GARAGE SALE STANDARD

THE META / MONUMENTAL

FREE!

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THE SOCIAL LIVES OF OBJECTS

AN ARTIST'S NEWSPAPER PROJECT BY MARTHA ROSLER

ISSUE 1

An object is always more than what it is: A chair is never only a chair, a spoon never merely a spoon. It travels through social worlds, and carries forward a history, belonging first to those who produced it, and later, to those who bought, used, altered, sold, traded, or discarded it. Value is ascribed to it, value is withdrawn; value is regenerated.

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In conjunction with—

The Meta-Monumental Garage Sale

NEGOTIATE WITH THE ARTIST!

EXHIBITION
November 17–30, 2012

VENUE
The Museum of Modern Art
New York, New York

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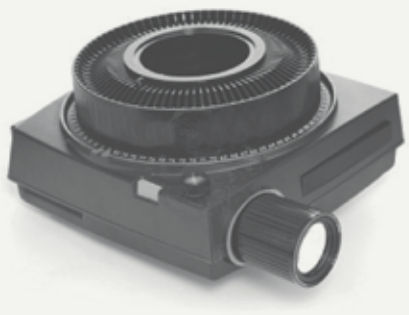


A Kodak Slide Projector

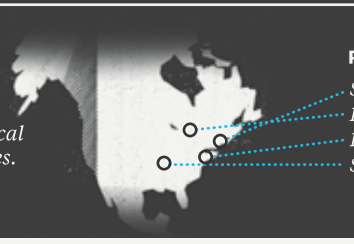
45-RPM Adapters

Cast Iron Horse

REGULATED MARKETS

Local rules governing garage sales in the US.

After the financial collapse in 2008, garage sales became more important to many Americans as a source of both income and goods—and more disruptive to "community" life, prompting some local governments to impose limits on the number of sales.
Source: Businessweek



RESIDENTS ARE LIMITED TO:

- *South Greensburg, Pennsylvania* 2 sales/year
- *Elkhart, Indiana* 15 sales/year (3 hours maximum)
- *Phenix City, Alabama* 2 sales/year
- *San Angelo, Texas* 2 sales/year

Illustrations & Photography

in **ISSUE 1**

Josh Neufeld
Lisa Congdon
Wendy MacNaughton
Don Hamerman
Kate Bingaman-Burt
Kelli Anderson

GARAGE SALE STANDARD

Issue 1 of 2 / Published by Martha Rosler on the occasion of the—

Meta-Monumental Garage Sale

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

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The *Meta-Monumental Garage Sale* will be held from November 17 to 30, 2012, in the Marron Atrium of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, at 11 W. 53rd Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. 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 *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.

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

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

Illustration by Josh Neufeld ‣

Editor's Note—

Garage sales emerged in the United States in the late 1960s as one means of disposing of possessions from the home. Gretchen Herrmann took up the study of this informal economy as a doctoral student at the State University of New York (SUNY) Binghamton in the 1980s. By that time, the American garage sale had become an important social institution: According to Herrmann's estimates, six million sales were held every year, and between one and two billion dollars changed hands.

Herrmann eventually completed a dissertation on garage sales and interrelated questions of women, work, and community. Herrmann, now an anthropologist and bibliographer for the social sciences at SUNY Cortland, continues her participant-observation research and has, over the years, interviewed more than 280 shoppers and sellers, attended more than three thousand garage sales, and held over a dozen herself. Today, Herrmann calculates that there are between ten and twelve million garage sales each year in the United States, with a total of eight billion dollars exchanged.

IN CONVERSATION

Gretchen Herrmann with Martha Rosler

COMMUNITY, WOMEN, AND WORK IN THE AMERICAN GARAGE SALE

In the fall of 2012, Gretchen Herrmann and Martha Rosler discussed the cultural, economic, and social conditions in which the garage sale both emerged and grew in popularity.

KEY

| *Martha Rosler*

Gretchen Herrmann

Your research locates the emergence of the garage sale in a contradiction in American life: Prosperity brings families the ability to replace domestic items regularly, but long-term decline in spending power puts stresses on that ability. The two processes of consumerism and survival help drive the behavior of families and individuals. Right after the collapse of the housing bubble in 2008, the New York Times *noted the rise in garage sales in affected communities and the detachment from "sentiment" this involves.*

When were the first garage sales, and how would you characterize the economic conditions and the changing nature of consumerism during that time period?

Garage sales as we know them—sales of a diverse allotment of household goods, decorative items, clothing, and other belongings from the home at an advertised date and time—are a product of the 1960s. There has always been some informal selling from the home, but never with the variety and amount of miscellaneous items that we see in garage sales. Several factors converged to allow this front-yard trade to thrive. One was a backlog of consumer goods. The 1930s were the "make-do" Depression, the 1940s were the Second World War, and it was only in the late 1940s, the 1950s, and the early 1960s that the average American householder could have built up enough consumer goods to sell. In part, the upsurge of acquired material possessions resulted from "planned obsolescence," by then introduced into product design, encouraging shoppers to purchase the latest styles of an increasing variety of household commodities.

Another factor was a change of architecture from multistory houses with an attic for storage to ranch style homes in suburbia with far less storage space. Unused belongings became clutter. Cars enabled the move to the suburbs and the US became a more mobile society, forcing families to sell possessions rather than move them as they sought the American dream in places like California. Finally, the liberalization of cultural values in the second half of the 1960s and early 1970s swept in a generalized ethos that it was perfectly OK, even cool, to buy used stuff. For many, the Depression-era stigma attached to the sale and use of secondhand goods diminished or disappeared. So, by the end of the 1960s, and especially at the start of the 1970s, garage-sale trade took off. It was abetted by numerous women's magazine articles and Sunday supplements that legitimized holding garage sales to proper suburban housewives "for fun and profit." During the 1970s, the number of garage sales exploded all over the country and they became firmly established as means to clean house and garner some savings. Also, to have fun.

ANNUALLY, AT LEAST EIGHT BILLION DOLLARS IS EXCHANGED AT GARAGE SALES.

Underlying these cultural changes and shifts in "lifestyle" was an economic shift. Starting in 1969, and accelerating with the recession of 1973-74, the real spendable income for workers in the US began to drop. Families that could live on one salary now needed a second, usually contributed by the wife. So, the extra money garnered through selling unwanted household items or money saved through purchasing garage-sale bargains has assisted American families struggling to maintain a foothold in the middle class. In this way, garage sales act as a kind of "survival strategy." Many claim they wouldn't have made it economically without garage sales.

Before the late sixties, the common term for a residential sale was "rummage sale." At some point the term "garage sale" emerged. What about American life occasioned the change, and what cultural values would you ascribe to this linguistic shift?

Good point. There was a linguistic shift as garage sales took hold. Initially the term "rummage sales" was used, likely modeled after sales held by religious and civic organizations to raise money and to assist those in need. "Rummage" describes undifferentiated goods of small value; it has a rather low-rent connotation. But in the late 1960s, the name for sales in and about private residences shifted to where sales were held, i.e. the driveway, porch, lawn, yard, carport, and, of course, the garage. These are all terms that speak of owning property and carry the implications that the seller is a respectable homeowner with desirable consumer goods to sell—better than mere rummage. These sales reflect the suburbanization of American culture of the time, with a fondness for single-family homes, Parent-teacher's associations and other community organizations, and automobiles.

When I was growing up in Brooklyn, New York, people would not have considered selling their used goods in a public place. The reasons were several, the least of which, it seemed to me, was the lack of privately controlled yet publicly frequented spaces in which to lay out the goods. On the one hand, there were expectations about the virtuousness of charity donations; on the other hand, there was the shame of revealing one's unwanted possessions in a kind of unwilled portrait. (Not to mention the shame of appearing to need to sell your things at all.) In fact, a German interviewer asked me just the other day why anyone would consider exposing one's castoffs to the scrutiny of one's neighbors. When I first came across garage sales in the early 1970s in Southern California, I too was amazed and appalled.

You are an insightful observer! Garage sales are a uniquely American institution dependent on values of openness and friendliness. Aside from Canada and a few "Ameriphile" enclaves around the world, people don't sell used possessions from their homes. Europeans, for example, have different notions of privacy and traditionally furniture has passed down through the family. Most other parts of the world, such as much of Latin America, have long had a larger polarization of wealth, gated houses, and marked class stratification, and used goods are donated to domestic help.

There has always been an element of exhibitionism on the part of garage-sale sellers, and a corresponding element of voyeurism on the part of shoppers who can take stock of the sellers while literally pawing through their used underwear. Books, music, clothing, pet paraphernalia, art, and decorative items all say something about the seller, and many shoppers admit they love to frequent sales so they can look into other peoples' lives. Some sellers try to "edit" their sales so that they reveal only relatively nonembarrassing things about themselves in the items they put out to sell.

You are right that there was a shift in previous notions about charity, and about guilt and shame at selling and buying used things. But they have not shifted entirely; or rather, they have not shifted for everyone. Some feel that garage sales detract from the goods that might go to charitable organizations to help those in need, while others feel that they can more directly help those in need by selling to them at their sales. Besides, sellers often donate goods that have not sold to charitable organizations. Even today some people have a shame-related hesitation to engage in garage-sale trade because others might think that they actually need the proceeds or savings they derive from garage-sale involvement. The very notion of buying some castoff from someone else is also still repugnant for some. Others participate along class lines. Those who are secure in their middle-class status often feel free to purchase secondhand items and to wear used clothes, whereas those who are trying to gain a foothold into middle-class respectability may signify their earning power by consuming only new goods. But most Americans are not embarrassed to buy and sell at garage sales. Indeed, for shoppers there is often the cachet of unique finds and amazing bargains that they flaunt as "garage-sale chic."

GREGOR'S ROOM

by Franz Kafka, from *The Metamorphosis* (1915), translated by David Wyllie

They had got into the habit of putting things into this room that they had no room for anywhere else, and there were now many such things as one of the rooms in the flat had been rented out to three gentlemen. These earnest gentlemen—all three of them had full beards, as Gregor learned peering through the crack in the door one day—were painfully insistent on things being tidy. This meant not only in their own room but, since they had taken a room in this establishment, in the entire flat and especially in the kitchen. Unnecessary clutter was something they could not tolerate, especially if it was dirty. They had moreover brought most of their own furnishings and equipment with them. For this reason, many things had become superfluous which, although they could not be sold, the family did not wish to discard. All these things found their way into Gregor's room. The dustbins from the kitchen found their way in there too. The charwoman was always in a hurry, and anything she couldn't use for the time being she would just chuck in there. He, fortunately, would usually see no more than the object and the hand that held it. The woman most likely meant to fetch the things back out again when she had time and the opportunity, or to throw everything out in one go, but what actually happened was that they were left where they landed when they had first been thrown unless Gregor made his way through the junk and moved it somewhere else. At first he moved it because, with no other room free where he could crawl about, he was forced to, but later on he came to enjoy it although moving about in the way left him sad and tired to death and he would remain immobile for hours afterwards.

In my experience, most garage sales are held by women and most of the shoppers are women. You've written that of the numerous garage sales you observed in and around Cortland and Ithaca, New York, over two-thirds of both sellers and shoppers are women. How are traditional gender roles inscribed in the garage sale or, on the contrary, subverted by it? What does participation in garage sales reveal about how women understand their worlds, especially with respect to patterns of work and consumption, and the still-prevalent assumption that women are the keepers and maintainers of the domestic sphere? Can you relate this to the inclusion of caring, or the caring community, as an element underlying the garage sale?

Yes, garage sales can be described as a women-dominated trade. Even today, when I do spot checks of participation by gender, there are still around two-thirds of sellers and buyers who are female. There are lots of reasons that this form of trade is female dominated. Garage sales take place in and around the home, traditionally women's domain, and involve activities that are extensions of traditional women's domestic duties: cleaning house and managing possessions; selecting items for disposal; cleaning and arranging the items; sorting and organizing belongings; creating an attractive display; and assigning prices (values) to the goods up for sale. Women still do most of the household shopping and are more aware of going prices and styles. Given that women are the primary domestic shoppers, they constitute most of the garage-sale shoppers, particularly when they are seeking goods for domestic consumption.

When holding a sale, the gender division of labor tends to follow traditional lines. Men are likely to be the ones charged with lifting, carrying, and setting up heavy and/or bulky items. They put up the signs and help set up. They also price the "guy" stuff such as tools, sporting goods, electronics, music, and recreational items. Women still preside over children's items, clothing, housewares, decorative items, linens, and various crafts. There are of course many exceptions to these stereotypes, particularly as men have increasingly taken on more household responsibility and involvement in raising their children. For example, I often see younger men with small children as sellers and men of retirement age actively engaged in sales whose purpose is household downsizing.

Since women constitute the majority of garage-sale shoppers and sellers, this style of trade, coming as it does from the home, is informed by "women's values." What I mean by that is that women's traditional role in caring for the family, promoting the health and well-being of the community,

APPROXIMATELY TWO OUT OF THREE GARAGE SALE PARTICIPANTS ARE WOMEN.

and nurturing others, shape the style and substance of garage-sale exchange. Thus, garage-sale trade invokes mythical depictions of community in which things go from where they are no longer of use to those in need at little, sometimes no, cost. Shoppers are nurtured through commodities. Sellers will often reduce the price if something especially suits the buyers, the buyers demonstrate special appreciation for the item, or if the buyers appear in need. Children are often given things outright. Thus something of a "moral" trade emerges, one that is based on semi-gifts or quasi-commodities. Money and profit are not necessarily the point of the trade. Women create ties with shoppers through the items circulated, in part because the goods in garages sales are used and carry something of the seller with them (even if only in the form of scratches and dents). There are also numerous sales held for good causes, whether for a school trip or a dog rescue group, which helps to build community.

You've written that the garage sale is typical of a wide range of informal social institutions that allow participants to feel a greater degree of power over their lives than they do in the formal economy. How would you characterize this sense of empowerment? What motives can we attribute to the garage-sale buyer and/or seller that are not directly economic?

Participants in many informal economic and social institutions feel empowered through their involvement in them. One salient theme, especially for shoppers, is that of "beating the system." Shoppers can get loads of good stuff for next to nothing; they may even vie with their friends to see who can get the best or most stuff for the least amount of money. Shoppers may even overdo it and end up with living spaces chock-full of great garage-sale finds (and thus ensuring that they will need to in turn, hold their own garage sale). Shopping economically for needed goods is probably most empowering to those who are struggling to make ends meet, but all garage-sale shopping vastly stretches the value of money.

Another notion is that of claiming one's own labor. Although setting up and holding a sale is physical work, and sellers do complain of the effort it requires, it is *their* work: They set up goods in their own little store, they decide when to sell and to whom, they decide the prices, and they are experts in the history and peculiarities of the goods. The sellers are in control and they do not have a boss over their shoulders telling them what to do. Besides, the efforts involved are often fun. Friends and family members get together to stage a sale and it ends up being part sale and part party, especially when other neighbors and acquaintances join in the fun. Most, but by no means all, garage-sale participants find shopping a lot more fun than selling because there is considerably less physical effort and time commitment involved.

Garage sales also allow participants to assign value and price according to a sense

Photographs by
Lisa Congdon

Garages sales are a natural gathering place for building community. They provide a temporary site for neighbors, friends, relatives, and strangers to congregate, swapping advice on canning tomatoes and passing along outgrown children's clothes or never-used yogurt makers.

of justice and proportion. The very act of offering items for sale (re)values these items, and sellers can determine what they are worth. Because sellers often do not need to make a profit on their used items, they have enormous flexibility in what they can charge for their goods. Overall, everyone wins in garage-sale exchange because sellers get a little cash for things they have already paid for and used, while shoppers get a really good deal on something that they need. Prices can also be created interactively through bargaining.

> *You define transactions at garage sales as occurring along a continuum from profit maximization to gift giving. You argue that even the most commercial of these interactions are more gift-like than in a store, since the parties to the transaction are linked in a fundamentally social way. What are the characteristics of garage sales that make them gift-like?*

There is one overarching factor about garage sales that establishes the social conditions and practices that make them such a rich and hybrid phenomenon: that is, commercial activity takes place in and about private residences. This means that there is always a tension between notions of hospitality and desire for profit, between gift-giving and profit-maximizing behavior. And the goods at a garage sale, although sold for money, may be sold for next to nothing or at full retail price.

Another gift-like aspect of garage sales follows from the fact that items sold are used belongings. They are "possessions" that are "singularized" or endowed with personal affect and frequently with signs of use. Social ties, however slight, are formed among shoppers and sellers through the trade of garage-sale goods, especially when memories and stories are passed along with the objects that change hands. Many shoppers prefer garage sales to buying new because they acquire things with a history, and because something of the seller is passed along.

> *You've written about barter economies like Ithaca dollars and the way they can facilitate sharing and play. In what ways do garage sales promote a sense of community, imagined or otherwise? Would it be fair to characterize garage sales as doing so in part by enacting social rituals that increase visibility and a sense of identification among neighbors?*

Garage sales are a natural gathering place for building community. They provide a temporary site for neighbors, friends, relatives, and strangers to congregate, swapping advice on canning tomatoes and passing along outgrown children's clothes or never-used yogurt makers. People generate conversations and pass on news and gossip. Multi-family and neighborhood sales are enhanced cases of this sale-as-social-event form of community, and they often end up with a party-like, high-spirited atmosphere. Shoppers and sellers joke, play with the stuff for sale, listen to music, and amuse themselves by interacting with other participants. Neighborhood sales are often one of the few times of year, especially in northern climates where those who live in close proximity are out of their houses and socializing face to face. Annual neighborhood sales may be the only event that brings neighbors together.

> *How might you compare shopping at garage sales to shopping online, whether through eBay or Etsy, or even Craigslist, each of which is divided into communities? Do you recognize an influence of the garage sale on these digital marketplaces, and is the influence reciprocal?*

This is a great question and I'll do my best to answer. I have only done a limited amount of buying and selling through these channels. The first thing I would note about all these venues is that initial contact between the parties is not face to face but rather mediated through the computer. In the case of eBay, there is almost never a face-to-face interaction or even a voice interaction, but there can be some limited email interactions between buyers and sellers. There are also feedback mechanisms rating the seller. Craigslist, depending on the category of use, can involve interactions through email, telephone, and in person. There is more direct opportunity for taking in information afforded by personal exposure, i.e. through writing style, voice, and presentation of self, and for greater interaction.

Another possibility for the exchange of used goods is Freecycling. Interactions in this venue begin rather like those on Craigslist, but instead of meeting with a seller to see about purchasing items, Freecyclers often leave goods outside their homes to be picked up by a person they don't know, located through Freecycling.

At garage sales, shoppers and sellers engage in face-to-face interaction from the start and derive a great deal of information about one another through this contact. Sellers, especially, reveal a lot about themselves through their wares, their home surroundings, and their presentation of self. Sales also generally promote an open, friendly atmosphere for trade, and this reduces anxiety about any possible misrepresentation of goods for sale. The ability to actively see (and touch, hear, smell) the merchandise at a garage sale is also a relative advantage for purchasing in that venue, as opposed to eBay or even catalogue sales. Touching the fabric, checking to see if all the parts are present, or trying on the shoes, along with an (often unconscious) assessment of the seller(s), provide much more information for the shopper. Prices can also be quite low at garage sales—perhaps more so than in these online venues—and there is no delayed gratification in waiting for shipping.

> *We tend to see economic exchanges through frames provided by neoclassical economics: utility maximization and rational choice. You argue that the garage sale acts as a counterexample and cite bargaining, or haggling, as a process in which cultural values are factored into pricing. What determines bargaining at garage sales? How does bargaining reinsert elements of the personal into economic exchange? Does this injection of personal narrative reduce the aura of impersonality or alienation attached to industrially produced goods?*

You are quite right that neoclassical economics elevates the market as the measure of value for so-called rational agents who are trying to maximize their economic positions. Behavioral economics has been challenging the universality of those views for some time by looking at how actors actually make economic decisions, and economic anthropology, the approach I take, looks at how value is culturally and contingently constructed, and at the social relations of exchange. Economic sociology takes a similar approach. The garage sale flourishes under the metaphor of the market, yet, as noted previously, retains elements of gift exchange in the form of give-away prices and outright gift giving, and insofar as as the histories of these used possessions are often passed along with them. The stories, memories, and enthusiasms that often accompany the items changing hands provide additional dimensions to the act of valuing items that are far removed from rationalized exchange.

From a strictly rational economic perspective, most garage sales would not be held at all. Sellers rarely derive enough cash from the sales to justify all the time and effort invested, and in some cases, expenditure on price stickers, advertising, and the like. It is often more economically advantageous to donate items to charity and to take the tax write-off for doing so.

Ultimately, sellers want to make sure that their used belongings go to "a good home," and garage sales enable sellers to match up with shoppers who will appreciate what is on offer. It can be a very intimate form of exchange. I have often seen sellers hold back from selling to a dealer something like an antique wood dresser, in hopes of selling it directly to a shopper who would love and appreciate it. And as a shopper, I have experienced certain purchases as genuine gifts with something of the sellers passed along with them.

The prevalence of bargaining at garage sales also personalizes and distinguishes the exchange. Sales are one of the few places in American culture where shoppers can haggle over low to moderately priced goods. The fact that most goods for sale have been bought and used once already renders the monetary "value" of the merchandise highly variable and open to mutual negotiation by the shoppers and sellers; many sellers price a little high to allow room for bargaining. Since the monetary value of the goods tends to diminish over the course of a sale, bargaining late in the sale, or over a group ofitems, or over damaged goods, is very common.

In general, Americans prefer a soft or respectful approach to bargaining, something like, "Will you take a little less for this?" Some sellers bristle at aggressive bargaining, especially early in the sale. They may refuse to sell to someone who contravenes their sense of protocol given that sales take place on their property and concern their belongings. In general men bargain more than women and because bargaining is a learned behavior, foreign-born participants from more rigorous bargaining cultures often haggle more than those who are US born. But for many, one of the chief attractions of garage-sale shopping, and a form of empowerment, is the ability to interact with the seller through bargaining to create a mutually agreed-upon price.

> *What survives the transplantation of a garage sale into an exhibition space? What comes to our attention when we consider the garage sale as a portrait? What sort of self-image are we assembling here?*

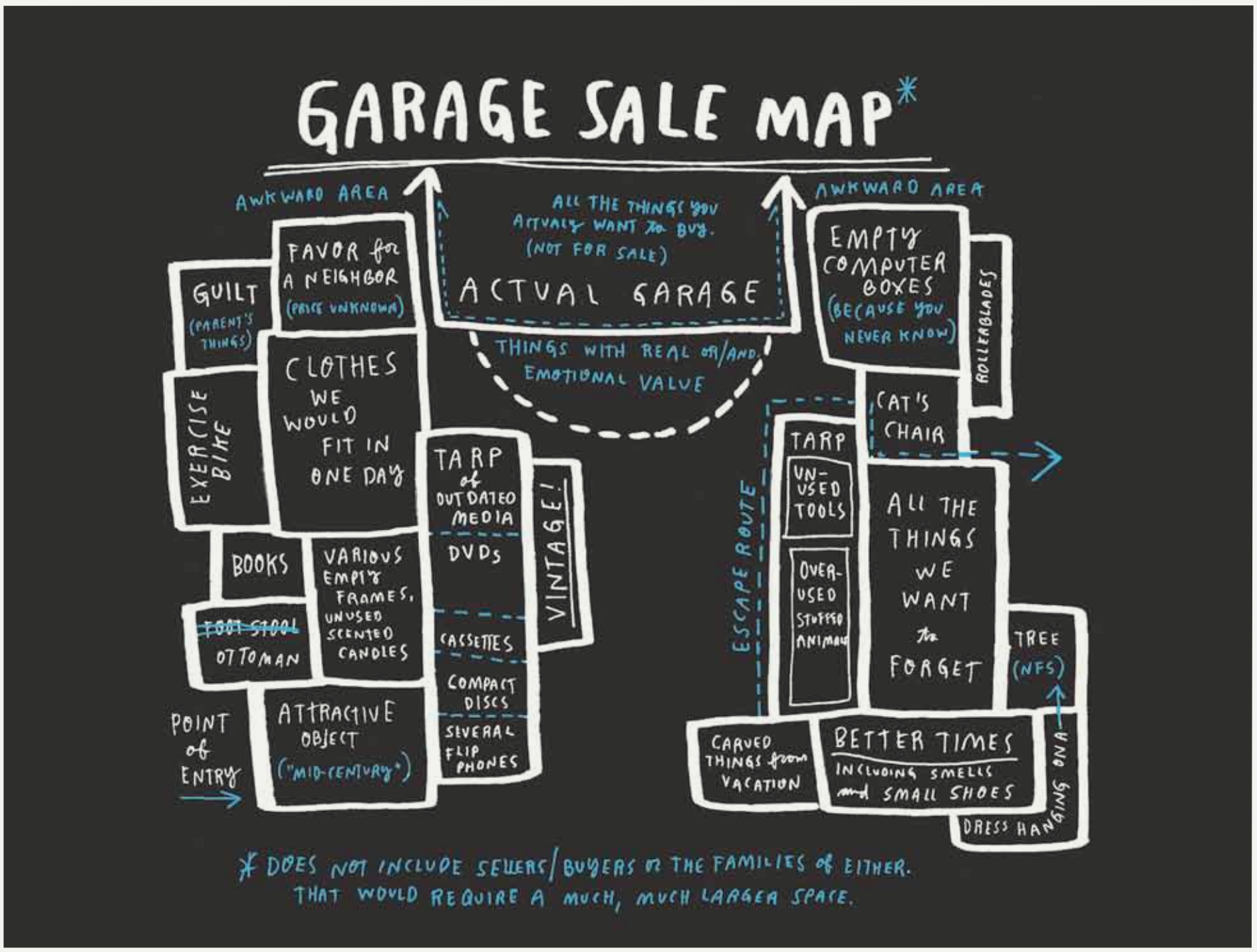
This is a totally fun question in which I get to peek through your artist's lens for a bit. I would imagine that bringing a garage sale into an exhibition space foregrounds the goods for sale over what in a home-based would be the ambiance of the surroundings. That is, in an exhibition space we don't see the lawn, the garden, the tools in the garage, the surrounding neighborhood. We don't see the wind kicking up and blowing things off tables, the rain dampening the clothes, nor the beating sun forcing the seller to seek shade in the garage. We don't hear the street sounds, and car doors closing with engines starting, nor do we smell the outdoor air. We don't feel the affective qualities of individual sales in their specific milieus.

In the exhibition hall, our focus is primarily narrowed to the selected and arranged assemblage of goods. Is the assemblage organized or just a jumble of items? Have shoppers rearranged things? What goods are for sale? What do they represent? Do they reflect the artist personally as her belongings, or are they donations by others? Is clothing important? What about books? Which authors? Which subjects? What do these say about the artist, either as owner or assembler? What parts of the exhibit space are used?

When the seller is present, she breathes life into the assemblage and becomes its focus. Where does she put herself in the exhibit? Is she standing on the side or sitting in the middle? Do the goods reflect her tastes and personal presence? Does she tell stories about the goods for sale? Or does she let the shoppers tell her how they want to use their purchases? With the seller present, the exhibit becomes interactive and vital, especially as shoppers become engaged with the sale.

Although the exhibition hall privileges the visual, it also allows for interaction and for the purchase of the goods. Sounds of shoppers and their conversations may start to vie with the visual primacy and become another focus of interest. Participants can touch the wares, examine the items, and haggle over the price. I'd say it's probably a good place to find a bargain!

Illustration by Wendy MacNaughton



PETER FRASE

The Garage Sale and Other Utopias

A garage sale makes the exchange of objects the occasion for a complex social interaction, tying together people who would otherwise be strangers. But standing behind these objects is another, absent set of strangers. In almost every case, the objects that populate the garage sale didn't originate with anyone who will be in attendance; they came from somewhere else, were made by someone else. Even if the host of the garage sale is selling her crocheted doilies or her private letters, as Martha Rosler did in one of her earlier iterations of the *Garage Sale*, it was unknown people somewhere else in the world who grew the cotton, spun the yarn, and made the needles, or who felled the trees, milled the paper, and produced the ink and pen.

This seems unremarkable to us, but historically it is quite novel. Capitalist society is marked by a pervasive decontextualization of objects that most of our ancestors would have found quite strange. For while exchange has been a feature of human societies since antiquity, only in capitalism do impersonal markets become the primary way people interact with material goods. In other modes of human civilization, much of everyday life is made up of things whose provenance is relatively, if not immediately, apparent. People may not have grown all of the food they ate, or woven the textile in the clothes they wore, but they likely knew those who did. The way we moderns are accustomed to interacting with objects—as things that come to us through a process of impersonal exchange—was something that existed only as a marginal phenomenon throughout most of human history.

It is only with capitalism that we confront a world of objects that are arrayed on store shelves, or as web-page images for us to buy, but whose ultimate origins are shrouded in mystery. This gives rise to an illusion that Marx described as the "fetishism of the commodity." The concept as explicated in Marx's *Capital* is embedded in dense philosophical prose, but the core insight is a simple one. Because capitalist production is systematically separated from exchange and from consumption, we come to see a fundamental aspect of our relationship to other people—labor—as though it were a property of the objects we obtain. Wallace Shawn, in his play *The Fever*, describes the effect of reading and understanding Marx's argument:

> He used the example that people say, "Twenty yards of linen are worth two pounds." People say that about every thing that it has a certain value. This is worth that. This coat, this sweater, this cup of coffee: each thing worth some quantity of money, or some number of other things—one coat, worth three sweaters, or so much money—as if that coat, suddenly appearing on the earth, contained somewhere inside itself an amount of value, like an inner soul, as if the coat were a fetish, a physical object that contains a living spirit. But what really determines the value of a coat? The coat's price comes from its history, the history of all the people involved in making it and selling it and all the particular relationships they had. And if we buy the coat, we, too, form relationships with all those people, and yet we hide those relationships from our own awareness by pretending we live in a world where coats have no history but just fall down from heaven with prices marked inside. "I like this coat," we say, "It's not expensive," as if that were a fact about the coat and not the end of a story about all the people who made it and sold it, "I like the pictures in this magazine."
>
> A naked woman leans over a fence. A man buys a magazine and stares at her picture. The destinies of these two are linked. The man has paid the woman to take off her clothes, to lean over the fence. The photograph contains its history—the moment the woman unbuttoned her shirt, how she felt, what the photographer said. The price of the magazine is a code that describes the relationships between all these people—the woman, the man, the publisher, the photographer—who commanded, who obeyed. The cup of coffee contains the history of the peasants who picked the beans, how some of them fainted in the heat of the sun, some were beaten, some were kicked.

Shawn goes on to portray the trauma, for the consumer, of piercing the veil of the commodity fetish. Behind each of the purchased objects in our lives is a long and complex history. The moment we begin to understand these histories and see them around us, we leave ourselves open to feelings of guilt or shame over the processes of production in which we are implicated. Defetishizing the commodity, or exposing the history of its production, is an uncomfortable process.

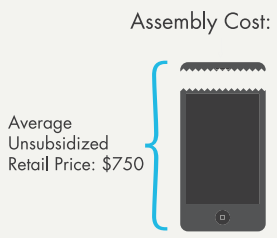
The lives of people in rich countries depend on maintaining the illusion inherent in the commodity fetish. The price of an object is seen as a fact about that object, or perhaps about the person selling it to us, but not often about the way it was made. We may have some general idea of the way in which the material basis of our lives is produced and delivered to us, but we will rarely be aware of the details. For if we constantly had to dwell on the conditions in which our food is grown, our clothes are sewn, or our electronics are manufactured, few of us would be comfortable with the picture that emerged. But periodically, we are confronted with the histories behind our objects in a way that forces us to confront these histories.

The reality behind an object's production often stands in sharp contrast to the image conveyed by its branding and marketing; the greater this contrast, the greater the shock caused by piercing the veil of the commodity fetish. Most recently, Apple has found itself caught up in this dilemma, thanks to revelations about the working conditions at the Chinese factories that manufacture the iPhone. Everything about the iPhone conveys affluence, convenience, and coolness; Apple's marketing connects the device's owner to the casual self-assurance of the actor in the "I'm a Mac" ads and the hipster capitalism of Apple's late CEO Steve Jobs. But the production processes that actually lie behind the iPhone involve the employees of Foxconn, where young, often migrant Chinese workers live in dormitories and work grueling hours for little pay in order to meet the demand of Western consumers. News coverage has revealed riots and suicides as workers resist or feel crushed by the brutal conditions of their labor.

Apple's reaction to the Foxconn stories was the sort of damage control typical in such cases. They hired an auditor to examine conditions in the Chinese factories, in a bid to persuade purchasers that, as a spokesman said in one statement to reporters, "Apple is committed to the highest standards of social responsibility across our worldwide supply chain." But for every Apple that sees the reality of its supply chain revealed to the public, there are hundreds of other companies that rely on similar labor conditions and receive no scrutiny. Whether or not you have an iPhone in your pocket, you almost certainly have other possessions that were made in conditions that would not compare favorably with Foxconn's.

To alter the conditions that produce things like the Foxconn scandal would require a radical, worldwide transformation of the kind of society and economy we live in. Lacking the ability to bring about such a change, consumers disturbed by what is revealed when objects are defetishized understandably look for ways to avoid implication in processes of production that they find ugly and exploitative. Two of the most popular strategies are ethical consumption and buying secondhand. But while each of these points in certain hopeful and utopian directions, each also demonstrates the limits of seeking individual solutions to a collective dilemma.

The desire to consume ethically is widespread enough among the middle and upper classes that companies targeting these demographics must at least pay lip service to it, as Apple did when it proclaimed its dedication to "the highest standards of social responsibility." But the ubiquity of these proclamations starts to reveal the contradictions embedded in the idea of ethical consumerism.



Milton Friedman famously said that the only social responsibility of business is to increase its profits. While this seems callous, it happens to be an accurate description of corporate behavior, at least to a first approximation. Why, after all, did Apple contract with Foxconn in the first place? (Did they not first inquire into the factory labor conditions?) Because workers in China are more cost effective than workers elsewhere, where wages are higher. In Apple's case, competitive pressure is not even required—assembling the iPhone accounts for only eight dollars out of its total cost of production, and Apple makes an estimated profit of at least 350 dollars on each device.

So why, then, did Apple audit its factories and declare its commitment to social responsibility? Again, because the outcry over Foxconn was threatening to reduce sales and profits. The timing of the statement disproves its content and demonstrates that Apple is committed instead to the lowest standards of social responsibility still consistent with Western consumers choosing to buy its products. And while a media outcry may be enough to wring some additional responsibility out of Apple, calling attention to one company does nothing to change the incentives, or the behavior, of all the other companies

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profiting from identical labor conditions. There are other companies that, unlike Apple, place the idea of social responsibility at the core of their image and marketing rather than treating it as something to be trotted out under duress. These are companies like the Body Shop, which on its website proclaims that it will "always strive to protect this beautiful planet and the people who depend on it." They insist, "We don't do it this way because it's fashionable. We do it because, to us, it's the only way." Or American Apparel, which brags that it "operates the largest garment factory in the United States, at a time when most apparel production has moved offshore."

But these companies are caught in the same dilemma as Apple in an even more severe way. They are still for-profit companies whose primary objective is to make money. Yet they sell their products, which often retail at a premium over their purportedly unethical competitors, partly by convincing their target demographic that they are not merely profit-maximizers but are instead trying to achieve some larger social purpose. When it is revealed that the aura of altruistic enterprise is the veil for the same old business of profit-maximizing capitalism, the moment of defetishizing horror is even more severe.

The Body Shop was beset by scandal in the mid-1990s when it was implicated in a range of practices that contradicted its green image. The company's "Community Trade" projects with indigenous communities turned out to be much smaller and less environmentally friendly than they appeared, and the company stood accused of exploiting its indigenous partners. Around the same time, journalist Jon Entine revealed that the company's claims to use all natural products and avoid testing on animals were also false.

American Apparel worked aggressively to prevent its Los Angeles factory from being unionized and attracted further negative attention for the exploitation and sexual harassment of its retail employees. The magazine *In These Times* reported that when the union UNITE HERE attempted to organize the company's Los Angeles factory, American Apparel adopted the standard corporate union-busting playbook: captive meetings featuring anti-union propaganda, harassment of pro-union employees, and threats to shut down the plant if the union was recognized. Meanwhile, founder Dov Charney faced multiple lawsuits for sexual harassment, and internal documents published by Gawker.com revealed a "full body head to toe" employment policy for American Apparel stores in which advancement in the company depended on physical appearance. The supposed commitment to ethical capitalism was, for both the Body Shop and American Apparel, revealed to be just another promotional tool.

While these tactics are unsavory, they are hardly surprising. To expect a for-profit business to favor ethical working conditions over profitability is an invitation to self-deception. Even when social responsibility is central to the brand, "ethical capitalism" still aims to convince consumers of its ethical bona fides at the lowest cost, which generally means maximizing the ratio of image to substance. And if one company doesn't take this approach, its competitor surely will—consumers may like social responsibility, but they also like low prices. And many won't look too hard at something that might seem too good to be true. Moreover, even with the most steadfast of good intentions, none of us has the time or resources to undertake the investigation that would be necessary if we wanted to penetrate the fog of corporate secrecy and PR misdirection that surrounds the myriad products in our lives.

The laudable impulse to inject ethical principles into consumer choices can be invested with real power, however, if linked to coordinated, collective action. The boycott, after all, is a long-standing labor tactic employed to great success by unions and workers' associations like the United Farm Workers, who used the call for a grape boycott to bring outside support to their strike against California agricultural employers. Ultimately, they won concession over wages and conditions for farmworkers in the fields. By listening to workers who know what lies behind the commodity's veil, consumers can avoid being drawn into the hall of mirrors that otherwise envelops the marketing of ethical consumption.

If ethical consumerism is too often undermined by the reality of capitalist production, the other alternative is to attempt to avoid being implicated in the process of production at all. Thus arises another reaction to defetishization: buying secondhand goods.

Garage sales, and other forms of secondhand buying and selling, offer wares that have, in some sense, already been consumed. The objects on sale in these places were, we can tell ourselves, not made for us but for some other consumer who originally bought them. Whether or not we know under what conditions secondhand commodities were produced, we can absolve ourselves of responsibility. We can instead view our consumption as virtuous, conserving the resources that would have gone into making new objects and refusing to partake in the unseemly labor practices that produce them. Defetishizing secondhand objects can then become a matter of connoisseurship and selection rather than guilt; we can tell the story of how our vintage jacket or end table was made without feeling personally implicated in it.

Secondhand shopping as a general solution to the shock of commodity defetishization is obviously an impossibility. We cannot all buy used goods only. But the garage sale, as a place of pure exchange uncontaminated by production, also has a utopian, indeed a postcapitalist moment. Many on the Left today speak pejoratively of "the market," but markets—that is, the exchange of goods for other goods, or goods for currency—were not the root of the problem that Marx or the socialist movement saw in capitalism. While the impersonality of exchange facilitates the exploitation of workers by making their labor invisible to consumers, the market itself is not the cause of that exploitation, which originates in production.

The trouble with production is the way that workers are deprived of any way of surviving other than to work for wages, and they are therefore at the mercy of bosses who seek to extract as much labor as possible for as little money as possible. It is this latter condition that socialists dreamed of transcending. We can never return to a (never-existent) arcadia in which we are all small craftspeople in control of our own means of production, but there are other ways to imagine liberating people from their subordination to waged work. One of them, which has gained popularity of late, is the Universal Basic Income, which would entail paying every member of society a wage, which would make it possible to survive at a basic level without taking a job.

The most visionary and optimistic alternative, however, has envisioned a future where objects might finally be separated from the grim business of human labor in production altogether, as the use of machinery would have finally freed people from toiling to secure their conditions of existence. This would be what Marx, in volume three of *Capital*, described as the escape from the "realm of necessity" into "that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom." It was Oscar Wilde, characteristically, who put this most pithily and provocatively. In "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," Wilde commented that the Greeks had been right to think that "civilisation requires slaves." But while the slavery of humans that underpinned classical civilization was an abomination, it was, Wilde insisted, "on mechanical slavery, on the slavery of the machine, that the future of the world depends."

In a world where all material production was undertaken by the slavery of the machine, we could still take an interest in objects, in appreciating them, exchanging them, using them as the occasion for human interaction. We might choose to make things by hand (or with our 3-D printers) and exchange them with other people, for money or for goods. This utopia of the garage sale might involve markets of a sort, but it wouldn't be anything we could recognize as capitalism. Or if so, it would be what the sociologist Erik Olin Wright, in his book *Envisioning Real Utopias*, calls "capitalism between consenting adults." Production and exchange would arise out of free cooperation, transparently, and as ends in themselves, and not because workers had no other way to avoid starvation. Until we reach such a utopia, however, the hidden abode of production will always lurk as the repressed unconscious of the gleaming world of objects.

GRYCE AMERICANA

by Edith Wharton, from *The House of Mirth* (1900)

Mr. Gryce's interest in Americana had not originated with himself: it was impossible to think of him as evolving any taste of his own. An uncle had left him a collection already noted among bibliophiles; the existence of the collection was the only fact that had ever shed glory on the name of Gryce, and the nephew took as much pride in his inheritance as though it had been his own work. Indeed, he gradually came to regard it as such, and to feel a sense of personal complacency when he chanced on any reference to the Gryce Americana. Anxious as he was to avoid personal notice, he took, in the printed mention of his name, a pleasure so exquisite and excessive that it seemed a compensation for his shrinking from publicity.

To enjoy the sensation as often as possible, he subscribed to all the reviews dealing with book-collecting in general, and American history in particular, and as allusions to his library abounded in the pages of these journals, which formed his only reading, he came to regard himself as figuring prominently in the public eye, and to enjoy the thought of the interest which would be excited if the persons he met in the street, or sat among in travelling, were suddenly to be told that he was the possessor of the Gryce Americana.

CHRISTINE SMALLWOOD

Remember That Duck

At the *Meta-Monumental Garage Sale*, the artist is present. She's not there as a mystic or guru but as something far more pedestrian: a peddler, a broker. While at a typical garage sale the owner has a personal attachment to the objects she's parting with, and may tell stories about each object, at the *Garage Sale*, Martha Rosler is selling other people's stories among her own—and adding to them. Each object a buyer takes home or gives away will have passed through the museum.

"Collectors are the physiognomists of the world of objects," Walter Benjamin wrote, and the garage-sale shopper may be a collector on the hunt. But according to anthropologist Gretchen Herrmann, many of those who frequent garage sales are less interested in taking home a specific item or kind of item than they are in the experience of the sale itself: They're open to the unexpected, eager to listen and to talk, prepared to be spontaneous. They may walk away with a teapot or a table. The fun is not knowing.

Rosler first staged *Garage Sale* in 1973, when the oil shock had driven many to their front yards to garner extra cash. If you experience the garage sale as a nostalgic ritual today, that's because you're lucky: After the 2008 financial collapse, many turned to sales to make ends meet—so many that the town of Elkhart, Indiana, felt obliged to pass a rule limiting residents to one sale per month. Elkhart has since relaxed the restriction, but it still allows residents no more than fifteen sales per year, which is more generous than San Angelo, Texas; Phenix City, Alabama; and South Greensburg, Pennsylvania—all of which, according to *Businessweek*, limit each household to just two sales a year. This curtailment of community markets was done in the name of community: Neighbors complained about unsightly piles of dolls and clocks and kitchenware, flea-market paintings and bed stands, mowers and Christmas sweaters, assembled on lawns and driveways.

Garage sales are an economic necessity for many, but they can also attract the wealthy: In 1990, *Texas Monthly* reported on the trend—both buying and selling—among the Dallas charity-ball set. "It's just fun looking through junk," one woman told the magazine. "It's like a mystery, seeing if you can find that one great deal." Some get addicted to the competition, getting up earlier to beat the crowds; others are driven by an ethic of reusing and recycling. But there's that other thing in the air, too—the lure of a good story. To buy someone's grandmother's toaster is to buy a little piece of that person's grandmother. Sometimes, though, the story turns out to be an autobiography. That same rich Texan merrily cruising through junk once encountered a ceramic duck, the very one that she had years ago made and given as a wedding present. The bride had herself given it away, or sold it, and now it was on the block in a third person's yard. The initials on the bottom confirmed the object's provenance.

Selling stories is precisely what online retailer Etsy has been trying to do since it first launched seven years ago. An Internet marketplace for handmade goods, vintage items (at least twenty years aged), and craft supplies, Etsy is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Eight hundred and seventy-five thousand sellers and fifteen million users are counted as members; in 2011, $525 million changed hands. (Roughly one-third of Etsy account holders live outside the United States.) Its scale notwithstanding, Etsy imagines itself as something like a garage sale—not in terms of bargains but rather as an ethos or brand identity. It wants to give old objects second lives and provide new ones with stories to pass on. "Around the world," reads the company's mission statement, "there's a new clamoring to know the story behind what we buy—who made it, how, what route did it travel to our door? We're here to tell these global stories, to introduce you to makers and collectors and the history of their goods."

The core values of Etsy are "ethical consumerism," which generally means something like eco-friendliness, localism (this despite global shipping), sustainability, and fair labor conditions. Artisanship, craftsmanship, and one-of-a-kindness are each in its own way a part of this overall strategy. Etsy is obviously not alone in this identity: Contemporary sentiment runs against the mass-produced, so much so that even giant retailers like Anthropologie (which recently launched "Made in Kind," its collaboration with independent designers, and partnered with an Oregon group to save cork forests), and Restoration Hardware (whose "eco-friendly" furniture is often made with "reclaimed" or "resalvaged" parts) have brands that emphasize the unique or "authentic" object and a commitment to sustainable and fair production practices. But Etsy is dedicated to imagining itself not as a store but as a "community": they have "labs" that teach craft skills; you can join a local Etsy "team" to meet other sellers and artists; and users log into online forums to trade tips and organize in-person events. Etsy is also known for facilitating craft parties, where anyone can stop by and paint fabrics or glass bottles.

Etsy works like this: The homepage features a selection of items picked by Etsy staff as well as a profile of an individual shop or virtual storefront. (Sellers can house their own "stores" on the site, which contain a tileboard of all the items they have available.) Clicking on Etsy's "Buy" tab takes you to a search screen where you can look for specific items ("mittens"; "leather belt") across all sellers. You can also sort specific categories ("Dolls and Miniatures," "Furniture," "Clothing") or search by color or location.

Each transaction between an Etsy seller and an Etsy buyer is mediated by Etsy—shoppers purchase items through an Etsy "cart" and can buy from multiple sellers in one transaction. It costs twenty cents to list an item on the site (the listing for unsold items lasts four months), and Etsy collects a 3.5 percent fee on the sale. There are no membership fees. Etsy doesn't demand that users sell exclusively through the site, and the company tries to create a culture of enthusiasm around selling as well as buying: It offers advice to sellers, and it publishes a videocast (episodes have titles like "Merch Trends for the Holidays" and "Transforming Creative Ideas into a Viable Business" that—as writer Rob Walker commented in the *New York Times Magazine*—"often feels like a D.I.Y. business school."

Elsewhere in this newspaper, Peter Frase writes about the way that the garage sale allows shoppers to learn about an object's history without feeling complicit in the way it was produced. On Etsy, that desire for storytelling has become a fetish in itself. One maker of fabric flowers based in the Netherlands wrote on the Etsy blog that she was inspired by photographs of her grandmother to create a collection called Hidden Memories, objects that "tell the story of a girl raised by Mother Nature who finds hidden places in the woods." She also buys vintage photographs on Etsy and at flea markets and uses them to create new stories. She used to work in public relations and marketing, but now she has her dream job—"a way to visualize my ideas and the stories in my head." Etsy, she writes, "is an inspirational community."

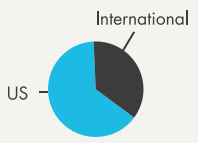
What inspires Etsy users is the belief that Etsy will do more than recover the social relationships and history of an object's production by talking about them or remaking them. After all, handicraft is not the necessary alternative to sweatshop labor, and sourcing every piece of felt or straight pin is an unattainable, if worthy, ambition. Rather the community feeds on the belief that Etsy can renew and fulfill human lives. It's good, of course, to seek community, inspiration, and meaningful work. But Etsy locates its meaningful work in the past.

The gap between then and now is filled with a boosterish knowledge-transmission, a

User Breakdown

15 M
Etsy Members

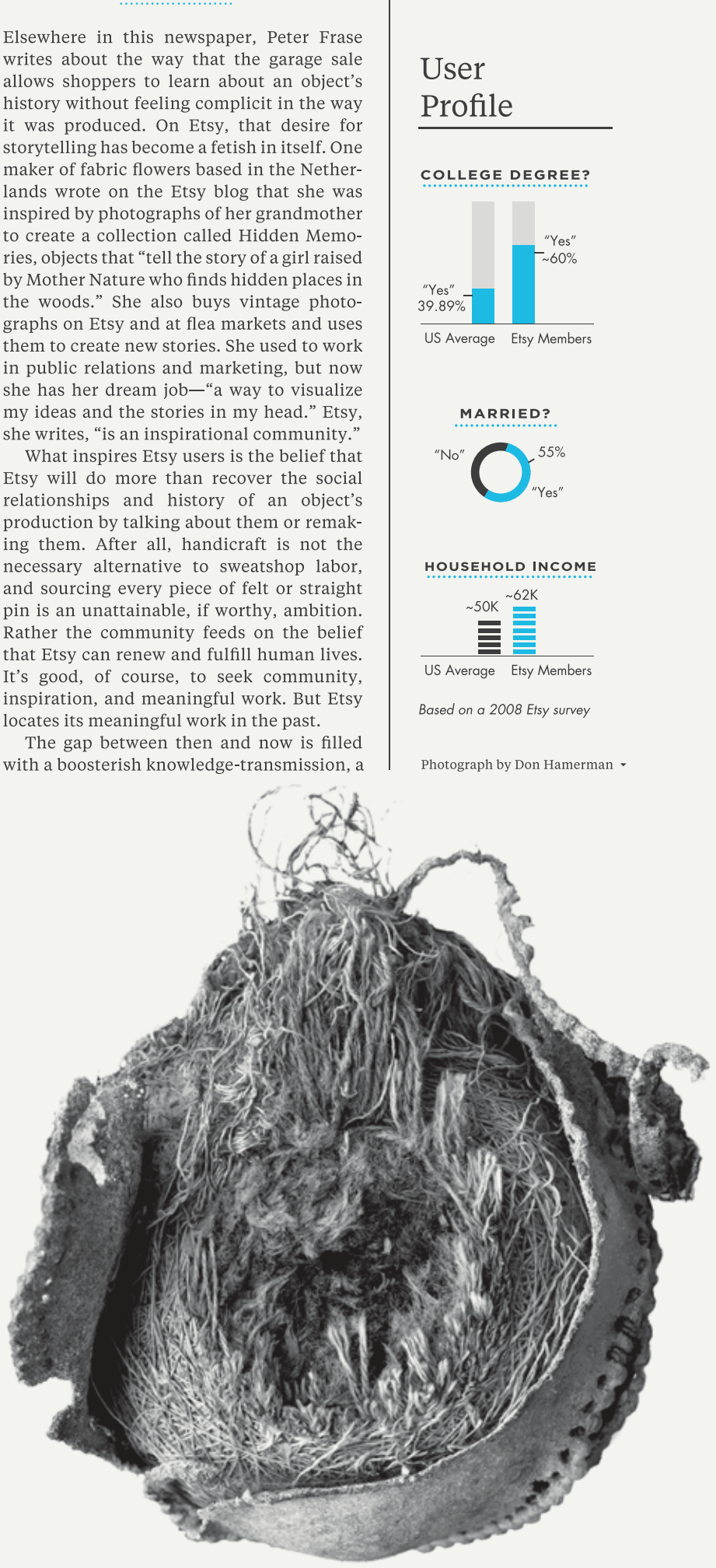
375 K
Etsy Sellers

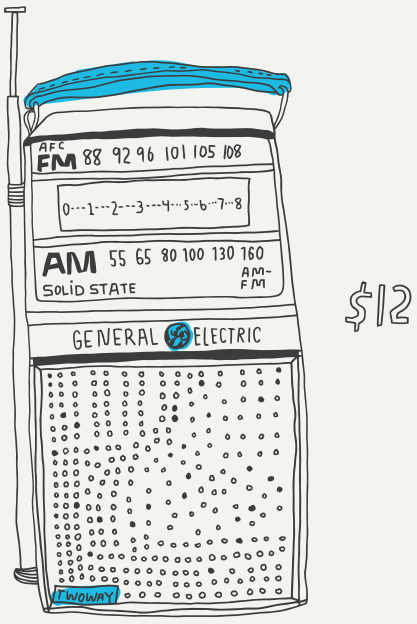


User Profile

Based on a 2008 Etsy survey

Photograph by Don Hamerman





$12

TYPOLOGIES OF GARAGE-SALE PROPRIETORS

(By importance of monetary considerations in their garage-sale involvement.)

1. Perpetual Sales
   - *Semi-retailers*
   - *Rural Vendors*
2. Desperate Straits
3. Entrepreneurs
4. Veterans
5. Retired People
6. Struggling Young Folk
7. Movers
8. Event Sales
9. Group Sales
10. Housecleaners
    - *Spring cleaners*
    - *Life-passage Sellers*
    - *Regulars*
11. Dabblers

Source: "For Fun and Profit," by Gretchen M. Herrmann

Illustration by Kate Bingaman-Burt

mix of lifestyle blogging and how-to instructions. Women who are dissatisfied that their mothers were too busy shattering glass ceilings to teach them to sew or knit educate each other about textiles or types of crochet needles. Etsy's blogs profile sellers and publish first-person narratives, always linking back to suggested items for sale. The tone is enthusiastic and inclusive; the commenters, bubbly and supportive. Etsy's community is positive, agreeable, and encouraging—there is no dissent or disapproval, no irony or second-guessing. Like most of what passes for collective life on the Internet, Etsy's community is not formed in action; it coalesces around previously shared tastes and standards. Everyone already agrees with everyone else. That's why they're there.

Etsy's users report being genuinely inspired and encouraged by each other, and indeed, one may experience a feeling of warmth when reading a positive comment, but conversations aren't just about "feedback," and they don't always leave you feeling good. Few things have the potential for unpleasantness like actually listening to what someone else is saying. A community of agreement quickly becomes an echo chamber of self-congratulation. One commenter on Etsy recently celebrated an Etsy shop called Knife in the Water for "beating the old system and creating something new. I love the way you take pictures, with the items in their natural surrounding, and all those little iconic atmospheric objects, like the picture of your mother or grandmother, it just warms my heart." Last May the site raised forty million dollars to grow internationally—in Australia and Canada, primarily. All those pictures of mothers and grandmothers, those "little iconic atmospheric objects," are economic facts.

Everything on the Internet calls itself a community, from Facebook pages to corporate comment loops to media outlets encouraging users to "talk back." The word has historically been opposed to "society": Raymond Williams explained years ago that it was in the nineteenth century that community became attached to a sense of immediacy and locality. In industrial societies, "community" was the word to designate any kind of alternative communal living. One thing about "community," Williams noticed, is that no one ever uses it negatively.

These days, community is a word that looks back. In *Against the Romance of Community*, Miranda Joseph writes that the invocation of community gets its power from its association with anti-capitalism: We imagine community "in a long-lost past for which we yearn nostalgically from our current fallen state of alienation, bureaucratization, rationality." As Etsy's former CEO, Robert Kalin, said in a 2007 profile, "Everything since the Industrial Revolution has been so fragmented." That same year he told another magazine, "If you look back 150 years, everything was made by artisans. Then along came the Industrial Revolution, and there was a huge swing toward mass production. What I really want to do is swing the pendulum back the other way." A year earlier he told another interviewer that "the industrial revolution and consolidation of corporations are making it hard for independent artisans to distribute their goods. We want to change this."

Etsy is deeply techno-utopian, an embodiment of the *Whole Earth*-turned-*Wired* magazine history of the Internet. It's also part of a general early-twenty-first-century turn to "community"—not against capitalism, as utopian communities were in the nineteenth century, but against a style of capitalism as faceless bureaucracy. As Joseph explains, "community" connotes something face-to-face, personal, and empathic, something with rules and boundaries and limits—"values" in contrast to stark capitalist "value." American culture has always made space for those who want to go back to the land. Hippies, communes, and collectives are nothing new; what's different now is that digital life and patterns of urban gentrification have made possible new kinds of entrepreneurial activity around the artisanal, handmade, traditional, local, healthy, and old-fashioned.

On the political Right, this kind of community-speak goes hand-in-hand with a critique of the welfare state, applying the "Do It Yourself" spirit to social services. On the Left, an incoherent romance about female domesticity plays out against the realities of work-family life. The "community" brand is visible and profitable, with *Martha Stewart Living* on the one side and craftivists on the other—and both modes of DIY involve a reclamation of traditional social roles. The great majority of Etsy's artisans are women. But as Sara Mosle wrote for *Double X* on Slate.com in 2009, only a tiny number can make a full-time living on the site. Etsy employs a full-time "team" of hundreds of employees who manage mostly female hobbyists pursuing meaning through small-scale entrepreneurial, traditionally female crafts. To call this a community, of course, is to claim a female realm as a positive good. Strictly speaking, though, this community is more of a network—something that one may choose to opt into or not, an organization defined not by bonds of care but by mutual interest, not by history at all, but by the present-tense moment of consuming. Etsy wants the emphasis to be on the crafting and not the shopping, but the little mouse-click of purchasing is what keeps the wheels turning.

That rich Texas woman who found her own unloved duck at a garage sale—a duck she had made and given away with her own beautifully manicured hands—had a more profound moment than anything Etsy makes possible. That isn't because it was "in real life," at a garage sale instead of on a screen. It's because she had a confrontation with herself, a moment in which she saw her work and her social relationships for what they were. Knowing the story of the object was to be implicated in it. Remember that duck, and its maker feeling her own initials traced in its breast. Etsy wants users to feel good about their exceptionalism, to believe themselves exempt from the routinized postindustrial world. But this is our routinized, postindustrial world, and it has all of our initials engraved on its breast.

"Community" connotes something face-to-face, personal, and empathic, something with rules and boundaries and limits—"values" in contrast to stark capitalist "value."

FROM JUDE TO ARABELLA

by Thomas Hardy, from *Jude the Obscure* (1895)

At night when he again plodded home he found she had not visited the house. The next day went in the same way, and the next. Then there came a letter from her.

That she had gone tired of him she frankly admitted. He was such a slow old coach, and she did not care for the sort of life he led. There was no prospect of his ever bettering himself or her. She further went on to say that her parents had, as he knew, for some time considered the question of emigrating to Australia, the pig-jobbing business being a poor one nowadays. They had at last decided to go, and she proposed to go with them, if he had no objection. A woman of her sort would have more chance over there than in this stupid country.

Jude replied that he had not the least objection to her going. He thought it a wise course, since she wished to go, and one that might be to the advantage of both. He enclosed in the packet containing the letter the money that had been realized by the sale of the pig, with all he had besides, which was not much.

From that day he heard no more of her except indirectly, though her father and his household did not immediately leave, but waited till his goods and other effects had been sold off. When Jude learnt that there was to be an auction at the house of the Donns he packed his own household goods into a waggon, and sent them to her at the aforesaid homestead, that she might sell them with the rest, or as many of them as she should choose.

He then went into lodgings at Alfredston, and saw in a shop window the little handbill announcing the sale of his father-in-law's furniture. He noted its date, which came and passed without Jude's going near the place, or perceiving that the traffic out of Alfredston by the southern road was materially increased by the auction. A few days later he entered a dingy broker's shop in the main street of the town, and amid a heterogeneous collection of saucepans, a clothes-horse, rolling-pin, brass candlestick, swing looking-glass, and other things at the back of the shop, evidently just brought in from a sale, he perceived a framed photograph, which turned out to be his own portrait.

It was one which he had had specially taken and framed by a local man in bird's-eye maple, as a present for Arabella, and had duly given her on their wedding-day. On the back was still to be read, "*Jude to Arabella*," with the date. She must have thrown it in with the rest of her property at the auction.

"Oh," said the broker, seeing him look at this and the other articles in the heap, and not perceiving that the portrait was of himself: "It is a small lot of stuff that was knocked down to me at a cottage sale out on the road to Marygreen. The frame is a very useful one, if you take out the likeness. You shall have it for a shilling."

The utter death of every tender sentiment in his wife, as brought home to him by this mute and undesigned evidence of her sale of his portrait and gift, was the conclusive little stroke required to demolish all sentiment in him. He paid the shilling, took the photograph away with him, and burnt it, frame and all.

KENDRA SULLIVAN

So Many Little Human Constructions

Garage sales take place in the future anterior. *All this will have been*. As in a dream, time is condensed. Objects once carefully separated by space and time stock the same driveway.

Meanwhile, multiple temporalities are fixed in a single household furnishing. The production and deployment of an appliance into the market; its niche, its need; its application in the home; its gradual wearing away through repeated use, and its resulting decorative appeal, are all past and all present.

Unmoored psychic values affix themselves to inanimate objects. Items for purchase appear to be one thing but symbolize another. Extracted from a specific domestic context, these articles are reordered as props that forge a fragile connection to a distant and impersonal past that feels strangely unthreatened by individual death.

Mechanical tools, outmoded instruments, and clothing—deeply inscribed with recurrent gesture—succumb to anamorphosis over time and through human contact. At a garage sale, you can trace the path a hand took to crank a flour sifter half a century ago, or you can slip into a vintage glove and become subject to the figurations of its former owner.

Spread out on tables with price tags attached, objects appear lost, broken off, projected away from a whole, a house. Interior decor is recast as the gaseous remains of a solid form, a body, a life. Such a sale reintroduces the extreme-personal to the external world through the semi-public arena of the yard, where oddments make a tentative, second debut in the public sphere.

A garage sale is also a catalogue of inexact clones and an exhibition of negative self-identification. This is what I am not. It turns the home inside out and is accompanied by a quivering sense of mastery over causality, and the hope that the future of the past can be controlled.

Some feel like landlocked shipwrecks, corroded, denoting familial expansion and cultural production overwhelmed by entropic processes, a reminder of Benjamin's "wish-symbols of the previous century." There I assume a caretaker's stance toward what Breton termed "the precarious fate of so many little human constructions." As a casual browser, I am confronted with the orphans of over-consumption. I adopt them.

In *Mad Love*, Breton and Giacometti stroll through a flea market where they are met with objects that offer insight into secret regions of the mind not accessible through other modes of research or inquiry. With illogical itineraries, they search in order to be found by envoys from the unconscious disguised as lifeless objects. Of such fortuitous encounters, Breton says: "It is really as if I had been lost and they had come to give me news about myself."

Giacometti fingers a mask-like military helmet that helps solve the riddle of his unfinished sculpture *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object)*, a hybrid figure of a mother/supplicant leaning on a plank for support. Crouching or sinking, poised in the manner of a praying mantis, the figure holds out her empty hands in a gesture that fuses the act of offering a gift and begging for alms. In the studio, her face refuses to form. Giacometti returns to the market, buys the mask, and symbolically covers the absence of her face with his purchase. The helmet undergoes a maternal transformation, and Breton explains "the intervention of the mask seemed to be intended to help Giacometti. . . ."

Breton alights on a spoon with a little boot carved into its handle. It harkens back to a dream-object he wished to fabricate: "the Cinderella ashtray," inspired by the Princess with cinder in her name. The glass slipper is, according to Freud, a fetish object. According to folklore, it is the symbol of wish-fulfillment, social mobility, sexual compatibility, and release from servitude. Proof: something (external or unknown) is searching for you. If the ashtray is a receptacle of castoffs, "the Cinderella ashtray" is a container of life, sex, dreams, death.

For Breton, a person mapping her way through a garage sale is threatened by externalizations of the self as a stamp collection, a crystal pitcher, or a porcelain doorstop shaped like a black poodle. Particles split away from an ultimate, inanimate dimension; these doubles begin as outward projections of desire and fulfillment, but, having outlived their owners, are embedded with the promise of death.

Some of my doubles include: a dyed wax candle in the shape of a fawn with a drooping frame; a wooden box with the word "apricot" stamped across its long side; four Normandy-lace curtains, discounted because of discoloration and gaps in the weave.

Hal Foster codes the rag-picker as a double for the artist, a figure in the margin, one who "recovered cultural refuse for exchange value." In Laura Riding Jackson's poem, "Forgotten Girlhood," she buries a secret, incorruptible flawlessness within the waste: "The rest is tatters, / But to rag-pickers / Faults are perfection's faults, / And only perfection matters." Outside the closed circuit of production and consumption, the outmoded is available if not valuable.

In *Compulsive Beauty*, Foster hints at the thanatopic undercurrent that guides Breton through the flea-market stalls in the guise of accidental discovery. The inanimate bric-à-brac approximates the unliving condition that predates consciousness and predicts death, and Breton's "trouvaille or found object is a lost object regained," forever substituting itself for something else.

This collision with the inanimate acts as a catalyst, to quote Freud, "to reestablish a state which was troubled by the apparition of life." Occurring at the axis of desire, loss, and identification, these encounters materialize traces of, according to Foster, "past loss and future death," promise and regret.

Often, in mourning, the full impact of personal loss is articulated through contact with the belongings of the dead. Repression of loss and preservation of the lost person prevail at garage sales. They are a rite of passage for the dead and living alike, and represent an adherence to an abstract lineage that, in middle-class America, is not passed down through inherited land or genealogical bond, but through the discontinuous purchase and sale of heirlooms belonging to strangers at flea markets, auctions, estate and garage sales.

While working as a hospice volunteer, I witnessed adult children divesting themselves of their parents' property. The mourners implemented garage sales as a kind of funereal rite, passage, or death ritual (standing in for any psychically functional release strategy), wherein letting go turned a small profit. Reminiscent of Freud's grandson's *fort-da* game, the garage sale provides opportunity to grow intimate with "gone," disperse the shattered nucleus of the family bit by bit, abolish memories, master absence, and enact revenge against the dead by scattering a lifetime of accumulated collectables-instead of ashes—to the wind.

In life, we line our nest, we overflow our empty homes with instruments and mechanisms, furniture. In death, we evacuate the nest. Our homes revert to empty rooms. It's easier to lower a body into the ground than to see her things bagged for the landfill.

How does a thing end up saying so much-about what has been and might be? How does a thing end up being a being? An old man is seated on a folding chair next to an open chest by the side of the road. Near a cluster of houses, but affiliated with none, he wears a plaid shirt and a baseball cap. One of his thumbs is missing. He is mute and deaf. In the chest, party masks from the first half of the last century lay faceup in the afternoon light. A neighbor emerges from a nearby porch and explains that the goods were salvaged from his former home, which had recently burned down. She set him up with a roadside booth to recover something from his loss. His masks are high-hued animals, grinning exotics, lady pirates, gothic icons. All masks are portentous and I buy a lot of them.

In life, we line our nest, we overflow our empty homes with instruments and mechanisms, furniture. In death, we evacuate the nest. Our homes revert to empty rooms.

Photograph by Don Hamerman

JEFF WEINSTEIN

The Life of Stuff

Who can doubt that flea markets are museums? Yard and garage sales are their feeder galleries, and all of them provide a surprise immersion into the lives that neighbors past and present have led.

Those of us who are hypnotized by these object lessons in popular culture also understand that the rich discards on display have soaked up buckets of emotional juice—some actually vibrate with survival after years of use and handling.

Faithful yard-salers, even the most blithe or cynical, will recognize each particular madeleine, be it the ceramic ashtray identical to the one your dead father filled or the old postcard of a pastel hotel you happened to have stayed in when, as a tan young man, you discovered the salty taste of a stranger's kiss.

I can't remember at which parking lot or on what lawn I found the sepia graduation photo for the "Class of June 1949, P.S. 238, Brooklyn," showing rows of boys in suits and ties and coy girls in cliché-prim white blouses. I bought it because P.S. 238 was my own school, the one I attended from the first to the seventh grade—at which time we moved abruptly from the tulip-lined plots of East 8th Street to a raw, swampy development in Howard Beach, Queens, directly under the path of flights to and from Idlewild Airport.

That photo, though of a much earlier class, pushed me to recall the names of my teachers: third grade's plump, encouraging Mrs. Horween; the disgusting Mr. Barash, who clipped his nails at his desk and never answered questions; the wondrous Miss (Jane) Costello, whose cool and clearheaded kindness and intelligence I will never forget. You probably don't care to read about how she passed around Halloween apples with hidden coins stuck in them, pennies in the large ones, nickels in the littlest, to make her modest moral point. That's my treasure, not for sale.

From "Yard Sale Tale," September 8, 2009, posted on *Out There*, artsjournal.com

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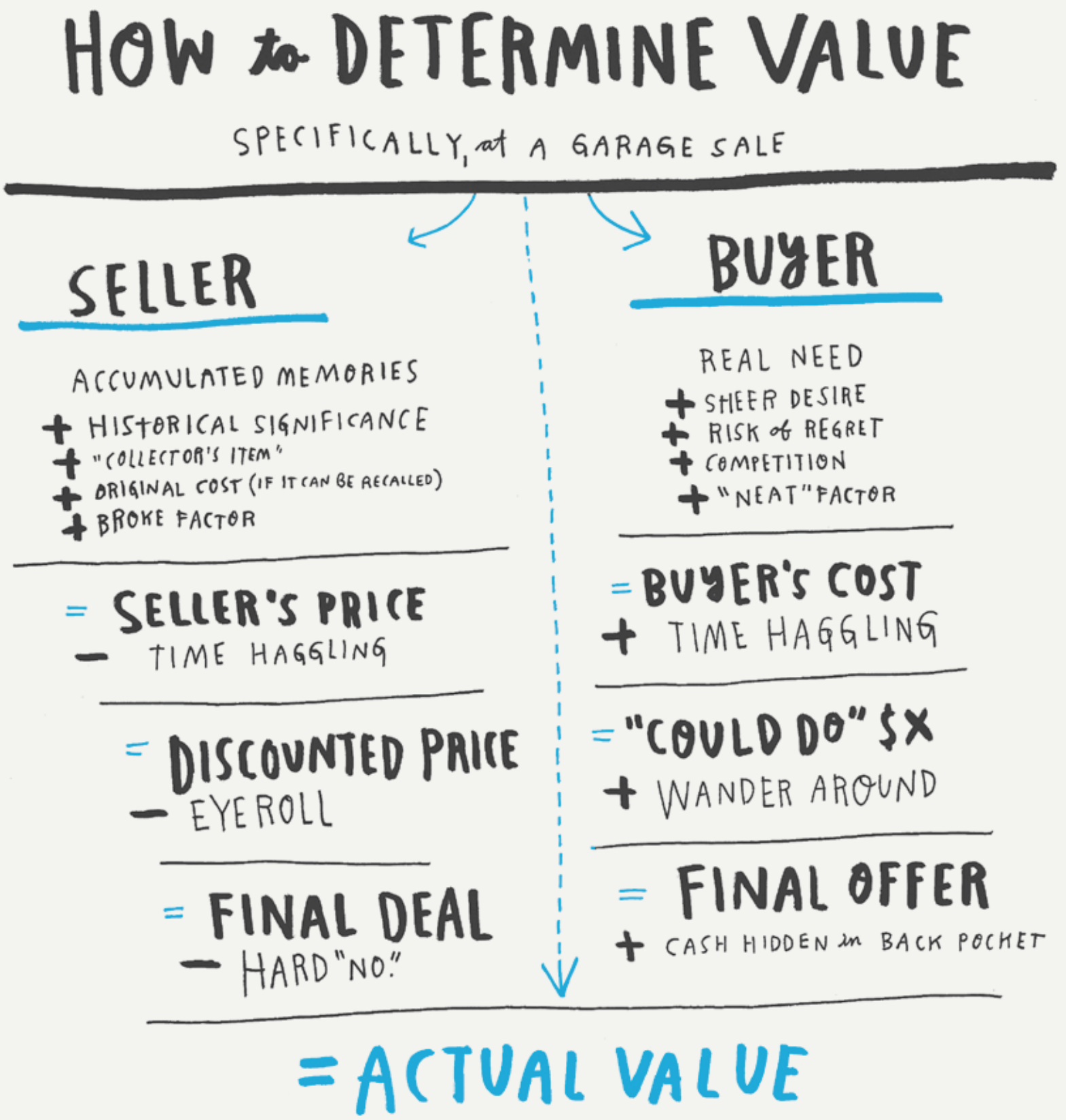


Illustration by Wendy MacNaughton

IN CONVERSATION

Martha Rosler with Sabine Breitwieser

THE UC SAN DIEGO YEARS

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 career. In this first of two parts, the conversation centers on the earliest iterations of the project in California, the social milieu in and around the University of California, San Diego, and Rosler's use of use of montage, circulating media, and the "everyday" as well as various communicative modes, as part of her artistic strategy.

KEY

Sabine Breitwieser

Martha Rosler

When did you first stage your Garage Sale *and where?*

I held the *Monumental Garage Sale* in 1973, at the art gallery belonging to the Visual Arts Department at the University of California, San Diego, where I was a graduate student.

What were your intentions with the project?

I had moved to Southern California from New York, in 1968, after a summer at a linguistics institute in central Illinois. As a resident of New York, I was largely unaware of the customs and folkways of the vast country of which I was a citizen. In the small towns and suburban communities in these two places, Southern California and central Illinois, I saw many so-called garage sales—a phenomenon I was completely unaware of. I was struck by the strange nature of these events, their informal economic status and self-centeredness, but also the way they implicated the community in the narrative of the residents' lives. In New York, people who wished to rid themselves of castoffs simply put them on the street for other, perhaps less fortunate, people to take home and use. There was no thought of that in any garage sale, of course; these sales were apparently about maximizing one's, or one's family's, cash on hand, often put together and run by the woman of the house, and perhaps her children. At the time, the US was suffering the famous oil shock, and the economy was in bad shape. No wonder people were trying to make ends meet by selling their goods! But the motive of charity and sharing seemed absent.

On the other hand, people did not hesitate to expose their past choices, or unwanted gifts, in clothing and household knick-knacks and other decorative items, to the scrutiny of their neighbors, apparently confident that their lives and tastes were very similar. Nor did people seem to think it was dirty or beneath them to be seen sitting on their lawn chairs all day, waiting for customers to drop by and haggle —which of course would be the operative caution for New Yorkers, whether middle class or working class. And in most cases in New York, you wouldn't have a front yard or garage to repair to! Garage sales, in their domestic and usually individualized character, were only superficially like flea markets, which were mostly populated at that time by professional sellers and the occasional households who felt they had enough to sell to make the hassle and the fee for renting the space worth it to them. The different relation to the recuperation of value in a monetary economy, the different relation of self and community, was very powerful for me, and I wanted to bring the garage-sale model to an art space, where questions of worth and value, use and exchange, are both glaringly placed front and center and completely repressed and denied. I wanted the work to engage the visitors not as observers but as participants enacting the impulse to possess things and find a bargain. And for whom the meta-level questions of the sale, I predicted, would be obscure despite the location in an art gallery, the inclusion of a slide show, and the tape recorder playing a meditation on value in capitalism and on questions of community.

I wanted the work to engage the visitors not as observers but as participants enacting the impulse to possess things and find a bargain.

What was your situation as an artist at that time?

I had considered myself an artist for as long as I could remember, making and exhibiting work here and there, but at that time I was a grad student going for an MFA at UCSD. I was also pretty straightforwardly poor, a woman with a baby. Because of the nature of art-world hierarchies and its forms of value tagging, I was known back then as a California artist. (Now we have fully converted from regional to age grouping to determine and signal an artist's market ranking.)

Did you sell your personal belongings or those of others? How did you collect all the goods for sale?

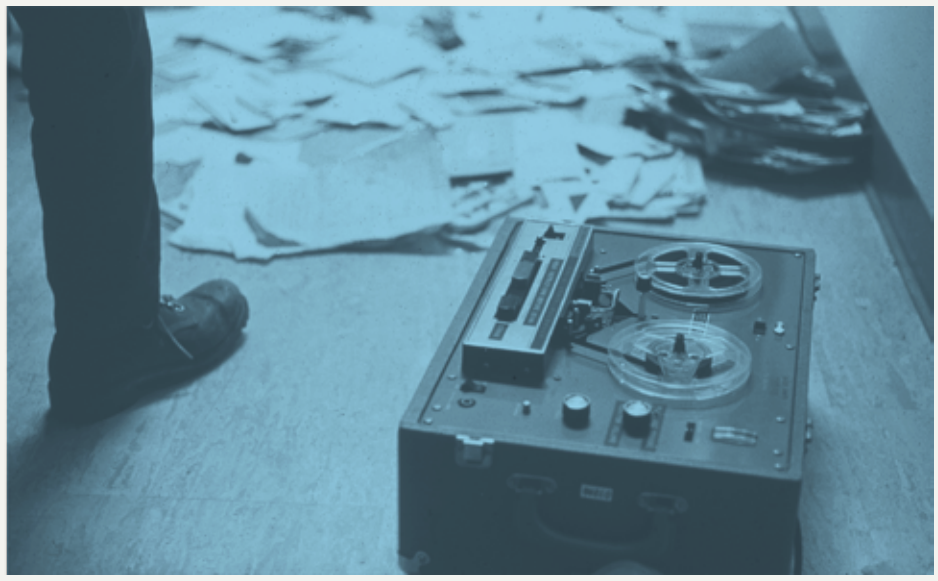
The sale was intended to call attention to the valuation systems at play in the art world. To cover the question of portraiture —the picture of the self and its accoutrements as set forth in the objects on view—I wanted to shade somewhat the matters of ownership. The basic assumption at any garage sale is that the goods sold are yours, unless there is reason to think otherwise. I solicited items from my friends and co-workers, mostly women, and put them out for sale. The shoes and clothes were obviously of different sizes. But more impor-

Photograph by Don Hamerman

TYPOLOGIES OF GARAGE-SALE SHOPPERS

Source: "For Fun and Profit," by Gretchen Herrmann

1. Retailers
2. Child-item Shoppers
3. Habituals
4. Economic-transition Shoppers
5. Specific-need Shoppers



tantly, I included personal letters and notes on lovers, old diaphragms, and underwear, and I hung pinups from old issues of the soft-core pornographic magazine *Playboy*. The setting out for sale of personal items, especially the letters and my son's baby shoes, elicited shock from some fellow female grad students and other visitors, and it solidified the idea in many viewers' minds that these were the belongings of one woman.

And the bare fact of holding a sale of "junk" in an art gallery evoked a blast of opprobrium in the newspaper from a friend of mine who was conveying the opinion of her PhD adviser, Herbert Marcuse, who was also a friend of mine!

> *The first* Garage Sale *took place at the "Revelle undergrad library," as the original poster reads, and lasted six days. How should we envision the setting of this work? The second iteration was called* Traveling Garage Sale *and took place in 1977 at La Mamelle Gallery, San Francisco. What made it "travel"?*

The Revelle gallery was a large space in which the visual arts graduate students held art shows and events. It was at the heart of campus at the time, as the library was on the quad. For the San Francisco show, I am fairly sure that La Mamelle invited me to hold the *Garage Sale* at their place, on the second floor of the building, so I asked to hold it in their garage instead, which was on the ground floor. I packed up my car and a large car-top carrier and moved everything up there. There was a lot of material! I can't remember if people in San Francisco donated anything to the sale, but it's possible.

> *Can you describe what people experienced when visiting the work?*

The people walking into the building were greeted with ordinary garage-sale signs pointing the way to the sale. When they entered the gallery they stepped into a garage sale mostly like any other garage sale . . . but with exceptions! The room had modulated lighting: The front area—the front of the "invisible" garage space—was the best-lit area featuring the most desirable goods; from there, moving toward the back of the room, the lighting gradually diminished to where the less desirable, less publicly acceptable items were displayed. At the far back, there were empty containers from welfare commodities as well as lingerie, and the aforementioned soft-core porn. But there were also private letters and mementos, things like my son's baby shoes. And that list of old boyfriends. In the midst of that array, a large reel-to-reel tape recorder played the meditation on garage sales and value I'd written, which has carried forward through every staging of this work. And there was a slide carousel of travel and family photos I'd bought at a garage sale held by the heirs of a man who recently died.

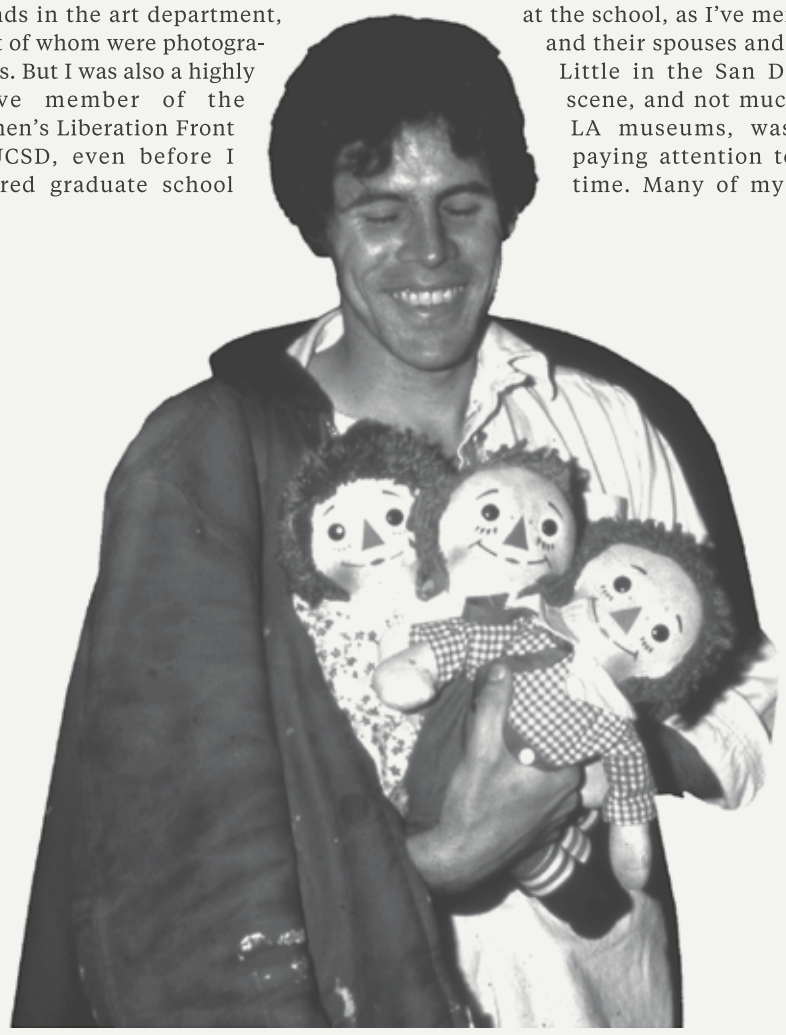
> *Earlier you mentioned Herbert Marcuse, who was then teaching at UC San Diego.*

> *How did the UC environment inform your work as an artist?*

UC San Diego was a very aggressive recruiter for the best and the brightest among faculty and students. The 1970s were the high point of the University of California Master Plan of Development, and the university was seeking to be the pre-eminent public research and education university in the country. Marcuse, Reinhard Lettau, Fredric Jameson, Anthony Wilden, and others were eminent scholars on faculty, while Lyotard and Edgar Morin were there as visiting faculty. The art department was new and had a whole range of mostly male faculty who all styled themselves as theorists. Cross-disciplinarity was a hallmark of UCSD. There was a highly politicized student population at most of San Diego's colleges and universities; it was a military town, and we held several student strikes and many actions against the war—too many to count. While we were respectful of our professors and more than happy to learn from them, we didn't pay all that much attention to what the faculty might want from us. Instead we answered to the generational insistence on what was important. That attitude was certainly the hallmark among my small group of friends in the art department, most of whom were photographers. But I was also a highly active member of the Women's Liberation Front at UCSD, even before I entered graduate school there, and we engaged in many forms of feminist outreach to schools and community groups. It may be hard to realize today how much the political struggles of the day informed our sense of ourselves as both students and citizens.

> *During that period, you were exchanging ideas with other like-minded photographers and visual artists. Can you say more about your social milieu?*

My close artist friends in San Diego were a group of people—the people I mentioned above—interested in refashioning the discourses of contemporary art by moving away from modernist separation and aestheticism and injecting a different viewpoint, and naturally also changing the art world, one way or another, but in no particular time frame. Our main focus was on photography and text, and inevitably film and video, and on questions not only of production but of distribution. We got together and talked about shows as reported in the art mags, and about films, and of course we were deeply concerned with political events and theories. We wanted to be active both inside and outside the art world and change the discussion. The wider San Diego circle included New York transplants who were teaching at the school, as I've mentioned, and their spouses and friends. Little in the San Diego art scene, and not much in the LA museums, was worth paying attention to at the time. Many of my friends



SUCH LITTLE FEET

by Theodor Dreiser, from *Sister Carrie* (1900)

Carrie was an apt student of fortune's ways—of fortune's superficialities. Seeing a thing, she would immediately set to inquiring how she would look, properly related to it. Be it known that this is not fine feeling, it is not wisdom. The greatest minds are not so afflicted; and, on the contrary, the lowest order of mind is not so disturbed. Fine clothes to her were a vast persuasion; they spoke tenderly and Jesuitically for themselves. When she came within earshot of their pleading, desire in her bent a willing ear. The voice of the so-called inanimate! Who shall translate for us the language of the stones?

"My dear," said the lace collar she secured from Partridge's, "I fit you beautifully; don't give me up."

"Ah, such little feet," said the leather of the soft new shoes; "how effectively I cover them. What a pity they should ever want my aid."

Once these things were in her hand, on her person, she might dream of giving them up; the method by which they came might intrude itself so forcibly that she would ache to be rid of the thought of it, but she would not give them up. "Put on the old clothes—that torn pair of shoes," was called to her by her conscience in vain. She could possibly have conquered the fear of hunger and gone back; the thought of hard work and a narrow round of suffering would, under the last pressure of conscience, have yielded, but spoil her appearance?—be old-clothed and poor-appearing?—never!

were feminist artists such as Laura Silagi and Elly Antin and, up in LA, Suzanne Lacy, Nancy Buchanan, Barbara Smith, Faith Wilding, Jerri Allyn. Also, the young women at the Feminist Art Program at Cal Arts, and later at the Women's Building, such as Laurel Klick and Cheri Gaulke. I followed their work avidly, as well as the work in some of the artists' spaces there. Of course, there were artists elsewhere, around the world, male and female, individuals and groups, whose work was of great interest to me.

> *How would you characterize the work you made in parallel to the* Garage Sale*?*

Around that time, my work consisted of postcard novels, antiwar montages, feminist montages, stuffed sculpture (these were also feminist works), performances such as *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained*, and others. At the same time I was doing so-called straight photography. All the while, I was still making large, unstretched Abstract Expressionist canvases, oddly enough!

> *Which artist projects in particular were influential to your practice in that era? Did you ever visit Claes Oldenburg's* The Store *in 1961 in New York's Lower East Side, or the Happenings at the Reuben Gallery? I've heard that later, during your time on the West Coast, you participated in a work by Allan Kaprow.*

I knew about Oldenburg's store but I was just a teenager then and wouldn't have had the courage to go find it on my own, and as a Brooklyn kid, I certainly did not imagine that I was entitled to go to commercial galleries. I spent my art-viewing times mostly in museums—primarily MoMA. And if you passed through a certain small door, you were in the Whitney Museum! I was fortunate enough to meet Allan Kaprow in the Brooklyn living room of David and Ellie Antin, my mentors, and I knew him in California, but I didn't participate in any of his works. I was ignorant enough not to realize for quite a few years that he was the mentor and literally the teacher of my feminist performance-artist buddies at Cal Arts in LA!

> *Your work spanned across various formats, but your practice clearly focused on the use of circulating media—magazines and postcards, for instance—in connection with other commonplace materials, like clothing.*

I didn't want to stick with studio-based media alone. I wanted to step out into the world, but also to continue to work with formal issues. I did work with objects, and I drew a lot, including life drawing. But I was increasingly concerned with questions of communication and distribution, and the use of public media was one route to a wider dissemination that bypassed art-world gatekeepers. Postcards are less public, occupying a liminal space between public and private life, but they enabled a wider reach from a base in the backwater that was San Diego. These formats are also an efficient way to use classical, that is, mid-century, communication theory: sender-message-channel-receiver. I wanted to use items, like ordinary clothing, that would ask viewers—women viewers in particular—to focus on questions of identification and disidentification: "This is me"/ "This is not me." These questions, for me, were a result of the war in Vietnam, in which we were targeting and killing people who neither looked like us nor lived like us. That issue was important not only to the antiwar photomontages, with Vietnamese in Western-style living spaces, but also to works like *Some Women Prisoners of the Infamous Thieu Regime in the Poulo Condore Prison in South Vietnam*, in which cast-off women's clothing was stamped with the name, date of birth, and number of such prisoners, and also to the photo-audio work *She Sees in Herself a New Woman Every Day*.

This interview will continue in the second issue of the Garage Sale Standard.

Photographs by Martha Rosler and Phel Steinmetz

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