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The *Meta-Monumental Garage Sale* is being held in the Marron Atrium of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, at 11 W. 53rd Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues from November 17 through 30, 2012. Museum visitors will be able to browse and buy secondhand goods organized, displayed, and sold by the artist.

Martha Rosler first staged this work in 1973 as the *Monumental Gar(b)age Sale* in the art gallery of the University of California, San Diego. The sale was advertised to the general public in local free newspapers as well as to the art and university community. Clothes, shoes, books, records, toys, costume jewelry, tools, personal letters, art works, and other mementos, as well as soft-core pornographic magazines and empty food containers, were displayed on racks and tables for visitors to browse or to buy, often after bargaining over the price.

The *Meta-Monumental Garage Sale* transforms the Marron Atrium into an informal cash economy—a space for the exchange of goods, accompanied by narratives and ideas—as it implicates visitors in face-to-face transactions. Martha Rosler will oversee the sale daily and engage with visitors. A slide show and an audio meditation on the role of commodities in suburban life, both artifacts from the work's early performances, are included in this newest installation; items accumulated during previous iterations of the work will also be for sale or on display, as traces from the project's past locales. Photographs of visitors at earlier sales will be displayed alongside photographs of museum visitors posing with their new acquisitions for a professional wedding photographer.

Rosler's *Garage Sale* has traveled extensively. In 1999–2000, it was included at some of the venues of her traveling retrospective: the Institute d'Art Contemporain, Villeurbanne-Lyon; the Generali Foundation, Vienna; Museu d'Art Contemporani, Barcelona (MACBA); the Nederlands Foto Instituut, Rotterdam; and the New Museum, New York. Rosler also staged the work in 2002 at Moderna Museet, Stockholm; in 2004 at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin; in 2005 at the Sprengel Museum, Hanover and at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; and in 2007 at the United Nations Plaza School, Berlin. In 2010, the project became the *Fair Trade Garage Sale* at Basel's Museum of Cultural History.

The current sale brings together a treasure trove of material from Rosler herself but also from friends and family, local art communities, and the museum staff. The *Meta-Monumental Garage Sale* will be open daily, from noon until the museum closes. Please check www.moma.org/garagesale for opening hours and special events.

The exhibition at MoMA is organized by the Department of Media and Performance Art, with Sabine Breitwieser, Chief Curator; Ana Janevski, Associate Curator; Jill A. Samuels, Performance Producer.

The exhibition is supported in part by the Modern Women's Fund.

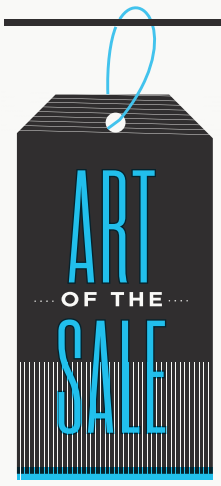
The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd Street
New York, NY 10019
USA
www.moma.org

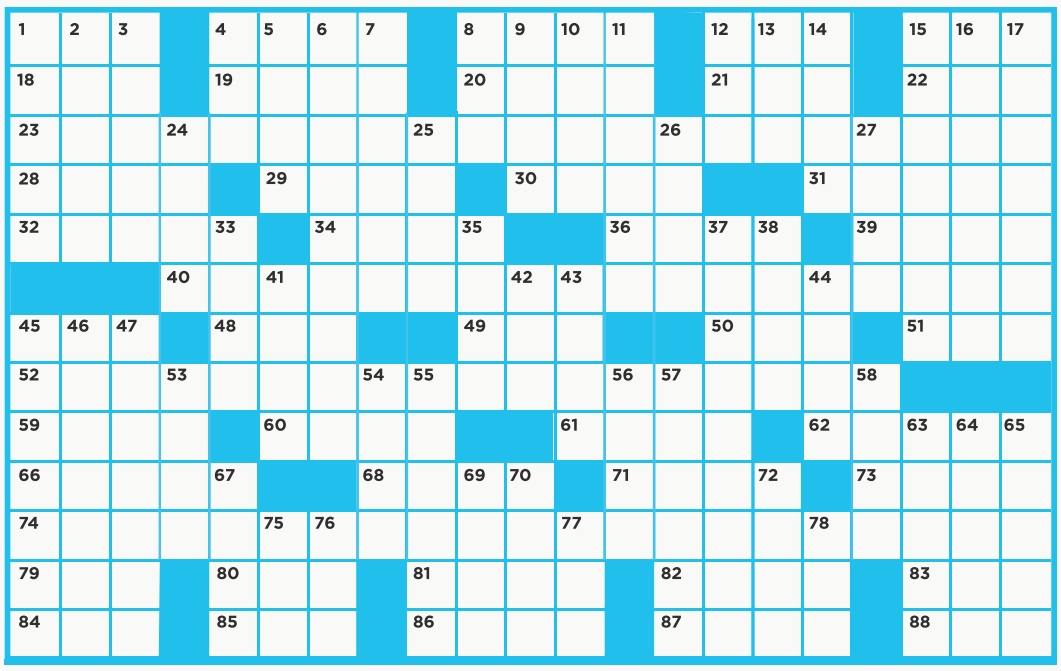
Upcoming public program—

WOMEN, LABOR, AND WORK

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 6:00 PM

In conjunction with the exhibition *Meta-Monumental Garage Sale*, join us for an evening in the garage sale as we explore the role of women and labor within the domestic economy. The evening will open with an informal conversation between several speakers, and will be followed by a series of open roundtable discussions.





ACROSS

1. Facebook-photo identifier
4. "Slipped" backbone part
8. Arduous journey
12. It provides support for women?
15. Delivery-room spectator
18. Genetic material
19. Act like an affectionate grandma, say
20. Senator's gofer, e.g.
21. Channel that airs *Modern Family*
22. Cleveland-to-New York City dir.
23. "You can't beat that price!," translated
28. Move like molasses
29. __-Seltzer
30. Dating preference
31. Memorable sequence in *The French Connection*
32. Flip remark you don't want to make to an attorney
34. *Girls* creator and star Dunham
36. $275 mil man for the Yankees, for short
39. Sultanate that borders Saudi Arabia
40. "Some assembly required," translated
45. Grant letter enclosure: Abbr.
48. As well
49. Sharer's word
50. Comedian Gasteyer with a palindromic name
51. Prez with an "I Like Ike" campaign
52. "Gently used by only one owner," translated
59. Installed, as flooring
60. He sold his birthright in Genesis
61. *Star Wars* character with a cinnamon bun hairstyle
62. Carriers made of burlap, often
66. Key-tickling rocker __ John
68. __B'rith (Jewish organization)
71. Group that breaks off from the mainstream
73. High school class for making bird houses, familarly
74. "Back by popular demand!"
79. Fort Collins sch.
80. "That's amazing!"
81. Geek Squad customer
82. Far from neon colored
83. In the style of
84. Wintertime Brooklyn clock setting: Abbreviation
85. It might be exposed by a flip-flop
86. A sampling of
87. Word repeated in a Doris Day classic
88. Fork over, at a garage sale

DOWN

1. Smallish jazz combos
2. Bartlett alternative
3. Dressing found in a nurse's station
4. Rachel Carson argued for its ban
5. Swing state in the 2012 election
6. Studs on a horse farm
7. Game that's like sudoku, but with math
8. Skin drawing, Abbr.
9. Pussy___ (group convicted of hooliganism)
10. Like boundary-pushing art
11. Practice persistence
12. Where you can get a Bronx in Brooklyn
13. Statistic for 36-Across
14. Hard rockers with the album "Powerage"
15. Damaged one's reputation
16. "To repeat..."
17. Peace activist's victory
24. Freeway monstrosity
25. Vessel for gasoline
26. Hatcher of *Desperate Housewives*
27. "Now I understand"
33. Cigar tip?
35. Yours, to Yvonne
37. Much-debated 2010s legislation, familiarly
38. First film to feature the line "Bond. James Bond."
41. Need for watering the lawn
42. Simple shanty
43. Shrinking Asian sea
44. Kayaking needs
45. It's "golden," in a phrase
46. Too stunned to speak, say
47. Cut some copy
53. Take a fatal dose of, briefly
54. "Off-limits" fragrance
55. Mushroom or mold, e.g.
56. Digs made of twigs
57. Obeys a triangular road sign
58. Not challenging at all
63. Like many garage-sale wares
64. Australian tree hugger?
65. Apply paint, perhaps
67. 2012 also-ran Gingrich
69. "Gotcha," facetiously
70. Society-page couple
72. Pre-Soviet leader
75. Exclamation meant to startle
76. Have a debt
77. Ticked-off feeling
78. Not yet planned, on a schedule

Crossword by Andrew Ries
Solution on page 15

DAYNA TORTORICI

Part of the Family

I remember walking into a neighbor's house, and all her children's clothes were lined up, hanging from a line that she had put in her living room.... I said, "What is this about?" She said, "I'm selling them." I said, "Why?" She said, "If I don't get any money of my own, I'm going to go crazy, so I'm selling all the clothes that the children have grown out of." ... And I understood that we needed money of our own without having to go out to work and do the double day and all the rest. —SELMA JAMES, *DEMOCRACY NOW!*, APRIL 2012

When Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa wrote the essay "Women and the Subversion of the Community" in 1971, "women's work" was "never done"—but it still wasn't thought of as *work*. Cooking, cleaning, laundry, childcare, and all the other tasks collectively called "housework" were considered labors of love, voluntary services that fell outside the realm of capital. James and Dalla Costa argued the contrary: Housework was work, and hardly extraneous to the waged economy. As mothers and wives, women maintained and produced the workers that made up the labor force. Whether by choice or by default, women provided the care that ensured its continued functioning. Women, in other words, "reproduced" the labor force every day, maintaining the social conditions that enabled men to head out to the factory or work place. Without the structure and support offered by the unwaged work of women, the waged economy could not exist. But this work—mistaken for a natural extension of women's skill and goodwill—was invisible. Omitted from the state's broader economic calculus, it obscured the true cost of all labor, both unwaged and waged. To correct this critical oversight, James and Dalla Costa proposed a simple demand: wages for housework.

A WOMAN'S WORK IS NEVER DONE

The resulting Wages for Housework movement—which James, Dalla Costa, and others cofounded in 1972—was more than just a rhetorical proposition. A state-issued wage meant no less than freedom to women who'd spent a lifetime folding bed sheets and wiping spit-up from babies' chins, forever indebted to the husbands and fathers they depended on financially. The very idea of a wage for housework erased the specious boundary between the factory and the home, granting women license to recognize housework as "a job like any other, that must be paid like any other, and that we can refuse like any other," as James and Dalla Costa wrote in their 1971 essay. It offered women the language of the struggle, encouraged them "to move out of the home" and come together in solidarity "with other women, not only as neighbors and friends but as workmates and anti-workmates." Not least of all, Wages for Housework enlightened men as to their own condition. "If you don't know how women are exploited," James and Dalla Costa wrote, "you can never really know how men are."

The movement had many champions but also many critics. Those who took its demand at face value saw Wages for Housework as little more than a clever slogan. More skeptical detractors considered it a half-baked theory with toxic consequences. Some feminists believed the campaign "didn't challenge the patriarchal political economy, or the domestic division of labor, or men," as Beatrix Campbell wrote in response to Jenny Turner's discussion of James's work in a survey on contemporary feminism in the *London Review of Books* in December 2011. For feminists like Campbell, wages would only further entrench women in the domestic role—or worse, stave off radical change with the balm of temporary reform. But looking back, these criticisms seem at best an optimistic view of women's "progress" since the Wages for Housework campaign. Forty years of such progress and women still shoulder the primary burden of uncompensated care; the lack of a wage has done little to ease that situation.

THE WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK CAMPAIGN REVISITED.

A look at the gender breakdown of labor today suggests that the demand for wages for housework still has much to offer. In the United States, women still account for 95 percent of paid childcare workers; 88 percent of nurses, orderlies, and attendants; and 89 percent of maids and cleaners, according to a 2011 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics—and that's just what's on the books. As of 2002, women were the sole or coequal earners in more than half of American families; meanwhile, women have continued to provide the majority of unpaid care to children and elderly family members. Middle- and upper-class women with full-time jobs may spend less time doing housework than their mothers, but middle- and upper-class men have done little to pick up the slack. Instead, people who can afford to do so hire nannies and housekeepers—often women from lower-income countries who have left their own children in the care of female relatives—to do the work they're no longer able or willing to do, passing along to them the problem of undercompensation for domestic labor.

Overall, the value that unwaged domestic work contributes to the global economy remains grossly underestimated. Back in 2002, the BBC reported that "if [unwaged] housework was paid, it would be worth seven hundred billion pounds to the UK economy," citing a study from 2000 on "leisure time use" released by the UK's Office of National Statistics. The BBC story surely intended to shock, but seven hundred billion pounds was nonetheless a conservative estimate. Had the study accounted for the wages earned by those whose ability to work—and whose health and whose time—depended on unwaged domestic labor, the pound value of housework to the UK economy would be astronomical. Ten years later, a study by the US Bureau of Economic Analysis on "nonmarket services" gave a more staggering figure: Had home production been calculated into the GDP in 2010, it would have raised the GDP by nearly 26 percent—valuing the unpaid work of "home production," which includes cooking, cleaning, and gardening, at roughly $3.8 trillion.

Some state policies have sought to address the problems Wages for Housework brought to light. In an opinion piece for the UK *Guardian* in April of this year, James herself called attention to a California bill called the Women's Option to Raise Kids Act (or WORK), which proposes to "recognize that all parents who stay home to raise young children are, in fact, doing important and legitimate work." The main purpose of the WORK Act would be to amend the work requirement of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) law—which replaced the welfare laws in the 1990s and brought with it a lifetime cap in assistance to the poor—so that caring for children three years old or younger would count as work. This would allow low-income parents to "receive job training, search for work, or raise their children until they are school-age without fear of losing TANF support and being pushed deeper into poverty."

We need legislation like this. Yet the WORK act and others like it are unsatisfactory. The dissonance between the gender-neutral language of the bill ("all parents") and its

CONFINED TO A ROOM

by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, from *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892)

I'm really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper.

Out of one window I can see the garden, those mysterious deepshaded arbors, the riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees.

Out of another I get a lovely view of the bay and a little private wharf belonging to the estate. There is a beautiful shaded lane that runs down there from the house. I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths and arbors, but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try.

I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.

But I find I get pretty tired when I try.

It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well, John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now.

I wish I could get well faster.

But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had!

There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down.

I get positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere. There is one place where two breadths didn't match, and the eyes go all up and down the line, one a little higher than the other.

I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before, and we all know how much expression they have! I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toy-store.

I remember what a kindly wink the knobs of our big, old bureau used to have, and there was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend.

I used to feel that if any of the other things looked too fierce I could always hop into that chair and be safe.

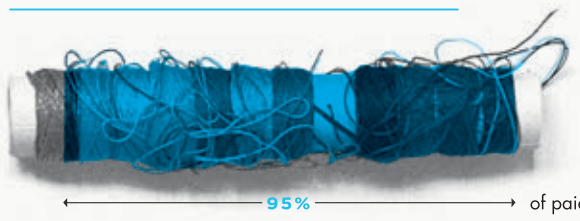
The furniture in this room is no worse than inharmonious, however, for we had to bring it all from downstairs. I suppose when this was used as a playroom they had to take the nursery things out, and no wonder! I never saw such ravages as the children have made here.

The wall-paper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred.

Then the floor is scratched and gouged and splintered, the plaster itself is dug out here and there, and this great heavy bed which is all we found in the room, looks as if it had been through the wars.

DOMESTIC WORK IN NEW YORK CITY

IN THE FIELD OF DIRECT-CARE WORK, WOMEN ACCOUNT FOR…



- 95% of paid childcare workers
- 89% of nurses, orderlies, and attendants
- 88% of maids and cleaners

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011

Statistics originate from the study *Home Is Where the Work Is: Inside New York's Domestic Work Industry* (2006), published by Domestic Workers United and the DataCenter, unless otherwise noted.

Photographs by Lisa Congdon, Diagrams by Kelli Anderson

explicitly gendered title (a "woman's option") mirrors the standing cultural preference that women care for children despite lip service to a shared commitment. The bill's cutoff at "children age three or younger" meanwhile leaves too much work to state-subsidized childcare, which is left to pick up the burden for families with children over four. Head Start and similar government-sponsored early education programs in the US have been a tremendous help to working parents, but parents' struggles don't end when children reach school age. Not all families qualify for free childcare, and free childcare doesn't relieve working-class women of a "second shift"—that is, upon returning home from a full day's work, starting again, this time with childcare and housework.

.....

Wages for Housework's more profound contribution has been the project of demystification at its core—calling attention to what linked, in James and Dalla Costa's words, "female oppression, subordination and isolation to their material foundation: female exploitation." If the material changes Wages for Housework envisioned seemed impossible to implement, they nevertheless raised questions we could stand to pose again: Who are the invisible workers? What does a wage, or lack of one, obscure? When a woman leaves the home to take up "productive" labor in the work force proper, who performs the reproductive labor—the cooking, cleaning, laundering, and child rearing—she leaves behind?

Increasingly, the answer seems to be migrant workers, almost all of them women, who travel great distances—from South Asia to the Gulf or Europe, from Mexico and Central America to the US, from Eastern Europe and Africa to Western Europe—to find work as nannies and housekeepers. These women are paid a wage, but as with most precarious employment situations—where employees are expected to work flexible hours without overtime, on call as once only doctors were, and without the expectation of benefits—the wage remunerated to domestic workers, often in itself insufficient, further writes off the uncharged hours these women inevitably put in, especially those who are hired for their willingness to work off the books. (Many, though not all, of these women are undocumented, which makes working off the books a necessity.) One study from the New York-based organization Domestic Workers United reported that as of 2006, over a quarter of domestic workers in that city received wages below the poverty line. More than half worked overtime, but 67 percent didn't receive overtime pay for overtime hours. Nine out of ten workers didn't get health insurance from employers, and a third could not afford healthcare for themselves or their families. Fewer than half of the surveyed workers had basic workplace benefits, such as regular raises or paid sick days, and because domestic workers are not granted the guaranteed protections of the Fair Labor Standards Act, they have no legal recourse to challenge exploitative labor practices. As of 2010, New York employers are held to the state's Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, which ensures workers' rights to overtime pay and sick leave. But the bill has yet to catch on elsewhere: In September 2012, Governor Jerry Brown vetoed an equivalent bill for domestic workers in California. Nearly all of these California workers are women, and almost 70 percent are Latina.

Live-in workers whose room and board are set against their wages meanwhile find themselves in a role similar to that of the dependent housewife: Whatever her designated hours, she's permanently available to "lend a hand," and this extra, uncompensated labor is registered not as work but as a gesture of loyalty to employers who consider her "part of the family." (Of course, she is only "part of the family" insofar as it suits the family: A nanny may be called upon in emergencies on the basis of her status as an honorary family member, but once "let go," for example, she may be able to visit the children she helped raise, but she has no legal right to do so.) Many new migrants without papers take live-in domestic jobs to solve the problem of finding employment and housing in a single stroke; but as Bridget Anderson, a professor of migration and citizenship at Oxford University, has noted, they pay the cost in long hours, low wages, and lack of privacy—and in some cases, sexual and psychological abuse.

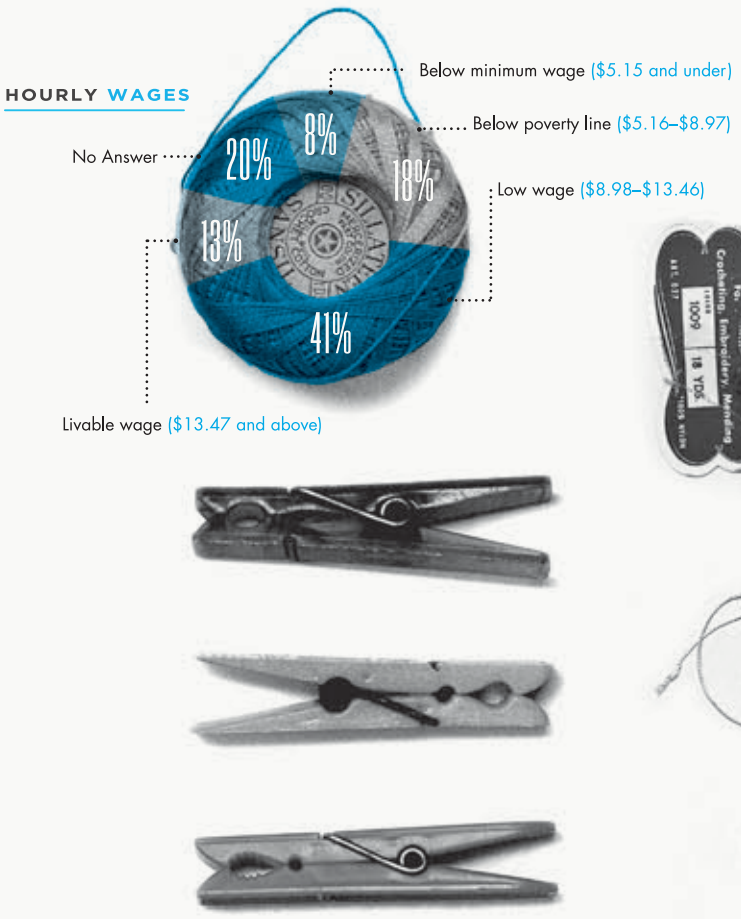
Isolated and without recourse to a higher legal authority, these women have no leverage in negotiating their working conditions. And because domestic is work often affective work—demanding warmth, care, discretion, and loyalty—as well as muscle, the relation between employee and employer (typically, a woman sending remittances to her family back home in a low-income country, and a woman in a high-income country) is not always a simple relation, and compensation not always a simple negotiation. A woman may "pay" her housekeeper for overtime hours in castoffs from her own closet or in the vague promise of camaraderie and protection—even if what the housekeeper needs, and deserves, is cash. On the surface, gestures like these—offering gifts to bulk up fundamentally unlivable wages—may register as goodwill on the part of an employer. In reality, they reflect the failure to recognize domestic workers as workers, or in the case of many migrant workers, as people. James and Dalla Costa wrote that "the machine doesn't exist that makes and minds children," poking fun at the longstanding Marxist and feminist dream of liberation from work through cybernetics and automation. But this does not stop many employers from treating the women who "make and mind" their children like machines—a reality especially true for women of color. Racism inevitably exacerbates the exploitation of workers.

As they care for other women's children to make money, many domestic workers are supporting families of their own. Behind these women are, unsurprisingly, more "invisible" women: sisters, aunts, and grandmothers who stay behind to raise the children whose mothers have left for wealthier countries in search of the means to support them. As much as any unwaged US housewife, or any underpaid and exploited domestic worker, these women in low-income countries must be recognized for carrying the burden of reproductive labor that powers high-income economies. Our wealth comes in no small part at their expense.

.....

The story of Selma James's neighbor, who sells the clothes her children have outgrown for a little cash, tells us so much with so little. It reminds us how much events like the garage sale belong to women, as spaces where they can wring value from the accumulated props of their daily work and where they present these physical objects as evidence of their existence. The garage sale, itself an act of housework ("spring cleaning," "downsizing"), is also a narrative—a material chronicle of so many years of care. Baby shoes often worn, popsicle molds never used; toys, cribs, clothes, odds and ends from fleeting hobbies never pursued; trophies, costumes, blenders and toasters, hockey sticks and Easy-Bake Ovens and half-dismantled Barbie dream houses: all these testify to a lifetime of reproductive labor. While it may bring women together "as friends and neighbors" more than as "workmates and anti-workmates," the garage sale nevertheless creates a space for the mutual recognition of women's work. Briefly, fleetingly, it offers a glimpse of the invisible.

But it also reminds us of what remains out of sight. The garage sale's wares may testify to the daily labor of the woman of the family; what objects among them testify to the lives of today's domestic workers and to their time spent laboring behind closed doors? The hand-me-downs from a wealthy woman to her domestic employee do not announce themselves on the street as evidentiary traces of reproductive work—or at least not as visibly as a line of children's clothes does, laid out on a lawn. These objects, too, carry histories of exchange, exploitation, and compromise. What would it look like to consider them, passed between hands in an even less visible economy of exchange? To see the T-shirt that belonged to one small child on the back of another, years later, in another, poorer, neighborhood or on the other side of the globe? Objects can say much, but perhaps on a scale larger than the neighborhood block—one that extends to encompass the global economy—objects cannot say enough.



SELMA JAMES & MARIAROSA DALLA COSTA

Get Out of the House

These observations are an attempt to define and analyze the "Woman Question," and to locate this question in the entire "female role" as it has been created by the capitalist division of labor.

We place foremost in these pages the housewife as the central figure in this female role. We assume that all women are housewives and even those who work outside the home continue to be housewives. That is, on a world level, it is precisely what is particular to domestic work, not only measured as number of hours and nature of work, but as quality of life and quality of relationships which it generates, that determines a woman's place wherever she is and to whichever class she belongs. We concentrate here on the position of the working-class woman, but this is not to imply that only working-class women are exploited. Rather it is to confirm that the role of the working-class housewife, which we believe has been indispensable to capitalist production, is the determinant for the position of all other women. Every analysis of women as a caste, then, must proceed from the analysis of the position of working-class housewives.

In order to see the housewife as central, it was first of all necessary to analyze briefly how capitalism has created the modern family and the housewife's role in it, by destroying the types of family group or community which previously existed.

THE ORIGINS OF THE CAPITALIST FAMILY

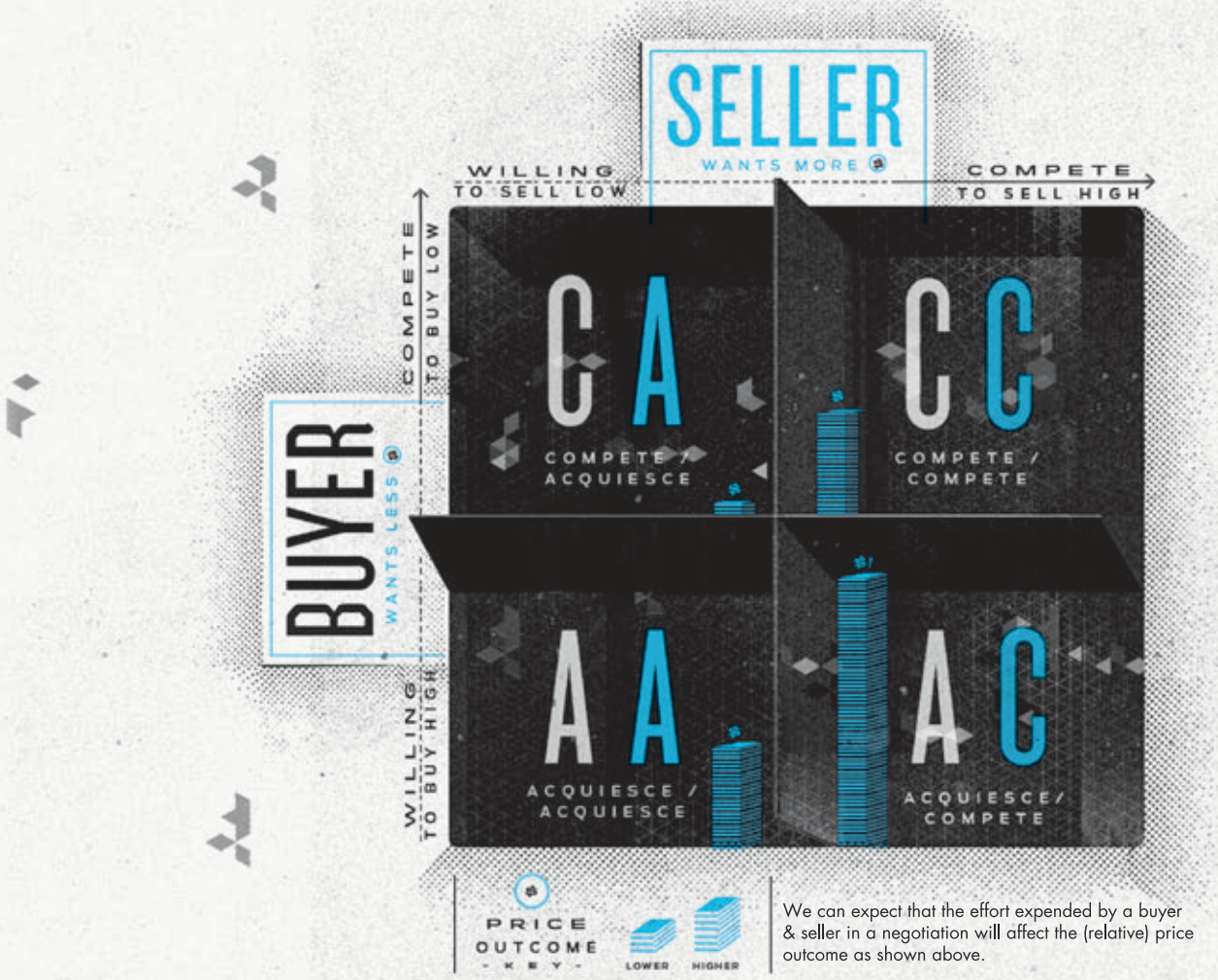
In pre-capitalist patriarchal society the home and the family were central to agricultural and artisan production. With the advent of capitalism the socialization of production was organized with the factory as its center. Those who worked in the new productive center, the factory, received a wage. Those who were excluded did not. Women, children, and the aged lost the relative power that derived from the family's dependence on their labor, which was seen to be social and necessary. Capital, destroying the family and the community and production as one whole, on the one hand has concentrated basic social production in the factory and the office and on the other has in essence detached the man from the family and turned him into a wage laborer. It has put on the man's shoulders the burden of financial responsibility for women, children, the old and the ill—in a word, all those who do not receive wages. From that moment began the expulsion from the home of all those who did not procreate and service those who worked for wages. The first to be excluded from the home, after men, were children; they sent children to school. The family ceased to be not only the productive but also the educational center.

CONFIRMING THE MYTH OF FEMALE INCAPACITY

With the advent of the capitalist mode of production, then, women were relegated to a condition of isolation, enclosed within the family cell, dependent in every aspect on men. The new autonomy of the free wage slave was denied her, and she remained in a pre-capitalist stage of personal dependence, but this time more brutalized because in contrast to the large-scale highly socialized production which now prevails.... To the extent that women were cut off from direct socialized production and isolated in the home, all possibilities of social life outside the neighborhood were denied them, and hence they were deprived of social knowledge and social education. When women are deprived of the wide experience of organizing and planning industrial and other mass struggles, they are denied a basic source of education, the experience of social revolt. And this experience is primarily the experience of learning your own capacities, that is, your power, and the capacities, the power, of your class. Thus the isolation from which women have suffered has confirmed to society and to themselves the myth of female incapacity.

A series of excerpts from the essay "Women and the Subversion of the Community," first published as "Donne e sovversione sociale," in *Potere femminile e sovversione sociale*, Padova, 1972.

It is often asserted that, within the definition of wage labor, women in domestic labor are not productive. In fact, precisely the opposite is true if one thinks of the enormous quantity of social services that capitalist organization transforms into privatized activity, putting them on the backs of housewives.



We can expect that the effort expended by a buyer & seller in a negotiation will affect the (relative) price outcome as shown above.

FIG 1. NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES

The process of negotiation can be described as the attempt to create and to claim as much value as possible. In 1992, David Lax and James Sebenius, professors at Harvard Business School, noted that the famous Prisoner's Dilemma has a natural application to negotiation. Negotiators, they argued, must decide whether to pursue a cooperative or a competitive strategy. If both parties cooperate, each will have a good outcome. If one cooperates while the other competes, the cooperative party will have a poor outcome and the competitive party an excellent outcome. If both parties compete, they will each wind up with a mediocre outcome. The dilemma is that both parties are better off if they cooperate, yet, faced with uncertainty about the other's strategy, each side's best choice is to compete.

◂ Illustration by Kelli Anderson

SURPLUS VALUE & THE SOCIAL FACTORY

When women remain outside social production, that is, outside the socially organized productive cycle, they are also outside social productivity. The role of women, in other words, has always been seen as that of a psychologically subordinated person who, except where she is marginally employed outside the home, is outside production; essentially a supplier of a series of use values in the home. This basically was the viewpoint of Marx who, observing what happened to women working in the factories, concluded that it might have been better for them to be at home, where resided a morally higher form of life.

We have to make clear that, within the wage, domestic work produces not merely use values, but is essential to the production of surplus value. This is true of the entire female role as a personality which is subordinated at all levels, physical, psychical, and occupational, which has had and continues to have a precise and vital place in the capitalist division of labor, in pursuit of productivity at the social level.

THE PRODUCTIVITY OF WAGE SLAVERY BASED ON UNWAGED SLAVERY

It is often asserted that, within the definition of wage labor, women in domestic labor are not productive. In fact, precisely the opposite is true if one thinks of the enormous quantity of social services that capitalist organization transforms into privatized activity, putting them on the backs of housewives. Domestic labor is not essentially "feminine work"; a woman doesn't fulfill herself more or get less exhausted than a man from washing and cleaning. These are social services inasmuch as they serve the reproduction of labor power. And capital, precisely by instituting its family structure, has "liberated" the man from these functions so that he is completely "free" for direct exploitation; so that he is free to "earn" enough for a woman to reproduce him as labor power.[1] It has made men wage slaves, then, to the degree that it has succeeded in allocating these services to women in the family, and by the same process controlled the flow of women onto the labor market.

[...]

Now it is clear that not one of us believes that emancipation, liberation, can be achieved through work. Work is still work, whether inside or outside the home. The independence of the wage earner means only being a "free individual" for capital, no less for women than for men. Those who advocate that the liberation of the working-class woman lies in her getting a job outside the home are part of the problem, not the solution. Slavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink. To deny this is also to deny the slavery of the assembly line itself, proving again that if you don't know how women are exploited, you can never really know how men are. But this question is so crucial that we deal with it separately. What we wish to make clear here is that by the non-payment of a wage when we are producing in a world capitalistically organized, the figure of the boss is concealed behind that of the husband. He appears to be the sole recipient of domestic services, and this gives an ambiguous and slavelike character to housework. The husband and children, through their loving involvement, their loving blackmail, become the first foremen, the immediate controllers of this labor.

The husband tends to read the paper and wait for his dinner to be cooked and served, even when his wife goes out to work as he does and comes home with him. Clearly, the specific form of exploitation represented by domestic work demands a correspondingly specific form of struggle, namely the women's struggle, within the family.

THE REFUSAL OF WORK

Hence we must refuse housework as women's work, as work imposed upon us, which we never invented, which has never been paid for, in which they have forced us to cope with absurd hours, twelve and thirteen a day, in order to force us to stay at home.

We must get out of the house; we must reject the home, because we want to unite with other women, to struggle against all situations which presume that women will stay at home, to link ourselves to the struggles of all those who are in ghettos, whether the ghetto is a nursery, a school, a hospital, an old-age home, or asylum. To abandon the home is already a form of struggle, since the social services we perform there would then cease to be carried out in those conditions, and so all those who work out of the home would then demand that the burden carried by us until now be thrown squarely where it belongs—onto the shoulders of capital.

[1] The term "labor power" is used by Marx in his analysis of capitalist production. Labor power can be understood as the capacity possessed by all able-bodied individuals to work, irrespective of personal distinctions of any kind. This must be distinguished from "labor," or "work," which is the specific activity or effort of producing goods or services in a concrete situation. Labor power is the first product of capitalist society because only under capitalism is human labor bought and sold as a commodity like any other. Under previous forms of economic organization, workers in possession of their own tools produced objects they then sold, whereas now they sell their labor power *as though it were an object* and thus largely interchangeable with that of any other worker. The difference between what is received by the individual artisan in exchange for a unique product and what is received by the industrial worker in exchange for his or her labor power is what accounts for the accumulation of "surplus value" in the process of industrial manufacturing, and is what allows the employer to garner a profit.—Ed.

WHERE ONCE SHE HAD BEEN INNOCENT

by Elizabeth Gaskell, from *Mary Barton* (1848)

Esther set off towards the court where Mary lived, to pick up what she could there of information. But she was ashamed to enter in where once she had been innocent, and hung about the neighbouring streets, not daring to question, so she learnt but little; nothing, in fact, but the knowledge of John Barton's absence from home.

She went up a dark entry to rest her weary limbs on a doorstep and think. Her elbows on her knees, her face hidden in her hands, she tried to gather together and arrange her thoughts. But still every now and then she opened her hand to see if the paper were yet there.

She got up at last. She had formed a plan, and had a course of action to look forward to that would satisfy one craving desire at least. The time was long gone by when there was much wisdom or consistency in her projects.

It was getting late, and that was so much the better. She went to a pawnshop, and took off her finery in a back room. She was known by the people, and had a character for honesty, so she had no very great difficulty in inducing them to let her have a suit of outer clothes, befitting the wife of a workingman, a black silk bonnet, a printed gown, a plaid shawl, dirty and rather worn to be sure, but which had a sort of sanctity to the eyes of the streetwalker as being the appropriate garb of that happy class to which she could never, never more belong.

She looked at herself in the little glass which hung against the wall, and sadly shaking her head thought how easy were the duties of that Eden of innocence from which she was shut out; how she would work, and toil, and starve, and die, if necessary, for a husband, a home—for children—but that thought she could not bear; a little form rose up, stern in its innocence, from the witches' caldron of her imagination, and she rushed into action again.

IN CONVERSATION

Vinay Gidwani with Brett Story

ON WASTE AS THE POLITICAL OTHER OF VALUE.

"Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without." This early twentieth-century adage, popularized during the Great Depression, typifies the era's ideology of thrift. Frugality was not merely a necessity but one of the highest virtues for those who, faced with dire scarcity, eked out every last bit of use from things that in years of abundance they might have discarded. This material thrift of the 1930s posed a systematic threat to an industrial economy premised on the mass consumption of consumer goods—goods that had to be bought if the crisis of overproduction was to be avoided. The solution? Built-in disposability, consumer credit, and the mass marketing of desire. Automobiles were traded in for want of new color, plastic diapers clogged expanding landfills, consumer debt skyrocketed, and the mass discarding of goods catapulted the old capitalist "problem" of waste into the spotlight of twentieth-century environmentalism.

With this postwar cultural and economic shift from thrift to overconsumption came not only new marketplaces but also new forms of waste. Walter Benjamin's famous figure for the angel of history, the image of Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*, turned backward to face a continuous catastrophe of accumulating wreckage hurled in front of its feet, now seems to prefigure an alarmingly literal index of progress: the massive production of material waste on a global scale.

One category of new waste is of the electronic variety: old stereos and televisions alongside computer equipment and cellular telephones. This category is an index to a larger problem: the decreasing life span of high-volume electronic goods, whose obsolescence is built into their production and marketing. Of the some three million tons of electronic waste ("e-waste") the US produces each year, only about 15 to 20 percent is recycled, according to a report by the United Nations Development Programme. The rest either goes directly into landfills and incinerators or is exported to countries of the Global South.

Along with China, India is one of the world's leading importers of e-waste. A study in 2007 by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation in India suggests that fifty thousand tons of e-waste are imported to India from high-income countries every year, despite the nation's ban on the disposal of foreign waste and on the importing of old computers and their accessories—a ban often circumvented through a loophole that allows for imports of used electronics as charitable donations. Bribes too, are often paid. Some shipments are sent to recyling plants, many of them informal, where items are disassembled into component parts and stripped for raw materials, often in unsafe conditions, and at costs far lower than in the United States or Europe. Other shipments end up in landfills or open dumping sites, adding to the country's already vast expanse of garbage: India is one of the world's leading creators of solid waste, with Delhi, according to a report published by the city's Department of Urban Development, producing 7,500 metric tons of municipal solid waste per day. That number is expected to explode to sixteen thousand metric tons by 2021.

India has long had an informal economy in which more than 150,000 socially stigmatized "waste pickers," the majority of them women, collect, sort, store, and sell or dispose of that waste as a means of livelihood. Much of it goes to small junk and scrap dealers—many of them risen from the ranks of waste pickers—and is reintegrated into the cycle of commodity production. These livelihoods are under new threat by the privatization of Delhi's garbage collection, underscoring the complex local and global relations that underwrite the value of waste in the twenty-first century.

In Bangalore, the city's technology sector—a thriving, state-subsidized domain that helps connect India to other centers of electronic capitalism—now leaves in its wake huge volumes of newly obsolete and highly toxic electronic equipment; estimates range from six thousand to eight thousand tons per year from the IT sector alone. (In Kolkata, an important port city and the largest point of commerce in the country's eastern regions, the situation is similar.) In Bangalore too a massive informal network of scrap pickers and recyclers disassembles these remains (and those imported from overseas, as mentioned above), extracting from them precious metals like gold, silver, and copper. The toll of this labor is being exacted on their health: Toxicology studies have proved such workers to be at increased risk of kidney damage, respiratory ailments, and cancer.

In September, I spoke with geographer Vinay Gidwani, assistant professor of geography and global studies at the University of Minnesota, who has worked with Delhi's waste pickers in an extensive exploration of the geopolitics of work, value, and waste. As Gidwani put it in an article coauthored with Rajyashree N. Reddy, assistant professor of geography at University of Toronto, "The bodies of e-waste workers have, quite literally, subsidized the disposal of Bangalore's IT waste since the sector's inception."

Waste, as elucidated in Gidwani's research, is more than just the detritus of commodities or even that which we fail to fully exhaust, as implied in the injunction "Don't waste!" Waste is also a political category, used historically to designate material excess that is disordered or improper for the purpose, largely, of legitimizing capitalist expropriation of common resources. The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the word's origin to the Latin vastus, which means "unoccupied, uncultivated." In Gidwani's fieldwork with Delhi's waste pickers, the "travels and perils" of waste yield their own historical insights, a minor history of capitalist surplus within which both lives and landscapes outside the pale of value are yielding old battles and new returns.

While the garage sale (now joined by Craigslist and eBay) might seem the preeminent American mode by which individuals and households recoup value from discarded possessions, Gidwani's work is suggestive of other, sometimes contradictory, afterlives of waste finally discarded far from the sites of the products' original use: watersheds poisoned and people diseased by the toxic remainders of e-waste; legitimization for diverse projects of development and enclosure; survival economies for those rendered superfluous by the formal economy; and fiercely contested frontiers of value and self-worth. Indeed, his phrase "the afterlives of waste" at once throws up the specter of death and haunting and also the hopes and foreshadowings of the production of noncapitalist value.

—Brett Story

KEY

| *Brett Story*

Vinay Gidwani

> *Your work explores the relationship between value and waste, and the geopolitics of that relationship in the lived experiences of "minor" subjects, such as India's urban waste pickers. Can you explain how that relationship works?*

In August, I was in Delhi to conduct some oral histories with waste pickers, scrap dealers, and municipal officials who have been involved for decades in the business of scouring the city's detritus. I am working a project called An Oral History of Waste: A Public Archive of Delhi in collaboration with Bharati Chaturvedi of Chintan Environmental Research and Action, an advocacy group that works with waste pickers and petty scrap dealers. In one memorable meeting, a waste picker in his fifties, who has been scavenging for almost thirty years, told us that when he first took it up, he was disgusted by the dirty work of sifting through garbage. "But eventually I came to like it," he said. "The garbage provides me the means to live; how can I hate something that secures my existence?" This particular waste picker, I'll call him Bhagwan, is literate and regularly reads discarded newspapers and novels. Like many others who deal with adversity, he is self-effacing and exhibits a cultivated stoicism. Thus, I wasn't altogether surprised to hear him describe his work almost poetically: "I think I give new life to things that are unwanted, that people have thrown away." Bhagwan came to the city wanting to become someone, but his dreams were thwarted. An acquaintance introduced him to the world of garbage collection, a task he took on reluctantly out of desperation. Initially he worried what people from his village would think should they find out his source of livelihood, but all that's in the past. He no longer frets; rather, like others who have found their livelihood in garbage, Bhagwan takes pride in his work.

You asked how the relationship between waste and value works, conceptually and on the ground. In answering, I'd like to summon Benjamin's musing on the "cultural-historical dialectic" from *The Arcades Project*, which conjures the positive from that which has been cast aside. Benjamin writes: "Every negation has its value solely as background for the delineation of the lively, the positive. It is therefore of decisive importance that a new partition be applied to this initially excluded, negative component so that . . . a positive element emerges anew in it too—something different from that previously signified." The pieties of (majoritarian) value systems, capitalist or caste-based, racist or patriarchal, rest on the effacement of that which sustains these systems, namely the work and imagination of people like Bhagwan.

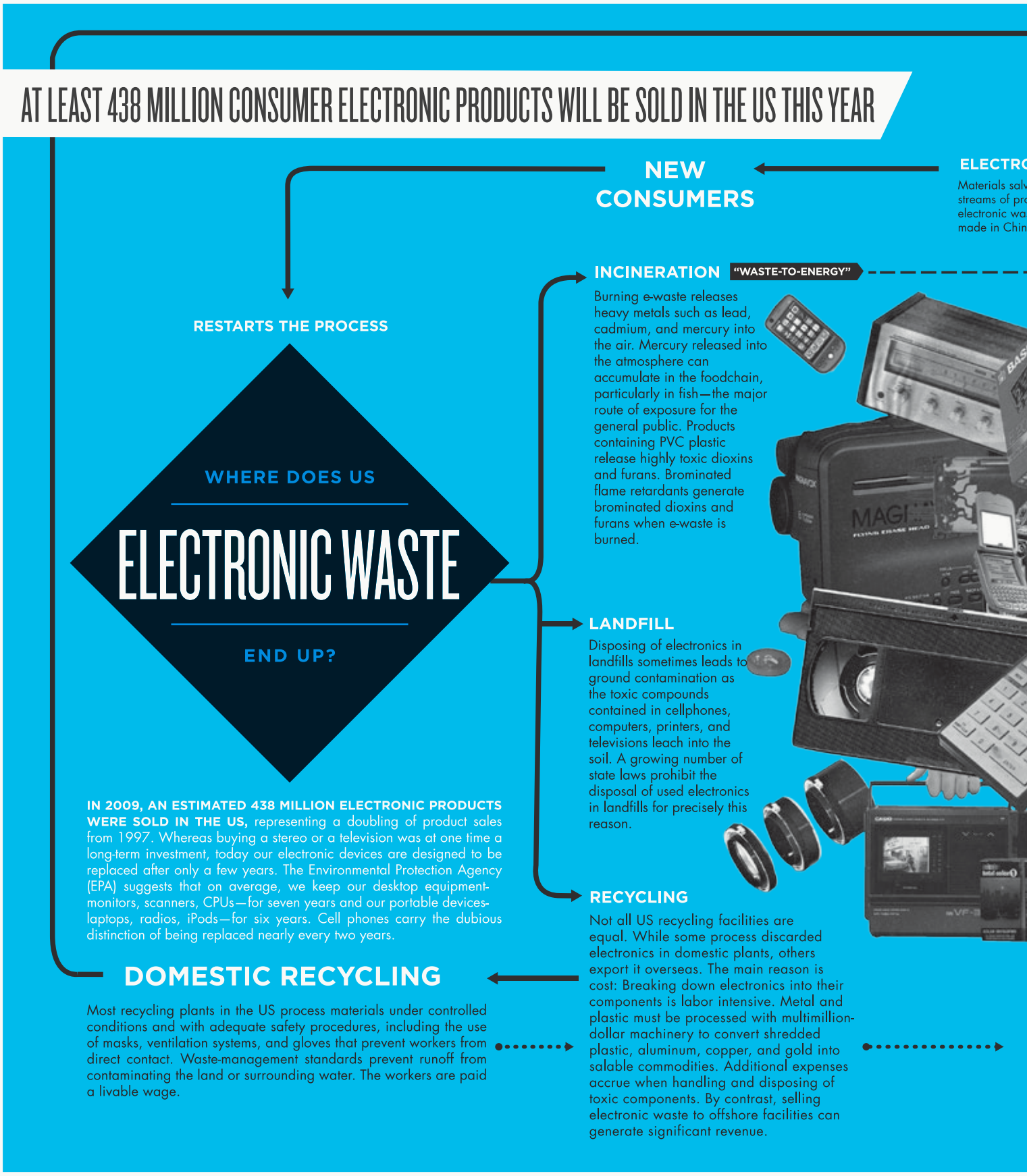
> *What's remarkable about what you describe is that the value being recouped by the work of waste pickers like Bhagwan is not only monetary but also personal, even existential. Yet we also know that this work is precarious, sometimes dangerous, and certainly socially stigmatized. Elsewhere you've used the phrase the "afterlives of waste" to describe some of the contradictions thrown up by the social "wastescape"—the image is arresting but also ambiguous. What do you mean by it? What's the relationship between an "afterlife" and the possibilities for noncapitalist forms of value production as suggested in your work?*

That particular phrase, the afterlives of waste, has a deeply personal resonance. For any child growing up in India to middle-class parents shaped by the tenets of Gandhian economics and Nehruvian socialism, it was commonplace to be enjoined, constantly, not to "waste." My mother, who grew up in dire poverty, never failed to admonish anyone who left uneaten food on the plate, allowed the water tap to run a tad longer than necessary, or forgot to switch off the light when leaving the room.

So the discourse of "waste"—alive in the injunction "don't waste!"—exerts a powerful hold on me, but is now anchored to the excesses spawned by capitalism. Capitalism proliferates untold waste—as remaindered lives, remaindered places, and remaindered things. Needing a docile army of wage slaves, it encourages "discipline" and "hard work"; it exhibits a relentless drive to quell forms of waste that thwart its need to profit.

The concept of waste dates back to thirteenth century tenancy laws in England. It reappears in John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, lurks just below the surface in the labor theory of value of Smith and Ricardo, and repeats with some differences as an absent presence in both Hegel and Marx. It permeates the English parliamentary acts that sanctioned the enclosure of the commons, reappears to index the inferiority of colonized populations in Europe's outposts, creeps into the terminology of the resource sciences (irrigation, forestry, fisheries) that sought to stem the waste of nature, and now, as part of value struggles in cities of the Global South that have embraced urban entrepreneurialism. Waste subtends value, in various places at various times.

As the economic and moral antithesis of value, waste has provided—and continues to provide—vitality and sanction to diverse projects of improvement. As the historian J. M. Neeson puts it, for projects of value, waste is "an enemy to be engaged and beaten." This antithetical aspect of waste, as a process that stymies the society of property and order, is mirrored in the various ways it comes to connote not merely the uncultivated or untended (for example in the *Middle English Dictionary* or latterly, the *Oxford English Dictionary*) but also the pointless, the futile; the ineffectual, the foolish; the improvident; the excessive, and the improper. Here, most vividly, the economic and moral collide as impropriety confronts propriety and its etymological sibling, property. Proper character or disposition, the original meaning of proprieté (twelfth-century Old French), morphs after the seventeenth century to imply both property as material possession and propriety as the possession of or conformity to good manners.



down into its component parts. Processing engages significant rounds of human labor to sort materials into domains of waste and value. In the US, these facilities have adequate safety protocols and waste management standards, and workers are paid a livable wage.

Yet most of our discarded electronics do not end up at one of these top-of-the-line American facilities; they go to low-income nations, where labor is cheaper and laws regulating disposal and safety are much laxer. Waste, it seems, rarely settles in one place, returning as pollution and toxicity, or as feedstock for new commodity production. The geography of this international division of labor is constitutive of broader social geographies of marginalization and exploitation.

The UN Basel Convention, adopted in 1989 and implemented in 1992, bans the export of hazardous waste from low-income to high-income countries. The convention was drafted when, in the 1980s, waste legislation in high-income countries grew more stringent, significantly increasing the costs of disposal, and "toxic traders" began shipping hazardous waste to countries in the Global South and Eastern Europe. As of 2010 the convention has 170 signatory countries. The US has signed the agreement, but has not ratified it, and is not bound by its limitations.

Time, money, words, things, and nature: all may now be wasted, defiling property and propriety, and are censured accordingly.

> *As you've noted, waste as a political category has been used historically to justify enclosures of common lands and criminalize associated practices of "communing." Earlier you cited John Locke's* Second Treatise*, in which the figure of "waste" comes to designate the unenclosed common and the ethical horizon of civil society. I love the idea, which seems implicit here, of the commons and, for that matter, community, as a kind of counterfoil to the propertied "commodity." How does this relate to the concept of waste? What do you mean when you suggest that "waste exceeds the commons"?*

I am reluctant to concede that the commons today can, or even should, be regarded as outside of capital, as much of the burgeoning literature chooses to do. My position simply is that what once was the external margin of civil society is now its internal margin. I conceive of the commons as heterogeneous spaces of exteriority that reside within capitalism, interrupting its logic and enabling it, but, above all, revealing it as parasitical.

What I am saying is that the commons is made and remade constantly. The work of commoning occurs at various scales and is of varying frequency and rhythm. The urban commons includes so-called public goods: the air we breathe, parks and spaces, transportation, sanitation systems, schools, libraries or book exchanges, waterways, and so forth. But the commons also includes the unobvious: municipal garbage that provides livelihoods to waste pickers; wetlands, water bodies, and riverbeds that sustain fishing communities, washerwomen, and urban cultivators; streets as arteries of movement but also as places where people work, live, love, dream, and voice dissent; and local bazaars that are sites of commerce and cultural invention. Indeed, the distinctive public cultures of cities (think Motown!) are perhaps the most generative yet unnoticed of urban commons.

While the terms "public" and "common" sometimes truck interchangeably, there are crucial differences between the two. The public is a juridical category, firmly in the ambit of state and law, which illustrates a contrast to that which is private. The commons, historically and etymologically, is that which lies at the frontiers, or within the interstices, of the territorial grid of law. It exists as a dynamic and collective resource—a variegated form of social wealth—that is governed by emergent custom and that finds itself constantly negotiating, rebuffing, and evading the fixity of law (as E. P. Thompson evocatively points out in his many writings on custom). In a sense, the commons thrives and survives by dancing in and out of the state's gaze, by escaping its notice, because notice invariably brings with it the desire to transform the commons into state property or capitalist commodity.

I am attached to the notion of the commons because, in my mind, its invention and upkeep is at the heart of what the late Indian political economist Kalyan Sanyal called the need economy (more commonly called the informal sector). In Sanyal's reckoning the need economy, in contrast to the capitalist "accumulation economy," is driven by the survival imperative as opposed to the surplus imperative. The common, as such, is—and always has been—necessary for people's survival, particularly those whose sources of livelihood are precarious. For example, Bhagwan, the waste picker.

But waste as a concept exceeds the commons. It is the remaindered existence of both civil society and capital—it emerges from them as their recurring antithesis, which must be conquered or inoculated but never fully is. Henri Lefebvre, in his (sometimes frustrating) essay, "The Right to the City," remarks that "the human being has the need to accumulate energies and to spend them, even waste them in play." I have found this an acute, poignant observation that hints at the possibilities of the everyday as a space of creativity and transgression; of a way of "being otherwise" that refuses the demands of capitalist existence. Thus, waste is play that evades the clutch of efficiency, entropy that evades value, marginality that questions the legitimacy of property and propriety. It functions not merely as the "retrograde" of value, but as placeholder for a vital logic of dissipation and denunciation that explodes capitalist society's pretensions of power and plenitude. To position oneself with waste, with the remaindered, is to animate Benjamin's "cultural-historical dialectic": to apply "a new partition [to the] initially excluded, negative component so that . . . a positive element emerges anew in it too—something different from that previously signified."

MARTHA ROSLER

On Obsolescence

DUSTING OFF THE DISCARDED, THE OVERLOOKED, THE OUTMODED.

The obsolete, indispensable. But obsolescence or obsoleteness? Obsolescence brings to mind a process associated with manufactured objects, as in "planned obsolescence": things that have not worn out are rendered passé, outdated by technical or stylistic innovation, whereas obsoleteness is the status that results. I address both. In *Capital*, Marx lays out the need for industry to develop new machinery, to lower competitively the costs of labor embedded in the production process; this drives down the price of labor to a point at which it is cheaper to rely on human labor power than on new machinery, a process that in turn drives up the cost of labor, leading to a new cycle of obsolescence, as new machines are developed to increase productivity further. The corollaries of this process include the progressive deskilling and cyclical obsolescence of those employed.

The obsolescent plant is the harbinger of commercial decline. (It is the model of all we do.) In a consumer economy, this tricky obsolescence is a requirement of product as well as of production, driven by technological imperatives—and other causes. What is now called globalization is a factor signaling the reconfiguration of tastes and the discovery of needs and wants that move quickly through populations touched by the scale of modern telecommunications. Staying up to date with high-touch and high-tech goods is not only frequently associated with improved social standing but is also conflated with civic participation, citizenship, or nationalism. Obsolescence here bears a negative valence.

A platitude: Obsolescence afflicts us all, and so far there is no reversal. Such windy sentiments in lieu of metaphysical theology and the secular religion of progress animated much of twentieth-century art (and mine has been no exception). A version of the modernist paradigm has consistently translated the artist-bohemian's occupation of the low-down (or down-market) corners of life into a search expedition, the well-recognized safari for the bourgeois patrons of the artistic endeavor. (We slum for you!) We artists have been expected to liven up patrons' lives by dusting off the discarded, the overlooked, the obsolescent, translating these elements into treasures of taste and allegories of mortality. Exotic objects and moments function as fragments revalorizing the bourgeois course, a Nanook narrative for the modernizing middle class.

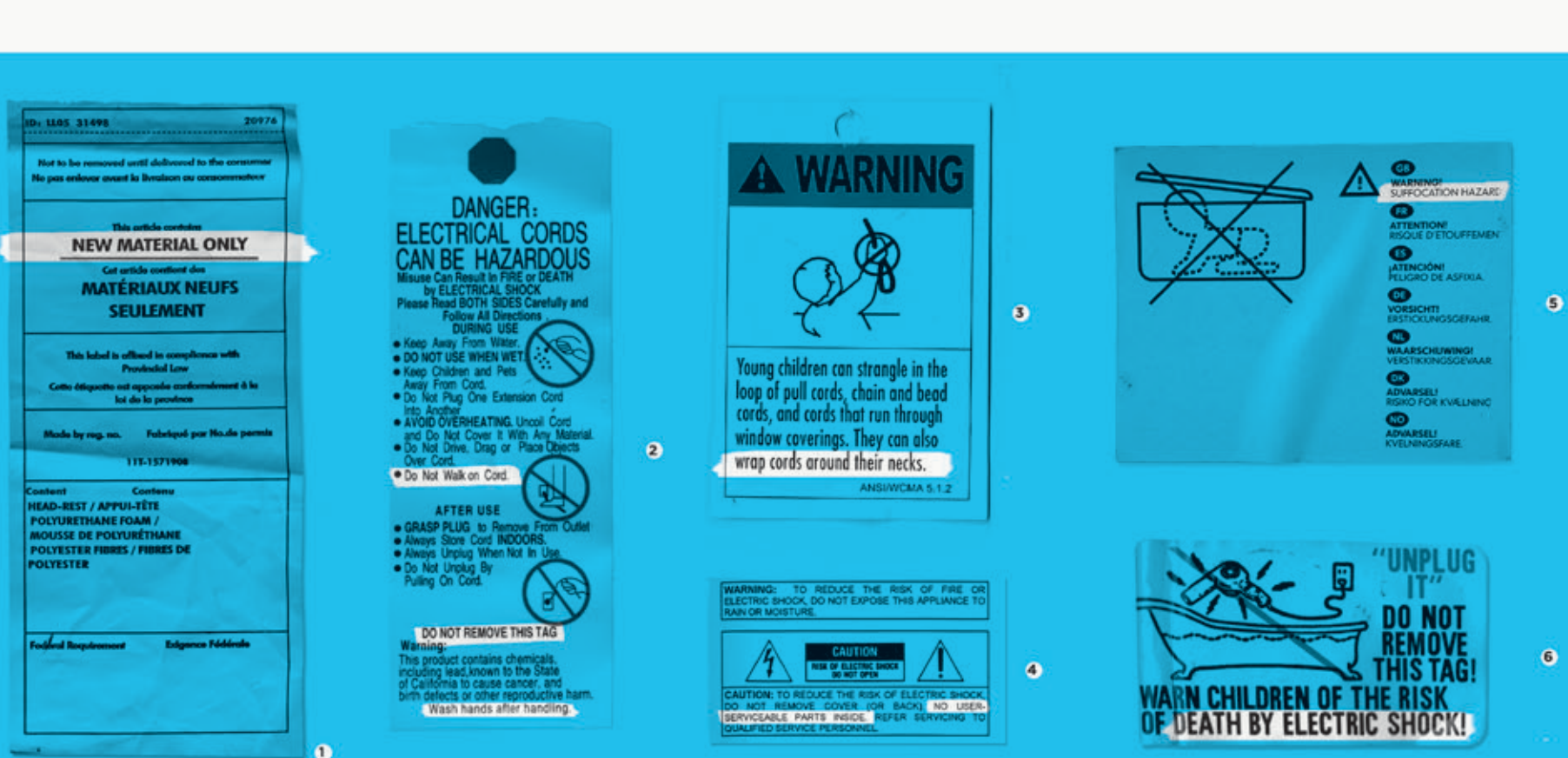
Along with the echoes of European surrealism, Beatniks taught me a sour postwar apocalypticism as a counterpoint to the fantastic proclamations of the conquest of time and space and desire by our civilization. Artist subcultures repetitively looked for a vantage point outside hegemonic discourses of modern, industrialized garrison societies, self-defined by forced regimentation, material comfort, and military might. This interest evolved away from what might be swept under the rubric of "driftwood," the Abstract Expressionist's longing for the remains of the "Real" and the natural, the return of the repressed that superseded the prewar preoccupation with the found (discarded, manufactured, low-level) object. But second nature having already effectively displaced nature in the "life world," artists turned to the implacable gloss of consumer culture, whose handling by artists was inflected by the passé, by human imperfection. No more search for an outside on our part. (But some still define themselves as outside. Should we see contemporary extremist and insurgency movements as versions of that desire to wish it all away in an instant, to tear aside the curtain of invincibility that is smothering the aggrieved and disenfranchised?) I am stuck with the obsolete commercial object, the discard and its image, and the lowly linguistic cliché, an image or a phrase drained of complexity, reduced to a simple sign.

So here is a venerable cliché: the mannequin. That it is a thing, not just an image, has intrigued artists for about a century now. It inhabits space. The mannequin is the dilapidated cliché of capitalism's fetishistic inversion, the automaton/commodity more real than the people who have made it, more vibrant than the world from which it springs. In it we contemplate our own inability to command the processes of production or to knit together the concomitant fragments of a life. If the mannequin is the prisoner of forced choice, we can recognize its neutered body as the one whose identity has been forfeited by its inability to purchase a life (a terrible category whose ranks are perpetually being replenished by all sorts of routine events). We jeer and we worship, honoring and despising the fetish, coveting its new clothes while mocking its lack of agency. The shop window and its frozen inhabitants, that tableau mort, can only testify to our inability—even in our imagination—to transcend fragmentation and distortion, if not depersonalization. (And of course the mannequin stands in for the artist, as the clown face did for an earlier generation: we keep the commodities cycling at the cost of the lost dream of authenticity. When is the last time we heard something denounced as kitsch?)

The obsolete used to call to mind ruins, freighted with romantic longing (à la Rose Macaulay) for their initial plenitude and for the hubris of vanished civilizations; but also with Benjaminian archaeological meanings. Ruins suggest temporality; they function as memento mori. They also suggest a "timely" relic, something that has "taken place," occupying space and time. Ruins remain, or are unearthed, bearing witness to history as failure. The specter of a past nation, a vanished people, hovers ghostlike and attenuated. Its mystery and glory attract, its collapse passes for philosophy. In evoking citizens or subjects, ruins can be seen to justify the present national course, for the decay of the past testifies to the vigor of the present. At one time, civilization gained legitimacy by claiming continuity with the ancient past; at present we have a triumphalist relation to history: we, here, now, are better. (But the doubts are never completely repressed.)

Twentieth-century fashion and design often engineered a look evocative of the futuristic dreams of technological optimism. At present, even science-fiction epics bank on the medievalism of the late British Empire's imaginary, a known mythic past in which, moreover, the Great Chain of Being reads us the script in advance—and fashion relentlessly courts the present with the look of the just-past, but not without irony (which in fashion as in art may pass for despair). Regarding the objects of style of everyday life, especially clothing, one friend, an African American man, suggests that—here in the United States at least, where the spin cycle of fashion's obsolescence and rebirth is whirling faster than we have previously seen, where the obsolete returns with astonishing rapidity—the obsolescent is a way of reinstituting whiteness, returning us, I interpret, to the days of Farrah Fawcett hairdos or white buck shoes, before fashion emanated from the 'hood. (Hip-hop fashion itself began by appropriating the leisure style of the dead white preps, inserting black bodies into the casual style of unattainable privilege.) In this instance, obsolete elements of daily life assume a positive revalorization for those intent on rescuing the racial hierarchies of the recent past and the certainties that went with them.

Is there a rupture in the house? A moment of resistance may (still) be offered by the cast-off commodity—when it first appears, intruding its repulsively worn-out presence into the present, not old enough to evoke nostalgia but only shame. This is not about the reinsertion of clothing styles into the fashion lexicon in imaginary bohemias but about the moment before. In the "United States of Amnesia" (whose phrase is that?), these objects, not remanufactured but simply reappearing, evoke no positive memories. They are ridiculous. Worse, they point backward. But that constitutes their critical moment: The unease of the present is forced to the surface by reimagining our habitation of these discards. They are our past. They reconfigure past personal experiences into a mise-en-scène that testifies loudly to a pathetic failure of taste. Their pure dysfunctionality equals trash—or necessity. Useless as stylish accoutrements, cast-off clothing and personal accessories vie with the sad exposure of a previously—or presently—felt need. As pariah objects, they have a stench. If they are not wearables, they still rebuke us with having once desired them despite their clunky overreach. They remind us of all despised things and people, those who live



Ruins suggest temporality; they function as memento mori. They also suggest something that has "taken place," occupying space and time. Ruins remain, or are unearthed, bearing witness to history as failure.

what used to be called the Third World, abroad or at home, of the arriviste taste our parents or relatives might have exhibited, old-country mentalities, loutishness. Need I continue?

Consider the garage sale. As a social form that is a well-entrenched element of the postwar, nonurban-household economy, it allows for several masquerades: homeowner as recycler, as idiot, as predator, as business-wise householder, as neighbor, as parent of rapidly growing children, as empty nester simplifying the home. The buyer is not a sucker but a smart deal maker, a connoisseur with secret knowledge, a neighbor helping out. At such sales, people may try to outwit each other, while at auctions, especially online auctions, the focus is on the competition and the contest increases the desirability of the prize. With the commodity at the center, the social situation mirrors the larger world of ordinary business dealings. In this context the obsolete object is reborn as a frozen moment of the past, pretending to speak of realities about which it is pressed to testify as witness (note the popular public-broadcasting circus Antiques Road Show). When I staged various carefully orchestrated garage sales in the 1970s in art locales, they were received with head scratching or dismay by critical types (and with glee by my artist contemporaries), but their exemplary reframing carried its own weight. Now the broad audience is untroubled by doubts and thinks we are colluding in pretending that these museum events are more than an ordinary garage sale, despite the array of elements suggesting the contrary. Now that "shopping" is the theme of shows on several continents, as an apparent reading of the collective activity of public space, the artist must contemplate whether the critical power of these events has been strangled by their institutional embrace. The fin-de-siècle great leap forward by museums around the world into digital media represents the opposite pole of institutional reach, the commodity moment of a dematerialized future, still without horizon—utopic only in a reading of that word as simple placelessness, or abstract, generalized space.

So I come to my final cliché: speed as metaphor of social progress. The engine of history has been interpreted by many techno-optimists to be the steam engine and the railroads (I am leaving out water transport), including urban railways and subways, then motor vehicles and their gigantically transformative webs of roads, and then air travel. Here social progress is measured not simply by the movement of goods and people but by landscape transformations, the creation of that Lefebvrian abstract space. If I were not interested in entropy (to invoke, belatedly, a thermodynamic metaphor that departs significantly from the humanist overtones of obsolescence and ruins)—as in the entropy of roads and subways—I would not be as vitally interested as I am in the drastic effort to banish its effects and to project a bubble world of absolute and impenetrable efficiency represented by the system of airports and air travel—a collective projection that we mournfully acknowledge is now in tatters.

Great buildings fall, bringing down with them an entire century's self-understanding and questioning the solidity of a public sphere whose location in physical or virtual space remains unclear to us. Less cataclysmically, urban decay—requiring constant efforts at reconstruction—tugs insistently at our consciousness, by its inconvenience if not its visual offensiveness, reminding us that even the most manifestly solid (whether we are talking about the built environment or social systems) is fragile beyond our imagining. Obsolescence and the obsolete, making their millionth reappearance in this period without horizons (if not of dystopian fears), may represent the effort of the moment to break the hypnotic tranquility of silent assent to the internalized order of things. This is an order that is dictated by what passes for the seamless fabric of ordinary life, but which we intuitively understand is not what it seems. Buyer's remorse means that these contradictions, circling around the promise of remembering and the disappointment of not being made whole, will constantly recur.

Originally published in the Spring 2002 volume of October, *in response to an artist questionnaire on the uses of the "obsolescent" or the "outmoded" as resources for artistic practice. The version presented here has been edited slightly for length.*

OLAV VELTHUIS

The Museum and the Market

1. SACRED GOODS | In no society is everything for sale. All societies exclude some goods from commodification, either by law or through shared moral values. Electoral votes cannot be bought or sold, at least not legally; neither can a verdict in court. The same is true of a nation's cultural heritage. Iconic works of art in museum collections, for instance, are often legally protected. Michelangelo's *Pietà* in Rome's St. Peter's Basilica, Picasso's *Guernica* in Madrid's Reina Sofia, Rembrandt's *Night Watch* in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum—these can never be bought or sold.

Or consider, in the West, the conceptual unease of joining person and commodity. The trade of human organs, for example, is heavily regulated if not prohibited; transplant surgeries rely on appeals to altruistic organ donors or bereaved families. Meanwhile, in some countries a rapacious black market has emerged, relying on indigent donors, often from low-income countries, to meet the demands of patients who can afford to pay.

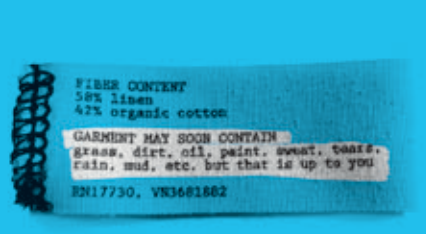
NOT EVERYTHING IS FOR SALE.

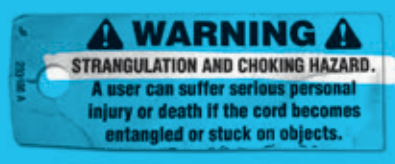
Intrusions of money and markets into parts of life where they are commonly deemed inappropriate are on the rise and increasingly pernicious. We can point to cities in California where prison-cell upgrades are available for as much as $127 per night. Or consider India's commercial surrogacy clinics, often used by infertile American couples. In India surrogacy is legal and offered at a fraction of the price.

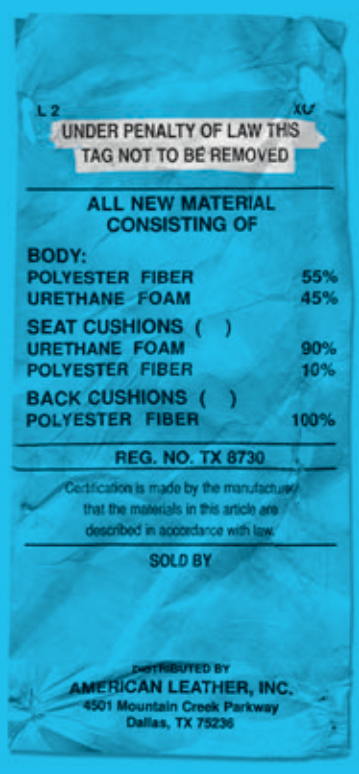
But while widespread marketization is real, especially in societies where the government is retrenching, long-term trends reveal that the opposite is also true. In the West, the slave trade was outlawed in the nineteenth century. Dowries, which equate the bride with a sum of money, have fallen out of fashion in many, mostly industrially advanced, societies. Modernity has been accompanied by a sacralization—a removal from the market—of goods with strong human, cultural, or symbolic value.

Insofar as we deem some things too sacred to be assigned a monetary value, the *Meta-Monumental Garage Sale* might be a provocation. Among the items Martha Rosler has sold in the past, many are considered too

1. Pillow
2. Extension cord
3. Window blinds
4. CD burner
5. Plastic bin
6. Hair dryer
7. T-shirt
8. Beanbag chair
9. Curtains
10. Microwave oven
11. Sofa
12. Chair







Photographic Illustration by Kelli Anderson (and Friends)

intimate for hawking to strangers—personal letters she had received from friends, for instance. We expect a letter to be written, sent, received, read, reread, and, after some time, stored away—in a box in the attic, for instance. If the letter writer attains fame and then dies, it is common for the letter to be transformed into a "collectible" and sold at auction. (In the case of national figures, it is assumed that public collections will obtain them as part of the nation's cultural heritage.) But Rosler's commodification of personal letters as early as 1973, while she was still a student at UC San Diego, might be frowned on as being in poor taste. Friendship should not wear a price tag.

The goods we buy and sell, use and throw away; the goods we cherish daily or neglect all together; the goods we inherit from our ancestors and pass on to our offspring; the goods about which we speak at length and those about which we keep silent—they all have a "social life," in the words of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai. They travel, at various times and by various means, in and out of commodity status. Their meanings, and in turn their value, are transformed through the ways they are used.

2. MARKET PHASE | Sacralization isn't the only means by which goods are removed from the market. In no society is any good consistently for sale. For some goods, such as gold bars, the movement on and off the market is frequent and fast. But for many of our personal possessions, no organized resale markets exist. Our possessions may retain their use value, yet when we no longer need or want them, we have little option but to discard them. Here, informal and secondhand markets of last resort—garage sales, flea markets, online businesses such as eBay—enable otherwise "terminal" commodities to reenter the market. Our used underwear and old diaphragms are not likely candidates for resale, and yet they sometimes do get bought, as Rosler's previous sales have demonstrated.

Art is no exception. We may lament the commercialization and financialization of the art world, but most works will be sold only once (if at all). This is not necessarily of the buyer's accord. Previously owned modern or contemporary art is a hard sell, except for works belonging to a small group of internationally acclaimed artists that see new life on a secondary market dominated by auction houses, private collectors, and commercial galleries. For these acclaimed artists, works may be dispelled from the market forever when acquired for a museum's permanent collection. Museums rarely resell or, in museum parlance, "deaccession" art, except in times of budgetary crisis, and the practice remains taboo.

3. COMMODITY CONTEXT | In no society can goods be sold anywhere. The context must be appropriate to what is being sold: that is, the physical space in which the transaction takes place, but also the application of cultural technologies (counters, cash registers, show cases, price tags) and social norms (dress codes, interaction rituals, speech patterns), all of which are specific to time and place. In some African countries, gas stations are frequently nothing more than a collection of glass bottles filled with gasoline on wooden tables along the side of the road. In Europe or the United States, no one would consider buying gas in such a context. (Although the recent gas crisis in the New York area demonstrates how quickly these norms can change and how disruptive it feels when they do.) In pre-Modern times churches were appropriate locations for conducting business; nowadays that would be hard to imagine.

In the US, one of the dominant commodity contexts is the big-box retailer, often promoting "one-stop shopping." These retail contexts are deeply bureaucratic, promoting efficiency, equality, anonymity, and predictability. They advertise that bringing a wide variety and selection of goods under one roof enables customers to economize on shopping time. Most of the goods are standardized and often prepackaged, with quality guaranteed by the brand on the label. They are sold for posted, nonnegotiable prices, reassuring customers that an item costs the same for everyone. Haggling with sales personnel is not tolerated.

These stores are also antibureaucratic in their way, designed as they are to feed unconscious desire and seduce customers into making irrational purchases—things they had not wanted before and may not need afterward. This is in contrast to garage sales, which are neither bureaucratic—they are inefficient, offering goods of unpredictable quality and price—nor enchanting. Anonymity is also absent: the exchange between seller and buyer is more personal, and the "biography" of the item links both parties in ways more obvious than in a retail store.

So what does it mean for Rosler to hold a garage sale inside the museum's walls? Indeed, it is no ordinary garage sale. Historically, museums provide a context in which commodities do not circulate; rather it is where they come to rest. Museums have, traditionally, deemphasized the financial value of objects, foregrounding instead their cultural and historical significance. In entering a museum collection, an artwork is removed from circulation and rendered singular and inalienable. Museum catalogues never mention a work's monetary worth, because to do so would be to violate an ethical principle: a work's aesthetic or historical importance should not be conflated with its price tag. To hold a garage sale within a museum highlights opposing forces: those of the museum, where an object will never be sold again, its value having transcended money; and those of the garage sale, where objects with lapsed value are again introduced to the market. (About the gift shop, more below.)

4. SYMBOLIC VALUE | If historically the museum's exhibition halls were too hallowed for monetary exchange, they have nonetheless been essential to the production of economic value within the art world. The museum has long bestowed symbolic value on the works it exhibits, which extends to other works in an artist's oeuvre. Art dealers can convert this symbolic value into economic value—that is, higher prices or higher volumes of sales. Without the tastemaking machinery of the art world, in which museums play a key role, the art market would collapse: What else, after all, makes a few hundred dollars worth of oil paint on canvas worth thousands or even millions of dollars?

The logic of symbolic value applies equally to Rosler's *Garage Sale*. While performance art is not easily commodified—what is there to sell?—the *Meta-Monumental Garage Sale*, located as it is within the museum's walls, becomes endowed with symbolic value that may increase the price of Rosler's more tangible works. The performance will be discussed and written about within the art world precisely because it takes place in a museum. Symbolic value is translated into economic value.

The economy of symbolic goods operates in another way here too. After a long career in the art world, Rosler has acquired symbolic capital as an artist. Buying a tea kettle from Martha Rosler's *Garage Sale* is not the same as buying a tea kettle from a neighbor's front yard. The goods at Rosler's sale are endowed with symbolic value—they are sold by an artist, and in a museum, no less. When, in 1973, Rosler offered her son's baby shoes for sale, they were functional goods; today they are symbolic goods circulating in the art world.

5. THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE | Yet even as the *Garage Sale* exploits a key cultural opposition between an informal trade economy and the near-sacred, noncommercial space of the museum, it also points to the growing dissolution of that opposition. In the past decade, the museum has grown increasingly subject to the discipline of the market. The visible evidence lies, for instance, in museum gift shops that have expanded in size and scope and whose carefully considered locations often force visitors to walk through them after leaving an exhibition. (In the same way, boutiques resemble exhibition spaces more and more.) Museum galleries frequently display the corporate logos of sponsors, whereas at one time these logos would have been anathema in a museum space (unless they were part of an artwork). Designated free or reduced-fee entry days at museums are now common, as corporations subsidize the cost of escalating entrance fees. Take the retail giant Target, for instance, whose free events at New York museums have become a corporate signature—"Target First Saturdays" (i.e., the first Saturday night of each month) at the Brooklyn Museum; Target Third Saturdays at El Museo del Barrio; and of course the weekly Target Free Friday Night at the Museum of Modern Art.

The sacred character of museums has also been affected by the extraordinary growth of the contemporary-art market in the last decade. Between 2002 and 2006, sales at contemporary-art auctions more than quadrupled. In 2007, sales of contemporary art at the auction house Christie's amounted to $1.5 billion, 75 percent higher than the year before. At Sotheby's, contemporary-art sales doubled in the same period to $1.3 billion, making contemporary art the largest auction category for the first time in the company's history. And while sales slowed after the financial crisis of 2008, today they have almost completely recovered. Earlier this month, Sotheby's contemporary-art evening sale totaled $375 million, the highest for any evening sale in its history. This growing force of wealthy private collectors has tightened its grip on the careers of artists and the art world's valuation regimes, while public collecting institutions have had their budgets frozen or slashed. Museum directors have long lamented that great works of contemporary art are difficult to obtain because public institutions are routinely outbid by private collectors, but now the situation has worsened.

The wealthy, often nouveau-riche, private collectors responsible for the art-market boom have a tremendous surplus of economic capital but in many instances an equally large deficit of social and cultural capital, to use the terminology of the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. The quest for status leads some of these collectors to donate works from their private collections to public museums, an act that, in turn, transforms the collectors' economic capital into social and cultural capital while raising the market value of the work of their favored artists. Buying contemporary art opens the gate to a prestigious, and previously inaccessible, social world—exhibition openings, gala events, exclusive parties, important artists and other collectors to call friends.

Yet not only does symbolic capital accrue in the museum, economic value accumulates as well. Increasingly, museums are borrowing artworks from private collections. The situation is win-win: Museums show works otherwise inaccessible, while the value of the private collection is enhanced, having received the museum's stamp of prestige. But this process, if too blatant, may attract negative publicity.

In 2009, the New Museum in New York exhibited the collection of the Greek Cypriot industrialist Dakis Joannou. Joannou also happens to be on the museum's board of trustees and is one of its primary donors. The museum claimed that difficult economic times forced it to find "creative" models to fulfill its public mission. But the apparent conflict of interest was conspicuous, raising eyebrows across the New York art world. The museum is a public trust, a government-supported nonprofit institution; it is supposed to act as an independent arbiter of art-historical value. Yet here it seemed to be offering special advantages to an important insider.

The debate over the New Museum show was hardly the first of its kind. A decade earlier, *Sensation*, an exhibition featuring supposedly scandalous works from the collection of the former British advertising mogul Charles Saatchi—many by a group of art school graduates informally known as the Young British Artists—occasioned similar ethical questions. The exhibition, which debuted in 1997 at London's Royal Academy of Art, was sponsored by Christie's auction house. In 1998, it traveled to Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof, and the following year to the Brooklyn Museu in New York City. In the two years between the London and New York exhibitions, Saatchi sold numerous works by artists featured in the show—at auction at Christie's.

In other words, the museum increasingly stands astride the world of the sacred and the world of the profane (to use the Durkheimian distinction). Where once art was an object whose value could not be measured, where once the only appropriate discourse would have been aesthetic or critical, where once plain commerce would have been considered taboo, the market has started to creep in. In other words, museum exhibitions and garage sales no longer relate to each other antithetically but reciprocally. This may be one reason why curators have continued to invite Rosler to hold the work in their institutions, calling attention to the means and methods of monetization of contemporary art and the circulation of value within the museum's walls.

FEVERS OF THE FLESH

by Gustave Flaubert, from *Madame Bovary* (1856), translated by Eleanor Marx-Aveling

Paris, more vague than the ocean, glimmered before Emma's eyes in an atmosphere of vermilion. The many lives that stirred amid this tumult were, however, divided into parts, classed as distinct pictures. Emma perceived only two or three that hid from her all the rest, and in themselves represented all humanity. The world of ambassadors moved over polished floors in drawing rooms lined with mirrors, round oval tables covered with velvet and gold-fringed cloths. There were dresses with trains, deep mysteries, anguish hidden beneath smiles. Then came the society of the duchesses; all were pale; all got up at four o'clock; the women, poor angels, wore English point on their petticoats; and the men, unappreciated geniuses under a frivolous outward seeming, rode horses to death at pleasure parties, spent the summer season at Baden, and towards the forties married heiresses. In the private rooms of restaurants, where one sups after midnight by the light of wax candles, laughed the motley crowd of men of letters and actresses. They were prodigal as kings, full of ideal, ambitious, fantastic frenzy. This was an existence outside that of all others, between heaven and earth, in the midst of storms, having something of the sublime. For the rest of the world it was lost, with no particular place and as if nonexistent. The nearer things were, moreover, the more her thoughts turned away from them. All her immediate surroundings, the wearisome country, the middle-class imbeciles, the mediocrity of existence, seemed to her exceptional, a peculiar chance that had caught hold of her, while beyond stretched, as far as eye could see, an immense land of joys and passions. She confused in her desire the sensualities of luxury with the delights of the heart, elegance of manners with delicacy of sentiment. Did not love, like Indian plants, need a special soil, a particular temperature? Signs by moonlight, long embraces, tears flowing over yielded hands, all the fevers of the flesh and the languors of tenderness could not be separated from the balconies of great castles full of indolence, from boudoirs with silken curtains and thick carpets, well-filled flower-stands, a bed on a raised dais, nor from the flashing of precious stones and the shoulder-knots of liveries.

IN CONVERSATION

Martha Rosler with Sabine Breitwieser

PART II: STEPPING OUT FROM BEHIND THE PROSCENIUM ARCH.

In spring and fall of 2012, Martha Rosler and Sabine Breitwieser, Chief Curator of Media and Performance at MoMA, discussed the history of the *Garage Sale* as well as elements of Rosler's artistic practice. In this, the second of two parts, the conversation centers on Rosler's use of wit, burlesque, and "as if" as artistic modes; her interest in performance as a means to transform art spectators into participants; as well as the significance of staging the *Garage Sale* at MoMA today.

KEY

| *Sabine Breitwieser*

Martha Rosler

> *The* Garage Sale *is your first "performance-installation." In your performances, as in your video work, you do not shy away from using a burlesque style, and you often make us laugh, even about tough subjects. Can you tell us more about how you came to use deadpan wit in your work?*

I am not sure that this work is my first performance-installation, since we resolutely neglected to document our performances. I think I may have done other lower-level, hit-and-run, anonymous works. I like to use low forms, like comedy. The remark, "If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh; otherwise they'll kill you," is attributed to Oscar Wilde, and it's not a bad guide for unpopular opinions. Laughter can often bypass people's defenses. Ridicule and burlesque are often used to denigrate and silence women, who are not permitted a response. Women comics used to collude in this by telling jokes about themselves and other women. It is when an edge is reintroduced into women-told jokes and burlesque that a revolutionary potential emerges. I tried to use this tactic, giving laughter an uncomfortable edge in the video *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, where the woman on screen may be an object worthy of ridicule but somehow presents an insurrectionary undercurrent. I keep returning to the basic realization that I am a New York Jew, and a vaudevillian "shtick" comes naturally to us as raconteurs.

> *How did you come to use such a diversity of material and media that would hardly be recognizable as your "artistic signature" and that—at least at the time—were not acknowledged by museums or the art market in general?*

I just could never bring myself to put together some art-making strategy that might affect things like art-world recognition. I always try to choose a mode of production, expression, and transmission that best suits what I am interested in conveying. I like the idea of thumbing my nose at medium-bound formalism, and although I am not one of the champions of "deskilling," I have always characterized my general mode as "as if": doing work that is in effect a sketch for how one might do a serious work on the matter at hand. It is meant to say to other artists and to the audience: "This is easy; why not try this too?"

> *It seems that you are interested in constructing a public for your work. When did you start interacting with audience members, transforming them from spectators into participants?*

What interested me about performance was precisely the rawness of stepping out from behind the proscenium arch, standing among and sharing breath with people who came to see and be part of the work. As a kid I was very impressed with the Living Theatre's presentation of European experimental works in which the separation of audience and actor is blurred or plainly transgressed. And I was coming of age in New York just after the invention of Happenings and Fluxus events, in which artists abandoned the studio for a quasi-theatrical or "process" space. I was also very interested in the Brechtian *Lehrstücke*, intended to activate the audience and impel them to make decisions concerning public questions. I've written articles on the distinctions between audience and public, and the difference in reception and action each idea conveys—and how they have shifted over time. Construction of an audience, an ad hoc community of sorts, was a central task of the exhibition cycle *If You Lived Here...* that I organized at the Dia Art Foundation much later, in 1989. There it was crucial to create an informal network of people interested in the subjects at hand, namely, housing, homelessness, architecture, urbanism, and in general the right to decent housing. The base of organizing was among artists and others in the art word, as well as film and videomakers, poets, and writers, but a much larger network of activists, advocates, homeless people, and related service providers, representatives, and academics was also temporarily assembled, all to contribute art works, displays, and, for the public forums, ideas and discussion.

> *In your work—including the* Garage Sale*—you've established a practice of performance art in which your live appearances are not particularly expressionistic and often employ media such as video to mediate the live character of the work.*

For most of us, cool was more interesting than hot or expressionist. And remember the element of humor you mentioned, that vaudeville delivery! I am not at all sure the performances of my friends, the LA feminists, including their video performances, could be characterized as expressionist either; once you are on camera, the emotive quotient had better drop if you don't want to be revolting or inadevertently self-parodying! I don't want to be seen as a scenery chewer or an emotional type in my performance work. But I was anti-Artaud, pro-Brecht from the beginning—I am a New York rationalist! I like to suggest that first-person works are really about someone else and vice versa, that third-person works are really autobiographical. In other words, I like to give myself permission to lie, a permission not usually accorded to artists. Artists can create fictions, perhaps, but not tell lies, and I wanted to mess up that distinction, as in the first-person postcard novels I sent out in the mid-1970s. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a fair number of women were creating personas, from Elly Antin to Martha Wilson to Lynn Hershman, among others, all having come to the realization that a female identity was a form of masquerade, a construction. This insight was provoked in part by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, but also inevitably by what might be considered the least persuasive elements of Freudian psychoanalysis (Freudianism had a serious hold on American thinking then), and also by the gay community's interest in masquerade and female impersonation.

> *Over the years, the* Garage Sale *has developed into a portrait of itself as a project: The items for sale consist of what has been collected but not sold in previous iterations of the project. We can see it as a collective portrait of all the people that have contributed to it, but also as a portrait of you and the larger socioeconomic context.*

It's amusing to see how the art world frames works: legitimacy is derived through a work's origin, provenance, and trajectory from its first iteration to the last, particularly by artists older than, say, thirty or thirty-five. I like your idea of the history of the project as existing in the collectivity of participation, a history that does not single me out specially. As I suggested earlier, from the first sale I was careful to fudge the question of whether the goods for sale were "mine" (belonging either to me, the artist, or me, the persona, the quasi-hippie), using the simplest means, such as grouping together clothes and shoes of widely different sizes.

> *In one of the early iterations of the* Garage Sale*, there was a blackboard inscribed with the question: "What if the garage sale is a metaphor for the mind?" This "mind" seems to have traveled through the many stagings of this project.*

A blackboard with that phrase, suggesting another dimension of the work, recurs in most of the project's iterations. It is, if nothing else, a reminder that there is an artist doing this sale, and that there is a symbolic or metalevel of reading the work. The sign goes together with the differential lighting program, in which goods in the gloom, at the back, are somehow racy, hot, or in other ways shameful, insofar as they attest to the low economic status or difficult economic circumstances of the seller. It is also meant to evoke the idea that the reading of the life-world, and of the objects that populate it, is beyond the reach of our

(Continued on page 15)

EDITOR'S NOTE *In February 1973, following the first staging of the* Garage Sale *at the University of California, San Diego's, Revelle College gallery, the* Triton Times *(now the* Guardian*), UCSD's student-run newspaper, published "A Note on Garage Sales," a review of the exhibition by Sandy Dijkstra. Dijkstra dismisses the show on account of its failure, as art, to jettison reality as such and imagine a newer and better version—to "seize things and free them from their bondage in an ugly and instructive reality," she writes, quoting Herbert Marcuse. The following week, the* Triton Times *published Martha Rosler's response, in which she counters that if life seems close to art, so much the better. "Art is life, art is reality," she writes. What follows is an excerpted version of their exchange.*

SANDY DIJKSTRA

A NOTE ON GARAGE SALES

First published February 9, 1973.

Martha Rosler's *Garage Sale*, recently shown at the UCSD art gallery, represents a negation of the possibility of negation. Enter in and you have not left the confines of the "one-dimensional" society: you are merely in another of its boxes. This one happens to be simulated. It is supposed to be a work of art. Which evokes the question: Why would anyone go to the trouble of staging an actual garage sale, in its full and endless mass of meaningless stuff, stuff which might have had significance to its individual owners . . . but which assembled here represents little more than your usual garage sale? Is this an art work or the thing itself?

[. . .]

Objects no longer have the same status they had in the earlier part of the twentieth century. In ordinary middle-class homes it is not unusual to see all sorts of transformations of objects from their original use value: bottles as lamp bottoms, spinning wheels as planters, etc. Indeed a real garage sale (and this was one) is a conglomeration of useless objects, useless because amassed together, records stacked inside refrigerators; if the world fairs of the nineteenth century, those "earthly paradises" of agglomeration, offer us insight into the consciousness of the people that could amass all kinds of exotic and domesticated stuff, separated from any use or logical order, existing only on the level of pure matter, then perhaps, the garage sales are the twentieth century's earthly hells.

Whereas those world fairs have been called the "the apotheosis of progress," we would have to proclaim the garage sale is apotheosis of Obsolescence. For nowadays these things are considered useless because they are old; we have been taught to treasure only the shiny, unused virgin objects. Thus, the need for garage sales. They are the wastebaskets of our culture: no longer is the world fair a useful index of the psyche of our time. Our society is better characterized by its rejects, in each individual garage, and the world fair, that collective manifestation enshrining merchandise on a pedestal, no longer represents us.

Somehow, Rosler's *Garage Sale*, although it provoked this long excursion, fails. It is nothing more than the thing it is and although the intention may have been to represent life in Southern California, or America, any critical dimension seems to be blunted by an overwhelming sense of suffocation in what is. It was a real garage sale; one could buy items if one wished. There is no longer a gap between art and social order. Art has become social order.

If, as Herbert Marcuse says, art should somehow "seize things and free them from their bondage in an ugly and instructive reality," if the aesthetic dimension ought to offer potential for newer and better reality, then art objects such as the *Garage Sale* must be rejected. For as a punctual Gertrude Stein might have said: they are more than what they are they are, they already are, they are are they. In art such as this, the medium has absorbed the message, and the society has absorbed the medium. If we are to "break the spell of the things that are," as Marcuse says in his *One-Dimensional Man*, then we must produce an art which will "name the things that are absent." That which is natural "must assume the features of the extraordinary." Or else, we haven't got art, we have a garage sale.

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MARTHA ROSLER

"MARTHA ROSLER'S *MONUMENTAL GARAGE SALE*" REVISITED

First published February 16, 1973.

WHAT, IS IT ART?

The definition of art was not handed down for all time by God. The question "But is it art?," whether asked bluntly or by implication, inarticulately or prettily, always has the same meaning. . . . The question presupposes a fixed distinction between that which is art and that which is real. . . . But there can be no flat distinction between art and reality.

[. . .]

I see art as an agreement, tacit or stated, between at least one individual (the "viewer") and one life experience. The agreement consists in the individual's willingness to consider the experience as falling within the domain "art." It is not particularly helpful to argue about whether something is art; the question is whether this thing is, by one's own standards, good art: a question not of ontology but of quality. And the definition of "good" can vary a lot.

ART OR LIFE?

If art seems close to life, so much the better. Art is life, a part of life. Reality is not art, life is not art (unless you decide to see them that way), but art is life, art is reality. I see art as a kind of privileged communication, capable of carrying many different kinds of messages or meanings, simple and complex. Emotion, physical qualities, natural processes, some specific illumination or realization about the world, are some of the things that can be communicated by art. Most art provokes a multileveled response in the range of responses of which people are capable. Art is not a zoo animal, caged and defanged, on display to tickle the sensibilities of the public who fancy themselves in danger from its bite but who very well know they are not. Artists should not settle for containment in the box of beauty and inspiration. Let there be no culture commissar who wishes to preserve the pathological alienation of a primary human function—art making—from the rest of life. Music had to become part of life again before it was anything more than a connoisseur's game, and so must art.

[. . .]

THE GARAGE SALE AS CULTURAL ENTITY

Most garage sales are not, as charged, "conglomerations of useless objects (useless because they are massed together)" but rather embody the idea that although the things in them are "used," they are still potentially of value—and of use—to someone else. Thus, Ms. Dijkstra's dubbing of the garage sale as the apotheosis of Obsolescence is incorrect. With this point falls her consequent point that "nowadays these things"—what things?—"are considered useless because they are old; we have been taught to treasure only the shiny unused virgin objects." This point of view speaks volumes about class identification. . . . Horrid accusations may be leveled at garage sales, but that is not validly one of them, I think. Garage sales are about the hope of retrieving some value from a castoff. They are the replacements for charity donation in a culture in which material plenitude has finally reached the "lower classes."

And should we indeed lament the passing of the era of the great "world fairs," when objects per se were capable of exciting awe and titillating the spectators? In Martha Rosler's *Garage Sale* at any rate, objects were data in the evocation, not only of an environment, a cultural consciousness, but of an individual psyche as well.

[. . .]

It was a process, or matrix of processes—in intention it was containment and decontainment, divestiture, renunciation, etherealization, exposure, explanation. In interaction with other embodied transactions of commerce: ripoff, distribution, participation, anti-participation. It drew on crowd control and failure or fulfillment of expectation. As object it was both a cultural monument and a metaphor for the psyche, as traditionally outlined in the Freudian topographical model (though I happen not to be a Freudian): . . . publicly acceptable, easily accessed ("well-lit") "items," including shiny paintings, pretty clothes, paintings, and records and books, in front—representing the conscious; somewhat less acceptable, less ordered, less accessible ("dimly lit") but still salvageable items, including erotic items, underwear and negligées, somewhat worn clothing, empty butter containers, and items of dubious worth—the subconscious; and finally, the back and extending around a blind corner, the obvious disordered heaps of empty milk cartons, used plastic bags, empty cans, torn, distressed, and mildewed clothing, names and addresses and descriptions of former lovers, frank pornography, empty wrappings, broken toys, heaps and heaps of letters, bills, and newspaper photos of the past and a tape recorder. . . played continuously a tape meditation in the voice of the person "Martha Rosler" that covered explicitly many of these points. But most simply, it was a presentation of a garage sale. And there was a xeroxed copy of my thirty-six-page *Garage Sale* notebook.

Each item in the *Garage Sale* was put where and how it was because of its "message"—if a book, its subject, its title, and its condition; similarly for food, clothing, toys, household appliances, and so on.

GETTING A POINT ACROSS

The environment I created was designed for crowd control. Obviously, this aspect of the show works best when, as on opening night, there was a crowd to control. I often . . . asked buyers if they really wanted or could afford the thing they were buying. . . A different tack was to tell them how important thing to me in my life and wonderfully valuable it was. Some I . . . declined to sell at all. If someone seemed dubious about the quality of the thing they were buying, I told them not to buy it or said that they could bring it back for a refund if it didn't prove satisfactory in the next few days. I frequently refused to take money for things. In other words, I often insisted on engaging with the person, an approach that is rarely met with at a garage sale. . . . What, for me, separated the work from an audience-participation piece is that there was no audience. . . . I was interested in people's movements through a metaphorically charged space, provoking certain trains of thought, certain behavioral patterns—not necessarily those of the art world but those of the marketplace, an ages-old hub of human interaction.

ART FOR SALE?

Isn't art in galleries usually for sale?

There are a number of questions that might be asked of this work, questions that do not necessarily have either/or answers. Some of these were (1) Art or reality? (2) How much of a person's insides can you divine from their "material need" (to use William James's term for the collectivity of goods in which a person's self is reflected or infested)? (3) Is what is no longer useful to me useful to you, or are are some things that still looked totally functional really all used up? (4) What sorts of things are okay to buy used—opened jars of food? Used shoes? How personal does the item have to be for it to be a social sin to get it already used? (5) Can the act of putting something up for secondhand sale alone make it seem undesirable, or are there other grounds for judging its worth? (6) Are things left over from our own pasts merely material detritus, or do we really need the kind of redundancy they provide in order to anchor ourselves in time? (7) What kinds of acts can be considered to violate the social contracts implicit in human interaction—concretely, what can I do in running the sale that would provoke this question in the minds of viewers? (8) Some friends of mine were upset because of the personal letters, snapshots, and baby mementos that were there. There is also an ambiguity—conscious on my part—about whether these items were really "for sale." (9) How does one adequately represent the sphere of activity "garage sale" and still invest it with additional weight? (10) Is this bunch of stuff an adequate portrait of a real event? And, of course, (11) Fun or not fun?

POINT AND MOMENT OF IMPACT

The writer tells me that a week or so after visiting the *Garage Sale*, she "just had to" write a piece on it and have it published. Her essay complains of the show's failure as a consequence of her "overwhelming sense of suffocation in what is." Only if one subscribes to the view of art as beauteous and ennobling could such a reaction be taken as a measure of failure rather than one of success.

transactions in public, and one map of consciousness and unconsciousness would spatialize our self-understanding and its lack.

How would you like to situate the project today? What does it mean to stage the performance at MoMA in the large, and in many ways, powerful atrium? What does it mean to do so now, soon after Hurricane Sandy, that could only highlight the huge differential in income and resources in New York and its environs?

Bringing a work that was an outlier in terms of its initial reception and location to what might, not unreasonably, be considered the center of the New York art world—and perhaps of a wider segment of the Western art world—casts into sharp relief questions of value, worth, and work, as well as the issue of the market-based art world and its valuation of art objects. One might well imagine that the walls of the MoMA are lined with money, but a visitor could hardly be as aware of the powerful monetization of museum objects as one is of the more down-to-earth prices of the items that are the subject of crass dickering at a lowly garage sale. I want to evoke the same desire for possession that all people who hold garage sales aspire to, which means I want to offer satisfaction but also a double consciousness—or double unconsciousness—about the questions I hope to raise.

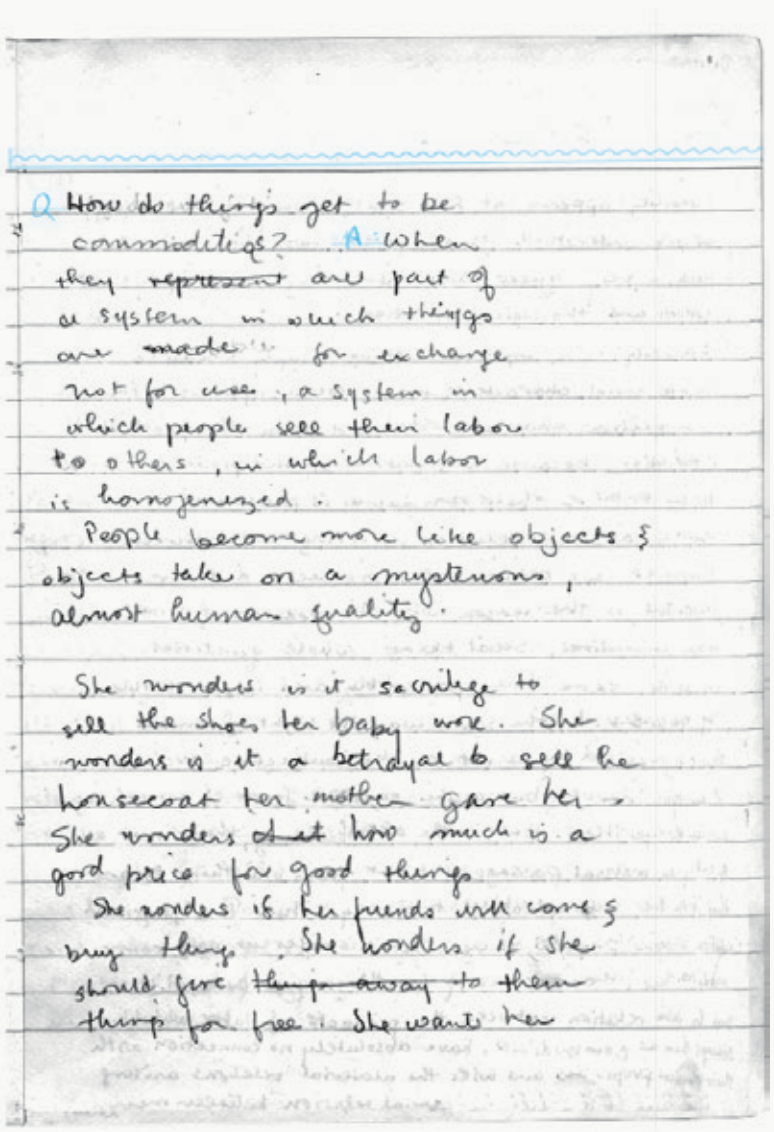
These questions of labor, value, and recuperation are also concerned with the relative share of private and public resources that people can call upon in a situation of sustained economic vulnerability. I have pointed out that the work began during the oil shock of 1973, when ordinary people of modest means were under great economic pressure in a declining economy. I realized then that the institution of the garage sale was a way for people—householders in general, but mostly women—to keep in the swim, so to speak, of the economy, to preserve their ability and that of their families to participate in the markets of daily life. Secondarily, I realized that the institutionalized garage sale either stood beside or eclipsed other forms of communal sharing and charity.

This exhibition hopes to provoke precisely these questions of sharing, desiring, valuing, circulating commodities, and human worth. The catastrophic storm that has ravaged our region, the second in a year, has highlighted that although individuals, communities, and government agencies have stepped forward to ameliorate the situation of those unable to recover on their own, in our reality of growing inequality none of the comfortable choices reside at the lower end of the economic scale.

There is a misperception that natural disasters are great levelers, that they affect rich and poor people equally, but that isn't the case. Catastrophes are born in the interactions between the event itself—weather, say, or an earthquake—and social forms and the built environment. Their effects will depend greatly on the way a society is organized. *The New York Times* informed us earlier this fall that of all the states in the US, New York has the most unequal income distribution, on par with countries like Gambia, Swaziland, and Costa Rica. Some people in evacuation zones were able to pack up, drive away, and rent a hotel room or escape to a second home, exactly as we saw in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast during Hurricane Katrina in 2006, while the poor and elderly, and others with few resources, had no such array of choices. Here as there, the poorest and the elderly are not only the most vulnerable going in, they remain the last served in the storm's aftermath—even to the point of neglect—and are the least reported on. The *New York Times* reviving a phrase I last saw in the 1960s, referred to their neighborhoods as "pockets of misery."

As we are discussing this, more than two weeks after the storm, there are low-lying neighborhoods in New York City that have not yet had their electricity restored or been visited by federal relief services; instead self-organized groups like Occupy Sandy have stepped forward and picked up the burden of care. I saw a newspaper photo of these volunteers providing food to other rescue workers. A man in Coney Island was telling the BBC yesterday that there is not a single business or food store open in the area. Public housing—city-owned high-rises housing poor people—sited in low-lying areas have had their power facilities and boilers destroyed by the huge surge of seawater and will need months for full restoration.

Here's where rather than holding a garage sale for personal or familial gain, in the immediacy of the moment, people donate goods and more importantly services and, if possible, money directly to those in dire need. Face-to-face communities reveal themselves or are newly formed. Everyone has observed the way that fences fall and people and affinity groups come together under conditions of adversity.



Q How do things get to be commodities? A When they represent are part of a system in which things are made for exchange not for use, a system in which people sell their labor to others, in which labor is homogenized.

People become more like objects & objects take on a mysterious, almost human quality.

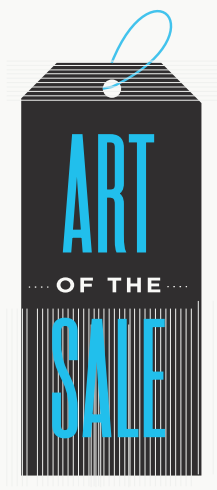
She wonders is it sacrilege to sell the shoes her baby wore. She wonders is it a betrayal to sell the housecoat her mother gave her. She wonders about how much is a good price for good things.

She wonders if her friends will come & buy things. She wonders if she should give things away to them things for free. She wants her

A page from Rosler's *Garage Sale* notebook, in which she drafted her meditation on the status of commodities in suburban life. These impressions form the script for the audio track that has played at each iteration of the exhibition since the first in 1973.

Photographs by Martha Rosler

CROSSWORD SOLUTION



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23 I	J	U	24 S	T	W	A	N	25 T	T	O	G	E	26 T	R	I	D	27 O	F	I	T
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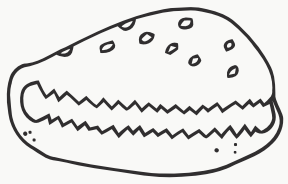
— CURRENCY —

- SHELLS



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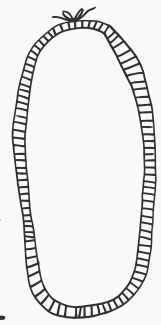

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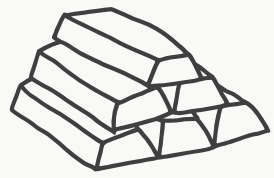
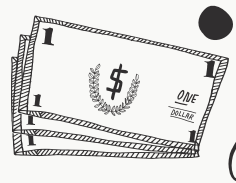
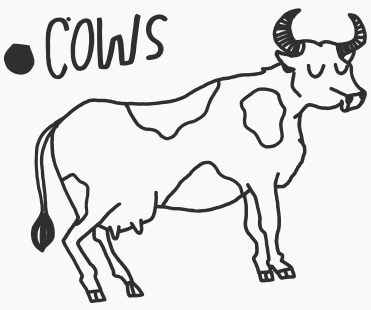


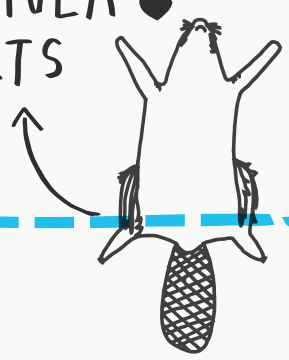


- FIAT BILLS (FEDERAL CURRENCY)
- ITHACA$

- COWS



- BEAVER PELTS



- WOODPECKER SCALPS

TRADED BY NATIVE AMERICANS

- CREDIT CARDS

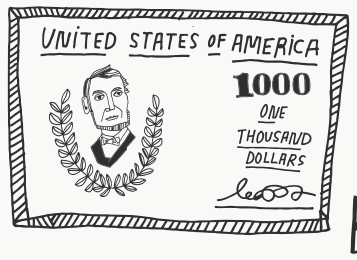
— CREDIT —

- KNOTTED STRING

TO TRACK DEBT

- NOSES

CUT OFF TO PAY FOR TAX DEBT (VIKINGS)

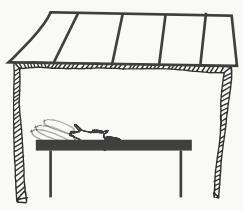


- BONDS (IOU'S)

- PACKAGED-UP DEBT (FROM OTHER PEOPLE) YOU CAN BUY

— MARKETS —

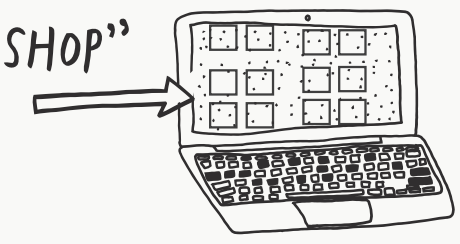
A "SHOP"



- THE MARKET

- POTLATCH: GIFT EXCHANGE w/o CURRENCY

A "SHOP"



- GARAGE SALE

- TRADING ALGORITHMS like "STUBBY TRIANGLES"

ANCIENT WORLD | MIDDLE AGES | AGE OF EMPIRE | INDUSTRIAL AGE | INFORMATION AGE

HISTORY →

Illustration by Kate Bingaman-Burt