Hoarding and the Cult of Money

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Abstract

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As a category of psychological diagnosis, Hoarding Disorder has spawned a conception of "the hoarder" marked by social exclusion, a habitual urge to possess objects, and an apparent difficulty in disposing them. Against this limited definition, which stems from a lack of long-term historical and social awareness among scholars of hoarding disorder, my work asks, How is hoarding logical? Can we read hoarding as non-pathological or adaptive? What kind of monuments and record have historical hoarders left behind? Proceeding from the longer etymology of the word, hoard, and coupled with oral history interviews drawn from my own life, this thesis recasts "hoarding" as more complex than the current paradigm implies, pertaining to the rise of capitalism, commodity fetishism, and broader forms of socio-economic reciprocity which preceded and responded to formal and informal empire.

Supported by historical documents from major thinkers in political economy, classical Liberalism, Marxism, Social Anthropology, and Neoliberalism, alongside periodical documents from nineteenth and twentieth-century Britain and the United States, I argue that hoarding among the poor and socially vulnerable, such as those affected by post-colonialism, deindustrialization, austerity, statelessness, etc., may be reread as a mode of economic survival and social investment, if the economic idiosyncrasies of an individual hoarder's subjective lifeworld and context are taken into consideration. In tandem with this line of reasoning, I argue that hoarding is a spectrum of behavior that also includes more 'normative' behaviors of the super-wealthy, including cash and land hoarding.

This thesis uses oral history, with cultural, anthropological, and literary sources, to shift the language around hoarding and to present it as an underlying logic of capitalism, as a mediator of interpersonal and family relationships, and as a dangerous extension of twentieth-century empire, functioning through hegemonic, legal, but deeply unethical institutions and financial tools such as major accountancy firms, central banks, international tax havens, and international corporations. Using sentimental objects from personal collections, I situate myself as embedded within history, and at the cusp of different economic and cultural worlds, wherein objects are read as unique signifiers of memory and meaning.

Acknowledgements

This project was all mine in intimate and frustrating ways, but it was helped by many hands along the way. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. encouraged aspiring writers to aim for an audience of one, addressing a book to a single person, to avoid trying to please too many people. While writing this thesis about hoarding, my father, and my own life, it was not my dad whom I imagined myself writing for, but to my siblings, Rachel, Sarah, Dylan, and Danielle, whose lives are interwoven with mine. It was Danielle whose interview proved to be the major fulcrum around which this project evolved, from my original questions to my unforeseen conclusions. Without the contributions of other family members, including Carol Kent, Nancy Clark Dennet, John Dennet, Janet Clark Moulton, Laurie Moulton, and Carol Clark, I would not have gained access to artifacts, photographs, and family stories which were tucked away or on display in their homes. I would like to thank my interviewees for their time and their shared vulnerability.

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I would like to thank Dr. Christine J. Walley for her inspiring book, Exit Zero, and for the autoethnography workshop and talks she generously offered in February 2019's History in the Making Conference, in Montreal. My supervisor, Dr. High recommended Dr. Walley's work to me, and combined with his own work in oral history and deindustrialization studies, I felt newly equipped with skills and research tools, and simultaneously validated in building scholarship out of my own life story, which is an endless headache and an ongoing work in progress.

I'd like to thank my wife, my mother, my stepfather, my grandparents, and my friends for supporting me and encouraging me on every step of this path, and finally for my father, without whose presence, this would have been impossible.

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Carol*: Because it was very important to acquire things, to have things, to not feel need… I guess. You might need this at some point, so I gotta have it now. It's on sale. Making a deal…getting a good buy on something overshadowed any kind of use the thing might have.*

-Carol Kent, oral history interview, August 2018

The hoarding drive is boundless in its nature. Qualitatively or formally considered, money is independent of all limits, that is it is the universal representative of material wealth because it is directly convertible into any other commodity. But at the same time every actual sum of money is limited in amount, and therefore has only a limited efficacy as a means of purchase. This contradiction between the quantitative limitation and the qualitative lack of limitation of money keeps driving the hoarder back to his Sisyphean task: accumulation. He is in the same situation as the world conqueror, who discovers a new boundary with each country he annexes.

-Karl Marx*, Capital, Vol. 1*

How to Make Friends and Influence People

In July 2010, I almost fell down the stairs of my father's three-bedroom house in Bangor, Maine. The stairwell looms over the front door and a narrow hallway, even more precipitous due to a large gun safe abutting the banister at the base of the stairs, themselves covered by old shoes and scattered piles of stuff—paperback mysteries, tools, boxes of nails and screws, old toys. The emotional climate in the house at the time was bad: my dad and his wife of twenty-five years, Carol, my stepmother, were getting a divorce. Carol's mother, Toby, the family matriarch, had died the previous November of aggressive cancer. Toby had been the glue holding the family together, keeping each person bolstered and supported, and when she was gone, everything changed for those around her. Carol was diagnosed with trigeminal neuralgia, a rare disorder in which the trigeminal nerve becomes inflamed. It runs from the neck through the lower jaw, the upper jaw, and the side of the face to the temple in three long branches. The disease has the nickname, 'the suicide disease', because it has no cure and the pain is so bad that chronic sufferers sometimes choose to kill themselves rather than live with it. The family dog had also died of cancer. Dad and Carol separated. At the time, I was twenty-five years old, my sister Rachel was seventeen, Danielle was fifteen, and Dylan was twelve.

People were coming and going from the house. When they were together, there were arguments, resigned anger, and hushed conversations followed by cars starting in the night. With the emotions storming through the house, without my stepmother or the children carrying the ongoing load of chores and cleaning up after my father, his mass of well-worn tools, construction supplies, generalized junk, and dilapidated antique toys had swelled everywhere, including on the stairs. Hurrying down, I slipped on a copy of Dale Carnegie's pre-Cambrian self-help bestseller,

How to Make Friends and Influence People. I fell two steps and caught myself on the banister, looming twelve feet above the heaps of detritus and the gun cabinet in which Dad keeps most of his guns (and mine: a .22 caliber single-shot, bolt-action rifle, literally 'child-size' and a BB gun—a replica of the Red Rider rifle featured in the classic American Christmas film, *A Christmas Story*). I could have broken my neck. Would the gun safe be the culprit, or the book? Dale Carnegie or Smith & Wesson? My own carelessness or my father's? One more person killed by some junk in the wrong place at the wrong time. Death by self-help guide.

In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, author Jane Bennett argues that the seemingly inanimate objects and innocuous substances that fill our homes, fuel our vehicles, and line our cookware should be considered, if not as *actors* in human affairs, then as *actants*: "a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that efficacy which can *do* things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events."[1] Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour, Bennet argues that, since the Industrial Revolution, the hegemonic swell of global capitalism, and the advent of a secular, empiricist Modernity, Western dichotomies between subject/object, self/other, human/nature, et al., have largely rested on a view of matter as inert, on a way of seeing human life as privileged and all nonhuman life as lacking a certain quality, depth, or even the *possibility* of something approaching human consciousness. The same Cartesian logic, which treats industrial commodities as simple tools serving rational actors guided by free will in their intended purposes, limits our ability to see how all actors and actants are always interdependent and enmeshed in circumstances beyond their control. In our quest for control over

[1] Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke, 2010), 1.

variables, a human hubris developed in regard to the actions of nonhuman forces, beings, and things. As Latour writes in *Reassembling the Social:*

> If action is limited a priori to what 'intentional', 'meaningful' humans do, it is hard to see how a hammer, a basket, a door closer, a cat, a rug, a mug, a list, or a tag could act. They might exist in the domain of 'material' 'causal' relations, but not in the 'reflexive' 'symbolic' domain of social relations. By contrast, if we stick to our decision to start from the controversies about actors and agencies, then *any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor—or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant.[2]

The apparent duality between *useful* and *useless* dissolves in liminal moments when objects enter bodies, alter bodily performance, determine fates, shape courses, and redirect flows. To Latour's list we could add drugs, bullets, bridges, dams, sex toys, books, shoes, computers, smartphones, disposable eating utensils, plastic fishing nets, cars, and musical instruments, to name a few. Such objects demand a rethinking of the concepts of storage, investment, fetish, economy, and waste, and hoarding is a key to that reconsideration. This thesis is an attempt to appraise these ideas anew and to shift the language we use around those who hoard.

No object remains unchanging or at rest. In this dawning age of apocalyptic Internet inertia, plastics, petroleum, and industrialized food systems, *seepage* is a crucial concept to bear in mind when considering any commodity that has passed through global supply chains to arrive at a front door ensconced in bubble wrap, perhaps—if you're really lucky—delivered by drone. When we consider pathogens, invasive species, and migratory patterns shifting alongside the ships and trucks and unmanned military aircraft around the world, we see biological forces coalesce around dangerous commodities in unpredictable ways like oil spill anticoagulants lodged in the fatty flesh of a tuna. Just as food may be contaminated, so may a particular solvent or fire-retardant, made in

[2] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford, 2005), 71.

a deregulated factory in rural America or exurban China, find its way into our homes, into our bodies, our air, our water. A landfill over an aquifer, a forest fire over a watershed, buckets of paint and the skeletons of many cars above porous leaden pipes bringing water from the agricultural run-off regions upstream from the coastal cities. The building materials and deindustrialized wastelands of yesteryear remain potent actants for those living nearby.

What does it mean to 'throw something away'? Where is the *away* for chemicals that seep out of industrial sites and landfills to enter the water and the air, or for plastics leaching into and throughout our bodies, breaking into smaller and smaller particles, changing DNA expression, changing what we mean by the word, 'inherited.' My father determined years ago to use recycled oil to heat his house. He salvaged used cooking oil from restaurants, filtered it himself in the back yard with a sieve and a paper towel, and then heated his poorly-insulated home through several Maine winters. The oil is abundant, with some restaurants giving it for free in the industrial-kitchen-size plastic jugs that are typically wrapped in cardboard boxes. I don't know if he still heats his house with recycled oil, but the jugs are still there. They have been there for years, in cheap, commercial plastic, now turning black and melting from repeated summers and winters. Twenty feet away, my father has a small tomato garden in which he started—since legalization—growing cannabis plants to sell. From one vantage point, this is an innovative means of recycling energy production, on the other hand, I won't drink the water or take a shower at Dad's house.

Such actants measure time and fashion identities, accoutrements to class, gender, family, and power: the multilayered masks of society, sometimes casually draped over and sometimes brutally fastened to each core Self. They are physical, chemical, and spiritual catalysts for transformations and situations that would be otherwise impossible—unthinkable—without them.

They can lead to cancer, cause traffic accidents, interrupt important conversations, and inflect the subjective, psychological makeup of individuals and groups of people on a day-to-day basis. The curation, ordering, and arrangement of such objects (and the experiences that they can provide) confronts the chaotic, infinite plurality of Life with approximations of logic and reason, while reinforcing beliefs, identities, and cultures. In *The Order of Things* Michel Foucault argues that in the Modern age, any order can serve to distinguish normality from deviance, and in the context of normative consumer behavior, this marks hoarders distinct from saner collectors, archivists, and connoisseurs.[3] How does our ability to 'organize' or 'dispose' of 'things' reflect our seeing of ourselves, our identities, and our ideas, or those of others?

In that moment on the stairs, in a chance encounter mediated by a vast web of family relationships, psychological tumult, and personal circumstance, some 'junk' that I would consider 'throwing away', but which my father was keeping 'for no good reason', was suddenly the determining factor of my lived experience—arms akimbo to clutch the railing, a quietly convenient object that had waited for the opportunity to serve its intended purpose. In an instant, I saw the familiar landscape morph into something strange. Having only seen it through my peripheral vision on semi-regular visits to Dad's house, it had remained unseen, lining the hallways—winding paths really—carved between heaps of stuff which sat stewing in the living room, in the basement, in the garage in which no car would fit—or in which one was buried under boxes of tools and children's toys. It's hard to tell. Things move, but the general structure has remained intact for many years, like a dune. The several cars in the yard bleached grey under years of sun like the desiccated bones of worn-out beasts of burden.

[3] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 49-58.

With Dad I learned about dry rot, rust, and corrosion. I learned to fix things and to try and do things by myself before asking for help. I learned that the smell of motor oil burns my nostrils and that dust make me sneeze. I learned—dubiously—from my father, that asbestos and lead paint were only harmful if eaten and were fine to ignore. I learned that a man should be funny, stoic, and self-sacrificing, but that he could also be arrogant, silent, and defiantly obtuse if circumstances prompted it, and that we wouldn't talk about those things. He told me often that he knew everything and for a long time I believed him. He worked from the "do as I say, not as I do" school of parenting, often trying to pack in the advice of a full-time father into the sporadic weekends we had together. He was concerned, but there were never questions, and his advice never worked from a place of knowledge about *you*, but from the heart of his own fear and prejudice. There was always a reason for things, but it was often assumed or dictated, and there was rarely a conversation before or after any kind of conflict, acquisition, or major change. We had been living *with* these things my father had kept which *nobody* wanted, but I didn't understand: Why does nobody want so much? From Dad's perspective, I imagine that he was saving these things *for* something: for me and my siblings, for the future, for the eventual payoff that would come when he would sell off everything one by one and find, hidden within, a boon. As they wait, however, objects have a way of making their silent presences felt.

So, you'd like to fix your Dad

I feel uniquely situated to investigate this aspect of my life. There is some distance, physically and emotionally, and I have never lived with my father, but I have spent a great deal of time with him, weekends and holidays and summer vacations at his houses, with my siblings, and despite

whatever space, I think about them daily and organized my whole master's degree around them, so clearly there is a lot of love. As a singer, I know how comforting wearing a guitar on stage can help to feel defended by the intermediate distance of the audience and the presence of an instrument between you and them.

This is how I'm dealing with our estranged relationship: with a sort of proximate distance and the comfort of abstraction. As a child, I would visit on weekends, often reluctantly. In an oral history interview with my colleague featured in Chapter Two, I relate this to childhood trauma I experienced, wherein I became averse to my dad's home. Through this rupture in my childhood life world, I adopted a new way of seeing, but which was also accompanied by symptoms of post-traumatic stress that went undiagnosed until adulthood. By a roundabout way and much inner work, this was to my accidental advantage. I have come to appreciate my challenges as the experiences that make me resilient, critical, and compassionate, having worked past most of the fear, avoidance, and anger. To reach back into my childhood, I interviewed my siblings and my stepmother, along with other family relatives to combine my perspective with that of those who lived within my dad's house, but who are not themselves hoarders, necessarily. I never lived there. It wouldn't be the place that comes to mind when I say, 'home,' but I was fed for years by its food and water, and by my relationships with family I am still drawn toward it. Like a snapshot, this is a way of measuring the impact of hoarding as a culture within our family and in the culture of rural America more broadly. As my sister Danielle remarked in an interview:

Danielle: I do think of hoarding as something to try to stay away from.

Bryan: Yeah. Where do you think it comes from?

> D: Insecurities. Like, I feel like people hoard things because they're worried about something in their life. Like, my dad collects all sorts of things, because he doesn't have all of these personal connections in his life that like, my mom has. So like, my mom doesn't feel the need for all of these physical things, because she has all these really good emotional connections with people.
>
> B: Yeah.
>
> D: Whereas my dad is still trying to kind of find that, and won't find it in *stuff*.[4]

I imagine that my siblings, who lived their childhoods in my father's house, would perhaps know better how to lithely spring down each step, around the detritus, through the valleys and the crags of clutter and out the door without a hitch, perhaps also dodging some emotional barbs, or perhaps just sharing a joke with my dad before leaving. They are all more dedicated to him than me. They understand his moods with greater clarity, and they are better at hearing the sentiment behind his often abrasive or disinterested words. Ignorance of my father led me here.

Latour insists that ignorance of context and distance from the normal course of events in any situation is one way (with accidents, innovations, archives, and artistic representation) of seeing beyond the deceptive tendency of objects to hide themselves in the background of a space. We must actively draw them out, reveal their hidden natures, and make them speak (or elicit a confession), as he writes:

> Even the most routine, traditional, and silent implements stop being taken for granted when they are approached by users rendered ignorant and clumsy by *distance*—distance in time as in archaeology, distance in space as in ethnology, distance in skills as in learning. Although those associations might not trace an innovation per se, the same situation of novelty is produced, for the analyst at least, by the interruption into the normal course of action of strange, exotic, archaic, or mysterious implements. In those encounters, objects

[4] Danielle Clark, interviewed by Bryan Gordon, August 30, 2018, in Danielle's apartment in Bangor, Maine.

> become mediators, at least for a while, before soon disappearing again through know-how, habituation, or disuse.[5]

Through an evolving symbiosis, human beings make bedfellows with objects, sometimes strangely, sometimes literally, and the choices we make in relation to our consumption patterns can shape entire generations in terms of political, environmental, and social expectations.

Early twenty-first century, neoliberal American culture teaches citizens to improve themselves through the acquisition of new, gratifying experiences and toys, and to view price and pleasure—rather than necessity or meaning—as the main motivators toward any desirable purchase. Thus over the course of two generations, Americans have traded workers' rights and environmental protections for the right to buy anything they can afford. In a 2015 article, measuring the cultural and economic impact of Walmart, anthropologist Jane Collins writes:

> The firm's retailing strategy and advertising campaigns suggest that market consumption is the most important way that an individual can pursue his or her economic interests. It offers the strategy of seeking the lowest price as an alternative route to prosperity and inclusion – a 'win-win scenario' that entails less conflict than seeking a union contract or a living wage.[6]

Walmart is the largest retailer in the United States, with a two-million person global workforce, and it has played a central role in reshaping the identity of post-1970s, deindustrialized working-class populations in the United States and elsewhere, from citizen-workers to consumer-citizens, allowing for the driving down of wages and a breaking up of worker protections in tandem with a race to the bottom in terms of price and convenience, comprising a major ideological and economic shift. My father does all of his shopping there.

5 Latour, 80.

6 Jane Collins, "Walmart, American Consumer-Citizenship and the Erasure of Class," in *Anthropologies of Class: Power, Practice, and Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), 90.

Distinct processes led to the development of present-day social inequalities, climate emergencies, and global violence. It is difficult to see that which makes itself feel taken for granted, natural, but all have their origins somewhere in the past, and hoarding, by individual consumer-citizens, by nations, by royal families, and by the beneficiaries of wealthy institutions and international corporations, is at their root. Rather than bringing a scholarly gaze to a supposedly 'alien' or 'foreign' context, those same analytical tools can serve to better study sites of ruptures and tears within the historical fabric of the West, of the United States in the later twentieth century, and the strange uniqueness (or commonness) of me and my family in particular. Just as early anthropologists traveled to the margins of American and European empires to categorize, fetishize, and capitalize the difference and situational precarity of those living there, as a lifelong expat, I feel that at the margins of the present empire, which is everywhere, and the present economy, which seeks to map itself onto the global territory, we may find borders, fissures, and ruptures not only in the United States or Canada or Europe, but within seemingly prosperous homes, neighborhoods, and in the hearts of the wealthiest and most powerful people, lurking behind the faces of privilege like a soul, wherever we look hard enough. Just so we might find hidden gems, dignity, and respect in the lives of humbler hoarders and other supposed deviants. To disavow the extractive legacy of such colonial Orientalists and their ilk, I do not wish to fetishize any aspect of my father's reality, but simply to empathize with it on a personal level, to try to better understand where he is coming from, and then to relate my findings to the wider American culture. We might find technologies and strategies for investment where standard tools do not apply or remain inaccessible. We can find manifestations of anachronistic social patterns and forms of community building that may appear anomalous in one world, but practical or auspicious in another. Economic

laws adapt with a shifting environmental and political terrain, but just as suddenly as a rupture may appear, it may sink back into the familiarity of the taken for granted.

Following the line of reasoning put forward by Gwendolyn Audrey Foster in, *Hoarders, Doomsday Preppers, and the Culture of the Apocalypse,* I suggest that hoarding is a social adaptation used by my father and those like him to survive under certain circumstances—a tool used by rich and poor alike, but I also wish to suggest that what my father does *isn't hoarding at all*. Here, my role as a historian opens up the possibility of suggesting that "hoarding" as a term, more accurately describes the behavior of billionaires, millionaires, et al. Foster writes: "Corporations and wealthy individuals are currently hoarding the greatest amount of cash ever recorded, but they simply don't make good exploitation TV."[7] I don't evoke the pathos of declension, but I do decry the triumphalism of the present. At the edge of an ecological and social disaster that is only beginning, in a country that has become increasingly brutal and xenophobic, I see my father's behavior as logical, hereditary, cultural, and, at times simply confused—a misguided, anachronistic appropriation of previous cultural iterations of capitalist discourse in a terrain that no longer fits the map. Within this form of knowledge making, we can plot numerous events and actors within a discourse or a spectrum of hoarding mediated by class and history, etc. Hoarding works as a fulcrum, a moment of transitive inference, to bring together seemingly unrelated historical contexts, uniting studies of early modern European political economy with the history of Byzantine Christianity, Marxian economic history, and modern day 'unbanking' processes in the developing world. Hoarding presages new economic actors and means of

[7] Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Hoarders, Doomsday Preppers, and the Culture of the Apocalypse* (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 39.

fetishization, such as professional organizers, aesthetical minimalists and wellness gurus, and a whole army of therapists, counselors, decluttering experts, civil servants, psychiatrists, and academics who approach hoarding, possession, and property from angles ranging from the historical to the supernatural.

Much of status and luxury are themselves synonymous with money and the things purchased with it, so it was striking that very little of the academic literature on tax evasion, billionaires, corporate greed, etc., should have spent so little time on discussing this as hoarding. Possession's demonic aspect reveals itself here as things become a way of projecting unspoken knowledge outward from oneself, communicating one's wealth, one's taste, one's sexual prowess, and one's values as an unspoken force for all to read through the simple flip of a coin. The moment of acquisition of a desired commodity is itself an object of worship in the culture of my father, exemplified in popular advertising, blockbuster films, and the popular American cultures of weddings, obesity, and Christmas films, to name a few. As Walter Benjamin, wrote in the early twentieth century:

> It is the deepest enchantment of the collector to enclose the particular item within a magic circle, where, as a last shudder runs through it (the shudder of being acquired), it turns to stone. Collecting is a form of practical memory, and of all the profane manifestations of "nearness" it is the most binding. Thus, in a certain sense, the smallest act of political reflection makes for an epoch in the antiques business. We construct here an alarm clock that rouses the kitsch of the previous century to "assembly."[8]

This type of thinking does not see consumption as a moment in the production cycle of the economy, but as an exalted moment of personal freedom and will against the chaotic, intractable march of time—a crystallization of Self in a temporary world.

[8] Walter Benjamin, "The Collector," in *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1999), 204-05.

Under capitalism, whether in leisure or at work, whether writing a novel, signing a contract, playing a video game, or drone-striking a rural village, all moments of time on Earth become interlaced as life, purchase, consumption, and waste, all serving the production of capital. Karl Marx wrote that, under capitalism: "Everything becomes saleable and purchasable. Circulation becomes the great social retort into which everything is thrown, to come out again as the money crystal. Nothing is immune from this alchemy."[9] In the heartland of twentieth century industrial capitalism such as the American mid-west and the coal fields of northern England, with many of the well-paid, unionized jobs that did not require a university degree have disappeared, retail, along with low-paid, low-quality, low-security service and manual labor jobs may be the only vital parts of the economy remaining—other than the black market in drugs, of course. While these markets are devastating for those with few choices in regard to housing or zip code, they remain profitable for the few. After an eviscerating half-century of neoliberalism, deindustrialization, and enforced austerity—with the power of government largely serving the needs of the super-rich—actual structural change is shortcoming, presaging ongoing crises in housing, addiction, health care costs, mass shootings, and environmental catastrophe.

In *How Will Capitalism End?: Essays on a Failing System,* social economist Wolfgang Streeck writes: "Better living and working conditions for the great majority would alleviate the need for yet more consumer toys to compensate for status anxiety, competitive pressure, and increasing insecurity."[10] Despite austerity, consumption patterns have remained high throughout much of the developed world, bolstered by relatively buoyant, but unsustainable pools of consumer

[9] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 229.
[10] Wolfgang Streek, *How Will Capitalism End?: Essays on a Failing System* (New York: Verso, 2016), 149.

credit and debt, which have largely moved to fill the gaps left by the last recession of the eviscerated social welfare state, but they will not do so forever. What happens when the dribbling stream of credit dries up, as they did in the wake of the 2008 crash, is less clear.[11] In a spiritual sense, it feels like the ecstasy of possession remains (with physical violence, populist band-wagoning, preservation of brittle hierarchies and racial, gender, and class roles, and fundamentalist traditionalism) one of the only valid ways for those under the sway of patriarchal, racist, and fundamentalist ideologies, to publicly and openly surrender to his own fears and desires, otherwise guarded and enclosed behind a stiff upper lip—but even this is highly gendered and codified. As gifts and found objects, my dad would come home with guns, soccer balls, model airplanes, used cars, speedboats, antique toy trucks, stray dogs, and hunted deer.

Uncanny Clutter

In 2010, Carol and Dad separated. She had moved out to her father's and recently-deceased mother's house, five minutes down the street, where she continues to live as of 2019. My dad was frantic in a way I haven't seen before or since. He was on the edge of tears, pleading. He whines the same way I do. I'd been staring into a shadowy mirror for days and I didn't like the reflection, but I wanted to help, or to fix things, and at the time, I couldn't tell the difference. After falling, I decided to do something that I've since learned not to do with a hoarder: I began to throw things away. I started at the base of the stairs. There was a heaping pile of shoes. At the top were larger ones, but near the bottom, there were children's shoes. My siblings were then thirteen, sixteen, and seventeen years old, all tall and athletic. The shoes at the bottom of the pile were child-sized,

[11] Ibid., 149-50.

curved and warped in stiff, rubber-sole *rigor mortis*. The urge to recycle or responsibly dispose of things was beyond me then, and I was hurriedly packing the shoes into the trash, half hoping that nobody would come home before I finished. After thirty minutes of bagging shoes and putting old toys and paperback romance novels into a bag for Goodwill, I had barely scratched the surface.

As I climbed the stairs with the garbage bag, my father returned home. Nobody else was there. Everyone was avoiding the house. He came into the hallway and asked me what I was doing. Defensively, I replied, opening my arms wide to take in the obviousness of the scene: "I almost fell!" Dad inspected the white plastic bag full of shoes, and without a word, he gingerly removed each one, momentarily considered it, and then, shoe-by-shoe, he returned them to a slightly more organized pile. In *Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things,* psychologist Randy Frost and social worker Gail Steketee write*,* "A forced cleaning temporarily improves the condition of the home but seldom changes the behavior that created those conditions. In short order, the home fills up again."[12] Due to strong emotional attachment to even the most mundane objects, "such cleanings are traumatic events that leave the inhabitants grief stricken, frustrated and fearful."[13] In, "A Magical Reorientation of the Modern: Professional Organizers and Thingly Care in Contemporary North America," University of Toronto scholar Katie Kilroy-Marac reports that the stuff itself is not what bothers most hoarders, "but the threatened or actual removal of stuff and the discarding of things that causes the most distress…the *intervention* is often experienced as distressing, while the things are not; hoarders have to be convinced that their stuff is the true cause

12 Randy Frost and Gail Steketee, *Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things* (Boston: Mariner, 2011), 174.
13 Frost, Steketee, 174.

of their suffering."[14] I didn't realize it then, but at that moment, my father probably couldn't handle any further loss, certainly not the small shoes of his adult children, mementos of something being forgotten, so he replaced them to their safe place at the bottom of the stairs. Then he left the room and we never talked about it.

Dad could easily be called a hoarder. His primary collected things, from my perspective, are projects and products that serve his household, in need of constant resupply of tools and materials. There is an abundance of sentimental objects, toys, and tchotchkes. He spends much of his spare time fixing and tending his house, the various family cars, and the Ford F-250 diesel truck that he calls, Big Bertha. Many of my memories of him are of working on cars in my grandmother's driveway—he kept two or three cars in the driveway there: at any given time he had an old Jeep Wrangler, a yellow 1960s Corvette, a 1980 Chevy Impala, a Pontiac T-Bird, a late-90s Ford Mustang, a Volkswagen Jetta, mostly all at the same time. I remember driving with him to and from my mother's house on biweekly Fridays and Sundays, and working on the house on Helen Street in Chicopee, Massachusetts, where they lived before moving to Maine. At Helen Street, I helped with painting the garage yellow with white trim, mowing the lawn, shingling and building dormers on the roof. Over a ten year period, he built an entire second floor with electrical, plumbing, and heating up to code, mostly by himself. He wasn't any sort of drill instructor and he gave a lot of freedom, often bordering on negligence, but he also gave me as gifts (in chronological order) a Jeep Power Wheel toy truck that I could drive, a 'kitty cat' children's snowmobile, a small Honda trail motorcycle, and a larger snowmobile when I got older. These were incredible gifts.

[14] Kilroy-Marac, "A Magical Reorientation of the Modern: Professional Organizers and Thingly Care in Contemporary North America" in *Cultural Anthropology* (Vol 31, 3), *443*.

When I began driving, Dad helped me keep my cars on the road without paying anything. There was something protective or wholesome there, but it also felt very secluded. Being the child of a huge man, who could seemingly fix or build anything, with a boisterous laugh, a devil-may-care attitude, and a stockpile of firearms and muscle cars was comforting and cool for me, as a boy. Now, it appeals less and less, but I know my dad longs for that lost feeling of home.

Deviant Definitions

What exactly does it mean to label someone "a hoarder"? Any narrative, judgement, or diagnosis coming from outside a person will be incomplete, despite the inevitable shifts in identity and socialization that labels prescribe. From the vantage point of the sheer complexity of an individual mind and life, even the most well-balanced person will not listen to *every* thought or understand *every* motivation. But like others classified as unwell, a hoarder's interior worlds are, according to the predominant thinking on the subject and because of the nature of their supposed pathology, an open book. Unlike a physical tick or a hallucination or a chemical imbalance in the brain, which requires the subject to reveal their interior world, hoarding is primarily diagnosed based on an quasi-expert appraisal of a living space or a home, perhaps from a social worker or a psychologist, but just as often from unqualified minimalist gurus, well-intentioned therapists, or angry landlords, perhaps on television.

Whole new forms of mainstream economic behavior have arisen around the culture of hoarding, such as professional decluttering services and climate-controlled storage units. These are rarely discussed when the spectacular gaze of an exploitative television program fastens onto

the particularity of an individual living in conditions of distress.[15] What masquerades as compassionate intervention, may also be read as a tacit acceptance of the social exclusion enacted by a lack of adequate social, psychological, nutritional, and health services in much of the supposedly 'developed' world and most of the supposedly 'developing' one. In a few decades, the term has become a catch-all for aberrant consumer practices, for dusty, cluttered homes, overflowing trash bins, and for rooms packed floor-to-ceiling with garbage. It is also a commonplace means of criticism among friends and family members, or of self-castigating ourselves when our closets and drawers bulge with mysterious content, much of which we cannot remember wanting or buying in the first place. Several very successful television shows feature hoarders in various contexts. Many books have been written, ranging from sincere guides by researchers and therapists, to 'minimalist' self-help programs sold by authors such as author and Netflix celebrity, Marie Kondo or psychologist Robin Zazio, author of *The Hoarder in You: How to Live a Happier, Healthier, Uncluttered Life*. From this perspective, we are all hoarders, but at the threshold of the pathological. By augmenting the presentation, organization, and curation of one's belongings, and by incorporating some Ikea-inspired, Danish, mid-century-imitation nesting, individuals may maintain 'healthy' modes of consumer behavior. Hoarders are simultaneously diagnosable by their living space, while the cure to their supposedly psychological

[15] For information about the medicalization of hoarding, in relation to law, culture, finance, and history, see: Kenneth J. Weiss, "Hoarding, Hermitage, and the Law: Why we Love the Collyer Brothers" in *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* (Vol. (Vol. 38, 2; 2010), 251-57. For discussion of storage units as a form of hoarding and commodity fetishism, see: Sasha Newell, "The Matter of the Unfetish: Hoarding and the Spirit of Possessions," in *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* (4, 3; 2014): 185-213. For the financial behaviors of hoarding, see: Anthony Canale and Bradley Klontz, "Hoarding Disorder: It's More Than Just an Obsession – Implications for Financial Therapists and Planners," in *Journal of Financial Therapy* (4, 2; 2013), 43-63.

pathology can be treated by simply emptying the cat box on time and keeping a Zen garden. All we need is a little adjustment.

Psychiatric and health professions increasingly equate the symptoms of hoarding with a psychological pathology, Hoarding Disorder. For the most normative definition of 'hoarding' we should begin with that published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Vol. 5* (*DSM*-5), published in 2013. First published in 1952, the *DSM* is an evolving index of psychological disorders and a handbook of recommended treatments for psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists and social workers to follow. The *DSM* has a significant impact in diagnosis and treatment standards for mental health disorders in the United States, with a strong global influence as well.[16] The *DSM*-5, is the latest iteration and the first edition to feature Hoarding Disorder as a unique pathology, tabled under "Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders." This definition is taken from the APA's website:

> Hoarding disorder is characterized by persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions, regardless of their actual value, as a result of a strong perceived need to save the items and distress associated with discarding them. Hoarding disorder differs from normal collecting. For example, symptoms of hoarding disorder result in the accumulation of a large number of possessions that congest and clutter active living areas to the extent that their intended use is substantially compromised. The excessive acquisition form of hoarding disorder, which characterizes most but not all individuals with hoarding disorder, consists of excessive collecting, buying, or stealing of items that are not needed or for which there is no available space.[17]

Questions arise when rereading this passage. For example, what does an 'active living area' look like? How big is it? Could a desert or a forest or planet Earth be considered an active living area?

[16] See, Zhen Wang, Yuan Wang, Qing Zhao, and Kaida Jung, "Is the DSM-5 hoarding disorder diagnosis valid in China?", in *Shanghai Archives of Psychiatry*, (28, 2. 2016), 103-05.

[17] DSM 5 online at https://dsm-psychiatryonline-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/doi/full/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596.dsm06

How many people live there? Do they have kids? Is it a single-parent household? What's the smell? Do the people live off of the interest of their investments and their inherited wealth, or do they work? What are their jobs? What is their postal code? Where did they summer? Or, was it a week in summer, a week in the winter? Did they go to school? Where did they go to school? Is there a standard definition for, 'actual value' or 'normal collecting'? Is it hoarding, for example, if a person is organized? Or content? What if they are wealthy enough to spread their many disused possessions across several homes and storage units, or to have them dusted and periodically rearranged by paid staff in a climate-controlled vault? The *DSM-5*'s concise and universalizing definition aimed at differential diagnosis and treatment renders a wild, mountainous landscape flat and readable: We know these people. We live with them. Maybe we *are* them. Many Americans, Canadians, and people from other parts of the world have some part of the home that persists in remaining disorganized or dusty because we simply can't be bothered.

Before 2013, Hoarding Disorder, or compulsive hoarding, had been officially considered a substrate of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and obsessive-compulsive personality disorder.[18] "Compulsive" distinguished hoarding from "normal" collecting and saving.[19] On the APA's website, they write:

> Hoarding is not the same as collecting. Collectors look for specific items, such as model cars or stamps, and may organize or display them. People with hoarding disorder often save random items and store them haphazardly. In most cases, they save items that they feel they may need in the future, are valuable or have sentimental value. Some may also feel safer surrounded by the things they save.[20]

[18] Alberto Pertusa, Miguel A. Fullana, Satwant Singh, Pino Alonso, José M. Menchón, and David Mataix-Cols,, "Compulsive Hoarding: OCD Symptom, Distinct Clinical Syndrome, or Both?" in *The American Journal of Psychiatry* (165:10, October 2008), 1289-1298.

[19] Samantha J. Redwine, "A Content Analysis of A&E's Hoarders," MA diss., East Tennessee State University, 2013, 8.

[20] Ranna Parekh, "What is Hoarding Disorder?", 2017 [article online]https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/hoarding-disorder/what-is-hoarding-disorder.

How did the deciding body choose *this* definition over others? Some clinical and therapeutic specialists have attempted to push back and to reshape this rather gross diagnostic framework. I start with the *DSM*-5, not because I think its definition of hoarding is best, but because it is hegemonic, being the main referent for psychologists, police officers, and social service providers. While the APA is not the only institutional body that defines and treats hoarding behaviors, it shapes best-practice policies in the United States and in much of the world. Its definition is not the only one, however, as I was delighted to learn by tracing the history of this concept's evolution in various contexts and at different scales of analysis.

Randy Frost has been writing about hoarding since 1993 with, "The Hoarding of Possessions," published in *Behavior, Research, and Therapy Journal*. As Professor of Psychology at Smith College in Amherst, Massachusetts, Frost remains a pre-eminent scholar in the field. In *Stuff,* published in 2010, Frost and Gail Steketee write that, like collectors, "Many people with hoarding problems have a predominant theme to their hoarding," but these themes are less aesthetic and more emotional, "such as fear of waste, the allure of opportunity, or the comfort and safety provided by objects."[21] Hoarders are highly intelligent and sensitive, they write:

> For hoarders, every object is rich with detail. We [non-hoarders] disregard the color and hue of a magazine cover as we search for the article inside. But if we paid attention, we might notice the soothing effect of the colors, and the meaning of the object would expand in the process...the physical world of hoarders is different and much more expansive than that of the rest of us.[22]

They typically struggle with some form of trauma, with attendant symptoms of depression, lethargy, and deficiencies in information processing. Frost and Steketee write, "clinicians describe [hoarders]

[21] Frost and Steketee, 15.
[22] Ibid., 15.

as lacking insight, meaning they don't understand how their behavior harms them or others around them."[23] Against the presumption that hoarders are oblivious to their actions, they write that "most hoarders have some degree of awareness of the problem. Even people who insist that they have no problem will go to great lengths to hide the stuff packing their homes. They seem to know, and feel ashamed of, what other people will think of their homes."[24] Frost depicts the 'classic profile' of a hoarder as someone male, in his fifties, who collects clothing, newspapers, magazines, and "lots and lots of containers", who keeps most of his possessions in a "pile", and who has little to no control over what he accumulates: buying, salvaging, and even stealing objects, "just in case." This profile applies easily to my father, and to his father as well. In an interview with my grandfather's widow, Carol Kent, she told me that my grandfather "never met a tote he didn't like." Following his death in 2017, Carol spent two years dispersing with his hoard of tools, antiques, and derelict cars in the woods around their property in rural Connecticut.

Frost and Steketee advocate for a moderate, empathetic approach to hoarding. While interventions can alleviate distress, improve relationships, and facilitate treatment, they suggest a slow approach wherein individuals and their family/caregivers learn to part with collected objects by honoring and appreciating them first. This is an idealistic approach, especially considering the potentially thousands of objects packed into a home, whereby therapists and social workers divine the meaning laden in individual objects which a hoarder refuses to dispose of, to see the object as they do, as treasure, to find ways to change patterns of genuine pain, obsessive attachment, and anxiety. Depth psychologist Renee M. Winters interprets the word, "hoard," in its original connotation, as *a treasure*

[23] Ibid., 172.
[24] Ibid., 186.

to be guarded. Using a methodology combining Jungian semiotics, the symbolism of dragons, and a private practice in psychotherapy, Winters seeks the symbolism implicit in any collection and in individual objects: "A common trait among hoarders is their dependency on the visual connection with objects they acquire and have literalized all dimensions of their life...Due to this symbolism inherent in objects, people who hoard have a tendency to confuse their possessions with their emotions."[25] Hoarders form strong and sentimental attachments to objects, intimately identifying with souvenirs, plastic ware, and other people's trash. They do not see it as refuse, but as something with hidden value, as *a diamond in the rough*. They often anthropomorphize objects. They are unable to make decisions without sometimes agonizingly long periods of hesitation over whether to dispose of or to keep even things like used tissue paper or the discarded shoes of one's fully-grown children.

Compulsive accumulation tends to go unaddressed for years as hoarders are typically secretive and possibly ashamed, allowing only vetted confidants into their cave-like homes.[26] Winter's speculative, mythic method uses Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious to incorporate the fetishistic value of objects into the counseling process, to trace forms of value that are idiosyncratic, uncanny, rooted in memory, and difficult to see with the naked eye or without a culturally sensitive lens. Winters argues that, before being removed from a basement or an attic, each object first needs to be observed, unpacked *emotionally* and given due appreciation, before being physically removed. I regret to admit that I entered this project with the misplaced urge to 'solve' my father, to force him to speak to me about his childhood, to remove his hoarding. But I am no white knight, and my attempts for clarity have led to more stories and new ways of seeing, but also to increased emotional distance.

[25] Renee M. Winters, *The Hoarding Impulse: Suffocation of the Soul* (London: Routledge, 2015), 10.
[26] Winters, 14-15.

Most of the things cluttering my father's home are useful, but not presently being used: building materials, construction equipment, auto parts, tools, old photographs, books never read, furniture-repair magazines, second-hand CDs, and old remote controlled cars and airplanes, several cars, the hull of a speedboat, and many guns. My father is a tinkerer and a deeply sentimental man with a long list of unfinished projects. He has spent much of his life building a threadbare, but sturdy, monument out of these synecdochical symbols of 'home'. I imagine he has a thorn in his side, and rather than reaching it or pulling it out, each flailing gesture and acquired thing weighs it down a little more. Upon rereading the drafts of this thesis and bringing the parts together, I found a variation in my own emotional tone within the writing. Over time anger and reaction yielded to compassion and wonder, or at least, curiosity.

Standing on the stairs, staring at the wall my father silently threw at my intervention, I realized that these weren't just *his* things. They are also mine. As I have lived my life exposed to my father's influence, I could speak as an observer-participant in my own story, rather than from the detached place of a disinterested observer tacitly recording daily life from the outside. From where I sit, there doesn't seem to be much of an outside, but that isn't true from the perspective of walls and structures, habits and selves, built with care over time, and often unwilling to reveal their origins. As Latour writes:

> Once built, the wall of bricks does not utter a word—even though the group of workmen goes on talking and graffiti may proliferate on its surface…. Objects, by the very nature of their connections with humans, quickly shift from being mediators to being intermediaries, counting for one or nothing, no matter how internally complicated they might be. This is why specific tricks have to be invented to *make them talk*, that to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce *scripts* of what they are making others—humans or non-humans—do.[27]

[27] Latour, 79.

Unlike humans, objects tend to fall into disuse when their immediate function or efficacy recedes from importance, with objects of market value, "the greater their importance, the faster they disappear."[28] This does not mean, however, that they cease to act, but that "their mode of action is no longer *visibly connected* to the usual social ties, since they rely on types of forces chosen precisely for their differences with the normal social ones."[29] As Guy Debord writes in *The Society of the Spectacle:*

> Irreconcilable claims crowd the stage of the affluent economy's unified spectacle; different star-commodities simultaneously support contradictory projects for provisioning society: the spectacle of automobiles demands a perfect transport network which destroys old cities, while the spectacle of the city itself requires museum-areas. Therefore the already problematic satisfaction which is supposed to come from the *consumption of the whole*, is falsified immediately since the actual consumer can directly touch only a succession of fragments of this commodity happiness, fragments in which the quality attributed to the whole is obviously missing every time.[30]

In this way, a Christmas toy becomes a choking hazard, a self-help book kills your eldest son, or your car kills someone else's. A medical syringe transforms to hazardous waste as soon as it has delivered a lifesaving dose of epinephrine or naloxone.

I do not wish to maintain a dichotomy between rationality or irrationality, conscious or unconscious, modern or pre-modern, pseudoscience or Reason, but instead to shift the image that comes to mind when we see the word, "hoarder," and to dispel an illusion by which a form of magical thinking masquerades as disfunction, but which is truly a mode of economic behavior spanning class, aesthetic, and geographical barriers. Hoarding Disorder as a diagnostic is stymied

[28] Ibid., 80.
[29] Ibid., 80.
[30] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1977), 65.

by correlating with poverty, social exclusion, and mental health, rather than social maladaptation centered around competing notions of value, saving, and investment. At the porous boundary between the working class and the middle class in the former industrial heartlands of the West, hoarding serves as an indicator of those who sense their own economic precarity, either through family history, local and international current events, and the prevailing codes prescribed by the parent culture, ideology, religion, etc. The APA's definition lacks awareness of the longer history of the concept, privileging the object-centered approach, and neglecting to categorize the excessive wealth of billionaires, millionaires, et al., as hoarding.

While much of this thesis might be seen as touchy-feely mumbo jumbo, even more traditional economists suggest that hoarding is more abstract than typical connotations of the concept imply. In *Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Middle Class Is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That Is a Problem, and What to Do About It,* Brookings Institute economist Richard Reeves accuses the upper-middle class of 'opportunity hoarding,' in the form of legacy admissions to Ivy League universities and discriminatory zoning laws in the wealthiest neighborhoods in the U.S., Reeves adds nuance to the ongoing critique of the 'one-percent' mobilized by the Occupy Movement and Bernie Sanders. Instead, he argues that the top *twenty percent* of U.S. households are driving inequality. He writes directly to the well-intentioned surgeons or Senators who might share his affluent Washington D.C. neighborhood, encouraging them to notice how their wealth comes at the expense of the less advantaged. He offers solutions for them to check their privilege, which he argues would diminish the status anxiety of many in the upper middle class by allowing them to directly contribute to the social justice causes they might genuinely believe in. Reeves's critique, however, suffers from the illusion of a 'quick fix.'

He argues that if small lifestyle changes could be made by the upper-middle class, particularly by paying more taxes, then inequality could be ameliorated within a generation.[31] He does not extend into a wider critique of financial practices, however, neglecting predatory lending, big money in politics, and the exploitation of tax havens by the wealthy. I aim to make a unique contribution to social and political thought by applying the diagnostics of Hoarding Disorder to those hoarders whose dysfunction is obscured by their immense power and wealth. In any case, Reeves analysis opens the door to mainstream recognition that hoarding is not about old clothes and kitty litter, but also about opportunity, privilege, hope, and power, and that all of these abstract quantities have their basis in economic reality, dreams bearing the weight of GDP.

As economic sociologist Wolfgang Streeck wrote in 2017's *How Will Capitalism End?,* the outlook for capitalism and capitalist societies is grim. Capitalism has always been about economic growth, and when it hits a wall, either a depleted resource or a recalcitrant labor pool, capital moves on. But where does capital go when it has devoured the world? A parasite cannot live without a host. Greed may cause such damage to the foundations of organized society that the natural environment itself may collapse, particularly in regions that bear the heaviest strain of climate change and inequality. "The end of capitalism," Streeck writes, echoing Polanyi, "can then be imagined as a death from a thousand cuts, or from a multiplicity of infirmities each of which will be all the more untreatable as all will demand treatment at the same time."[32] If the system is ending, perhaps hoarders represent a prescient vanguard of those intent on surviving.

[31] Richard V. Reeves, *Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Middle Class Is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That Is a Problem, and What to Do About It* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute), 124, 152.
[32] Streeck, 13.

An injunction against the hoarding of wealth in the form of money, gold, and food has been a taboo of many human societies until quite recently. From the peripheral economies of both individual/group hoarding and the modern history of tax and regulatory havens, to the personal caches of survivalists and *otaku* collectors, to the family vaults of global economic royalty, we see a response and a reaction to global conditions of environmental, economic and social crisis being consistently mediated and diversely arrayed according prerogatives of class, race, and gender. Consider, as an example, the British Museum, clutching at Britain's ill-gotten Imperial curios, grown out of a single person's collection into the greatest museum of historical and cultural artifacts in the world, free to the British and tourist public, now fetishes more to Britain's dead empire than to those of Augustus, Cyrus, or Nefertiti. The museum embraces its atrocious colonial complicity under the guise of 'judicious stewardship', a defense reeking of Orientalism and outright racism, and it ignores calls to repatriate stolen national treasures from nearly every nation on Earth, clutching not only to the artifacts, but to the history that brought them there. Is this not harm? Is this not hoarding?

Rather than aberrations in an otherwise orderly world of rational consumers making sensible decisions to encourage their own flourishing, hoarding reveals the stitches and zippers of capitalism itself, in both excessive personal acquiring and the implicit greed underlying extreme wealth. Hoarding underlies the basic premises of capitalism on multiple levels. Under what Guy Debord calls, *spectacular capitalism*, the entertainment commodity is the object with a soul *par excellence,* since it sells itself through controlling the viewer, while simultaneously disseminating its culture to the audience whose actual major function within that economy is to view advertising, to docilely purchase the goods described, and through a conjunction with disciplinary, educational,

and surveillance systems, to provide the referential subject material for future entertainment. I would suggest that 'modern society' imbues stuff with the same semiotic values which shape many religious, spiritual, and traditional indigenous cultures throughout the world, obscured by the paper-thin veneers of contract, property, and identity.

By reading the subjective motivations of a hoarder with an awareness of *thrift* and concepts of *investment* that extend as a response to perceived precarity or scarcity, we may better understand the subconscious fuel hidden in the idiosyncrasies of a solitary stairwell. Stephen Gudeman writes, "Making savings or being thrifty has an ambiguous history in economic theories, which now largely ignore it. Here is the problem: through thrift leftovers are created in a material current. These remainders can be kept for the future."[33] An object in a hoarder's home might be read as the mark of madness or as a form of cultural deviance, but these distinctions are arbitrary without sensitivity to the cultural and economic context in which a person lives, wherein certain choices may have an internal logic that is sensible, if not socially pleasant or externally readable. According to Gudeman, most economists from the early 1800s to until Keynes (except for Marx and Malthus) maintained an idealistic and religiously inflected view of the economy as a perfect system with only imperfect parts and administration, considering it to be a pure cycle of movement and exchange, wherein "House 'keeping' opposes the dynamics of the market that requires house and corporate spending…Hoarding hinders market consumption."[34] This perception shifted drastically under the global economic policies outlined by Keynes following World War II: "In uncertain times and recessionary periods, he observed, people hold what they have and become

[33] Stephen Gudeman, *Anthropology and Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016), 42.
[34] Gudeman, 42.

thrifty as precautionary moves. They create hoards, which is the household practice."[35] The very term 'disorder' enforces the assumption that something is wrong, but implicitly carries the insinuation that it is the individual whimsy of a sentimental deviant or the persistent flouting of social norms and expectations, rather than state failure or economic violence. This project speaks to an emerging historiography on hoarding, a widening and more nuanced psychological and cultural conversation around Hoarding Disorder, and a rethinking of the standards and semantic blind spots of pathologies of excessive accumulation. It is also a humble attempt to continue cleaning the stairs.

Apocryphal Archives

Throughout this research, my primary way of seeing was as a poet, as a historian trained in oral history, as a family member and a subject participant. Geographically and temporally bound in the twentieth and twenty-first century United States, in New England, I retain an awareness of historical trends such as globalization, deindustrialization, Neoliberalism, working-class history, and the Anthropocene. I was born in a small town in Massachusetts to a young, single mother from a white, middle-class family from Rochester, New York. My grandfathers both went to college, and joined the ranks of the post-war professional managerial class, and attained aspects of the American dream that seem today anachronistic: home ownership, lifelong, steady employment, pension, and three children each. Both of my grandmothers were part-time workers outside the home, while shouldering the care of their respective children and grandchildren, and they both shaped my childhood immensely. I and my siblings all have or are working toward university

[35] Ibid., 42.

degrees. Of my parents' generation, however, nobody completed college except one distant uncle. My parents attended college in their late teens and early twenties in the early 'eighties, but then I was born and they dropped out to work full time and neither went back. Throughout my childhood, my parents and step-parents worked long hours in jobs that were either working class in kind, but provided stable employment and decent salaries based on overtime, or white-collar office jobs in the insurance industry, administrative assistance, and health services.

I have spent most of my adult life living abroad, in Canada and in Taiwan. Having been born in 1985, I have spent much of my waking life on the Internet, connected to vast repositories of culture—of pirated movies and music and .pdfs—that have fueled a curiosity perhaps more than my formal education in History and English. I have worked for eight years (as of 2019) as an English as a Second Language teacher, primarily for Mandarin speakers in Taiwan and China. Strangely, it has been my global existence, particularly living in Canada and Taiwan, that reinforced my identity as an American, and as a working-class intellectual, but one looking at my country from the outside, alienated and (especially since the election of Donald Trump) wary. Class is something this project brought to the forefront, but not in a clear or obvious way. Echoing the work of George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier* or various modern writers on class and deindustrialization, I would consider myself a "class straddler", rather than distinctly middle class or working class for reasons I hope will become clear as I proceed through the following chapters.

I felt guided at every step by writers more gifted than myself, shaped by disciplines such as literature, American history, the global slave trade, post-colonial political theory, oral history, ethnography, and autoethnographic methodology. Drawing on discourses of Modernity, Neoliberalism, Globalization, and Deindustrialization, I owe a theoretical debt to distant pillars

such as Michel Foucault, Kari Polanyi-Levitt, Pierre Bourdieu, Karl Marx, Karl Polanyi, and Raymond Williams. While the depth of Marxian and post-structuralist theory offered great insight into the problems I approached, I was more impacted and inspired by recent writing in oral history, deindustrialization, anthropology, social activism, avant-garde literature, and the Anthropocene. My work owes an immense debt to my supervisor, Steven High, whose work as a professor of Deindustrialization and Oral History methods was absolutely fundamental to my growth as a researcher, an interviewer, and a historian. Steven was the first 'gate-keeper' I encountered in this project, leading me to some of the major texts that influenced my work, offering strategies to overcome blocks, and instilling inspiration to listen to and to trust the validity of my own stories. As Dr. Hugh Gusterson writes in an essay on Ethnographic research methods, "In general, ethnographers entering the field seek to ally with gatekeepers who will vouch for them," and this was true for me from the beginning.[36] Despite studying something as intimate as my family, particular relatives such as my sister, my grandmother and my great aunts provided me with indispensable access to family stories and sentimental objects, as well as finding additional informants for me to interview, which I would not have had otherwise. In particular, Dr. High's work-ethic, combined with a mode of teaching by building people up, helped me to look past the surface emotions clouding some of my reactions to my father and to listen deeper to those who shared their stories. Whether as listener to an interviewee, creator of a narrative history, or mentor to his students, he facilitated new forms of writing, listening, and empathy that are without price. As I reread my thesis and transcribed my interviews, I was struck by times where my own

[36] Hugh Gusterson, "Ethnographic Research," in *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*, Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash, eds. (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 96.

emotional venting crowded the writing with tones of victimization, self-pity, and contempt, which Stephen helped me steer away from.

Many of the most intimately personal stories I read often seemed to echo my own experiences, often down to uncanny similarities. Academic texts inflected heavily by personal emotional experiences, such as Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman,* Christine J. Walley's *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago,* Annette Kuhn's *Family Secrets,* and bell hooks' *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love,* were my main guides in working with family memories. They often helped in working through my own difficult relationship with my father, with aspects of my own history, and with issues of class in general. Contemporary authors in geography, post-colonial theory, and history helped me to find links to certain meta-analyses of global capitalism. In dissecting a personal problem that I thought was centered around my father, it became a study of relationships: the ones I have with American culture, with my own identity as an American expatriate, and with my family as a whole. It turned from the story of a problem to an intergenerational portrayal of response to social and economic change, of personal identities forming in tandem with possessions, of changing expectations towards objects, roles, and certain modes of economic life, and of a certain consistent tendency among all subjects, living and dead, to imbue objects with a certain *vitality* rooted in stories. These object identities, do not usually reveal the global histories written into the extraction, production, and supply-chain processes that produce them, unless those processes are themselves sold as a form of exalted pastiche contained in buzzwords like, 'maker-made', 'vintage', and 'bespoke.' It also became a mode of analysis that extends beyond individual consumers and pathologized packrats. A new generation of scholars of the history of capitalism, tax havens, and money hoarding, such as Vanessa Ogle, Gustave Peebles,

Katie Kilroy-Marac, and Sasha Newell, prompted global ways of perceiving the origins of the present, interwoven crises of climate change, superstition, inequality, xenophobia, and hoarding.

In a research trip conducted over the summer of 2018, I visited public archives at the University of Maine, and I interviewed different family members about their relationships with hoarders, their life histories, and their personal ways of relating to memories through objects. I sought answers to research questions pertaining to the meaning of hoarding particular objects. I used oral history interviews, personal ephemera, sentimental objects, and photography to document my family's relationship to memory through objects. Hoarding has a history and a culture that runs parallel to the mainstream, sometimes intertwining, sometimes not. I sought how this behavioral spectrum may have its roots further back in my own family history than my father and grandfather. Apart from interviewing my grandmother, my sister, two great aunts, my stepmother, and my mother, I also submitted myself to be interviewed by a colleague, Eliot Perrin, in February 2019. With these interviews, I interweave several discourses, critical theories, and methodological frameworks to create a project that was unique in its micro-historical detail coupled with a global historical and broadly cultural awareness. All photographs featured in this thesis were taken by me, some on film cameras using cross-processing and other experimental development techniques, while most of the photos were taken with an iPhone 7s, while I used a Zoom H4n Pro to record the audio for my interviews. In chapter one, some Internet memes are cited as evidence of an ongoing popular discourse about the hoarding of extreme wealth via social media platforms such as Reddit and Instagram. Where I don't know the producers of the original content, I have used edited screen shots that I took myself. I did not write any of the memes.

In *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago*, Christine J. Walley writes an autoethnographic portrait of her working-class family and their personal experience of deindustrialization in Chicago. The book is a history of her family's experience of forced plant closures in the mid-seventies, her body's experience of cancer as a result of pollution caused by the steel industry in her neighborhood, and an anthropology and autoethnography of class identities and socio-geographical boundaries that are not clearly delineated or easily forgotten through upward social mobility. She traces her story back through her grandparents who immigrated to Chicago to find lifelong, stable, but dangerous employment in the steel mills, to the story of her father, who emotionally and physically collapsed after losing his job and subsequently his social world and role as provider. In one chapter, she details how, to escape the stifling despair and apathy of her recently post-industrial town, she tried to escape to a prestigious boarding school through a scholarship for the underprivileged and gifted. She writes that, until she had progressed to the role of Anthropology professor at a prestigious university, did she feel authorized to tell her story, nonetheless to tell it using non-traditional means: "It took me longer to realize the classism implicit in feeling unable to speak about one's experience without filtering it through the validating lens of academic study."[37] I admit my own sense of coming to this project through the relative distance—or closeness, depending on how you measure it—of an academic study of my own family, history, and life. The world from one particular angle is still the world, and I tried to begin as far from my own world as I could.

In Chapter One, I outline the historiography of Hoarding Disorder, whichwas officially designated as a stand-alone mental health condition in the *DSM*. Using secondary sources and

[37] Christine J. Walley, *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2015), 105.

psychological research journals, I outline the recent historiography of a disorder that has been in *discursive formation* since long before the nineteenth century. In this historiography, I aim to complicate the existing literature by using the work of Michel Foucault to draw on recent scholarship that extends this analysis to cultural and historical examples beyond a strictly Western consumer model, including colonialism, neoliberalism, tax havens, and central banks, taking us beyond the images that readily come to mind when we say the word 'hoarder'. Using the etymology of "hoarding" and related words, I trace the concept beyond the strictly historical, to comprise examples from religion, mythology, literature, and pop-culture. Far from being a symptom of present-day consumerism or a definitively modern disorder, hoarding has been considered as such for centuries, *but also* as a taboo discourse against greed. Hoarding remains a trope circulating among critics of greed and money hoarding on Internet forums and social media, reflecting these times of scarcity and social disturbance. This is the main difference between present-day writers and those such as Aristotle, Karl Marx, and John Locke, who made fewer distinctions between 'good' hoarding, such as collecting or amassing a personal fortune, and 'bad' hoarding such as obsessive attachment to non-utilitarian physical possessions. Before the rise of Mercantilism in the seventeenth century, and before the advent of industrialized manufacturing and financial capitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, hoarders were critiqued as threatening the reciprocal, interwoven, and traditional foundations of civilization.

Before the late-twentieth century, hoarding discourses focused less on those with an unhealthy preoccupation for clutter (though they remain a subject of curiosity, deviance, and primitive intervention), but critics focused on those who refused to participate in market economies by circulating their capital in the form of savings, investment, and production expenditures, and

those who abused the power of their hoarded wealth for private gain during a crisis. In a context somewhat overlooked in the psychological and cultural literature, accusations of 'illogical' hoarding were used to paternalize and trivialize the survival strategies, and subjective concerns of precolonial and colonial subjects who lived under economic conditions of life not yet dominated by capitalism and the West, who showed a 'shocking' lack of faith in imperial institutions (such as formal banking) by hoarding gold and other forms of currency under the mattress. These same subjects were consistently exploited and prevented from using or accessing these services and productive tools in the first place, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis. Seen from these perspectives, however, hoarding connects seemingly unrelated discourses of post-coloniality and neocolonialism, international finance and Neoliberalism, and deindustrialization in the capitalist heartland. Conflicting conceptions of 'investment' demonstrate various ways in which people react to fear, poverty, *perceived* precarity, and sudden or traumatic change.

In Chapter Two, I continue this line of reasoning with the help of oral history interviews drawn from myself and my family. I demonstrate how hoarding has impacted some of my personal relationships, how conditions (or perception or fear) of economic violence and social precarity may have reinforced the hoarding behavior of my father, how intergenerational memory and economic knowledge may create 'lags' in time, meaning, and expectations, between the culture of an individual, a community, or a nation, and the actual laws of the economy and political rules in which they live. In a small gesture of loyalty, I wish to dispel the illusion that my father is a lone hoarder, adrift in a world of 'sane' object relations. Using photography, family history, and autoethnography, I portray myself as a sort of hoarder, too—capturing some of the anxiety gripping myself and my siblings, but I also use some of my own dusty knick-knacks and souvenirs

to investigate the nostalgic, historical, and sentimental significance of certain moments in my own life, particularly categories of tools, toys, and treasure.

Drawing here on the sociology of the gift and discourses of working-class American culture, white masculinity, the history of childhood and memory, I demonstrate how the micro-historical and the macro-economic can be read in the same landscapes of class and identity. We should avoid seeing hoarding through a pathological lens, an individualizing gaze, or a classist, gendered, racially-fraught pastiche that idolizes the past, particularly the 1940s through 1970s in the United States, as a lost golden age. While it is important to retain the individual perspective, it is imperative also to read hoarding as cultural, intergenerational, and international. Working in tandem with material culture studies and Marxian modes of analysis, I raise questions of social justice, environmental impact, and the possibility of emancipatory solidarities clustered around how we relate to the seemingly inanimate and to nonhuman life. I use photography and interviews to capture that which is also *beautiful* in a hoarder's home, which only those privileged (or cursed) with emotional proximity can allow. The photographs I include should be seen as a way of reading a landscape, rather than making a fetish out of my father's home, distress, or political outlooks with which I may disagree. Nor, in my opinion, should hoarding be seen as 'backwards,' compared to some of the 'saner' mainstream alternatives and proposed solutions to hoarding, such as aesthetical minimalism, hipster consumption of the vintage and the kitsch, the pursuit of individual wellness while only paying lip-service to the social, global, or spiritual (at the expense of nature, non-human life, the commons, and deviant forms of pleasure/wellness/property/identity). The utopian worship of *pleasure* through order and economy wears many masks. While hoarding is an old technology, from various perspectives, it could be seen as intuitive and even cutting edge.

I gained greater understanding of my life through this project, but working with intimate memories, experiences, and relationships was emotionally difficult for me. Therapy and spiritual self-work were instrumental in helping me move forward without losing my sense of empathy and compassion, but I will not elaborate greatly on this here. As a literary nerd, I employ concepts of mythology, haunting, utopia, and apocalypse in my thinking and writing to better understand and change the pervasive impact of this behavior. On one hand, this work evokes E.P. Thompson's line about rescuing the supposed "losers" of history from "the enormous condescension of posterity. …After all, we are not at the end of social evolution ourselves."[38] On the other hand, the duty of the archetypal son is to succeed the archetypal father by 'ending' the father's world to bring a new world into being, as each generation raises and inevitably yields to the next. As Joseph Campbell wrote in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces, "*the work of the hero is to slay the tenacious aspects of the father (dragon, tester, ogre king) and release from its ban the vital energies that will feed the universe."[39] Less than entailing a physical death, this means using the permanence of change within the wholeness of existence to 'solve' the incompleteness of the individual, by bringing into being its opposite. I fundamentally see my father as part of myself, whether I want him to be or not. Perhaps my DNA is uniquely mine, or perhaps in a Buddhist sense, "I" might have been "here" in one body or another, since all consciousness emerges out of the same nothing, regenerating through forms and states of mind until achieving Nirvana, but without my father I would not be *this* "Me", "now," and so on for all humanity. Campbell writes, "Once it is glimpsed, the entire spectacle buckles: the son slays the father, but the son and the father are one. The

[38] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966), 12-13.
[39] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Princeton, 1973), 352.

enigmatical figures dissolve back into the primal chaos. This is the wisdom of the end (a rebeginning) of the world."[40] In full embrace of the strange Oedipal connotations of my work, and in response to my father's awakening of political consciousness as a Trump supporter, to the rise of intolerant, right-wing populism in my native country as a reaction to the disastrous socio-economic fallout of deindustrialization, neoliberal economic policy, and deregulation of global taxation and regulatory regimes. This is an act of gentle correction, salvage, and dissolution: to salvage and care for those inheritances which may be beneficial, but also to confront and deconstruct persistent fears, intolerance, cynicism, and selfishness undergirding this world.

Hoarding can be considered as a collective enterprise and as a cultural imperative, collocated with family, thrift, investment, and patriarchal, racialized systems of power. I believe it is *a spectrum of behavior*, rather than an anomalous or fundamentally pathological idiosyncrasy, extending beyond class, location, and nationality, particularly as a response to scarcity and danger. On a theoretical level, I suggest that certain institutions of state-owned or central banking, international finance, and offshore tax evasion could be held to the same standards as the psychology of an individual hoarder, though I consider myself to be opening a conversation more than making summary declarations about a context of which I am not an expert. But, we treat corporations as legal individuals, why not extend this to a psychological analysis as well? Can a corporate entity be psychotic, depressed, empathetic, compassionate or selfish? If a corporation could hallucinate, what would it see? Can a corporation an obsession? Could a corporation heal or emancipate itself from greed? Would it be more instructive to focus on the class of leaders and directors of such corporations?

[40] Ibid., 353-54.

Against the atomizing, individualizing gaze that holds each hoarder in contempt of the functioning system, I contrast the personal aspect with the collections and consumer trends of the super-wealthy, as well as the environmental implications for hoarding on the social and international level. A subjective perception of precarity is not always related to material reality, but may be a misrecognition, a fearful or cynical projection, an intergenerational prejudice, or a learned reaction to trauma. Whether rich or poor, "value" is not easily divested of inherited beliefs, rules, and modes of relationship. Drawing on recent historiography written by Quinn Slobodian, Wolfgang Streeck, Vanessa Ogle, Ann Laura Stoler, and Jane Mayer, I suggest that the Neoliberal turn that began in the 1930s, of which deindustrialization, decolonization, and tax evasion are mutant offspring, was prompted by an ideology that melded the rhetoric of Classical Liberalism with Cold War fears of International Communism, future world wars, re-distributional democratic and socialist regimes in the post-colonial periphery, and progressive tax regimes in the post-war capitalist heartland that led financial elites of the West, colonial settlers, and postcolonial autocrats throughout the world to insulate their private hoards through complex tax evasion schemes, constant government intervention, and global supply chains of resource extraction, production, and consumer spending, corporate and individual money laundering, and the legal norms of international finance.

In the conclusion, I discuss the concept of 'value', how its appearance within the diagnostics of hoarding demands a more complex and continually evolving understanding of commodity fetishism for the present moment and the future, to suit the needs of an ever more rapidly changing world. When the context changes, due to sudden upheaval, unforeseen circumstances, or gradual, hegemonic, shifts in a social or political landscape, so too must the

scales of value, and they will never be the same for all places. Here is the graveyard of empires, over-extending themselves into an oblivion of excessive accumulation. Hoarding may be a moment of misrecognition, on the part of the hoarder's own sense of worth or vis-à-vis that of her social context, where the hoarder values that which is socially *worthless* as idiosyncratic as the jargon of a particular shop or a jig to help a particular machine function, knowledge often only understood by the workers of said machine.[41] In a context with supermarkets and gas stations and low unemployment rates, it might be easy to call hoarding food or weapons "insane" behavior, but when disasters strikes, when jobs are lost, or when currencies or work forces or food systems suddenly lose their viability in a place where the majority of the population owns a firearm and put 'family first', then suddenly, hoarding food and fuel become of utmost practicality, whereas owning large amounts of a devalued currency would be catastrophic. I use this space to elaborate on popular critiques of greed as hoarding, which manifest in internet memes, popular media, and a rising understanding among writers, researchers, and the general public that individual hoarding and social inequality are two sides of the same coin.

I find universality in the microscopic details of a human life, a gesture, and a word, and I hope any readers looking for narrative history could suspend that in the aim of experimenting. My experience as a musician, a poet, and a photographer were part of my process in dealing emotionally with working with intimate memories, personal experiences of trauma, and family secrets, and I try to treat literary sources as worthy of historical note, both as artifacts of the time in which they were written, personal signposts of memory within an individual life, Hermeneutic

[41] See, Tom Juravich, "Artifacts of Worker's Knowledge: Finding worker skill in the closing and restructuring of a furniture manufacturer," in *Ethnography* (0,00, 2017), 1-22.

documents, and objects to be hoarded in their own right. I try to acknowledge the cultural tropes, economic trends, and social mores which have shaped me personally, including examples from music, philosophy, and literature. Karl Marx wrote:

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.

In relation to the global environment in crisis, my work characterizes wealthy nations, corporations, and individuals as in need of compassionate, but firmly urgent, psychological intervention, lest they wreck the planet and social world which sustains them. I do not wish to misrepresent all economic behavior as hoarding, nor to demonize human beings acting out of fear or ignorance, nor to diminish the suffering of those living amid piles of junk, but I wish to better characterize hoarding as something deeper, with roots in the history and culture of capitalism, with implications for future histories of human civilizations, and with speculative potential for rethinking notions of property, the commons, memory, investment, and community. Following the opening lines of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* Marx expounded on the cycles of political revolution through which capitalism thrived during the nineteenth century, demonstrating how history would be used recurrently as a primary tool of power, how those in power seek to rewrite history, and how forced forgetting can ensure the continual cycles of chaos that define capitalism, but also how historical consciousness might awaken oneself and others from the nightmare: “Thus the resurrection of the dead in those revolutions served to glorify new struggles, not to parody the old; to magnify fantastically the given task, not to evade a real resolution; to

recover the spirit of revolution, not to relaunch its spectre."[42] By shining the light into the dark recesses of the human experience and using words to make some humble sense of the indescribable, history reminds us that some beauty may be found in the trash, and that revolution begins inside. Within that which has been taken for granted, left to decay, and forgotten, we may find a message or catch a glimpse of light.

Inspire, 2015

[42] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* in *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire: (Post)modern Interpretations,* Mark Cowling and James Martin, eds. (London: Pluto, 2002), 21.

Chapter One: Hoarding Historiography

Alongside the direct form of the hoard there runs its aesthetic form, the possession of commodities made out of gold and silver. This grows with the wealth of civil society. 'Let us be rich, or let us appear rich' (Diderot). In this way there is formed, on the one hand, a constantly extending market for gold and silver which is independent of their monetary functions, and on the other hand a latent source of monetary inflow which is used particularly in periods of social disturbance.

-Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*

In all societies that preceded those wherein they monetized gold, bronze, and silver, there were other things—stones, shells, and precious metals in particular—that were used and have served as means of exchange and payment. In a good number of those that still surround us, this same system in fact functions, and it is this that we are describing.

-Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*

Pop Culture Packrats

The shift toward the medicalization of Hoarding Disorder as a psychopathology in the *DSM-5* was preceded by several decades of work by specialists such as Frost, Steketee, Weiss, Winters, and many others studying the phenomenon. Before 2013, the condition had many misnomers and labels derived from historical figures such as the Collyer Brothers, the so-called "Hermits of Harlem", eccentric billionaire and recluse Howard Hughes, obsessive pop-art collector Andy Warhol, or Edith "Big Edie" Bouvier Beale, featured in the 1975 documentary, *Grey Gardens*. Depending on the time, hoarders could be diagnosed with Diogenes syndrome, after a Roman statesman known for his miserliness, syllogomania, "Big Edie" syndrome, the Collyer condition, disposophobia, or collector's mania.[43] As a child, forensic psychiatrist Kenneth Weiss's mother would admonish him to clean his room, or else he would "end up like the Collyer brothers!"[44] Nightmarish fascination with his childhood neighborhood 'Pack Rat Man' spurred cultural historian and literary scholar Scott Herring to write *The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern American Culture.*[45] In studying the evolution of hoarding from an eccentric characteristic of the wealthy to a generalized pathology aimed at the public, Herring reframes hoarding as a form of social deviance through several public historical reactions to high-profile hoarders.

Homer and Langley Collyer lived in a Harlem mansion purchased by their parents, from 1909 until the brothers' deaths in 1947. New York City police had found the blind Homer's wasted corpse amid more than 130 tons of hoarded trash, newspapers, and other curiosities that his brother Langley

[43] Samantha Redwine, "A Content Analysis of A&E's Hoarders," MA Sociology thesis (East Tennessee State University: Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2013), 8.
[44] Kenneth Weiss, "Hoarding, Hermitage, and the Law: Why We Love the Collyer Brothers" in *Journal of American Academy of Psychiatry and Law* (38:25, 1-7, 2010), 251.
[45] Scott Herring, *The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern American Culture* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2014), 1-4.

had gathered on nightly ventures across the city over the previous four decades.[46] Homer had been blind and wheelchair-bound since the 1920s, and he had refused to leave the house for more than twenty years before his death. He was totally dependent on his brother, Langley, who claimed to osmotically absorb medical expertise by keeping medical journals stacked in soggy piles throughout the house, which he clung to for the future day when his brother would regain his sight. Langley prescribed a daily regimen of one hundred oranges to alleviate his brother's blindness. When Homer's body was found by police, sent to investigate the house by an anonymous tip, they found the decaying body behind the labyrinthian walls of newspapers stacked floor-to-ceiling throughout the three-story brownstone. Homer had starved to death. Langley was nowhere to be found, prompting a thorough search of the house. Several weeks later, after authorities emptied the house, removing many tons of garbage and sparking an international curiosity with the Collyers, Langley's corpse was found less than ten-feet away from his brother. He had been crushed by one of many booby traps hidden to protect the treasure trove. While crawling through a narrow tunnel in the newspapers, he had set off a trip-wire dropping rocks, cans, newspapers, and appliances onto himself. After clearing the house and disposing most of the things categorized as junk, the remaining goods fetched just 1,800$ at auction, roughly thirteen dollars per ton.

Despite the relatively widespread story of the Collyers following their deaths, which was reported in the Montreal Gazette on April 7, 1947, beyond newspapers, any personal and historical records remain sparse, modulated by a sensationalized mythology and a morbid fascination that began while the brothers were still alive, and which continues in the form of semi-historical, fictional

[46] Weiss, 253.

accounts of their lives.[47] Winters writes that finding accurate information about the Collyers is difficult, because the only two books written about them, both novels, are based largely on contemporaneous newspaper articles and the authors' creative conjecture.[48] Both bely a certain romantic fascination with the brothers, more captivated by and attentive to their defiant refusal to bend to social norms than their obsessive hoarding and the squalor in which they lived and died.[49]

According to Herring and Winters, Harlem of the Collyers' childhood was a prestigious bourgeois neighborhood marked by the Victorian architecture and rampant dome building of the United States' late "Gilded Age" at the turn of the twentieth century. Following the American Civil War and the Great Migration, millions of people fled the formerly slave-owning South to escape the racial violence enforced by Jim Crow Laws and the Ku Klux Klan throughout the early twentieth century. They settled in the northern cities of Chicago, Detroit, and, of course, Harlem, which became the epicenter of the eponymous Renaissance of black American culture.[50] As immigration to New York City surged throughout the ninteenth and twentieth centuries, these neighborhoods and cities became enclosed around new migrants, creating borders within northern cities and neighborhoods that were often as segregated as southern ones, but often with unofficial and shifting boundaries.

Harlem's transition to a racialized space marks, for Herring, a paradoxical moment wherein the Collyer brothers retreated further into their den of possessions as a protection against a neighborhood that seemed, from their perspective, increasingly hostile. He attempts to demonstrate how the media then characterized the brothers' squalor as characteristic of the neighborhood itself and

[47] Winters, 67.
[48] Winters, 68. See, *Homer and Langley* by E.L. Doctorow (2009), and *Ghosty Men* by Franz Lidz.
[49] Winters, 67-69. Herring, 49.
[50] Herring, 19.

of the influence of African American culture on otherwise sanitized and sane (coded white) spaces. In a cited interview, Langley Collyer blamed his tattered rags on his neighbors: "I have to dress this way. They would rob me if I didn't. We make our home look as if no one lived in it. We would be murdered otherwise."[51] Hoarding was building a wall out of irregular bricks. Conversely, Herring writes, "a connection emerges between the social disorganization" of urban immigrant life, and the chronic individual disorganization personified by the Collyers.[52] Herring argues that the formalization of Hoarding as a disorder began with "grotesque accounts of the brothers."[53] These public stories: "reified social disorganization into a chronic condition… In doing so, they enabled modern disorganization discourses surrounding immigrants and African Americans to mutate from pointing to a social pathology into identifying a psychological one."[54] One of the implicit risks of living near black people and European immigrants, according to the logic of contemporary Eugenicist, racist thinking, was that one would become 'infected' by behavior coded as belonging to "sub-human" races of people: including, in the United States at various times and places, black people, Chinese immigrants, First Nations Americans, poor whites, and quasi-white Irish, Polish, and Italian immigrants. The Collyers served as warnings against both abnormal accumulation and the deleterious effects wrought by exposure and mere proximity to society's undesirables.

Less mysterious, but no less fascinating, is the story of the Beales of Long Island, captured in great detail by the 1975 documentary, *Grey Gardens,* by Alfred and David Maysles, numerous news articles, and a 2009 biopic featuring Drew Barrymore and Jessica Lang. *Grey Gardens* features Edith

[51] Ibid., 27.
[52] Ibid., 30.
[53] Ibid., 30.
[54] Ibid. 30.

"Big Edie" Bouvier Beale and her daughter, Edith "Little Edie" Bouvier Beale, aunt and cousin of Jacquelyn Kennedy Onassis. The Beales lived together in the run-down mansion named, Grey Gardens, in affluent East Hampton, New York, following Big Edie's separation from her husband in the 1920s until her death in 1977. They lived out of a shared bedroom on the second floor, where they cooked meals on an electric hot-plate and kept perishables in a small refrigerator beside the beds. The rest of the house was colonized by the lush, overgrown garden, overrun by fleas, raccoons, and cats, filled with empty cat food cans and dry animal feces. Contrasted with the high-society poise of these women who had fallen on hard times, but who retained a certain air of posh dignity amid their squalorous lives, Winters writes, "The natural order was reclaiming Grey Gardens from the cultural social order."[55] The women gained notoriety when met with an eviction notice from the town of East Hampton for not properly maintaining the property, prompting a cleaning of the house sponsored by Jackie Kennedy, which allowed the women to continue occupying the house.[56] Without this help, they would have been evicted.

Two years later, in 1975, the Maysles filmed *Grey Gardens.* Considered an exemplary, if not contentious, piece of *Cinema Verité*, the film uses a fly-on-the-wall directorial style, capturing the apparent innocence and neuroticism of the late-middle aged Little Edie and the playful neediness of her bed-ridden, elderly mother.[57] According to Winters, both women grew up in a wealth of privilege and New York City high society. Before marriage, Big Edie had been a child prodigy of singing and piano and had lived in a twenty-four-room mansion on Park Avenue in Manhattan.[58] Little Edie

[55] Winters, 63.
[56] Ibid., 63.
[57] For a critique of *cinema verité* and of the Maisles, in particular, see: Werner Herzog and Paul Cronin, *Werner Herzog: A Guide for the Perplexed*.
[58] Winters, 58.

displayed early talents for singing, dancing, acting, and writing, but as her parents' marriage deteriorated, she was repeatedly kept out of school and her social world to become sidekick and emotional caregiver to her mother.[59] At seventeen, Edie modeled for Macy's, earning the nickname, "Body Beautiful." She received marriage proposals from Joe Kennedy (John F. Kennedy's elder brother, who died in World War II), and fellow famous hoarder Howard Hughes. Winters claims that Little Edie's mother chased away all of her suitors, "out of fear that she would be left alone with no one to care for her."[60] She was left with a broken heart and an inability to leave her mother for any length of time.[61] Fifty-six year old Little Edie evokes the pathos of a forlorn child who sulks and whines to get attention. Throughout the film, Little Edie returns constantly to the notion that she would have 'been somebody', if not for her mother, whom she had spent her life caring for. While discussing opportunities past and loves lost, the camera pans across piles of discarded trash, contrasted with close headshots that overlook the mess.

Big Edie displays a stereotypical characteristic of hoarders: troubled old age. Herring writes, "Big Edie exemplifies elderly hoarding in particular and the compulsive hoarder in general...hoarding is thought to occur across an individual's life span, yet links between pathological possessions and late-life object relations are pronounced."[62] Depictions of Big Edie at the time, and on the Internet in response to the film, and a 2009 fictional miniseries starring Drew Barrymore and Jessica Lang, are rife with assumptions about proper or "successful aging", and "crazy old hoarders", who are associated with the failure to maintain an organized home and "a poor adjustment to old age."[63] One critique

[59] Ibid., 59.
[60] Ibid., 59.
[61] Ibid., 59.
[62] Herring, 115.
[63] Ibid., 123.

from *New York* magazine implied that the film was more of a voyeuristic freak show, rather than a documentary. While the film opens with sensationalized newspaper headlines about the squalorous cousins of the famous first lady, the Maysles' focus, not on squalor, but on the intimate relationship between the mother and daughter, their mutual regrets and memories. Herring considers this to be "an ethical gift" which "suggests that the film may be more about American culture's ongoing obsession with the social deviance of old age and its attendant material relations."[64] As Little Edie claims in the opening sequence of the film, it demonstrates the ways in which it is difficult for people "to keep a line between the past and the present."[65]

Herring draws the link between the biopolitical, normalizing gaze and "material deviance", the term he uses to signify "Hoarding Disorder", as a culturally contrived and socially reinforced behavior that is decidedly *not a pathology*.[66] Using several public and highly sensationalized case studies of famous hoarders, Herring questions the inherent motivations for turning what he sees as a social and cultural problem into a psychological one. Herring chose his subjects to highlight hoarding "as historical discourse, as culturally conditioned disease, as normalizing plot," which is laudable in itself, but strangely myopic in his historical examples of hoarding, as they remain bound by the *DSM-5* definition he has set up the book to critique, and despite thoroughly repudiating that definition, he fails in expositing whatever else he thinks hoarding is. He makes a convincing argument: the shifting terms and various names for hoarding reveal more about the neurotic preoccupations of race, age, and class-consciousness for the American public. He does not extend his analysis beyond modern history and pop culture, however, and while he adeptly traces the 'race hysteria' that colored newspaper reports

64 Ibid., 137.
65 Ibid., 137.
66 Herring 138-141.

about the Collyer Brothers, and the 'age obsession' shaping public responses to *Grey Gardens,* he fails to bring his analysis to bear on hoarders who are neither privileged, white, nor relatively famous.

Weiss argues that we continue to be fascinated by people like the Collyer Brothers and other famous hoarders because they were eccentric outsiders who defied society's rules, living and dying on their own terms.[67] Herring writes, "As their cultural deviance became indistinguishable from their individual disorganization, their personae laid down track for scores of future hoarders once the Collyer condition became HD."[68] Herring questions the essentially *prejudged* category of 'hoarder', but he does not go deep enough in analyzing this urge to categorize aberrant behavior. He neglects to relate hoarding and deviance to taste and class, focusing instead on sensationalized figures from mid-twentieth century history. He admits that his book represents preliminary work in an emergent discourse. Both authors identify a contrast between public depictions of hoarders from privileged backgrounds, versus those on reality-television programs such as A&E's *Hoarders*. We may consider the distinction between an outlaw, who skirts the edge of social constraint and the moral imposition of order, versus the criminal, who uses violence in the pursuit of private gain. Many Americans sentimentalize the military and the police, but our culture also romanticizes the cowboy, the gangster, and the vigilante in ways that I know titillate and inspire my father, lover of Clint Eastwood, John Wayne, and Bill Murray. When he isn't working, he watches television, particularly shows like *Hoarders*, *Storage Wars, Doomsday Preppers, This Old House,* and *Pawn Stars*.

[67] Weiss, 251.
[68] Herring, 31.

Hoarders first aired in 2009, just a year after the financial crisis began. The premiere episode counted over four million viewers in the United States.[69] It remained popular for eight seasons, being nominated for an Emmy Award and generating profits for A&E's parent companies, Disney and the Hearst Corporation. Each episode featured two hoarders or families, who have either sought psychological and social intervention, or who have had intervention forced on them by concerned family members, neighbors, or the state. Primary concerns are often self-harm, child neglect, fire hazard, or animal abuse. The show offers a sympathetic approach, focusing on providing cleaning and mental health services to hoarders and their families, with the help of teams of decluttering specialists, professional organizers, psychologists, and social workers. Despite its relatively sympathetic approach, it rarely veers towards empathy (wherein we are made to relate with and understand the subjects as equals), and it never fails to frame hoarding as a psychological illness, at best equating it to a maladaptive strategy for coping with traumatic loss.

The narrative recurrently ignores questions of class, race, geography, power, and gender. We never see what is excluded from these strictly edited productions. There is no blooper reel or pre-production exposé of the process whereby participants are selected by production, nor are there long-term follow-ups to capture the evolving nature of the stories portrayed in an oversimplified form which preys on pathos and contempt. As Susan Lepselter writes: "without losing sight of the suffering involved, it is still possible to imagine a different range of stories, in which all cases now called

[69] "Hoarders has best premiere ever for A&E with adults 18-49," TV by the Numbers (18/8/2009), [article online][accessed: 16/12/18]: https://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/cable/hoarders-has-best-a-premiere-ever-for-ae-with-adults-18-49/25002/

"hoarding" might not be contained within a unifying diagnostic frame."[70] Missing "is any recognition of the social disturbances in the world surrounding the hoarder," and, according to Lepselter:

> We are watching a world without politics or power, in which the isolation of the hoarder is presented as a sad and lonely aberration from communities of family and friends visiting in clean homes. Practices and norms of consumption are not connection to historical, political, or economic structures.[71]

The show does not adequately appraise the context in which people live, but "presents hoarding as a failure of circulation. Emergence from this state becomes a sign of both healthy personal connection and semiotic correctness."[72] Nor does the show ever question its own experts, such as psychologists whose terms of diagnosis changed during and partially *due to* the show's production, or a random cadre of decluttering services and professional organizers, whose main role, as Katie Kilroy-Marac writes, is to function as quasi-healers, wherein by rearranging the symptomatic living space of a hoarder, they miraculously rearrange these psyches bound to objects, inculcating the perception of a certain decluttered life as a hallmark of virtue, as simple as fifteen trips to the dump: "It's not just the meticulous arrangement of these interiors, then, but the obvious absence of clutter that signals a new form of affluence."[73] Subjects (and viewers) are taught to view their homes from the pure aesthetic of minimalism and the utilitarian streamlining of an assembly line, newly ordered homes often resembling an impoverished and hastily assembled IKEA store display. Given the prerogatives of reality television and the capitalism of the spectacle in general, I am skeptical about what has been edited out, misrepresented, or intentionally structured, framed, and reshot to evoke pathos within a specifically American discourse of normative consumption, familial piety, and personal wellness. The

[70] Lepselter, 923.
[71] Ibid., 924.
[72] Ibid., 922.
[73] Kilroy-Marac, 445-46.

lack of follow-ups and long-term treatment with subjects is particularly striking, making the whole show feel like lipstick on the pig of the partially failed state the United States became following the 2008 financial crash, the Occupy Movement, the Ferguson riots, resurgence of white supremacist ideologies, and the rise of Trump. Underneath the gauzy veneer of social media, spectacular entertainment, and economic growth, we find a whole population made homeless by economic laws written elsewhere, and another segment of the population increasingly aware of the looming margin over which a sudden accident or illness might send them plummeting, and thus driven to hoard. At the same time, the wealthy are doing just fine, having hoarded in a moment of competitive control.

In a master's thesis that analyzes the ideological content of *Hoarders*, Samantha Redwine writes, "what comes to be defined as deviant (or any other social label) is a process of social negotiation between those with vested power and interests."[74] Lepselter agrees: "these narratives produce specific ideas about social disconnection and reconnection, ideas that are linked to the management of memory and fantasy."[75] Citing Raymond Williams, Lepselter argues that by analyzing the tone of these representations of hoarding, we can read what William's called the "structures of feeling" of past and present. Within the specialized discourse of hoarding, none of the above-mentioned authors investigate the ideological foundations of its power, and while Herring gives lip service to Foucault's notion of biopolitics, I have sought to investigate the ideological and institutional presence of the concept and the behavior of hoarding as a cultural motif, and as an example of what David Harvey dubbed, "primitive accumulation."

[74] Redwine, 17.
[75] Lepselter, 922.

In the 2016 film, *Sour Grapes*, for example, the filmmakers follow the story of Rudy Kurniawan, an Indonesian wine exporter who is currently serving time in a U.S. prison for selling millions of dollars' worth of fraudulent wine.[76] Within the luxury and historical wine collection industry, Rudy became famous for selling some of the best and rarest wines of modern and early-modern history, until an investigation led to Rudy's arrest and subsequent imprisonment, prompted by one of his main clients and competitors, wine-collector, Bill Koch, whom Rudy had defrauded of millions of dollars' worth of wine. Koch is brother to Charles and David Koch, co-owners (until David's death in 2019) of Koch Industries, America's largest privately owned corporation. Aside from busting labor movements in the United States, Canada, and the UK, and beside funding climate denialist propaganda, and despite being the major funders of the "Citizens United" bill that ended caps on political campaign donations, and apart from being the major forces of opposition to Barrack Obama's agenda in the United States, the Koch's are avid collectors.[77] In this film, w the hoarder reveals himself in the full comfort of his own sense of taste, curation, conspicuous display, as well as a sentimental and emotional attachment to objects which represent millions of dollars.

As the wealthy subject and catalyst for Rudy's arrest, the narrative makes a thrill out of Koch's wine collection. He says, "Collecting has to have an emotional meaning to me. Part of it is the detective story of tracking it all down." As the camera follows Bill Koch through his cavernous Palm Beach, Florida mansion, the interior of which is part Metropolitan Museum of Art, part Smithsonian, with a touch of the mansions of Newport, Rhode Island. As much as his home exudes luxury, there is a profound dullness and sterility to the securely sanitized and meticulously ordered home. Koch's off-

[76] Jerry Rothwell and Reuben Atlas, *Sour Grapes*, (London: Dog Woof distributors, 2016), Netflix.
[77] See, Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: the Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York: Double Day, 2016).

camera voice narrates the camera down into the basement, where behind a false brick, a key panel opens a hidden door behind a suit of medieval armor onto a cavernous wine cellar:

> I've collected Impressionistic art, samurai swords, silver coins from Greece…and I've collected wine…. I've been a little obsessive about buying wine in the past. I have in total 43,000 bottles with superfine wines, you can taste the love the vintner had in making it and that to me is an almost religious experience. You know, we collectors like precious things. Love is extremely precious. What price can you put on the love of your wife? What price…well if you're getting divorced you can, but....

Koch laughs at his own joke before revealing various bottles of Lafitte THJ, wine from Thomas Jefferson's own vineyard 1787: "I'll set it down on the table. We'll line 'em up. The reason I wanted to buy four bottles of Thomas Jefferson wine: It's very simple. The mere fact that Thomas Jefferson owned it, and held it in his hand, etc. etc. that's a part of history." He empties out a locked cage within the vault, and holding out a stout, oblong bottle. "Look at this bottle. Isn't it beautiful in and of itself? 1737 Lafitte, Chateau Rothschild. The faker didn't know his wine history very well, because the Rothschild's didn't own Lafitte in 1737." He laughs, holding in his hand tens of thousands of dollars of worthless, counterfeit fermented grape juice and glass.

In this scene, Koch removes the fake bottle from the safe, where presumably he still keeps it among authentic others. He smirks awkwardly for the camera before shuffling away to place the fake bottle next to four other fabricated wines. "Unfortunately I paid a hundred thousand dollars per bottle…. I have over four hundred bottles which have been proven fake, for which I paid four million dollars."[78] The film goes on to depict the massive fraud committed against Koch and other duped wine collectors, selling over 35 million dollars' worth of fake wine between 2003 and 2006. The film itself is a whodunnit documentary exposé, and like *Hoarders*, it makes no judgement and shows no aversion

[78] Rothwell and Atlas, *Sour Grapes*.

to the sheer audacity of spending a small country's GDP on some old merlot, however authentic and historical it might be. Primitive accumulation can include the seizure of a parcel of land, the heredity transmission of a title, an elusive series of bank accounts insulating the financial lives of the untaxed rich, allowing them a free hand in an increasingly digital world. All of these things could be considered hoarding through an expansion of the concept of 'object' to comprise things like thoughts, homes, dreams, relationships, power, time, memories, opportunity, and money. For hoarders, the key is not *how much* do they have but, what is the quality of each item? What is its monetary value? How is it redistributed, if at all? Here, as ever, names shape the reality of things.

Etymological Ethnography

By 2013, linked to the pioneering work of academics and therapists such as Scott, Sketekee, Brian Hall, and David Tolin, hoarding was an established indicator of Obsessive Compulsive disorder, Acute Anxiety Disorder, and Depression. These authors were regular guests and consultants on *Hoarders.* The following section focuses on revisionist work that has complicated hoarding beyond the stereotypical, pathologizing gaze of spectacular commodities such as *Hoarders*, *Doomsday Preppers*, *Storage Wars,* and *Pawn Stars.* I focus on recent articles that help conflate the hoarding of money, physical objects, and abstract qualities such as opportunity, power, and influence. The second half of this chapter leaves the attics and personal spaces of individual hoarders, and instead focuses on other historical and anthropological manifestations from a more global and long-term perspective.

I was surprised by the sheer abundance of material I found, starting in the Oxford English Dictionary (*OED*), followed by routine searches of British Periodicals and American Periodicals database, academic research journals in Psychology, Anthropology, History, Economics, and Political Science. Hoarding is fairly niche, but emerging as a micro-discourse unto itself. Each time I thought I had found my angle of approach for writing, I stumbled on someone who beat me to it. I suspect many of the people drawn to study hoarding have experience with family and community members who were hoarders, while others study the various economies that have grown up around hoarding, such as therapists specializing in hoarding, social services for decluttering, laws protecting disability claimants from eviction, and professional organizers aiming to create order in the spaces of these pathologized consumers.

In the first semester of my master's degree, a professor suggested I search the *OED* for 'hoarding' and whatever related terms I could find. According to the *OED,* the word 'hoard' first appears in literature in 937 CE, in the Old English, as the noun, 'hord', in the "Poem on Æthelstan", an Anglo-Saxon king famous for his invasion of Scotland and his early attempts to unify post-Roman England. The word was a close synonym for 'store' or 'cache', used repeatedly in the Anglo-Saxon saga *Beowulf,* in which the titular king repeatedly defends the communal wealth of his kingdom against the ingress of monsters and dragons, symbolic beings of unchecked avarice and violence. The humans have a communal store defended by the steward king, but there is also the dangerous hoard of the dragon, whose legendary greed brings destruction on the world of humans who would dare to steal even a single golden cup. The literary impact of *Beowulf* cannot be overstated in English literature, having influenced, in particular, J.R.R. Tolkien in writing *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In a poem, "The Hoard", Tolkien suggests hoarding is common

among all beings, whether elf, dwarf, human, or dragon. The urge to keep and hide leaves each race vulnerable to the thief and to the greed of one's enemies:

> There is an old hoard in a dark rock, forgotten behind doors none can unlock; that grim gate no man can pass. On the mound grows the green grass; there sheep feed and the larks soar, and the wind blows from the sea-shore. The old hoard the Night shall keep, while earth waits and the Elves sleep.[79]

As even immortal elves and near-immortal dragons can be killed in the end, only the hoard remains. As a verb, the word appears around the year 1000 C.E. in the *Homilies* by Aelfric, a Catholic Anglo-Saxon abbot whose prolific hagiography forms some of the earliest English literature. Aelfric wrote of the distinction to be made between "heavenly" possessions such as a body, a world, and love, versus the stagnant promises of self-aggrandizement:

> The heavenly possessions are common to us all. Naked we were born, and naked we depart. The brightness of the sun, and the light of the moon, and of all the stars are common to the high and the low. Rain-showers and the church-door, baptism and forgiveness of sins, partaking of the house and God's visitation, are common to all, poor and rich: but the unhappy covetous wishes to have more than suffices him, though he enjoys not freedom from care in his abundance. The covetous hath one body and divers garments; he hath one belly and a thousand men's sustenance; but that which he, through the vice of avarice, cannot give to any other, he hoardeth, and knoweth not for whom, as the prophet said, 'Vainly is every man troubled who hoardeth, and knoweth not for whom he gathereth.' Verily he is not lord of those possessions, when he cannot distribute them, but he is the slave of those possessions, when he wholly serveth them; and in addition thereto, diseases of his body increase, so that he may not enjoy food or drink. He cares night and day that his money be preserved; he attends greedily to his gain, his rent, his buildings; he bereaves the indigent, he follows his lusts and his pleasure; then suddenly departs he from this world, naked and charged with crimes, bearing with him his sins alone; therefore shall he suffer punishment everlasting.[80]

[79] Tolkien, "The Hoard", *Songs of Tom Bombadil.*

[80] Aelfric, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric, in the Original Anglo-Saxon, with an English Version, Volume I.,* no. 67, http://gutenberg.org/files/38334/38334-h/38334-h.htm [ebook online].

In a tone echoed in the literature throughout the Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance eras, Aelfric writes of hoarding as a decidedly un-Christian practice *unless* it serves the greater good.

Money Morals

Historical injunctions against hoarding are significant for two reasons. First, they generally decry neither wealth nor the wealthy writ-large, but the excessive accumulation and unjust redistribution of wealth derived from nature and the energy of exploited labor, often associated with primitive accumulation and the use of violence to hoard—not the money or the land itself, but the power it affords. Second, only in certain cases has the social injunction against hoarding been lifted, significantly in tandem with cases of extreme inequality. An injunction against amassing money, gold, and food in the face of abject suffering has been a moral code in many human societies that relied on standardized money currency as a form of exchange only partially or not at all. As a principle, savings, accumulation, and preservation for rational self-interest underlies the basic principles of capitalism, but includes as its corollaries economic hierarchies, social exclusion, and the violation of ecosystems and animals.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle advocates for 'liberality' toward possessions, as an ethical person should strike a balance between maximal, but measured, generosity and self-sufficiency to the extent of personally flourishing: "It is not easy for the liberal man to be rich, since he is not apt either at taking or at keeping, but at giving away, and does not value wealth for its own sake but as a means of giving."[81] As Aristotle is one of the foundational touchstones of

[81] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, 55.* [ebook][accessed online: https://socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/aristotle/Ethics.pdf].

Classical Liberalism and its ideological geology, Aristotle remains vital for thinking about how early-modern Europeans who used his work as alchemists, natural philosophers, and political economists thought about notions of property and value. For Aristotle, generosity weaves a tighter social fabric, providing greater security to the individual, reducing the likelihood of theft, and mitigation of disaster in times of crisis. The main opposing vices to liberality are prodigality, or excess consumption and squandering, and meanness, or being cheap:

> Those who are called by such names as 'miserly,' 'close,' 'stingy,' all fall short in giving, but do not covet the possessions of others nor wish to get them. In some this is due to a sort of honesty and avoidance of what is disgraceful (for some seem, or at least profess, to hoard their money for this reason, that they may not someday be forced to do something disgraceful; to this class belong the cheeseparer and every one of the sort….[82]

Money served as a universal mediator of complex, hierarchical social interactions, all deemed essential to complete every task of city and home, but beyond that risked more harm than good.[83] Wealth that noticeably exceeded that of one's fellow citizens could be a mark of shame. Aristotle argued for a middle way between excess and parsimony: show restraint and practice kindness and generosity as a guiding principle, but avoid spreading yourself too thin.[84] This was not unique to Aristotle, echoed in many philosophies and religious teachings throughout the world .Money was primarily and most importantly for Aristotle, "an instrument of justice", a sentiment echoed all the way up to now by the proponents of Classical Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and fringe forms of Anarcho-capitalist Libertarianism, but Aristotle perhaps did not see the way in which the symbolic qualities pertaining to money could become symbolic objects of desire and power in and of

82 Aristotle, 57.
83 Carl Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit: The English Financial Revolution: 1620-1720* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2011), 32.
84 Aristotle, 32.

themselves, or that this power could extend to the accoutrements, all the status objects with which objects purchased come to represent intangible qualities, beyond use-value.[85]

In *Managing Financial Resources in Late Antiquity: Greek Fathers' Views on Hoarding and Saving*, theological scholars of Byzantine Greece, Gerasimos Merianos and George Gotsis, trace an opposition to hoarding wealth through the tradition of Jewish mysticism, to the teachings of Christ, to twentieth-century economists. In this fascinating study, the authors examine debates over proper household economics (from the Greek, *oikonomia)* in the ancient Mediterranean, extrapolated into formulae for political economy and morality when they were excavated by humanist scholars of the late-Renaissance and Enlightenment in Europe: "wealth in ancient economies was defined as anything that satisfies human wants and participates in the generation of surplus that can provide opportunities for leisure…Excesses could be harnessed through an ethical choice intended to channel resources outside the boundaries of the economic domain," toward patronage, politics, philosophy, and the support of institutions.[86] As stated in Proverbs, "A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. People curse the man who hoards grain, but blessing crowns him who is willing to sell."[87] To be in the position to give provides the means by which the rich may redeem themselves, ideally giving away everything they have unto death, thus squeezing the camel through the needle's eye. Excessive enrichment, however, was seen as a serious threat in a society where most people lived at or near subsistence levels, and where the greed of one could cause the suffering of many.[88]

[85] Wennerlind, 34.
[86] G. Merianos and G. Gotsis, 18-19.
[87] *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, Proverbs, 11.25-26.
[88] Merianos and Gotsis, 19.

Early Christian admonishments against hoarding reflected the social needs of an agrarian economy living at the margins of the Roman Empire. As in later empires in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas, many marginal farmers were exploited under systems of debt-peonage, tenant farming, and slavery.[89] It is such 'worthless' figures whose needs Jesus addresses directly in Christian scripture: the peasants, fishermen, and artisans living at the whim of the wealthy and powerful: "social harmony was enfeebled by hoarding behaviors…. The sages favored a level of moderate prosperity but condemned the excesses of wealth acquired through iniquity."[90] The teachings of Jesus from the Book of Luke stood in direct opposition to this power. Rather than the paternalistic cycles of unequal distribution favored at the time, "an economic system perceived as highly exploitative by lower strata, Jesus envisions the possibility of generalized reciprocity, of an unconditional commitment to others' needs."[91] According to Saint Paul, in the community of the faithful, excess could be mitigated through community meals wherein social distinctions were momentarily obscured through sharing food, as well as using balanced reciprocity and the gifts of prosperous Christians to further the Gospel, i.e. generosity and acts of kindness are the primary means of proselytizing, rather than forcing conversion.[92] Few could mistake the tone from the Book of James:

> Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the

[89] Ibid., 20.
[90] Ibid., 21.
[91] Ibid., 22.
[92] Ibid., 23.

> ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.[93]

The turning point came with Christianity's incorporation into the ruling structures of the Byzantine Empire when Constantine became the first Christian emperor, prompting changes in relation to the hoarding of wealth and monetary policy. For the most powerful person in the Empire, and the face emblazoned on Imperial coins, it changed social expectations and the symbolism of power for Christians, who were simultaneously economic agents in a centralized money economy.

According to Merianos and Gotsis, Constantine attempted to standardize the Imperial currency in response to the steady decline in quality of Byzantine coins over the course of the first four centuries of the Common Era due to counterfeiting, clipping (the shaving of small bits of precious metals from coins), and subsequent debasements, which had frustrated his predecessor's attempts at Imperial economic management, inhibiting taxation revenue. Compounded by the sheer profusion of types of coinage in the Empire, the quality of coins varied greatly from place to place, while the best quality coins were habitually kept out of circulation. Fluctuations in quality "led to extensive hoarding of the coins with finer silver alloy, the *denarii*."[94] In such a situation, "the purchasing power and the status of someone with regular access to gold coinage were beyond comparison."[95] Under Constantine (as at the advent of Mercantilism in eighteenth-century Europe), a standard currency based on centralized hoards of gold caused money to supersede land, "as the general form (and indication) of wealth," which resulted in "ruinous social repercussions, especially for the lower social strata," and for middling yeomen farmers and small-scale artisans.[96]

[93] *Bible,* James, 5.1-5
[94] Merianos and Gotsis, 159.
[95] Ibid., 163.
[96] Ibid., 165.

By eliminating older, frequently counterfeit forms of currency, by controlling the central outward flow of gold into the economy, and by demanding taxes paid only in the new coinage, Constantine shifted the entire political economy into a system of patronage leading from the emperor directly to his aristocratic allies. Of course, in an far-flung empire spread across diverse climates and cultures, with a largely agrarian population, to implement a standardized, gold-based currency and a system of formal contractual debt and patronage leading back to the Emperor, the Roman state meted out brutal punishment to forgers and counterfeiters, serving as a Classical model for British economic reformers much later, as Wennerlind discusses in *Casualties of Credit:* new forms of money, expanding imperial borders, and the assimilation of novels markets was enforced with the death penalty, debtors prison, forced indenture, and slavery to secure a steady value in money, just as remote colonial magistrates, politicians, and slavers used violence to ensure steady flows of raw materials back to the imperial center. A monopoly over violence, faith, and gold laid the foundations of the Eurasian feudal economy, just as the face of the emperor on each gold *denarii* reminded each subject of his place in the wider empire, however far from Constantinople.

In shifting allegiances the Christianity, Constantine established a precedent of the divine right of kingship among Christian rulers. Constantine's successors would establish and legitimize a close association between gold and emperor.[97] As the Church gradually became more institutionalized and hierarchical, the edict against excessive accumulation faded as the Church itself became *the* major owner of land and money. Apparent contradictions were mediated by tithing and selling indulgences, which mollified Church leaders and funded charitable activities. The late Byzantine clergy became mediators, not only between God and humanity, but between

[97] Ibid., 166.

capital and the poor as well.[98] As Christianity itself became more identified and interwoven with power, its radical politics dissipated, though revived periodically by reformers such as Giordano Bruno, Martin Luther, Saint Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas.[99]

Much later and jumping to the context of Christian, Anglo-Saxon Britain, the injunction against hoarding wealth is echoed in *Beowulf*, in which generosity and selflessness stand out as the wellspring of a good leader's power. *Beowulf* can be read as a discourse on ethics, duty, community, and sovereignty, but it is also one of the first primary texts in which the word, 'hoard' appears in a text written in something approximating English. A heroic saga blending Norse mythology and a rough-spun, Catholic veneer, *Beowulf* valorizes kindness, selflessness, and generosity, more than courage and violence, characterizing the kind as faceless steward and humble guardian of the common hoard, the *ideal* function of a king. He gathers the common goods to his great hall for safe keeping. The outsiders, Grendel and Grendel's mother, who threaten Herot, his mead-hall and citadel, and who kill and eat Beowulf's kin, are particularly insidious, since they do not threaten the king's body, but they repeatedly destroy the *doors* of his hall to kidnap and murder his loyal subjects, symbolically opening the treasure vault, exposing the vulnerable genetic line to an existential threat, here tied to the context of agricultural/tradition life in precarity, during which a bad harvest or hunt or a spoiled grain cache could lead to total failure of the community. In the end, Beowulf is killed by a dragon that ravages the countryside after a peasant steals from it a single golden cup, revitalized by Seamus Heaney's beautiful rendition:

> When the dragon awoke, trouble flared again. He rippled down the rock, writhing with anger When he saw the footprints of the prowler who had stolen Too close to his dreaming

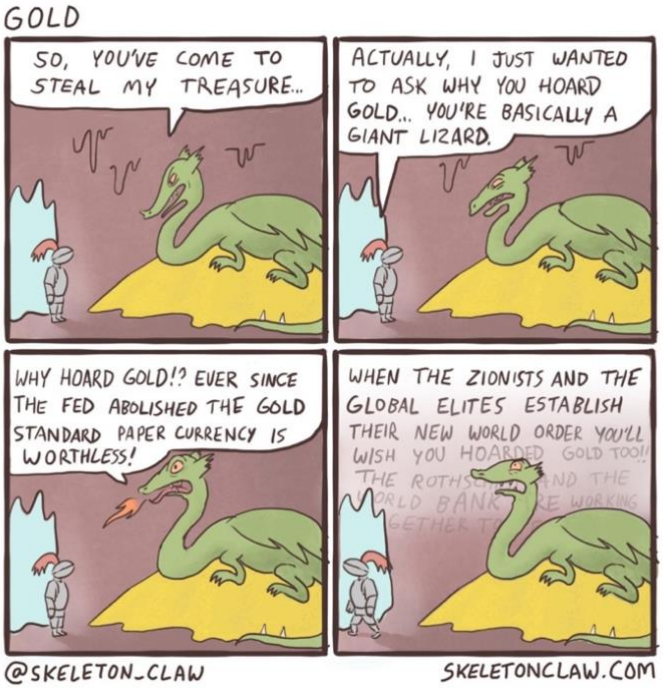
[98] Ibid., 203.
[99] Ibid., 5-6.

> head. So may a man not marked by fate Easily escape exile and woe By the grace of God. The hoard-guardian Scorched the ground as he scoured and hunted For the trespasser who had troubled his sleep. The dragon began to belch out flames And burn bright homesteads; there was a hot glow That scared everyone, for the vile sky-winger Would leave nothing alive in his wake.[100]

Like Smaug in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, the hoarder dragon destroys the town and Beowulf's hall, laying even the greatest human effort to waste. Just as evoked in the following meme drawn by the Internet comic artist Skeleton Claw, which showcases a paranoid and xenophobic dragon boring an errant knight into submission, the terrible, alienated power of the individual which brings ruin, not only to the community of the one who stole the cup, but to the dragon as well: greed is his greatest weakness and lures him out of the impenetrable shelter of the cave. In the fight, the dragon dies in dealing Beowulf a mortal blow: "The treasure had been won, Bought and paid for by Beowulf's death. Both had reached the end of the road Through the life they had been lent."[101] Awaiting his death, Beowulf wished only to see the cache of gold, to know that it would be distributed among his subjects, paid toward their future.

In losing their king, his followers paid no attention to their new-found wealth, carried away as they were by grief. They heaped a massive sacrifice of gold on his funeral pyre, "And they buried torques in the barrow, and jewels And a trove of such things as trespassing men Had once dared to drag from the hoard. They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure, Gold under gravel, gone to earth, As useless to men now as it ever was."[102]

100 Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf*, line 2288-95 [ebook][https://mralbertsclass.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/beowulf-translation-by-seamus-heaney.pdf]
101 Ibid., line 2841.
102 Ibid., line 3162.



Gold, skeletonclaw.com, 2018

Gold is useless except as a means of collective prosperity, as a source, under the guise of just stewardship, for the foundations of an enlightened sovereignty. Tracing the semantics of 'hoarding' in this circuitous way demonstrates briefly how representations of hoarding evolved over time. Over the ensuing millennium, the taboo against excessive accumulation here briefly described would give way to a world view that prized individual prosperity, originality, and profit, rather than collective prosperity, a process accelerated by European contact with the Americas, colonialism, the Atlantic slave trade, and early capitalism.

Mercantilism, Alchemy, and Political Economy

The histories of the scientific revolution, Western occultism, and the Enlightenment are deeply interwoven with the modern history of money and monetary policy. Alchemy was fundamental to

the formation of the modern disciplines of astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology. Here we are concerned primarily with the alchemical worldview that was predominant among the intellectual elite of the early seventeenth century England, Western Europe, and the English colonies in New England. Alchemists contributed to the development of engineering, artistic media, natural philosophy, and political economy. Products of their time, natural philosophers such as Francis Bacon, Thomas More, and the Hartlib Circle, developed Bacon's empirical method across a vast network of thinkers and institutions ranging from Baghdad to Boston. These globally networked intellectuals developed advances in extractive technologies, particularly in mining and agriculture, paying attention to careful land management, advocating for enclosure, and in the pursuit of greater means of circulating credit, giving rise to land banks and advanced systems of mortgage. They were students of strategic hoarding.

In *Casualties of Credit: The English Financial Revolution 1620-1720*, historian Carl Wennerlind describes "a scarcity of money problem" facing early-seventeenth century England similar to that of Constantinian Byzantium mentioned above. An abundance of clipped and counterfeit coin drove sterling into personal hoards, inhibiting the flow of commerce in England's early ascendance in an Atlantic economy dominated by the Spanish and intra-European trade dominated by the Dutch. The same issue was happening throughout Europe. As Foucault writes in *The Order of Things,* "At the end of the [seventeenth] century, at all events, the shortage of coin became an acute and direct experience: recession of trade, lowering of prices, difficulties in paying debts, rents, and duties, a fall in the value of land."[103] In France, in the first decades of the eighteenth century, deliberate currency devaluations by the government "were intended—though

[103] Foucault, 180.

the attempt failed—to draw hoarded bullion back into circulation."[104] The Spanish controlled the surplus flow of Incan and Zapotec gold and silver into Europe from the Americas. English merchants sold their wares in Spain and illegally in Spanish America, a trade which increased when the English took Jamaica in 1655. Across Europe there was a general scarcity of solid currency, "because of the insatiable demand for Asian, African, and American luxuries—mostly textiles, slaves, and spices—and the lack of reciprocal interest in European exports, the silver stock in Europe was continuously depleted by this trade."[105] Figures of the Hartlib circle, surrounding the Russian-English émigré, Samuel Hartlib, grew a network comprising aristocrats, merchants, artists, natural philosophers, traditional artisans, colonial governors, and leaders in the rising East India Company and its various equivalents across the continent. While many late-medieval and early modern alchemists claimed to know methods of the transmutation of base metals into gold and other precious metals, or of devising the Sorcerer's Stone or the Elixir of Life, the alchemists also helped to further refine the scientific method, leading to breakthroughs in plant and animal genetics, engineering, mining, geology, the chemistry of agricultural fertilizers, and modern weapons.

They attempted transmuting lead into gold, developed elaborate systems of astrology, and arcane models of human and animal physiology, but even these *magical* proclivities should not be excised from histories of scientific enquiry in favor of those aspects of the historiography which can be read as modern or proto-modern. As the early-twentieth century occultist, novelist, spy, and Talmudic scholar, Aleister Crowley, wrote in 1929's, *Magick, in Theory and Practice*, magic in

[104] Ibid., 180.
[105] Wennerlind, 28.

the traditional sense cannot be understood by a term such as "metaphysical" or "illusion," but rather represents the willful attempt to create a successful recipe for a desired action to occur:

> Magick is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will. (Illustration: It is my Will to inform the World of certain facts within my knowledge. I therefore take "magical weapons", pen, ink, and paper; I write "incantations"—these sentences—in the "magical language" i.e. that which is understood by the people I wish to instruct; I call forth "spirits", such as printers, publishers, booksellers, and so forth, and constrain them to convey my message to those people. The composition and distribution of this book is thus an act of Magick by which I cause Changes to take place in conformity with my Will).[106]

What Crowley postulated, and what the natural philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries believed was that, "Any required Change may be effected by the application of the proper kind and degree of Force in the proper manner through the proper medium to the proper object." For some, this manifested in attempts to transmute lead into precious metals or to read Earth's history in the stars, but empiricist advances in science also proceeded from the belief, then nascently divergent from a Christian Absolutist determinism that, "it is theoretically possible to cause in any object any change of which that object is capable by nature."[107] Sharing a revolutionary worldview in an infinite universe, linear time, and the unlimited capacity for human development through the exploitation of nature, the late alchemists were Baconian empiricists, and, being also landed aristocrats, merchants, and yeomen farmers, they rooted much of their study in improving agricultural yields and commerce, using capital and empire to derive profit from nature and to 'humanize' the Earth.[108]

[106] Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (Naples: Albatros, 2018), XIII.
[107] Crowley, XIII.
[108] Ibid., 58-61.

While some members of the Hartib Circle attempted transmutation as a means of solving England's scarcity of money problem, when those attempts proved unsuccessful, they shifted toward other means of creating money from nothing: credit. Based on new conceptions of wealth, particularly within the *episteme* known as Mercantilism and by the mechanisms of empire, state-bank, credit, and limited-liability chartered corporation.[109] Since silver and gold could not serve as a reliable basis for credit as long as England suffered a trade deficit, a land bank was devised as a way of extending credit through mortgage, which would allow for the circulation of stable currency tied to property, but not necessarily *land,* in the form of paper bonds.[110] Wennerlind writes:

> A further benefit of a land bank was that once the new currency had been created it would not be removed from circulation, as its lack of intrinsic value eliminated all incentives for people to export it abroad or hoard it as a store of value. This ensured that the expansion of the money stock was sustainable and that the scarcity of money problem would not reappear…Hence, in credit, the Hartlibians had found a panacea similar to the philosopher's stone, but one that required far less effort and expense to develop.[111]

This would encourage individuals to spend their coin and melt down silver plate, as hoarding it would no longer be as secure as buying land, while the best minted coins would serve as a stable vehicle for taxation and the basis of royal power: If land secured the credit currency, and if one could only pay the tax man in gold, lest end up in debtors' prison, then all available silver would be brought to the mint. In addition to money in circulation and in hoards, people would be *required* to bring in their silver plate.[112] Wennerlind argues that these cultural changes in the economic base precipitated and coincided with the institutionalization of the death penalty for counterfeiters and

[109] Ibid., 63. Michel Foucault, *Order of Things, 180.*
[110] Ibid., 68-74.
[111] Ibid., 74.
[112] Ibid., 139-140.

coin clippers. While land served as the basis of domestic credit, funding speculative ventures such as the East India Company, silver would expand England's dominance of the Atlantic slave trade and the commerce in spices, tea, and textiles from India and China, whose populations often *only* accepted silver until the EIC and the British Navy were powerful enough to impose monopolies based around cotton in India and opium in China in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Throughout the early-modern period, however, European financial institutions, individuals, and states insistently replaced one form of hoarding with another, through the establishment of larger, more powerful hoards such as the monopoly, the corporation, and the central bank.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century and the end of the Civil War and Restoration in England, the hoarding of 'dead capital' underwent a paradigmatic perceptual shift, from a parasitic consequence of shoddy currency, to becoming the basis of international finance and banking. Locke considered the hoarding of dead capital to be a symptom of distrust in the power of markets. In 1691, Locke tied currency to the ultimate aims of human development, making a clear distinction between the hoarding of consumer goods and the hoarding of money in, *Some Considerations of the Consequences of the Lowering of Interest and the Raising the Value of Money.* He wrote, "'Tis in vain therefore to go about effectually to reduce the price of Interest by a Law; and you may as rationally hope to set a fixt Rate upon the Hire of Houses, or Ships, as of Money."[113] As economic actors and markets themselves determined the 'natural' price of goods and service, it was in the best interest of the state to adopt the *laissez-faire* attitude toward financial

[113] Locke, John. *Some Considerations of the Consequences of the Lowering of Interest and the Raising the Value of Money.* 1691, 5.

markets as well as for consumer goods.[114] Lowering the interest rate would harm the primary movers of industry, merchants, such as Locke himself:

> It will hinder Trade. For there being a certain proportion of Money necessary for driving such a proportion of Trade, so much Money of this as lies still, lessens so much of the Trade. Now it cannot be rationally expected, but that where the Venture is great, and the Gains small, (as it is in Lending in England upon low Interest) many will choose rather to hoard up their Money, than venture it abroad on such Terms. This will be a loss to the Kingdom, and such a loss, as here in England ought chiefly to be looked after: For we having no Mines, nor any other way of getting, or keeping of Riches amongst us but by Trade, so much of our Trade as is lost, so much of our Riches must necessarily go with it; and the over-ballancing of Trade between us and our Neighbours, must inevitably carry away our Money, and quickly leave us Poor, and exposed. Gold and Silver though they serve for few yet they command all the conveniencies of life; and therefore in a plenty of them consists Riches [sic].[115]

As the adopter of the neo-Aristotelian belief in the infinite profitability of the exploitation of natural resources, particularly human bodies and land, Locke insisted that those who lent money into the economy of circulation deserved and needed an ever-increasing hoard of riches on which to support further economic growth as guarantors of credit.

Locke speaks from the perspective of vested interest in capital, as opposed to the previously dominant and agriculturalist aristocracy of Europe, and of a new kind of human subject, who would invest himself, in a spiritual sense, with the power of money. Foucault argues that Locke construes money as a *pledge* that ties itself back to a common cache of gold, ideally held in a bank, which would use that capital as currency for further investment. But, he writes:

> To say that money is a pledge is to say that it is no more than a token accepted by common consent – hence, a pure fiction; but it is also to say that is has exactly the same value as that for which it has been given, since it can in turn be exchanged for that same quantity of

[114] Locke, 6.
[115] Ibid., 6.

> merchandise or the equivalent…Money is a material memory, a self-duplicating representation, a deferred exchange.[116]

Money requires an invisible submission by both spender and purchaser, to align their sails with the prevailing winds of capital, to the state power whose constant adjustments maintain a certain regularity to the value of currency, and to the physical coercion of law and order. At a certain interval, an exchange based on a paper or lesser-value metal currency is fundamentally worthless, and thus requires an act of faith by the user of money. It is "an act that lacks, for a time, that which recompenses it, a demi-operation that promises and expects the converse exchange whereby the pledge will be reconverted into its effective content."[117] For Locke, money was a peculiar commodity. Unlike those created for consumption, which if not consumed is 'wasted', with money the tendency is to keep it as long as possible through thrift, savings, and investment:

> In all other Commodities, the Owners when they design them for Traffick, endeavour as much as they can to have them vented and gone, i.e. removed out of the reach of Commerce, by Consumption, Exportation, or laying up: But Money never lying upon Peoples Hands, or wanting Vent, (for any one may part with it in Exchange when he pleases;) the provident publick, and private care, is to keep it from Venting or Consuming, i.e. from Exportation which is its proper Consumption; and from Hoarding up by others, which is a sort of Ingrossing. Hence it is that other Commodities have sometimes a quicker, sometimes a slower Vent: For no body lays out his Money in them but according to the use he has of them, and that has bounds. But every body being ready to receive Money without bounds, and keep it by him, because it answers all things.[118]

Lowering of the interest rate negates the main incentive for saving beyond mere survival, causing faith in banking to wane, and leading back to the hoarding of silver in the mattress: "as if it were not in Being."[119] As rentier and a major investor in the Royal African Company, which held the

[116] Foucault, *181.*
[117] Ibid., 182.
[118] Locke, 24.
[119] Ibid., 40.

monopoly contracts for transporting slaves from West Africa to entrepots in Jamaica, Barbados, and South Carolina, Locke saw the accumulation of personal wealth as the key to building more advanced systems of credit, that would enhance trade, and support institutions for alleviating poverty and vice, uplifting supposedly inferior classes and races (toward, but never equal, in his eyes) to the level of the white, upper-crust, male European, and in the height of Classical Liberal idealism, personal self-interest would tend to the overall well-being of society. The establishment of a gold-backed paper currency would alleviate poverty, which he deemed the source of criminality and indolence, rather than criminality and indolence among slaver financiers and hoarded private wealth driving inequality.[120] Locke spoke for an emergent bourgeois class which used opportunistic speculation and strategic hoarding to establish hegemony against the vested interests of aristocratic, religious, and guild powers in the preceding centuries.

Early-Modern discourses on money were part of larger shifts wherein sovereignty and property rights underwent massive transformations. With industrialization, the Atlantic slave trade, the French Revolution, the creation of whole new classes of industrial proletariat and a hegemonic bourgeoisie, the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries ushered in an era of commodity relations. Just as under the emperors of ancient Byzantium, power would be tied to one's representations of order, wealth, and power through commodities and taste, through coercive strategies of the State, through the uninterrupted flow of markets, and by the accumulation and assimilation (or extermination) of imperial territories, minerals, and peoples, which ensured that commercial flow. Over the course of the eighteenth century to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the development of biopolitics, political economy, and capitalism produced a world of manifold

[120] Wennerlind, 72.

sovereignties centered on large, individual and institutional hoards. These actors vied for control over states, colonial territory, and natural resources, expanding outward in search of new markets, constructing the infrastructure for industrial capitalism, nation states, and global empires.

Until the establishment of the gold standard in 1844, the United Kingdom employed a bimetallic standard of currency using both silver and gold. David Ricardo wrote that the use of two standards for a currency was imperfect:

> Much inconvenience arises from using two metals as the standard of our money; and it has long been a disputed point whether gold or silver should by law be made the principal or sole standard of money. In favour of gold, it may be said, that its greater value under a smaller bulk eminently qualifies it for the standard in an opulent country; but this very quality sub-jects it to greater variations of value during periods of war, or extensive commercial discredit, when it is often collected and hoarded, and may be urged as an argument against its use.[121]

When a single commodity becomes the universal signifier of value, the risk of its being kept out of circulation will follow naturally. Like Karl Marx in the epigraph to this chapter, Ricardo remarked that:

> There may be a great demand for the precious metals in times of war and convulsion, on account of their superior convenience; and such a demand operating upon a country possessing a small quantity of them, must occasion either a great rise of price, or an extraordinary and most in-convenient diminution of currency. To keep a paper currency on a level with the precious metals without great fluctuations in the value of the currency, I fear we must have hoards, and a partial metallic circulation."[122]

Ironically, Classical Liberalism and *laissez-faire* economics are founded in government intervention, control over fluctuating mediums of exchange, and the increasing drawing of disparate wealth towards central, state-controlled banks, and private accumulation. Having

[121] David Ricardo, *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo: Vol. IV: Pamphlets and Papers, 1815-1823*. Piero Sraffa, ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 63.

[122] David Ricardo, *The Collected Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo: Vol. VI: Letter 1810-15* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004), 269.

witnessed the French Revolution and the British and Prussian-dominated Counterrevolution's universalization of war across the European continent, coupled with the economic crises and political unrest of the early Industrial revolution in England, Ricardo saw the private and state institution of hoarding as a necessary evil, that, echoing Aristotle, paid for inequality with relative social stability, particularly in the maintenance of the institutions which safeguarded property and capital.

Hoarding played a role in establishing and encasing powerful financial interests from the economic convulsions and political changes of their times, whether in Ancient Byzantium, early-modern England, or neoliberal New York City. From the perspective of capitalist imperialism's critics, hoarding presents opportunities to challenge crystalized and entrenched class power—crystals being brittle. The following section examines several limited, but demonstrative examples in which common notions of hoarding evolved in accordance with tremendous social shifts in relationships between producers and commodities, between capital and labor, and between European empires and global multitudes. Whether gold or junk, the study of hoarding from both ends of the socio-economic spectrum is about the relationship between human beings and commodities, and the strange power that emanates from this relationship. In *Grundrisse,* Marx formulates that wealth only becomes capital when it begins to circulate, to mobilize labor at sites of production. Until capital expends itself through labor in production, it remains dead:

> That is, individual capitals can continue to arise e.g. by means of hoarding. But the hoard is transformed into capital only by means of the exploitation of labour. The bourgeois economists who regard capital as an eternal and natural (not historical) form of production then attempt at the same time to legitimize it again by formulating the conditions of its becoming as the conditions of its contemporary realization ; i.e. presenting the moments in

> which the capitalist still appropriates as not-capitalist - because he is still becoming - as the very conditions in which he appropriates as capitalist.[123]

By circulating capital as labor power, capitalists add the catalyzing agent to the reactive environment that enacts or shapes technological and social evolution. Class struggle, particularly by the vested interests of European aristocracies and a triumphant bourgeoisie in the mid-nineteenth century, Fascism, Stalinism, Maoism, and American militarized global capitalism collectively stymied any progression toward genuine socialist utopia. What Stalinism, Neoliberalism, Nazism, and post-Deng Xiao Ping Chinese Communist Party Capitalism have in common is the controlled management, measured distribution, and coercive encasement of a collective hoard, generally centered on either a nation or a political party or some combination. In *Capital,* Marx insisted that "we suffer not only from the development of capitalist production, but also from the incompleteness of that development," and this is true everywhere. [124] In the Anthropocene, we must seek out the pathways of our collective missteps, and to do so we must enter into a paradoxical mental space that is both absolutely unique and simultaneously one with history and nature and whatever other affiliation you choose. Alongside the modern evils of child labor, working poverty, and the total alienation of owners from labor, and of producers from their products, the hoarded wealth of the ruling classes in Europe presented the illusion of insurmountable forces arrayed against the progenitors of an imminent proletarian revolution. Today that same conflict plays out in forms of gender and reproductive rights, the enforced and continued consumption of products that are proven to be harmful, the legal and illegal drug

[123] Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*(London: Penguin, 1993), *460.*
[124] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 91.

economies, and in the many-headed hydra of militarism, energy and economic government policy, and climate change. Marx is an excellent starting point for seeing hoards as a space of power.

Marx assured readers: "the present society is no solid crystal, but an organism capable of change, and constantly engaged in a process of change."[125] He writes in the opening lines of *Capital*, "Every useful thing is a whole composed of many properties; it can therefore be useful in various ways. The discovery of these ways and hence of the manifold uses of things is the work of history."[126] Whereas Locke and other early-modern economists considered price as a direct correlation to utility, or use-value, Marx warned of the iceberg lurking unseen beneath the ripples on the surface of the social sea.[127] The base of the capital system is not *just* the hoarding of wealth, but the fetishism of commodities: their glimmering, symbolic qualities. Fetish-value is the value beyond utility that stems from the labor, time, quality, rarity, and socio-cultural significance of individual objects: status, prestige, power, order, freedom, and so on.

Symbolism makes objects comforting, as each carries the assurance that it will *say* or *do* something. We see a hammer and we understand, if we have been taught, the range of actions and uses that hammer could have. This is use-value. We see an expensive car and we understand that the exact utility of that car to bring us from A to B is not the only reason someone buys it. A Ferrari evokes something that a Honda Civic doesn't. Books and films and works of art are unique in that the statement is implicit, but everything leaves a trace. At certain points, Marx sings off the page, and his recurrent references to magic and the metaphysical channel a sensibility that remains relevant in 2020:

[125] Ibid., 93.
[126] Ibid.,125.
[127] Ibid., 126.

> A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties…The form of wood for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness.[128]

By placing commodities in relation to the ultimate signifier, money, an object (and its producer) leaves the neutral equality into which all life is born, toward the rigid structures of a hierarchical society.[129] Money "conceals the social character of private labor and the social relations between the individual workers, by making those relations appear as relations between material objects, instead of revealing them plainly."[130] As a mode of production, the commodity form renders everything equivalent to money, which leaves the owner (or hoarder) of money first among equals in a bourgeois democracy (as well as in a neoliberal suburb, in a slum, in a post-communist apparatchik oligarchy, or wherever else you might find yourself in this world of few alternatives).[131] Under the steady coercion of capitalist political economy, even non-material, abstract qualities such as *honor*, *conscience*, and *freedom* can be purchased at market rates.[132] For this purpose, powerful people and organizations assert dominion over space by expanding markets, wars, and empires, and over time, through waste, arbitrary technological developments, planned obsolescence, forced migration of populations, and forced creation of markets through military intervention. Marx challenged early iterations of "Creative destruction" of existing commons, increased automation of the means of production, industrialization, and deindustrialization. Marx highlights how hoarding of capital allows for the symbolic control of the *terms of fetish-value*

[128] Ibid., 163.
[129] Ibid., 163-65.
[130] Ibid., 169.
[131] Ibid., 169.
[132] Ibid., 169.

within society. Capital is used to exert changes in standards of living, to cultivate powerful relationships, to instill and enforce arbitrary (but deeply ideological and expensive) needs for new classes of citizen consumers, and at the same time ensuring the preservation and continued recreation of alienated underclasses, who are the basis of the economy, continually drawn upon to staff the military and to fill the prisons, to keep labor cheap and pliant, and miraculously, through the collectively unpaid labor of child bearing, unpaid and underpaid human work, and "free" nature, to generate profit. While Marx wrote from the context of London in the mid to late nineteenth century, his works are effective signposts for those navigating neoliberalism in the twenty-first century, wary of the dividing line between the two overarching classes.

In the world of the commodity, money—gold in particular—is the universal marker of value: "Money is the absolutely inalienable commodity, because it is all other commodities divested of their shape, the product of their universal alienation."[133] Marx argues that the social division of labor is such that a producer must continually be alienated from the products of his own labor in order to exchange them for other commodities, or money in particular: "That money, however, is in someone else's pocket. To allow it to be drawn out, the commodity produced by its owner's labor must above all be a use-value for the owner of the money."[134] However, since the price of certain commodities varies according to demand, those with wealth will not choose to keep their wealth in coats, for example, but instead will keep it in money: the most liquid commodity: "In this way, hoards of gold and silver of the most various sizes are piled up at all points of commercial intercourse. With the possibility of keeping hold of the commodity as

[133] Ibid., 205.
[134] Ibid., 201.

exchange-value, or exchange-value as a commodity, the lust for gold awakens."[135] The urge to hoard in a modern sense begins with economy—with survival—but sustains through desire:

> With the extension of commodity circulation there is an increase in the power of money, that absolutely social form of wealth which is always ready to be used. 'Gold is a wonderful thing! Its owner is master of all he desires. Gold can even enable souls to enter Paradise' (Columbus, in his letter from Jamaica, 1503). Since money does not reveal what has been transformed into it, everything, commodity or not, is convertible into money. Everything becomes saleable and purchasable. Circulation becomes the great social retort into which everything is thrown, to come out again as the money crystal. Nothing is immune from this alchemy, the bones of saints cannot withstand it, let alone more delicate *res sacrosanctae, extra commercium hominum* [consecrated objects, beyond human commerce.].[136]

The language of alchemy remains embedded in the capitalist system, and in Marx's analysis the use of religious and symbolic language should not be discounted as simple, prolix discourse. Rather, Marx's analysis of the commodity as the basis of social relations remains a poignant portal into the underlying mystical, symbolic nature of brands, and the illusory and seemingly magical nature by which wealth (through compound interest, exploitation of so-called, 'free' natures) begets wealth, and power begets power.[137] Foucault writes:

> The drop in value of precious metal invoked here does not concern a certain precious quality which it is thought of as possessing in itself, but its general power of representation. Money and wealth are to be thought of as twin masses, which necessarily correspond to one another.[138]

Demonstrations of luxury commodities, rare fruits and animals from the Americas, and the consumption of manufactured goods become one fundamental aim of life in a capitalist society,

[135] Ibid., 229.
[136] Ibid., 229.
[137] Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life* (London: Verson, 2015), 1-8.
[138] Foucault, 184.

but excessive consumption or 'profligacy' could be just as disastrous as excessive miserliness. As David Hume wrote in late eighteenth century in, "Of Luxury":

> The increase and consumption of all the commodities which serve to the ornament and pleasure of life are advantages to society, because at the same time that they multiply those innocent gratifications to individuals they are a kind of *storehouse* of labor, which in the exigencies of the state, may be turned to the public service.[139]

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue (echoing Marianos and Gotsis above): "The liberatory tradition of European modernity…was built in part in opposition to the arrogance of Byzantine power," manifested in the Hobbesian tradition of an absolute sovereign, characterized by Elizabeth I and Louis XIV, but, in the competitive attempt of the bourgeoisie as a class to replicate the power of absolutism through the representative display of commodities as power, they recurrently recreated conditions of chaos for the natural world and for non-monetized modes of Being.[140] It is not only the acquisition, but the *display* and *organization* of wealth that becomes important for those who aspire to the new nobility of capitalism.

As public debates over the virtue of hoarding gold circulated across Europe, a new discourse emerged pertaining to the proper use of commodities, luxuries, and manufactured goods, creating whole new categories of workers and consumers in tandem with national citizens, though these were often not the same people. While some scholars have traced the recent history of hoarders, their focus has remained largely American and Anglo-centric, it has focused on hoarding as a form of individual consumer deviance (even when criticizing that gaze, as in Herring), and most commonly known historical examples of hoarding tend to be rich, white, and publicly

[139] David Hume, "Of Luxury," in *Enlightenment Reader*, Kramnic Isaac, ed. (New York: Penguin, 1995), 492.
[140] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 326.

eccentric. A new range of scholars has shifted to a focus on hoarding that is international and interdisciplinary. It perceives beyond the cluttered living spaces of *Hoarders,* but gaps remain. Rather than a seemingly hidden history, revealed by hoarding authors, the disorder was widely discussed throughout the nineteenth century under various guises.

Some nineteenth century writers held a largely negative attitude toward hoarding, except as a provision against uncertainty or as a means of aiding one's family and society. Primary sources from the nineteenth century help us understand modern forms of hoarding as a *product of* and *a productive force within* industrial capitalism, wherein the increased purchasing, social, and political power of a new middle class engendered a culture centered on money as a universal signifier of wealth and value. These sources demonstrate, far from being relegated to a topic of concern among eccentric philosophers and famous political economists, hoarding was of concern to the general population, at least to the reading public of British and American periodicals. Alongside new orderings of value, of money as both commodity and as representative power, arises the ideal image of "Modern Man," whose sensible stewardship, balance of educated refinement and brute masculinity, between Liberalism and empire, is communicated through his work, and by the people and the commodities he surrounds himself with. As Foucault writes, over the course of the modern era, "wealth becomes whatever is the object of needs and desires; it is split into element that can be substituted for one another by the interplay of the coinage that signifies them."[141] Here especially, definitions depend on the class perspective and moral sensibility one adopts.

[141] Foucault, 175.

In the nineteenth century, for a British coal miner, a tenant farmer in the southern United States, or an enslaved rubber worker in Brazil or the Belgian Congo, hoarding any and all scant scraps of material wealth was an intuitive and pragmatic economic behavior. For a bourgeois industrialist or financier, a flood of commodities cascaded into the home, many the products of newly defined social roles, technological regimes, and political ideologies, while the new tools reinforced the growing impression that white, wealthy Euro-Americans had a 'manifest destiny' to own such things and to command such power. An abundance of increasingly inexpensive manufactured goods—ranging from books to buttons to antiques—coupled with skyrocketing purchasing power, new forms of credit, and a seemingly endless expanse of future market possibilities thanks to the march of Euro-American Imperialism and the devastation of enslaved Africans and First Nations throughout the Americas, the global poor, and indigenous peoples throughout the world. For the very wealthy, hoarding was assumed as a basic quality, here the table turns since the ability to hoard gold, land, people/life, objects of luxury value, collectability, and antiquarian historicity become themselves sigil representations of power. For the working class, hoarding was a marker of pollution, unfitness, and deviance, or at the very least, an indicator of ignorance, backwardness, lack of manners, and lack of faith in modern financial and governmental (or, colonial) institutions. During the nineteenth century, specialists and medical practitioners *noticed* hoarding. They attempted, rather clumsily, to insert it into new categories of biopolitical and medical ordering. Though each deviant must be placed somewhere, as showcased throughout the literature of Michel Foucault, nineteenth century authors struggled to know where to stick the hoarder.

In 1842, author Thomas Frognall Dibdin, published the second edition of *Bibliomania; or Book Madness: A Bibliographical Romance,* having published the first in 1811. The book is not good. Its seven hundred pages are full of lengthy footnotes, and poorly written historical and fictional scenes meant to capture examples of bibliomania, the obsessive compulsive need to read and collect books. I'm sure most historians can relate to being bibliomaniacs themselves, and despite the ponderous length and irritatingly comprehensive style, including lists of rare collections of famous book owners, and moralizing scenes meant to demonstrate both right and wrong forms of relationships to books, historians of hoarding and the literature of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder would enjoy *Bibliomania.* It is an eight-hundred page novel as social critique, coupled with half-page footnotes detailing the history of famous bibliomaniacs, collectors, and dealers.

In a dream where one of the characters was led on a spirit quest after the mystical Guide rubs some aromatic herbs against his temples, the character beheld a vision of the forces that advance civilization through knowledge: first, the leaders of 'the bodies corporate,' second, organizations of formal learning, and finally, asylums and poorhouses for 'educating' the 'afflicted':

> I obeyed, and, within the same city, saw a great number of Asylums and Institutions for the ignorant and helpless. I saw youth instructed, age protected, the afflicted comforted, and the diseased cured. My emotions at this moment were wonderfully strong—they were perceived by my guide, who immediately begged of me to consider the manner by which epidemic maladies were prevented or alleviated, and especially how the most fatal of them had been arrested in its progress. I attentively examined the objects before me, and saw thousands of smiling children and enraptured mothers walking confidently 'midst plague and death. I saw them, happy in the protection which had been afforded them by the most useful and most nutritious of animals! "Enough," exclaimed my guide, " thou seest here the glorious result of a philosophical mind, gifted with unabatable ardour of experiment. Thou wilt acknowledge that, compared with the triumph which such a mind enjoys, the conquests of heroes are puerile, and the splendor of monarchy is dim ! " During this strain, I fancied I could perceive the human being, alluded to by my guide, retire apart in

> conversation with another distinguished friend of humanity, by whose unwearied exertions the condition of many thousand poor people had been meliorated.[142]

Dibdin saw obsessive knowledge acquisition as the dangerous overgrowth of civilization's virtuous development of knowledge. Socially-responsible accumulation of ideas and items was a mark of English civilization, but for Dibdin, the pursuit of learning for curiosity's sake or for the sheer love of books took on eerie characteristics. While he paid lip service to the Christian God throughout his text, he placed his faith in mythical and idealized "Man" for the improvement and preservation of civilization, particularly those leaders of 'bodies corporate.' In the hands of the Englishman, whom Dibdin described as, 'the most nutritious of animals', it would come naturally to heal the wounds of those too poor and ignorant to do this for themselves. Dibdin's sentiments would be reiterated by social moralizers and religious evangelizers on both sides of the Atlantic, throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

On October 6, 1837, a contemporary serial novel, *Mechanics' Children; or, Hints to Agrarians,* was published in newspapers in the United States by *Waldie's Literary Omnibus*. It was a series of moral lessons of bourgeois respectability, prescribed for different genders, proper forms and manners for bourgeois children to follow during interclass relations, between spouses, and towards children and the poor, including the manner of appropriate charity, bodily hygiene, and object relations. In Chapter 11, "Acquisitiveness—Its Uses and Abuses," the anonymous author wrote painfully flat, cardboard characters, Mother and Father White, who confront Jane,

142 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Bibliomania; or Book-Madness: A Bibliographical Romance* (London: Henry Bohn, 1842), 475.

their youngest daughter for having "too great a fondness for hoarding up things."[143] They wondered whether this was a flight of whimsy or a sign of blossoming charity: "may be she is hoarding up things to make a present to her little friends."[144] They worried that she was behaving below her station, befitting the children of country farmers, but not the urban middle-class. In the story, when Mother confronts Jane—being left with the task of managing the domestic and emotional sphere by her *rational*, *industrious,* and *emotionally-void* "man-lord" husband—Jane replies confusedly, "I am sure you have taught us to be frugal and careful, and to save up our things." One can hear the callow, Dickensian mew of the child's character: a placid recipient of parental wisdom. Mother replies:

> I have, Jane, but I wish all things done in moderation. There must always be some good motive for hoarding up a thing. There is an old proverb which says, 'keep a thing for seven years and it will come to use.' Now, this is a very good advice to those who are wasteful, and throw things aside because they are not wanted at the moment. If this rule were always observed, the house could not contain all the things that would accumulate in seven years. I am sure you have not, to my knowledge, used this pair of scissors in a twelvemonth; and if some poor person had it, how much good it might have cut for itself.

The author outlined the normative position an upstanding bourgeois citizen should have towards objects. As Mother chastises Jane for keeping (gasp) *three* bodkins, despite her sister asking for one the day before, Jane falls at her mother's feet, begging forgiveness, crying: "I could not see a thing without wanting it." Jane claimed that she did not share with her sister out of greed, but out of shame: if she had opened the drawer to give her sister a bodkin, she would reveal her secret cache of curiosities. The author specifically used this example of an ideal bourgeois household,

[143] "Mechanics Children,; or Hints to Agrarians, Chapter XI, Acquisitiveness," in *Waldie's Literary Omnibus, News, Books Entire, Sketches, Reviews, Tales, Miscellaneous Intelligence* (October 6, 1837)(1;40)[Accessed online: American Periodicals Database], 1.

[144] Ibid.

not to speak to a family like the Whites, but to instruct 'mechanics', or working laborers and the poor, on how to properly speak to their children, to encourage socially desirable 'up-classing' behavior, and to avoid physical discipline in lieu of education. Mr. White, who "had a great desire to accumulate wealth, but only to provide against want, and to benefit others" only appears in the beginning of the story, to vocally permit his wife to choose the appropriate manner of disciplining and educating their daughter and managing their home, and again at the end, to both give the final say and to serve as exemplary Liberal consumer, only seeking gain for the greater good.

Several years later, in 1841, a short editorial was printed in *The New York Mirror: A Weekly Gazette of Literature and the Fine Arts*, entitled, "Hoarding." The anonymous author wrote of a wealthy man from Iuce, England, a late Mr. Blundell, upon whose death "upwards of twenty-three thousand pounds in money was found in different parts of his house, eighteen thousand (and odd) sovereigns in an iron chest in his bed-room, five thousand pounds in gold and notes in a bureau, etc."[145] According to the author, claimants to Mr. Blundell's will noted this storage of such a quantity of money to be a sign of insanity, but the author claimed that "a passion for hoarding may co-exist with (in other respects) a perfectly sound mind," particularly in those "who had so little faith in the stability of government." In, "Anecdotes of Misers", published in the United States in July 1853, the author, described as a wealthy citizen of Marseilles, "regarded by all as an avaricious, griping old miser, whose whole life was devoted to the hoarding up of gold."[146] Upon opening up the man's will, the executors discovered a letter in which the man claimed his hoarding

[145] "Hoarding" in *The New-York Mirror: a Weekly Gazette of Literature and the Fine Arts (1823-1842)*; Jan 9, 1841; 19, 2, p. 11.

[146] Merryweather, S.F., "Anecdotes of Misers," in *The National Magazine; Devoted to Literature, Art, and Religion (1852-1858);* July 1853; 3, 1; p. 43.

urge had stemmed from a desire to build an aqueduct for the city's poor, whereas another self-described miser was reported to have said, "my parsimony enables me to bestow more liberally on charity."[147] Thus the wealthy man gradually assumed a position of hoarder-in-chief, just distributor of the social product, and protean predecessor of trickle-down economics.

Against this self-congratulatory tendency among the bourgeois, authors such as Reverend Thomas K. Beecher published damning critiques of so-called, Christians, who—aside from whatever pittance counted for charity—considered it moral and desirable to hoard money and wealth. In a scathing editorial in 1886 titled, "Money and Hoarding,"[148] Beecher asked:

> What would Jesus teach if he had twelve bankers and business men in a room together? He certainly would not say, 'Lay not up to yourselves treasure upon earth, where moth and dust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.' For they could answer: 'We are not laying up anything. We are using all our money in our business. That's not laying it up. We have no hoarded values.

He argued that men could honor Christ with generosity and charity, but nonetheless capitalism's culture tended toward inciting competition among neighbors, creating a zero-sum, xenophobic world of winners and losers in place of a reciprocal community: "Take heed…ye busy men, who never hoard, but keep things moving. What is this thing you call making money? What is it but power among men? Power to buy and pay for! Power to hire and profit by another's work!" He outlined specifically modern forms of hoarding done by capital: hoarding of land and property to impose rents, and hoarding wealth in the form of large cathedrals, universities, and institutions meant to serve the greater good, but actually serving only the class interests of the bourgeoisie:

147 Ibid.
148 Beecher, Thomas K., "Money and Hoarding," in *Christian Union (1870-1893)*; Jan 14, 1886; 33, 2; American Periodicals, pg. 18.

> The hoarding now is not of money, but of power; a mighty power for good or for evil. In such a day, enfeebling luxuries lift up under us like cushions, and fluff us softly like downy beds, and we are in danger again. We are hoarding, not using! And when all the people are united in finance as one man, and from governor to bootblack are mindful of pay in money, take heed! …for the whole State has gone into this hoarding—wasteful hoarding—unwise hoarding. Any costly thing (1) owned; (2) not used by the owner; and (3) not allowed to others to use is hoarded. And whenever or wherever a man falls into this bloated unwisdom, he will lose spring, faculty, faith, hope, and the vision of god.

While a rich person could attain the means to do good works, there was no guarantee that the same money would not be used to crush recalcitrant laborers and social democrats. His focus was not on money or luxury goods themselves, but the power those things represented in the eyes of those who wielded them and in the eyes of those who suffered at their hands.

In the later part of the nineteenth century, in phrenological journals, hoarding was defined variously as "profligacy" if a person could not stop acquiring. They were misers or spendthrifts if wealthy but cheap, a packrat if poor. Phrenologists attempted to locate hoarding within a certain region of the brain, called 'the organ of Acquisitiveness' by one such pseudoscientist: "All habits, as far as we know, leave their impression on the physical or cerebral organism." In an anonymous article criticizing a publication by phrenologist Alexander Bain in 1884, he wrote, "the function of Acquisitiveness is a real element in the constitution of man…Some are greedy and avaricious for mere trifles, which have no value in themselves, and do not exalt those who possess them in power or influence." According to the author, however, there was little distinction between that and the hoarding of the wealthy: "There is no real necessity in the retention of many things which the wealthy retain. The love of power, the necessity of existence, ought to weigh equally with all

classes, yet we find a vast difference between men in the hoarding capacity."[149] Another phrenologist, George J Manson wrote more clearly within the idiom of bourgeois Liberalism. In "Thoughts are Things," Manson argued that, by making poor choices in regards to objects of desire, the poor actually *attract* the conditions of their existence, and that the means of rising above want comes from simply, not wanting: by mastering "the silent power of the mind." The poor, therefore, were responsible for themselves: "Your forces are your daily, hourly thoughts. If you put those thoughts or forces in one direction, they will bring you health and the good of this world to use and enjoy, but not to hoard…If you think poverty, you put out an actual force to attract poverty." The author made a distinction between depraved, ignorant hoarding by the unwell (poor), and that of the implicitly sane rich: "Mere hoarding brings nothing in the end to him who hoards but pain and trouble. One of the secrets of the kinds of finance is that they know when to rid themselves of possessions on seeing how those possessions can be of no farther use to them. Mere hoarding is not business." The author prescribed a change of attitude as the first way of bootstrapping oneself out of mental and financial despair, evoking the starry-eyed apologetics of neoliberal economists in the twenty-first century: "Live in mind in a palace, and gradually palatial surroundings will gravitate to you. You must not envy and growl at people who are better off than you are, because the growling is just so much capital stock taken from the bank account of mental force." Manson's outlook toward normative object relations informs also how New Yorkers reacted to the Collyer brother in the 1940s, whose willingness to live among immigrants, people

[149] "A Metaphysician's Analyses Analysed: Philoprogenitiveness, Acquisitiveness, and Secretiveness," in *The Phrenological Journal and Science of Health* (78, 4; April 1884)(American Periodicals), 193.

of color, and the poor allowed an apparent 'social pollution' to seep into their otherwise sanitized air of bourgeois respectability.

This conceptual split between good and bad hoarding would only widen in the coming decades. In 1902, in an editorial titled, "Encourage the Boy's Hobby," a Mrs. Wheeler of Salem, Massachusetts encouraged readers to see hoarding as proper, healthy, and masculine behavior:

> The majority of boys, however, turn to collecting, the hoarding instinct being to the all around boy as natural as breathing. It grows with him; with his first trousers he is content to carry in the three pockets only a modest collection, but later, especially upon arriving to the dignity of vest and jacket, with seven additional pockets, the hoarding instinct assumes much vaster proportions.[150]

Mrs. Wheeler wrote, "the hoarding instinct is to be encouraged," because it will discourage both effeminacy *and* brutishness, encourage industriousness in the accumulation of more and greater quality items, and serve as fuel for imagination and scientific curiosity. The author was delighted that her son hoards quartz crystals and mineral samples, because, "All of us can recall childhood friends whose playtime occupation have in the way been the germ of a successful career." The trappings of bourgeois sociability (vest, coat, occupation) sprang from a fascination with the accumulation of desirable objects.

A shift occurred in the criticism of economic hoarding *by* the poor, in attempts by financiers and institutions to 'recover' unbanked currency in colonial India, Africa, and among the working class. A 1910 editorial in *Banker's Magazine* decried the fact that, "Tremendous sums of gold and silver are known to be hoarded in India, and but little use is made of these metals by the natives as a basis for bank credits, as it is the custom with more advanced nations." The Indian population is

150 J.W. Wheeler, "Encourage the Boy's Hobby," in *New York Observer and Chronicle (1833-1912)*, March 20, 1902; 80, 12; American Periodicals, pg. 381.

"entirely devoid of all banking facilities," with the agricultural population, "which practically is the Indian population," prefers to hoard money in the home, particularly in the form of silver and gold jewelry that can be worn by women. This form of investment was literally unreadable to the white, British author, who sees it as a vain and wasteful use of money, belying a lack of faith in the institutions of Liberal modernity and ignorance, thus justifying the paternalist stewardship of a colonial magistrate. The author cited that, over the course of the thirty-two years preceding 1902, a sum of 356,324,000 British pounds-worth of gold and silver had entered India through trade, had been hoarded, and remained unbanked. The author insisted, "It is obvious that if that vast sum had been laid out in enterprise it would have immensely improved the condition of the people; whereas, hoarded mainly as ornaments, it served no other purpose than to gratify feminine vanity." He evoked not only colonial hubris, misogyny, and white supremacy, but also a lack of nuance in understanding divergent forms of making economic gains and investments.

While beyond the scope of the present study, other authors have shown how the British used the international commodity value of local currencies—cowry shells in East Africa, for example, to artificially inflate prices to serve British economic domination of existing markets and supply chains, but as Jane Guyer writes in *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa*: "The convoluted history of the western institutions and practices that have created the monetary experience of others is largely erased."[151] The result of European contact was the sudden and rapid devaluation of currencies held in private hoards in East Africa and elsewhere. In such an environment, if local currencies became unstable, finding the most stable one—usually a metallic standard—would become the most sensible place to keep one's wealth. Concern with the

[151] Jane Guyer, *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2004), 15.

'unbanked' hoards of the developing world was not limited to British India, but formed a major part of the colonial framework throughout Africa and much of the rest of the world touched by Anglo-American imperialism, including British colonies in Africa and in the American Midwest.

In a 1908 article published in *The New York Observer and Chronicle,* "Hoarding Money An Evil Thing," the author argued that, to keep any quantity of money out of circulation prevents the great vital forces of the economy from flowing: "The hoarded dollar is dead stuff."[152] The author demonstrated how hoarded wealth welcomed robbery and murder, whereby even a modest stash of wealth could bring ruin on a family or a town: "Not only has he made the dollar a worthless thing, but he had made it a danger-breeding thing."[153] The safest place for money, the author argued, was in a bank. To withdraw one's money during a time of financial crisis or currency devaluation was a breach of trust and a lack of faith in society: "There is an ethical phase of hoarded money that is worth considering. The man who takes his money from the bank destroys the very confidence which is part of the basis of trade. If a man will not trust his banker whom will he trust?" Granted, this author did not live through the Great Depression of the 2008 Financial Crash, and he hasn't had the benefit of watching *The Big Short*, and clearly his house wasn't repossessed by Wells Fargo, but he makes a poignant linkage in equating the concept of faith—both in terms of trust and in terms of divinity—with the concept of hoarding: "The thing is to show faith in affairs by faith in the fountain head of credit, the bank:"

> The miser hoards his money. The man who loves the gold for its own sake, who revels in the imaginary power it gives him, in the riches he thinks he possesses, runs his hands through the shining yellow coins at midnight and is happy. But he is selling his soul. This

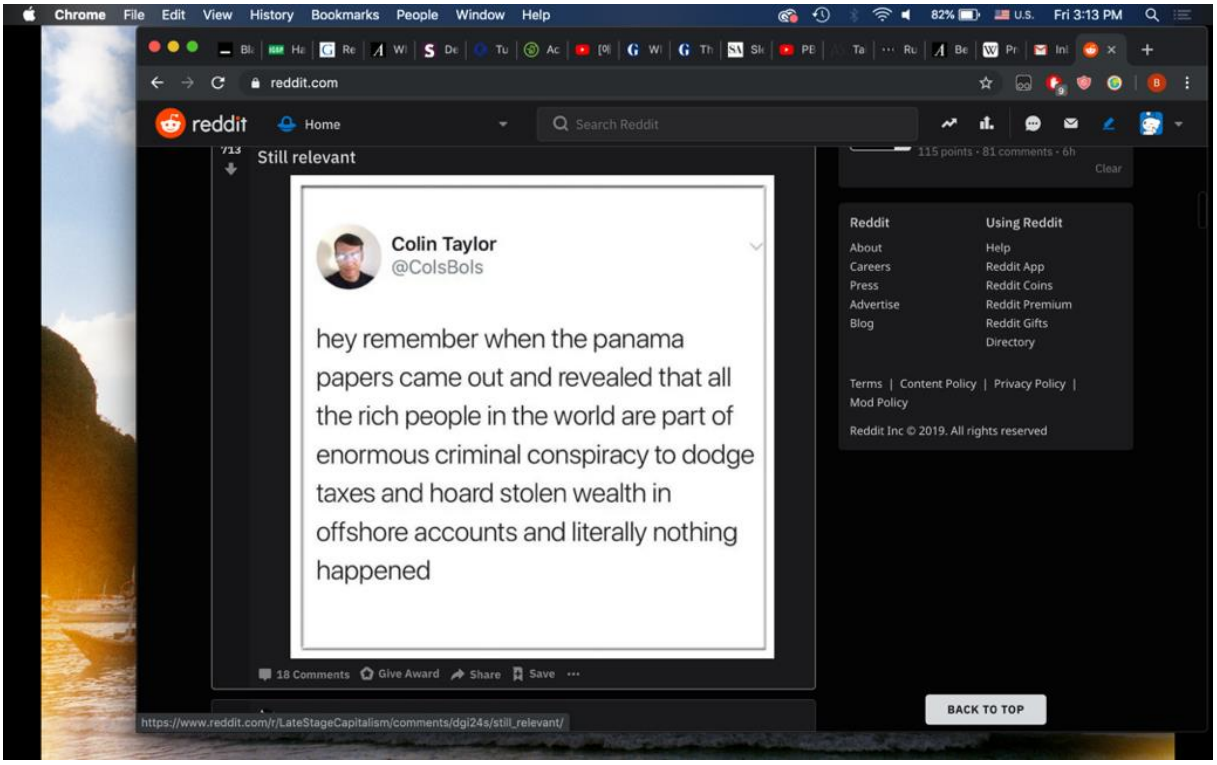
[152] Charles W. Stevenson, "Hoarding Money An Evil Thing" in *New York Observer and Chronicle* (May 28, 1908; 86, 22; American Periodicals), 701.
[153] Ibid.

> is an unholy love. Money is only worth what it will buy, and mark the term, what it does buy. The miser's gold buys nothing, helps no one, harms everyone, and takes the man's soul from trust and love for his fellowman to the mean selfishness that gives nothing to anyone and spends nothing for self. To hoard money is to tempt the soul to become miserly. It is to educate the man in meanness. It is to make out of the glorious intellect and the gentle heart of a man a monster of unrighteousness and greed that cares naught for suffering and has no thought of the other men who toil and try.

The author's enchanted beliefs towards banks, notwithstanding, he is less focused on the micro-hoarding of Indian or Midwestern American farmers than on that of the penny pincher. Whether large or small hoards, with advent of modern banking and international finance, we see a distinct shift in the literature of hoarding wealth and gold in particular. Banks are chosen as the preferred hoarders of wealth in much of the world, because they provide, in the perception of their clients, a more secure means of hoarding than maintaining exclusive ownership over ones' wealth. As demonstrated by the recent history of the Panama Papers, and the many unpunished crimes that led to the 2008 financial crisis, the security offered by banks is itself tenuous, depending on who you know.

Marginal Misers

The present ubiquity of borders as a historical and rhetorical mode of inquiry, particularly at the intersection of discourses like human migration, climate change, political stability, and economic inequality, provides us with an opportunity of seeing a border zone or threshold space between legitimate and illegitimate object relations. There can be boundaries between people, between states, regions, forms of currency, and normative ideas.



Internet meme, reddit.com, 2018

As Jane Guyer writes, the only way to study competing and unequal forms of historical competition between economic models, "is on the borderland, looking in both directions. So instead of an encompassing theory, I work outward from the most characteristic generative element on both sides, namely the expectation of gain: within Africa, across the interface, and all along the transactional chain."[154] "Marginal gains," in Guyer's work refers both to the propinquity of colonial and capitalist actors to attach themselves like lampreys onto the soft belly of existing supply chains and reciprocal communities globally, such as in oversea transit routes between India and the Middle East, or between Swahili speaking ivory traders and in-land merchants and hunters who used cowry shells as their major currency for centuries before the British arrived.

[154] Guyer, 17.

Dense webs of trade and affiliation were unwoven and recycled, often by funneling support into existing ethnic and political conflicts, or creating them where none had existed. Marginal gains are also the ways in which people live in these littoral spaces between hegemonies, or at the edges of one. From the perspective of Gustave Peebles, hoarding is difficult to study, since *everyone hoards*: "that is, everyone hopes to set aside some money in the event of a rainy day. If a hoard is, in the end, simply unused capital, then we can follow Marx in saying that this sort of dead capital is the obligatory, dialectical counterpart to living capital."[155] Much of the work on hoarding disorder by psychologists and therapists has been remarkably obtuse toward social, economic, and political actants behind hoarding behavior, though Peebles and several other scholars have recently tied hoarding to larger histories of American consumer culture, colonialism, neoliberalism, and Empire.

Hoarding indicates the persistence of older, deeper forms of social life, and forms of symbolic *relating through objects* that the current diagnostics of hoarding do not adequately explain, and which hint at the persistence of deeply felt *spiritual* and *emotional* modes of being. In *The Gift*, anthropologist Marcel Mauss wrote that, for the Maori of Polynesia and New Zealand, "the bond of law (*droit*), a bond occurring between things, is one of souls, because the thing itself has a soul, is of the soul."[156] In *Inalienable Possessions* and "Inalienable Wealth," Annette Weiner continues to develop Mauss' thesis by analyzing *keeping-while-giving* practices in which objects create a metaphysical bond, linking giver and receiver, even after one has left or died.[157] Weiner

155 Gustave Peebles, "Rehabilitating the Hoard: The Social Dynamics of Unbanking in Africa and Beyond," in *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* (84, 4; 2014), 597.
156 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Expanded Edition* (Chicago: Hau, 2016), *72.*
157 Annette Weiner, "Inalienable Wealth," *American Ethnologist* (1985), 211.

focuses on objects whose symbolic and social value come from being *kept out* of circulation. She argues, "Keeping...is primary as the means for achieving wealth that not only expresses a person's or a group's identity, but concentrates that identity into a symbol of immortality."[158] Objects are rooted in the cultural and spiritual practices surrounding life, birth, death, marriage, harvest, and changes in power.

In "The Matter of the Unfetish: Hoarding and the Spirit of Possessions," Sasha Newell develops an engaging thought experiment, comparing the use of ritualistic fetishes in traditional magic/medicine practices in West Africa with the use of storage units in North America in the twenty-first century. Newel critiques the diagnostics of Hoarding Disorder as remarkably short-sighted. She writes, "Given that the disorder is officially defined as 'the acquisition of and failure to discard possessions regardless of the value others may attribute to these possessions,' many if not most Americans deserve the moniker as hoarders."[159] If we are going to study hoarders, why not also study so-called 'purgers' who cannot help but throw *everything* away and to keep nothing of sentimental value.[160] She writes, "Fetishism and hoarding merge as practices that grant things an overpowering agency over the person who is supposed to master their 'possessions.'"[161] She urges readers to disavow the dichotomy between person and object, "to reveal the act of possession as more of a negotiation between people and materiality, in which sometimes the thing possesses us, even as it is 'possessed' by the spirits of forces we cannot control."[162] Katie Kilroy-Marac

158 Weiner, 224.
159 Sasha Newell, "The Matter of the Unfetish: Hoarding and the Spirit of Possessions," *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* (4, no. 3, 2014), 186.
160 Newell, 187.
161 Ibid., 188.
162 Ibid., 188.

writes about the economies that have sprung up in response to hoarding, such as professional organizers and specialized dishoarding companies. Interestingly, some professionals use a combination of amateur ethnography coupled with pseudo-psychological counseling and outright magical thinking to get people to divest of their hoarded goods.[163]

Newell's thesis dovetails with the theory and methodological approaches outlined in Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*, particularly in his discussion of the politics of subaltern histories. Chakrabarty argues that Western historians and those trained within the Western analytical episteme, must cease dismissing whole categories of human experience as (pejoratively) spiritual, superstitious, or irrational, but rather to transcend the language we have been trained to use to interpret difference. We should look past practices of fetishization as 'misrecognition,' and instead to analyze the social practices which develop through and around objects.[164] He writes:

> One historicizes only insofar as one belongs to a mode of being in the world that is aligned with the principle of 'disenchantment of the universe,' which underlies knowledge in the social sciences (and I distinguish knowledge from practice). But 'disenchantment' is not the only principle by which we world the earth. The supernatural can inhabit the world in these other modes of world, and not always as a problem or result of conscious belief or ideas.[165]

Chakrabarty's postcolonial approach is oddly appropriate for negotiating world-views pervading psychological diagnosis and hoarding in the West following the disastrous fallout of

163 Katie Kilroy-Marac, "A magical reorientation of the modern: professional organizers and thingly care in contemporary North America," in *Cultural Anthropology* 31.3 (2016), 442-7.

164 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton, 2000), 106-07.

165 Chakrabarty, 111.

deindustrialization and Neoliberalism, and through this analysis, we can see how *the colonial* took root in former epicenters of capitalism such as Detroit, Michigan or Worcester, Massachusetts.

In, "Rehabilitating the Hoard: The Social Dynamics of Unbanking in Africa and Beyond," Peebles suggests that one of the main challenges for capitalist markets is to induce people to bring their capital, however, meagre, into the bank, instead of allowing it to 'languish' in 'economic hoards.'[166] Rather, "it is not so much that Africans are refusing to store economic value for the future (a classic function of a bank). It is that they are not always choosing formal banking mechanisms in which to do so."[167] Peebles argues that hoarding should be considered rational from the perspective of a person saving his or her capital under the mattress or in assets such as building supplies for an addition to a home to support a growing family, for example. In a racially segregated state for example, one might be restricted from formal banking measures, or in a failed state, none might exist. Peebles argues that hoarders might be doing multiple things by keeping their capital unbanked, while Guyer suggests: "The production of gainful margins in economies that do not have effective state and bank disciplines cannot be concealed by official definitions that divide and merge phenomena for their own institutional purposes."[168] In West Africa, many prefer 'indivisible' carriers of wealth, particularly cattle, which allows wealth to be kept in a form where it cannot, like cash, be dispersed and diluted among expansive networks of kin in varying degrees of need. In the case of Gambia, "the word for 'cattle' is literally 'reserve'."[169] In other

166 Gustave Peebles, "Rehabilitating the Hoard: The Social Dynamics of Unbanking in Africa and Beyond," *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* (84, No. 4, November 2014), 595-96.
167 Peebles, 595.
168 Guyer, 18.
169 Ibid., 602.

cases, construction materials, food, water, cigarettes, or seeds may be carriers of wealth in a situation wherein inflation and currency devaluation are a very real threat.

As Peebles suggests, we should be wary of labeling hoarding behavior as *irrational*.[170] To do so risks ignoring social, gendered, political, racial, and economic realities underlying a behavior that, while seeming odd, also seems to haunt even the most ardent minimalist's make-up drawer, tool box, car trunk, attic, or computer desktop. We not only have an unending stream of clutter, waste, and detritus passing through our hands each day in the complex dance of simply *being* in a consumer society, nonetheless living in a large city or a developed suburb. We save for the future if we can. Both rich and poor hedge their bets, choose ways to invest in themselves and their social circles: in mutual funds, in marriages, in education. To simply have a savings account turns most of us into hoarders, only to varying degrees which, might be difficult to label as such, precisely because of the hegemonic standards of global capitalism, in which they might appear as highly rational, self-interested behavior.

Peripheral Economies and the Cult of Money

In *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, economist Karl Polanyi cited examples, also used later by Mauss, from Polynesia and the Trobriand Islands to denote the absence of individualized hoarding as an indicator of a social economy, which he saw as the antithesis of the English-American market economy based on private property, contract, and enclosure, which had been exported globally through Imperialism and re-enforced by Fascism:

[170] Ibid., 609.

> The Trobriand Islands belong to an archipelago forming roughly a circle, and an important part of the population of this archipelago spends a considerable proportion of its time in activities of the Kula trade. We describe it as trade though no profit is involved, either in money or in kind; no goods are hoarded or even possessed permanently; the goods received are enjoyed by giving them away…. Yet this complex whole is exclusively run on the lines of reciprocity. An intricate time-space-person system covering hundreds of miles and several decades, linking many hundreds of people in respect to thousands of strictly individual objects, is being handled here without any records or administration, but also without any motive of gain or truck.[171]

Polanyi saw that the modern state form, and its extensions commerce and colonialism, was increasingly able to exert dominance, internally and externally, over disparate and diverse populations through trade:

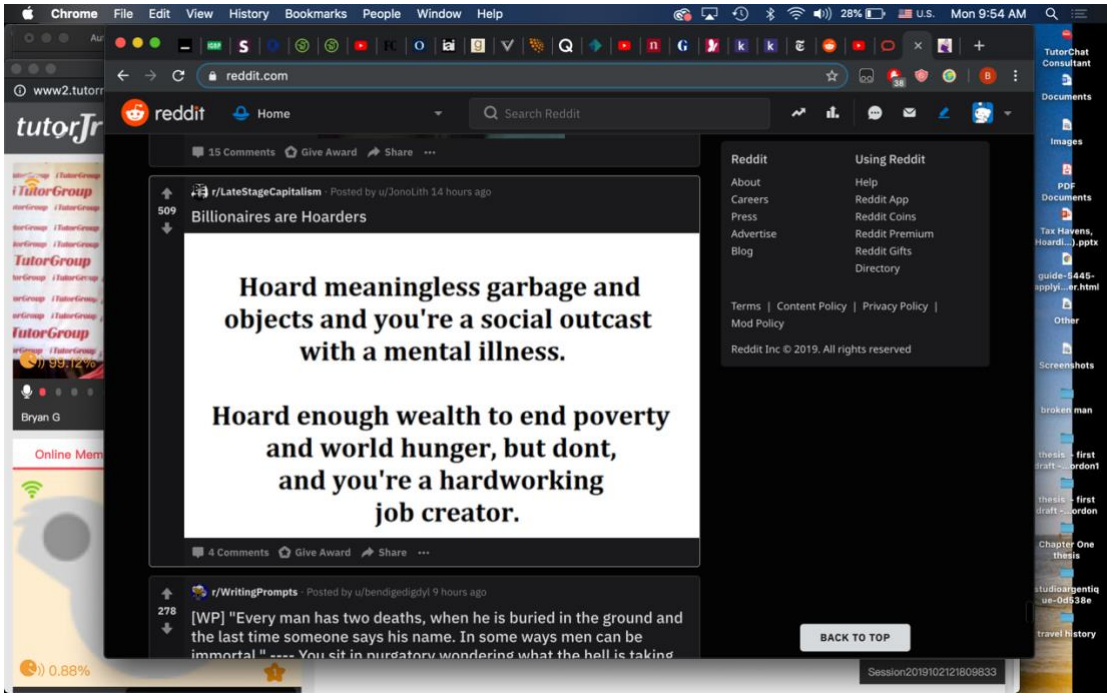
> Politically, the centralized state was a new creation called forth by the Commercial Revolution which had shifted the center of gravity of the Western world from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic seaboard and thus compelled the backward peoples of larger agrarian countries to organize for commerce and trade. In external politics the setting up of sovereign power was the need of the day; accordingly, mercantilist statecraft involved the marshalling of the resources of the whole national territory to the purposes of power in foreign affairs. In internal politics, unification of the countries atomized by feudal and municipal particularism was the necessary by-product of such an endeavour.[172]

By thus determining, diverting, and obstructing flows of strategic goods to isolated industrial laborers and distant colonial territories, the West forced much of the world to drink from its tainted chalice:

> Economically, the instrument of unification was capital, i.e., private resources available in form of money hoards and thus peculiarly suitable for the development of commerce. Finally the administrative technique underlying the economic policy of the central government was supplied by the extension of the traditional municipal system to the larger territory of the state.[173]

171 Karl Polanyi, *The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon, 2001), 52-53.
172 Polanyi, 69.
173 Polanyi, 69.

From the time of Locke, market economy had grown exponentially through fundamental changes that had been used to modernize Europe, to spread the secular religion of capital throughout the world through corporation, contract, war, slavery, and Christianity. Regular shocks and crises notwithstanding, it was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that crisis became the prevailing condition of humanity on Earth, reaching its zenith in the mid-twentieth century. Indicators are strong that climate change and future recessions will further exacerbate these trends. This state of crisis is significant for the study of hoarding, as I personally believe that hoarding stems directly from the pervasive sense of disaster and chaos which market economy *needs* and *creates* in order to thrive. From the perspective of capital, little has changed since the Byzantine Empire, except that the instruments whereby capital may be hoarded have reached a point of extreme hegemony.



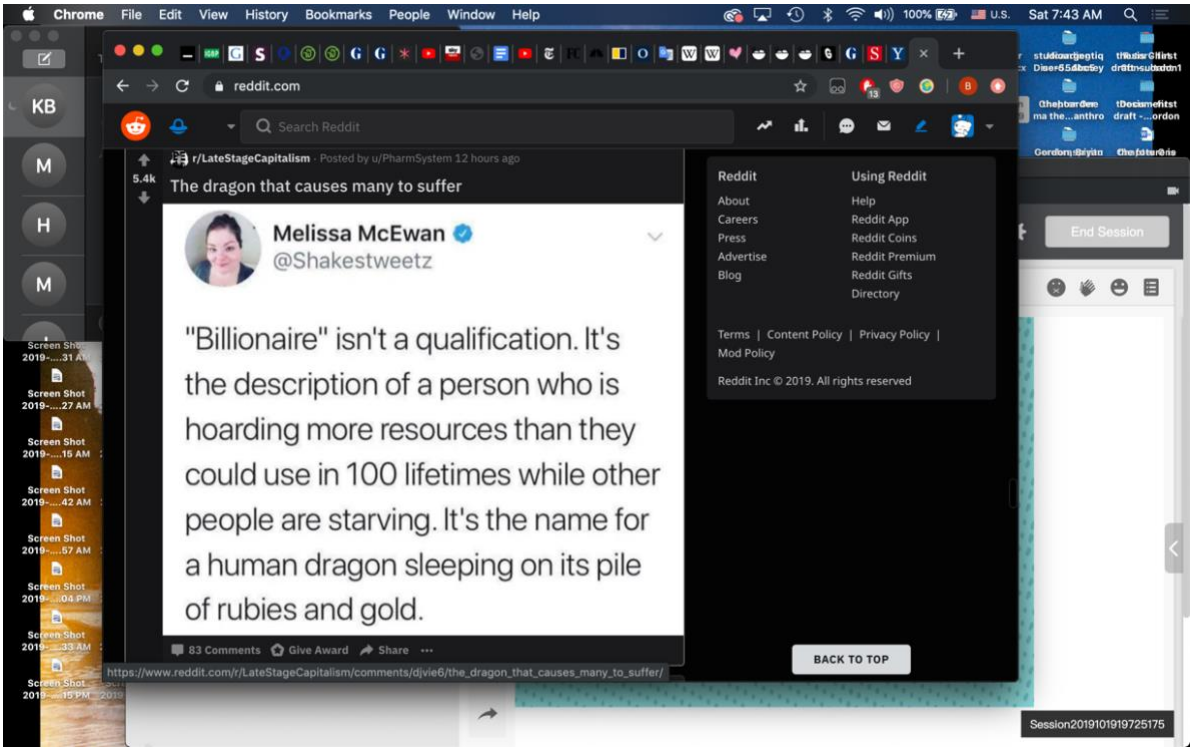
Internet meme, reddit.com, 2019

In much of the world, local banks, credit unions, and large financial corporations are chosen as the preferred hoarders of wealth, because they provide, in the perception of their clients and shareholders, reduced personal liability and a more secure means of making investment:

> To further manage future risk, banks in most countries maintain a connection to national central banks, which themselves maintain gigantic reserve hoards of liquid capital. Living in the anarchist world described by the international relations paradigm known as 'realism', central banks are like small-time individual hoarders – they have no one else to trust outside themselves. They cannot alienate their planning for tomorrow to some other institution, for there is no formal infrastructure in which they could bank; in this very precise sense, the Federal Reserve Bank of the United States is, quite ironically, unbanked – that is, while all of its member banks are required to lodge a portion of their own hoard with the Federal Reserve, the Federal Reserve itself has no other bank in which to place its own cumulative hoard. Almost everyone claims that central banks are the 'lenders of last resort', but they retain this capacity only because they stand as the hoarder of last resort.[174]

This is not a reassuring thought. Considering the emergent history of tax havens, and the role of global financial institutions in shaping national political discourses, it would seem that the hoarders of last resort are stepping up their game. Fortunately, historians, journalists, therapists, and political scientists continue to shed light on potential paths toward resistance and the formation of enduring social identities that may evolve in opposition to capital hoarding.

[174] Peebles, 607.



internet meme, reddit.com, 2019

The history and economic impacts of tax havens, regulatory havens, ships of convenience registries, and other taxation avoidance infrastructure is, on one level, nebulous due to the profusion of jargon surrounding these industries.[175] Some states specialize in one service, while other zones offer layered degrees of secrecy, ease and speed of transactions, low regulatory oversight in terms of labor standards, occupational safety, and environmental accountability, double-residency requirements that allow a resident of one country to have a company established in another, flag of convenience registries, whereby most of the world's shipping traffic is registered in countries other than where the owner of a particular ship might be a resident taxpayer.[176] Special

[175] Vanessa Ogle, " Archipelago Capitalism: Tax Havens, Offshore Money, and the State, 1950s-1970s," in *American Historical Review* (Dec 2017), 1448.

[176] Nicolas Shaxson, *Treasure Islands: Uncovering the Damage of Offshore Banking and Tax Havens* (London: Palgrave, 2012), 13-18.

Economic Zones (SEZ) and Export Processing Zones (EPZ), exemplified by the southern-Chinese cities of the Pearl River Delta or the border region of southeastern U.S.A. and northern Mexico, where export-duties are suspended for companies producing components for say, Apple or Ford, which will then be shipped north for the US market, where they pay zero import duties. This allows certain products to be stamped, "Made in America," even if only the final stages of assembly are done within the U.S. border. Panama is a tax haven and a shipping registry. The Caribbean Islands of the British Commonwealth are tax havens with direct ties to London, as are Switzerland and Ireland. Luxembourg, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Mann. The Cayman Islands and Swiss banks might come to mind first when thinking of a tax haven, where drug dealers, terrorists, and Ponzi schemers funnel their illicit funds. The conception dissolves, however, as the greatest users of tax havens are large global corporations, who do so through shady, mendacious, but nonetheless legal means. These distinctions between so-called, 'treasure islands' and the glass towers of international banks in global megacities further disintegrate when, right at the heart of the global financial system, the two largest tax havens by volume of funds and daily transactions are the City of London and New York City.

Tax havens emerged from the ashes of crumbling European empires, whose rearguard action to preserve hegemony in the developing world eventually yielded to formal independence and the establishment of nation states, but these events also reshuffled domestic politics in Europe, as migration patterns shifted along post-colonial trajectories, and a broad swath of white, colonial *emigrés* repatriated to Europe with their racist ideologies, but *not* with their money, which was variously stationed in shell companies and ghost accounts throughout the tropics—the formerly colonial states remaining vital to the preservation of economic power. This history is a crucial link

between the end of formal empires and the current period of neoliberal hegemony in which we live. Changes in the global financial system, driven by European and American intellectuals, business leaders, politicians, and conservative economists such as Milton Friedman, Alan Greenspan and Frederick Hayek, would devise international means to insulate capital from the progressive tax systems of individuals Keynesian welfare state and from the nationalizing regimes of newly formed post-colonial states in Africa and Asia.[177] During the uncertain transition period after empire, the 'hoarders of last resort' used the offshore world as a bridge between two forms of sovereignty. As political scientist Ronen Palan writes:

> The offshore economy is the product of this bifurcation of the sovereign realm, and it is proving an ingenious device to reconcile two apparently incompatible trends. Instead of confronting the state directly, the more mobile and yet traditionally heavily regulated sectors of the economy…are relocating to relatively unregulated realms that present themselves as external to the state.[178]

This might happen between independent nation-states, or within them. Palan's work situates the first modern tax haven in Switzerland, though, despite the myth of Swiss banking's foundations in the flow of illicit Nazi money out of the Third Reich, secret bank accounts were invented "to protect Swiss bankers from prosecution by other states."[179] Contrary to the belief that tax havens emerged in the nineteen sixties in response to rising tax burdens, Palan's argument parallels the intellectual history of neoliberalism itself as a concern with the stability of currency, inflation, and militant labor following the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the collapse of the German

[177] Ogle, 1438.
[178] Ronen Palan, *The Offshore World: Sovereign Markets, Virtual Places, and Nomad Millionaires* (New York: Cornell UP, 2006),, 3.
[179] Ronen Palan, Richard Murphy, and Christian Chavagneux, *Tax Havens: How Globalization Really Works* (New York: Cornell UP, 2010), 107.

post-war monetary system, and the rise of redistributive, New Deal social welfare policies following the Great Depression.[180]

Proponents of Neoliberalism have tried to trace a lineage of such zones back to the free ports of the Roman Empire, though both Palan and Professor Patrick Neveling refute this ideologically charged premise. Palan argues that, before the twentieth century, an antecedent to tax havens in Europe was the casino built by Prince Charles of Monaco in 1869.[181] During the second half of the nineteenth century, individual US states competed with one another in a 'race to the bottom' in State taxes, which led to the establishment of New Jersey and Delaware as preferred locations for business headquarters due to their low-taxes and lax-labor standards compared to their larger neighbors (most major American credit cards have their home offices in Delaware).[182] Palan writes that in the early twentieth century, Swiss cantons competed among themselves, led initially by the impoverished Canton of Zug, near Zurich, modeling themselves on the competition between U.S. states.[183]

Beginning with JP Morgan, Carnegie Steel, and Standard Oil, international corporations intensified this process. Extractive industries remain some of the principle clients of regulatory havens where environmental protections are often nonexistent.[184] Patrick Neveling cites Puerto Rico as the first Export Processing Zone, tracing a link between discourses of development and post-colonial continuities of Empire. Puerto Rico's significance cannot be overstated, Neveling insists, since it was its model which guided post-colonial relationships throughout the world

[180] Ibid., 107.
[181] Ibid., 108.
[182] Ibid., 108-9.
[183] Ibid, 111.
[184] Ibid., 109-11.

between European states and former colonies, rich in raw-materials and labor power, but hamstrung by centuries of genocidal violence, political repression, and forestalled infrastructure, usually at the hands of those now offering deals for 'investment', 'development,' 'infrastructure', and 'aid'. During the 1930s, consulting companies such as Arthur D. Little Inc., used development as a means of bringing much-desired mainland capital to the island colony. In exchange for business, Little and other developers were often granted 'virtual suzerainty' over the territorial concessions, blurring the lines between sovereignty and citizenship, or between king and CEO.[185] On one hand, continued relationships with New York, Paris, and London were vital to cash-starved post-independence states, often themselves reeling from some internecine conflict fueled by the Cold War superpowers, but on the other hand:

> The plight of former colonies and the continuing prosperity of former colonizers continued after decolonization because the price that former colonial power paid for imports of raw materials from former colonies did not reflect the gains that manufactured goods would fetch when sold to countries that produced the raw materials.[186]

During the Cold War, the development of tax havens entered what Palan describes as its third and present stage, wherein the management of capital hoards in such 'zones of indifference' forms the bedrock of our present, seismically turbulent, socio-economic terrain. No longer dominated by colonial powers, tax havens are standard practice for global corporations, and as revealed in the Panama Papers, for most of the wealthiest global citizens, and in turn for many smaller investors whose investment portfolios shift according to the purchasing patterns and private deals of the wealthy. Even international organizations such as the United Nations, the International Monetary

185 Patrick Neveling, "Free Trade Zones, Export Processing Zones, Special Economic Zones and Global Imperial Formations, 200 Bce to 2015 Ce, in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism,* Ness and Cope, eds. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 4.

186 Ibid., 5.

Fund, and the World Trade Organization legitimized and molded 'structural adjustment' programs on this model since the 1990s.[187]

Vanessa Ogle's "Archipelago Capitalism: Tax Havens, Offshore Money, and the State, 1950s-1970s," offers the first substantial work on tax havens written by an academic historian. Echoing Soviet dissident author, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, Ogle offers a stepping stone toward a history of the ethereal infrastructure of capital in the twenty-first century. Her work serves as an excellent companion piece to Quinn Slobodian's *Globalists*, because both demonstrate how the proponents of 'free-trade' used government and international laws, organizations, and ideological institutions to craft a legal world in which capital may move across national borders as easily as smog, shaping international relations and domestic politics within nations in unprecedented ways, prompting links with existing historiographies of deindustrialization, neo-fascism, and climate change. Ogle demonstrates how tax havens are a key to understanding the means by which post-colonial, post-imperial, neoliberal dragons encased their hoards in the face of formal dissolution: "the emerging offshore world replaced empire's unevenness with another variety of lumpiness."[188] This was not the natural ebb and flow of market forces, nor was it a shadow world, populated solely by the criminal underbelly:

> Archipelago capitalism was the product of concrete, conscious, and deliberate government decisions and support, most typically pushed by lawyers, accountants, former diplomats and politicians who were now engaged in business, and former spies and people with ties to intelligence services acting at the behest of business groups as well as in their own interest. It was a regular and integral rather than exceptional element of twentieth-century liberal-democratic capitalism.[189]

[187] Ibid., 6. Ogle, 1452.
[188] Ogle, 1432.
[189] Ibid., 1433.

The history of tax havens reveals the methods by which, to quote Quinn Slobodian, "the neoliberal project focused on designing institutions—not to liberate markets but to encase them, to inoculate capitalism against the threat of democracy, to create a framework to contain often-irrational human behavior, and to reorder the world after empire…."[190] Free-market economists like the Mont Pellerin Society in Europe, the Chicago School of Economics and the Libertarian Movement in the U.S., and their political champions such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, who advocated a worldview in which government's only role was to aid—and then promptly step out of the way of—business interests, funding police and middle-class educational institutions, while divesting from local industries, outsourcing well-paid manufacturing jobs and taxable income to more pliant hosts in the developing world, eager as Ireland for even a fraction of Google's tax revenue. This process prompted a 'death-match' to the bottom in the value of international labor standards, wages, environmental regulations, and social services.

Slobodian demonstrates how, contrary to their rhetoric about minimal government, neoliberals employ *maximal* government regulation to ensure zero interference with the flow and use of capital.[191] The inheritors of this legacy have profited by their own insidious argument that the shift toward this 'most-advanced' form of market economy was the inevitable, natural flows of market forces, while a culture of militant secrecy maintains a virtual wall of contempt. Ogle estimates that around eight percent of global wealth is currently sitting in some form of tax haven, representing a $7.6 trillion in untaxed assets, and though all authors admit that estimates are tentative at best, due to the anonymity and confidentiality of services offered, Ogle surmises that

[190] Slobodian, *Globalists,* 2.
[191] Ibid., 13.

the U.S. loses $130 billion annually to the offshore world.[192] Out of fear of the global spread of Communism and against the expansion of New Deal social welfare programs throughout the developed world, tax havens "allowed a certain aspect of neoliberalism to thrive before it came fully to the fore with the end of the Bretton Woods system."[193] The hoarding that took place in tax havens during the Cold War built a model for the future. Following the 1970s, capital was in a suitable position to repatriate those methods back to the industrial heartland of the social welfare states, mobilizing against organized labor with the sole purpose of guaranteeing a stable currency, curbing inflation, ending full employment and cutting social programs. Without first understanding this world of tax avoidance and offshore finance, we cannot understand the origins of the billionaire class, the financial crash of 2008, the intractable inaction on a coordinate response to climate change and global inequality, the euphoric and disastrous rise of the international megacorporation, the sudden rise of China, or the monstrous ascendancy and creative accountancy of the current President of the United States.[194] Along the hidden spider webs of offshore money flows, however, this global tapestry appears less baffling than at first glance, and I suggest that here we may return to diagnostics around Hoarding Disorder to apply it beyond objects, in a strictly tactile, aesthetic, experiential, or physical sense.

In "Hoarding Disorder: It's More Than Just an Obsession – Implications for Financial Therapists and Planners," the authors argue that childhoods of abuse, experiences of war, extreme poverty, intergenerational trauma, and parental modeling must be taken into account for

[192] Ogle, 1435.
[193] Ibid., 1446.
[194] Ogle, 1447.

hoarders.[195] Texts on hoarding commonly reference the Great Depression and the Second World War as the starting point of a parent or grandparent's hoarding behaviors, forming relationships with money, objects, and between people that could extend intergenerationally. While deemed self-evident from the perspective of consumers, I suggest also that we should analyze financial institutions, international corporations, and the wealthy strata of society from the same vantage point. Perhaps capital, however insulated from the horrors of Stalinism, complicit with defeated Nazism, was also traumatized by World War II, by the New Deal, and by waves of civil war that swept the formerly colonialized during the Cold War. In the self-conscious knowledge of how close it came to be subsumed in the embedded liberalism and social welfare state, capital grew the offshore world at the peripheries of capitalist states to encase private hoards for good. David Harvey writes that "Keynes held the 'coupon clippers,' who parasitically lived off dividends and interest, in contempt and looked forward to what he called 'the euthanasia of the rentier' as a necessary condition for not only achieving some modicum of economic justice but also avoiding the devastation of those periodic crises to which capitalism is prone."[196] For a hoarder, whether of power, money, privilege, or junk, the gathering begins through the perception of an advantage to be gained through having a future store. We are all hoarders, but each cache reveals intricate details about the interconnected subjectivity of individual human beings dancing in commodified murmuration. Every single thing came from somewhere else, and was kept for reasons which only the keeper can accurately describe, and even then, often only fleetingly.

[195] Canale and Klontz, 46.
[196] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford, 2005), 187.

Through human beings, objects speak. They shape outcomes in relationships between our self and our environment regardless of best or worst intentions. As money is perhaps the most impactful of commodities, we should consider hoarding specifically in relation to money more carefully. This chapter has aimed to demonstrate how the meaning of the term 'hoard' has long been part of the moral discourse of human societies, and it was once used to discuss excess concentrations of wealth that worked against the common good. In the face of the social and environmental upheavals being caused by structural inequality and massive imbalances in the concentration of wealth, I suggest reviving this notion and raising the question, "Who is allowed to hoard?" This chapter attempted to recharacterize hoarding as more complicated than the clinical definitions of the American Psychiatric Association would have us believe. Clinicians and therapists and professional organizers should understand certain recent developments in the scholarship of hoarding coming from outside psychology departments. While historians and economists have begun to retrace hoarding, as a form of deviant consumption, a form of collective economic behavior, and as a psychological category in need of work, much of the use of the word 'hoarding' remains focused on the behaviors of wealthy misers, synonymous with Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge. In Herring's so-called, object panics, in response to public hoarders or 'material deviants' such as the Beales or the Collyer brothers or Andy Warhol, the truly shocking fact for 'respectable' readers was that people of means would live such eccentric lives, living in squalor, if not in poverty (considering that the Collyers owned a Manhattan mansion, while the Beales lived in a home on Long Island). It is only recently that the behaviors of the super-rich seem to escape either the clinical or the moralizing gaze, whereby in the same hour of television watching, one could wander through Bill Koch's wine vault, or stream an rerun of *Keeping up with the*

Kardashians or *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* alongside *Hoarders*, *Doomsday Preppers*, or *Storage Wars*. In the language of mass media, the difference between a good hoard and a bad hoard is taste, money, and proximity to power.

Within the examples presented here, we see how, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, formal norms were established for economic behavior, international business, commodity fetishism, advertising, and personal object relations. In traditions of Socialism, Marxism, Methodism and Baptist Christianity, public condemnations of social and collective hoarding by the very wealthy continued, particularly against those 'misers' who refused to make their capital circulate for the mutual benefit of society. From this perspective, corporate stewardship, state-capitalism, and compound interest are forms of hoarding that gradually became *permissible* from a social perspective, evolving gradually into prime methods of attaining political hegemony. Some historians, journalists, therapists, and political scientists continue to shed light on potential paths toward resistance and the formation of enduring social identities that may evolve through resistance to capital hoarding. Hoarding may be read as a form of investment, made sensible by an economic actor's location at the peripheral space of an economy, whether monetarily, culturally, or geographically, or due to their reliance on illegitimate or devalued forms of currency and value hoarding, such as cowry shells, an ounce of heroin, or a pouch of gold coins sewn into a mattress. According to Peebles, even small hoards serve a broadly social, financial function, as the reserve basis of small loans and local-network microfinancing, allowing for reciprocal economies to flourish even during times of global or institutional precarity.

In the term, "peripheral economy," I play with Guyer's concept, "marginal gains," but I suggest, 'Peripherality' better captures the quality of borders crossed, defended, and transgressed,

whether transnational, transpersonal, psychological, or ontological. It suggests how individuals make lives worth living for themselves and their loved ones, each according to their means, after finding themselves occupying the wrong side of such tenuous and shifting boundaries. An analysis of power that rests solely on any single binary of inequality (gender, age, class, race) risks missing how these binaries intersect across borders, within families, and within individual subjects. Here is the essence of Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?": each person has a subaltern within, and whether we wear that identity as a garment or hide it beneath a shroud of status, identity, and mind, it can suddenly make itself felt when disaster strikes in the form of a death, a plant closure, a sudden illness, or war. A peripheral economy alludes to the processes that made those spaces profitable, compliant, and fundamentally necessary to the 'mainstream' economy.

In *Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict*, geographer and activist Phil Neel writes that dispossessed human beings living in a plurality of material, historical, and political circumstances are united by, "The commonality that comes from being increasingly surplus to the economy, though also paradoxically integral to it."[197] One of the great injustices of colonialism, deindustrialization, and social inequality is that those assigned the role of deviant, poor, criminal, patient, et al., tend to have their historical uniqueness circumscribed by arcane economic statistics and by the seemingly inevitable processes of change in which all try to survive, which Carolyn Kay Steadman calls, the "refusal of a complicated psychology to those living in conditions of material distress."[198] Having lived at such an edge, both as a privileged, white, middle-class, American male from Massachusetts, and also as a working-class, queer, radical,

[197] Phil A. Neel, *Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018), 13.
[198] Carolyn Kay Steadman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1987), 12.

recreational drug user with multiple Humanities degree and a mountain of debt, I can stand in this place and look both ways, attesting to the simultaneous privilege and precarity that can exist in a single household. Having stood there, where one can see hoarding as a long, transnational, historically complex behavior and mode of discourse, moving from macro to micro, I will bring attention now to the intimate, but opaque waters of my own memories, using stories of my family to suggest how hoarding may be adaptive, financially-oriented, intergenerational, simultaneously mainstream and uncanny at the same time. A physical memory signature, a tangible ghost.

Chapter 2: Tool, Toy, Treasure

If I were trying to bring somebody new into the house, I would try to describe it with as little stuff as possible, so that they think it's more of a regular household that doesn't have so much stuff in it, because none of the stuff is practical. None of it is helpful or useful in any way. It's all just stuff that's been acquired, like old magazines or old books. There are broken things and stuff that will never, ever be fixed, but for some reason is still there. Umm…if I'm being truthful to someone like you….

-Danielle Clark, my sister, oral history interview

In the attics of my life
Full of cloudy dreams; unreal
Full of tastes no tongue can know
And lights no eye can see
When there was no ear to hear
You sang to me

I have spent my life
Seeking all that's still unsung
Bent my ear to hear the tune
And closed my eyes to see
When there were no strings to play
You played to me

-Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter, "Attics of my Life"

Home Economics

In September 2018, I arrived at Dad's house to do an interview that he had loosely agreed to do. I had been following him around for the week, trying to work up the courage to present him with the consent form and to explain the nature of the project I was trying to do. I wanted to talk about his life story, but I also wanted to talk about feelings—about hoarding and drinking and our estranged relationship. I didn't want to admit to myself that maybe this was not the right way to unpack so much emotional baggage, nor whether I had bitten off more than I could chew. In all honesty, as an amateur photographer, I have been photographing and recording my Dad for years without his knowledge or consent, observing him, noting how he speaks and his mannerisms, long before my training in Research Ethics. I write fiction and poetry in my spare time, and I have tried to capture his ways of speaking, but now I needed to be clear and forthright in ways that felt threatening and unfamiliar. I felt like I was walking a knife edge through sap, teetering stickily between wanting to bridge a wide gap in communication, to honor the ethics of my profession, to go deep into personal and family histories around which I only had other people's perspectives, to honor the language and culture of my working-class family *and* the literary and academic language I aspire to attain. Most importantly, I wanted to talk about hoarding and addiction without pathologizing my father or making a spectacle out of him. I had resigned myself not to get much out of him. I expected something, but I don't know what. I felt quite certain that there was an industrial past somewhere back in my family history, but I knew that neither my father nor myself were part of it.

His father's family grew up on the far eastern edge of the United States in rural Maine, where I imagine the only jobs revolved around timber, fishing, and tourism, but I didn't know

much, except that my grandfather had ‘made it’ by getting his Masters in Social Work and having a long, successful career. My father did some college, but he dropped out, and now he works as a garbage truck driver—a vital, indispensable service with a steady income—but one that I imagine he begrudges for its lack of glamour. Throughout his life he has worked odd jobs, as a mechanic, a car salesman, and a driver, without long-term benefits, stable, consistent employment, or a union. When I was a child and sometimes now, he evinced a strong work-ethic that remains fundamental for who I am. He once woke me up on a Saturday morning to go shovel an old woman’s driveway. He had met her randomly, and he chastised me as I dragged my feet. I protested, “We aren’t even being paid!” He stopped and told me something to the effect of ‘everything worth doing is worth doing right’, and that sometimes serving another person in need was payment enough. At other times he would chastise me for revealing my age honestly to some ticket-booth attendant at a carnival as he’d try to sneak me in for the child’s price, seeming genuinely disappointed in my lack of guile. Signals were inconsistent.

Sherry Lee Linkon writes about the ‘half-life’ of deindustrialization, wherein residual forms of life and ‘structures of feeling’ persist in communities long after the economic ways of life that once sustained them have drastically changed:

> While many outsiders have created representations of deindustrialized sites, some of the artists and writers whose work engages deindustrialization occupy a middle space. They do not have their own memories of either industrial work or widespread job loss, but they were born and raised during the decades after major closings, and their families and communities experienced both industrial labor and the displacement and disorientation of deindustrialization. Their parents and grandparents have worked in the abandoned mills and plants that they grew up with, but their own memories involve navigating economically-challenged, crumbling physical and social landscapes. If we are to understand the long-term legacy of deindustrialization, what we may think of as the half-

> life of deindustrialization, we must take their representations seriously, not for what they show us about the past but for what they reveal about what the past means in the present.[199]

In the words of Raymond Williams, whose essay, "Structures of Feeling," has played an outsized role in oral and cultural histories of the working class and deindustrialization due to its reliance on "not feeling against thought, but of thought as felt and feeling as though: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity."[200] As one of the foremost early critics of mass-media consumer capitalism, Williams would probably have a lot to say about the solutions to 'aberrant' object relations offered on *Hoarders*, particularly its ignorance of cultural, racial, class, and social determinants to hoarding:

> We need, on the one hand, to acknowledge (and welcome) the specificity of these elements—specific feelings, specific rhythms—and yet to find ways of recognizing their specific kinds of sociality, thus preventing that extraction from social experience which is conceivable only when social experience itself has been categorically (and at root historically) reduced…The idea of a structure of feeling can be specifically related to the evidence of forms and conventions—semantic figures—which, in art and literature, are often among the very first indications that such a new structure is forming.[201]

With my father, I wanted to know what kind of half-life radiated outward from his house, packed so densely that it possessed its own gravity, sending out invisible waves of attachment to me and my siblings.

When I arrived at the white house sitting at the top of a small rise on a side street near downtown Bangor, Maine, I felt instant dread. There were too many cars in the driveway. My Dad knew I was coming to do an interview, but when I walked in, he was two cups deep and yelling at

199 Sherry Lee Linkon, "Narrating Past and Future: Deindustrialized Landscapes as Resources," in *International Labor and Working-Class History* (84; 2013), 39.
200 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford, 1977), 132.
201 Ibid., 133.

his girlfriend. Her adult son sat in the living room laughing loudly to *America's Funniest Home Videos*. Dad was livid. A woman had given him the middle finger while he was driving. "Bitch" is a word I find uncomfortable to say or hear and my dad is throwing it around the kitchen like salt and pepper. When I had asked him months earlier why he didn't like Hillary Clinton, that had been his monosyllabic reply. As he swore, he seemed to relish it, savoring each morsel of contempt oozing from his mouth—the dark, permanent moustache going grey. As usual, he reserved for me a jovial, teasing attitude that, I knew, could become mocking or needling, but only if you revealed something he with which he disagreed, which I tend to never do, to do so obliquely, or with my guard up. He stormed into the room, and he asked, "You want a drink?"

He was blowing off steam. His body language was furious, but not toward me. He likes me. He doesn't raise his voice to me in the way he does—half-joking—toward my siblings or his girlfriend. He always pulled a strong, 'my house, my rules' routine with everyone except me, but it's never been *my* house, except on odd weekends, so his law could weigh heavily on me on long car rides. It held strong symbolic weight, but which I could escape more or less at will. I could out-cool him with silence, though this tactic comes with its own costs, and in the end I only feel my frustration, caught in adolescent reactive patterns, which I like to imagine, when far away, that I have gotten over. This has been understood since I was a teenager, so our fights were always somewhat attenuated. He restrained himself. He would order me to the car, and we would drive to the supermarket in silence, buy a melon or a squash, and then drive to the firing range and shoot at it with rifles and handguns. America.

Dad can be mean, though. When I hear him vocalizing contempt, I remember the times when I felt disregard lacing words directed at me. At the moment, I arrived at his house to do the

interview, he was smiling, despite the yelling. He was happy to see me. He wanted someone to drink with, and he gets nervous and excited around me because I don't visit often enough. He likes to drink light beer, homemade wine, and sugary Manhattans. I'm pretty sure he drinks every day, which worries me. After several years of drinking less and less, I am wary of drunkenness in myself or others. I don't blame alcohol or judge anyone for exercising their right to do as they please with their bodies, and the night before, my sister and I had drank beer during a three-hour long interview in which we discussed my father, our memories of childhood, and living in a hoarder's home as a child. In my young adult life, however, nearly all of the darkest moments were shared with alcohol, and I have seen enough of alcoholism in my father and his parents to be wary of growing into the same pattern, though to be totally honest, I am a lifelong and heavy user of marijuana, which my father detests and has never tried. In my experience, almost any substance can be safe and enjoyable in moderation and in the right context. I have never felt physically or emotionally worse though, than the times where I drank excessively, and no drug has ever had such an impact on my emotions as alcohol, so I try to be very careful with it now.

In my hands, I held consent forms that I had written meticulously, conscious of this impending moment, conscious of him. Like a knight in chess, I was trying to obliquely dance through his defenses. As I wrote the ethics forms, I had thought, How can we talk about hoarding without focusing on those terms, but including them in the form in the interest of informed consent? At that moment, in his kitchen, I was asking myself, How can I bend the living hell out of these rules? I honestly considered forging his signature and making something up. He took one look at the document I held, and without even putting on his reading glasses, I could sense his whole being shrink slightly away, which was a common response among all my family members,

who all expressed reservations about signing any forms in order for us to talk. In the brief second standing there, I felt him go to a place of emotional silence, where I doubt that anyone has ever followed or if we could or—if any of us were able to—if we would even be willing. I can't.

Part of me collapsed inside, but I felt a guilty sense of relief. Pulling himself away, he offered again a drink. "No, thanks," I said. I tucked the consent form into my bag where I had my audio recorder and my computer. Without speaking, we had acknowledged that no interview would take place. I realized then that by 'dinner', which I assumed to be dinner between me, him, his girlfriend, and one or two of my siblings, would involve Amy's whole extended family. I have heard from my siblings that they are nice, but heavy drinking, vociferously pro-military, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ+, etc. wonky-ass Christians. All my siblings have bailed. This is a personal nightmare. We are going to the sports bar at the end of the street because they have drink specials.

Amy's family is cordial and welcoming, but listening to their stories feels like watching the show, *Cops*. They regale me with stories of alcoholism, spousal abuse, addicted ex-husbands, and many wayward children, cackling laughter in dry snorts, smoking cigarettes and drinking Bud Lite draft, with the wispy hair and parchment-paper skin of aging drinkers. Amy's dad had a career in the Army in the sixties and seventies, serving in the artillery in Vietnam, and he is nearly deaf. At the end of the evening, I waited with my dad in the car as Amy and her son helped her father walk out of the restaurant to his car. He seems like a coarse and bitter old vet, but in seeing their family together, each person caring for one another I felt guilty by the prejudicial eyes with which I was watching them. They loved each other. They walked very slowly. Her dad can hardly walk or hear, but he still drives which infuriated my father. As they walked, we sat waiting in Dad's car,

while he fumed that Amy's father shouldn't be driving anymore, "He's too fucking old! You'll never see me get that way." He shook his head with disdain.

His contempt for his potential father-in-law was weird enough, but he had also spent almost six months of the previous year on workman's comp after falling at work and breaking a shoulder blade. I could see how he was also getting older, despite being resilient and physically strong. He was cared for by his girlfriend, and though they seemed to fight often, she made his house more livable—at least for herself and for him. He is estranged from his siblings and his mother has dementia. His adult children share a love for him torn by the shitty things he has uttered over the years, and by a guilty tendency to avoid him much of the time. As I watched Patrick guide his grandfather patiently to the car, I wondered if I would be there to do the same for my father. At the end of the night, before going to bed, my dad fixed himself nightcap, and even though I declined when he offered, he brought me a large water glass filled to the brim with sweet, homemade wine. I said, "I'm all set." He waved it in my face, batting his lashes to silently insist that I just lighten up and take it, but when I rejected his offer a third time, he darkened. He shrugged, sat in his chair and gulped down the entire glass before sipping his own over the next half-hour of silently watching TV together.

This felt like a familiar experience: wanting to express something, but shying away. I had seen his contempt practiced and honed against many, and fearful that it would fall onto me in response to something I wanted or cherished, I faked it, receding into my role as grumpy enigma, and in an awkward silence, I ended up pissing him off for something totally unrelated. I remember fighting in exasperation as a child when I told him about the Food Pyramid. He insisted I was wrong. My teacher was wrong. There were four food groups. When I corrected him on the

pronunciation of “nuclear” (not, [nu-kyu-lar]) around age ten, he shouted at me and told me to learn when to shut up. He tells people to shut up often.

On the other hand, much of our time was spent in the car, at Home Depot, on the way to my grandparents’ houses, and it always felt like he was eager to pack in as much parenting as he could in a short time. We would listen to Pink Floyd and drink sodas, sometimes driving off road through the Maine wilderness to camp by spring fed ponds. We would pitch a tent and fishing from a canoe or from the shore, catching our dinner. Dad would keep his beers in the cool water by the edge of the shore in a six pack and he would put my six pack of root beer beside them. I learned a lot from him in our times together. When I was eighteen, I fell in love with a young woman from Quebec. After her first visit to my dad’s, when I called him to ask his opinion of her, his only response was, “She needs a little sun.” After the second visit, when I began floating the idea of transferring to a university in Canada, he took me aside and said simply, “You know, this isn’t gonna work out, right?” After that I didn’t speak to him for two years, and since then I visit only about once a year. Words stick, and they stay spoken, becoming little landmarks of a relationship. With him, I look back and I see a line of unvoiced grievances and solemn, unfulfilled vow extending almost to the horizon.

The next day, I left. I decided to not interview him. I’ve been working on this project for more than two years now, and my dad still doesn’t know about it. I could not bring myself to even talk about the ethical consent form on which I had written the words ‘hoarding’ and ‘painful experiences.’ I felt that pressing him along the lines of his own blind spots and coping mechanisms might break whatever fine balance of strategies and stories keeps his glued-together pieces in place. Alessandro Portelli writes that oral history is distinguishable from traditional, archival, text-

driven history primarily because of the interdependent relationship between the interviewer/researcher, whose questions make a project possible, and the informant whose life *is* the story. In the shift from traditional archival history, "the most important change is that the narrator is now pulled into the narrative and becomes part of the story."[202] I brought myself into this project as a researcher, but also as a son and a brother, which presented unique challenges.

Dr. Hugh Gusterson describes doing ethnography as "deep hanging out", but for me it felt a lot more like tripping down the stairs. I don't relax at Dad's. We sit and watch the TV and he brings he a drink while he barbecues, but it feels claustrophobic. I've never had a room or a place to retreat to, so I sleep on the couch. I get stir-crazy. This translates to poor listening, and a bad interview. Everything annoys me in petty little ways: He doesn't recycle. He describes people casually by whatever half-hearted racial slur loosely describes them. He comments on the appearance of *every* woman he sees. When I was a practicing vegetarian, he would cook chicken or steak for dinner, offering me the meat of a deer he had shot, wrapped in bacon he bought at Walmart. He will waste huge amounts of time by "shopping around", chasing deals on things he doesn't even want or need. While following him during this trip, we spent an hour driving to two different big-box stores to get the best price on a three-pack of men's deodorant—a kind he didn't usually wear.

When I was younger and I could not smoke pot or risk being high around him, it was worse. But that isn't much of a solution, and I can't force him to speak to me in the way I want him to. What bothers me most is that despite everything, I love him and mentally try to defend him to myself, against myself. He rouses in me a slurry of love, pity, humor, guilt, and contempt, that all

[202] Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (New York: SUNY, 1991), 57.

the mindfulness meditation, psychedelics, and psychotherapy in the world can't seem to fully dismantle, because it's all a part of me. I was fortunate here in two regards: first, despite the distance between my father and I, the primary feeling I have for him is pure love. I remain closely connected to him through my siblings, his ex-wife, and our extended family. These people were gatekeepers to family histories that I didn't know, aspects of relationships and family spaces that I was not privy to, and archives of family documents, sentimental objects, and stories. This is itself part of the relationship I have with my father, an overbearing joker, a heroic absentee, mediated and mollified by a dense web of caring, and often, enabling women and children.

Oneiric Objects

With the advent of mass commodity forms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as described above, modern forms of hoarding, such as those depicted on *Hoarders*, began to emerge. The earliest fetishists of mass-produced goods were, of course, those who could afford them, and until the late-twentieth century, hoarding, or acquisitiveness, tended to be a feature of eccentric, bourgeois collectors. The modern phenomenon of collecting is itself a feature of Modernism and a product of the Enlightenment. In "Notes on Book Collecting: Unpacking my Library," Walter Benjamin focused on the visceral pleasure his collection of books brought to him—not the collection itself, nor the process of acquisition, but the practice and the sensation of collecting, seeing his books, handling them, and associating them with memory. He writes, "It is certainly not an elegiac mood but, rather, one of anticipation—which these books arouse in a genuine collector."[203] He divulged the bibliomaniacal relationship the collector has to his objects, but he

[203] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Shocken, 2007), 59.

clarified that it was a means of *ordering through memory* the internal chaos of the mind's comprehension of time:

> If I do this by elaborating on the various ways of acquiring books, this is something entirely arbitrary. This or any other procedure is merely a dam against the spring-tide of memories which surges toward any collector as he contemplates his possessions. Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collection borders on the chaos of memories.[204]

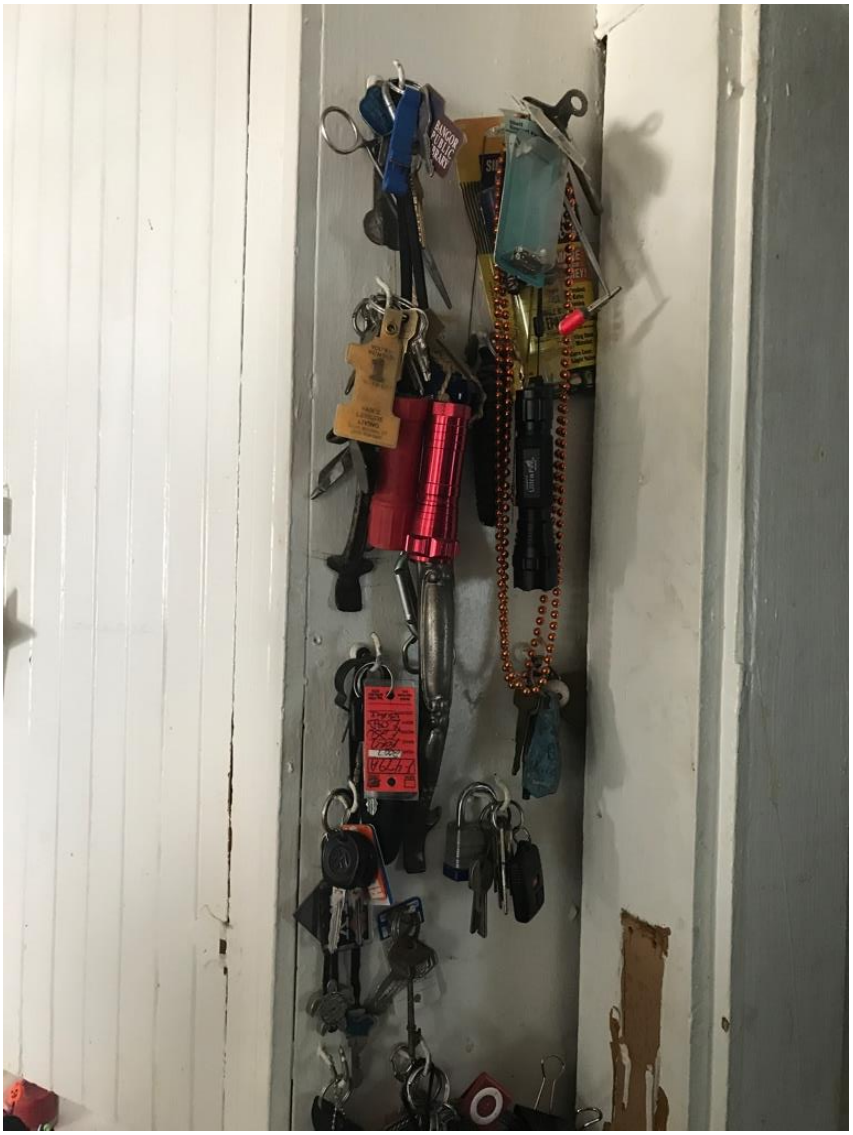
Kilroy-Marac calls objects, "repositories for memory," which, if properly handled, organized, separated from other objects, and potentially displayed, might transform into a collection.[205] Benjamin portrays the sentiment of the moment of acquiring certain books, and he argues that private collections supersede public collections of art, museums, or libraries, because through the owner of a collection one may learn the history of each object or its 'fate,' as he says. Benjamin showcases a fascination coupled with anxiety about the increasing interdependence through which boundaries between persons and objects could be dissipated or dissolved, while the connotations of 'hoarding' gradually changed to incorporate deviant relationships to objects, as well as seemingly aberrant ways of choosing to keep money unbanked.

As a child, I took it for granted that kitchen tables were more like expansive, single-tier shelves rather than vital centers of family life. Repositories for bolts, nuts, screws, power tools, used books, three-month old Halloween candy in a dish shaped like a Christmas tree, unopened second notices for electricity and Visa, framed family photos. The table was a negative space, a singularity that absorbed objects and broke them down, removed their batteries, brought them out of the world of function and assimilated them into a heap: mere presence at hand. It was never

[204] Ibid., 59.
[205] Kilroy-Marac, "An order of distinction (or, how to tell a collection from a hoard)," *Journal of Material Culture* 23.1 (2018), 24-26.

sifted through or sorted out; it was accepted or ignored. When the table was for was eating, you'd shove stuff back out of the way, towards the wall. Carving out a sort of normal. We ate in front of '90s primetime network sitcoms like, *Friends, Seinfeld,* and *The Simpsons*.

The table was one symptom: the basement, the garage, the attic, and the spaces behind chairs, under tables, and inside cabinets were vaults unto themselves, safeguarding disused antiques, the rusting keys of cars no longer owned, or antiquated pornography. The dust was incredible. Most things, such as belt sanders, chain saws, auto-parts, and buckets of paint, all had a utilitarian purpose, reflect the ongoing, single-handed renovations of his house and the upkeep of his three or four cars. While the house was disorganized, much was in some way necessary to the projects that Dad set out for himself. He simply took on so many that they often took years to finish, if at all. Here, I see the American Dream of meritocracy and self-reliance, in tension with the inevitable interdependence and emotional complexity of family life, spelled out in dusty keepsakes and old keys, writ-large but forever incomplete: a dream of home and family and leisure, but also anxiety stemming from particular ways of imagining those same things.



Keys, 2018

As Dr. Christine Walley writes, in response to the fallout after the steel mills that supported her neighborhood closed, whole generations of people raised after World War II, who had expected fair pay and a full time job, for life, with a comfortable pension, who suddenly found themselves "unceremoniously ejected from the American Dream."[206] I grew up in the 1990s, when even the

[206] Walley, 68.

memory of that industrial past, of the thirty years following WWII, had faded into a gloss of nostalgia, second-hand stories, and *Nick-at-Night* re-runs. My parents didn't go to college. Dad's a driver, and my mother supports my step-dad, a machinist who disabled his hand last year in an accident outside work. Growing up with my stepfather, I began work in the same factory where he was shop foreman, shoveling coolant-soaked metal chips into a large dumpster, covered in dirt and sweat. When I was twenty, and about to move to Canada to study, my stepfather lost his long-term job at the shop. They were selling to a company in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, and my step-dad was getting a temporary windfall by training the Mexican workers who were replacing him. His father, the shop manager, was pushed into early retirement with a decent severance, while my uncle, my cousin, several family friends, and myself were all laid off. This was a small-scale story that happened everywhere in the country following the institutionalization of NAFTA, setting up a tinder-box that burst into flames when 2008 rolled around. My grandfathers belonged to the white, middle-class, professional managerial class, but my parents struggled financially. My mother and father couldn't afford their mortgage after he got laid off, and they abandoned my childhood home in 2015. So my class identity is more complex than my vocabulary, my degrees in History, and my taste for vintage records and designer sunglasses might imply.

Dad's choice to *not* attend university placed him in an economic class that his upbringing seems to clash against, belying expectations unfulfilled and unmourned losses. Nonetheless, Dad tried to live up to his father's success. As he has bound himself to a certain inscrutable duty, he expects others to follow his code and his logic, the rules of which fluctuate according to his shifting moods. Following his divorce, his tendency to keep things has seemingly developed into something more family-centered, particularly with the introduction of toys and antiques he aims

to repurpose and sell. He has also started growing cannabis since it became legal. Now, among the buckets of roofing nails, the circular saws, and the 8*4ft. sheets of blue drywall are woebegone, generic framed photographs of giraffes and dead family members scattered across the floor beside the skeletons of fossilized computer towers, the empty cages of long-dead birds and rodential pets, and the frame of a broken, high-lumen, grow-light he is fixing for his grower friend, next to the flayed shell of a remote controlled car whose wires he is soldering, on a tray table shared with a big glass of wine, while he watches TV.

The night before interviewing my father, I asked my youngest sister, Danielle, how it felt to be in my dad's house now that she had moved out, she said, "Claustrophobic." Before that interview, I had sat alone in the living room at his house, with the dog, watching the thickening dusk through the living-room window. Nobody else was home and the television was off, and as it grew dark, I felt so alone in that space that I felt trapped, and I had hurried to Danielle's as soon as she finished working at the coffee shop she manages. When I asked my sister to describe Dad's house, she revealed, as noted in the epigram to this chapter, that her representation of the house to outsiders would vary, depending on whom she was speaking to and whether or not they would actually come over:

> Bryan: And, ugh, if you were walking through the house, could you like close your eyes? You don't have to close your eyes, but could you describe walking into the house.
>
> Danielle: In its current state?
>
> B: Yeah, now.
>
> D: (Laughs)
>
> B: Just imagine someone's not going to see it, and just be as descriptive as possible.

D: If I were trying to bring somebody new into the house, I would try to describe it with as little stuff as possible, so that they think it's more of a regular household that doesn't have so much stuff in it, because none of the stuff is practical. None of it is helpful or useful in any way. It's all just stuff that's been acquired, like old magazines or old books. There are broken things and stuff that will never, ever be fixed, but for some reason is still there. Umm…if I'm being truthful to someone like you….

B: Please.

D: Then I walk into the porch and there's stuff on both sides of me leading from door to door. So I have a narrow path to go from the first door into the second door that actually leads into the kitchen. Once, I'm in the kitchen, again there's a pile of things—mostly mail on some sort of a table or a stand that I'm not sure what it is because (laughs)…

B: That you've never seen (laughs).

D: Because it's so covered in things. The rest of the kitchen doesn't quite have walls at the moment, because Dad tore them down to replace them and is still working on replacing them. He tore them down quite efficiently, but putting 'em back up seems to be a lot lengthier of a task. Turning right into the middle room, there's just so much stuff that it's not even useful as a room. There's a computer there that I'm not sure if anybody has used in months, because of how much stuff there is.

B: Yeah. It's gotten even more…

D: It's the room where the dog is fed, and I feel like that's its main purpose in, at least, any kind of functional way. There's just so much stuff. For a while, they were getting rid of things and moving stuff out of it, so it looked pretty clean for a while, and by 'pretty clean,' I just mean, there was a *wide* strip of space that you can walk on, instead of a *narrow* space.

B: You could use the computer.

D: You *could* use the computer.

B: There was a bird.

D: There *was* a bird years ago (laughs).

B: Andy. (Laughs) I remember multiple birds named, Andy.

D: There was one bird named, Buddy.

B: Okay, Buddy. I hate birds as pets. I like birds, but I just don't like birds in places as pets.

D: He was a cockatiel and he was delightful. He was much more a guard dog than any dog we've ever had.
B: He was chirpy.

D: He was lovely. I loved him. He was friendly.

B: Continue through the house.

D: Once you're in the middle room, you can turn left to go towards the downstairs bathroom that has no sink. It has a microwave…

B: (Laughs).

D: …that's still in the box. That was intended to go on top of the stove, but not until my dad got the vent thing to go on top of the stove, so that hasn't happened yet, even though it's been a decade.

B: (Laughs).

D: Umm…there's more piles of things. There's the cat box in there, along with a machine that looks like a vacuum cleaner, but it's to take wrinkles out of clothes somehow?

B: Oh, yeah, like a steamer.

D: Yeah, and once you go past that bathroom, if you go straight, you're going to see what should be a hallway, but that you absolutely could not walk through unless you climbed on top of the piles of things. There's—I don't know what the machine is called. It's the thing where you hang upside down from to work out on. You hang from your ankles, and you can do sit-ups on it, or something.

B: Oh, yeah. I don't know what that's called.

D: I'm not sure what it's called, but we have one.

B: (Laughs).

D: That's never been used.

B: Yeah.

D: That's in that hallway, along with boxes of things like empty wine bottles, stacks of boots, umm…just a lot of stuff that's so random that you couldn't possibly list what it is.

B: It's so old.

D: It's so old. It's so dated. The same thing goes for the middle room. The living room has a little bit more functionality than the rest of the house. It has the couch. It has Dad's chair, the TV, a stereo that hasn't been used for a couple years, so I'm not sure if it works. Umm…but *that's* kept because it used to be a really good stereo. And, when it works, it works really well. I'm just not sure how it does, at the moment.

B: Yeah.

D: Then you go upstairs, and once you go upstairs, you hit another brick wall of stuff. Instead of seeing a wall at the top of the stairs, there's a stack of things. Once you turn a 180 at the top of the stairs, you go to Dad and Amy's bedroom. Outside of their door, there's another bureau that has more stacks of things on top of the bureau. I'm not sure what inside their bedroom looks like, but I'm happy about that, because I'm sure it's also filled with things. The upstairs bathroom is probably the only place that doesn't have a lot of stuff in it, because it's small. It has the claw-foot bathtub…that's broken (laughs). It's been broken for a few years. Hasn't been fixed, and I'm not sure it ever will be, which is quite sad, because it was a really nice bathtub.

The upstairs hallway has a little jelly cabinet that's not used anymore, because it's just so covered in things that you can't open it. There's stacks of board games and tote boxes that used to have summer clothes, or the Christmas decorations that never went back up to the attic. At this point, now that I don't live in that house anymore, if you go into my bedroom, it's so filled with more stuff that used to be stuff covering that upstairs hallway or the middle room downstairs, that he's just tired of looking at so he stuffed them in my room, because I'm not using it anymore. I'm not sure about Dylan's bedroom.

B: It's pretty clean. Relatively.

D: Is it?

B: Yeah, he keeps it fairly organized.

D: Good. Good for him. I feel like the fear of becoming a hoarder is paralyzing for him.

B: It's very high. We've talked about that a little bit. How does it feel when you go there now?

D: Number one, claustrophobic, because there's so much stuff that it's just hard to move. Tonight, I was sitting on the floor, because there's not enough seating, but that's not because they don't have enough seating. It's because there's a lack of room for seating, because they just have so much stuff (audible sigh).

Show and Tell

As Herring writes in *The Hoarders*, there is no normal way of relating to objects, no standard, no *normal*, except that which has become part of the psychological and culturally-coded order. This order projects a very particular vision into the mind's eye when we hear the word, 'hoarder', as being someone in distress, in poverty, unhealed, unclean, and unwell. My dad's house, on the other hand, may be chaotic, but he works hard and gardens and pays his taxes and invests in the stock market and regularly cleans, etc. Furthermore, he is privy to a complicated and rich inner world that neither I nor anyone can be a complete authority about. Herring aims "to unstandardized these pervasive visions of material life that now inform hoarding."[207] A hoarder's home may be troubling to outsiders or to family, but as anyone who has found an old photograph or a forgotten letter, "one can be troubled by a single object as much as by a thousand of them, and while what looks like

[207] Herring, 17.

hoarding may be depression, so too could be a clean house."[208] A confession is demanded of hoarders, to explain their motivations, to relinquish their deviance, and to be returned to the fold of faithful consumers, but we are not demanding a confession of all hoarders or of all types of hoarders. While they are asked to explain why they keep things, Herring suggests that we are asking the wrong questions, namely, "What counts as acceptable material life? Who decides? …And an often unaddressed question: what if a so-called hoarder takes a liking to her possessions? Accounts of hoarding tend to rely on the presumption of deep anguish. Less is made of the fondness for particular accumulations…."[209] As much as the diagnostic may be used to ease suffering, Sasha Newel writes, "this new definition will also be used to catalogue millions of people as mentally unfit based upon their nonnormative relationship to their possessions."[210] Newell's 2014 article, "The Matter of the Unfetish: Hoarding and the Spirit of Possessions," makes a comparative ethnography based on a comparison between the use of fetishes in West Africa with the sentiments and practices surrounding storage containers and domestic spaces where things are kept out of sight, but cannot be gotten rid of. Newell notes that we have almost supernatural relationships to certain objects.

An object may be a placeholder for a memory, as words like 'souvenir' and 'keepsake' imply. Tools of all kinds work as amplifiers, analogs, and substitutes for human action. Talismans and totems can produce feelings of protection to some and nothing to others, while tchotchkes and trinkets can evoke nostalgia, a supernatural pathos, as when we discover a favorite childhood

208 Ibid., 17.
209 Ibid., 17.
210 Sasha Newell, "The Matter of the Unfetish: Hoarding and the Spirit of Possessions," in *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* (4, 3; 2014), 186.

paper-back or a forgotten, careworn toy suddenly reappearing in another life. In a chapter of *The System of Objects,* Jean Baudrillard analyzes "collecting" as a system of management and control over time, subjectivity, and death. From the onset, he distinguishes between a *utensil*, something which is functional and useful, and an *objet*, "which is the cause and subject of a passion…A utensil is never possessed, because [it] refers one to the world; what is possessed is always an object *abstracted from its function and thus brought into relationship with the subject* [author's italics]*."*[211] While Baudrillard's work focused on 'serious collectors,' whose passion was to collect historical spoons or rare books, his analysis extends to pathologized collectors, as well.

For many, obsessive-compulsive behaviors are coping mechanisms, and in situations such as the loss of a loved one or a violation of personal security, compulsive hoarding appears to be an attempt to build a walled, protected space wherein the subject is surrounded by comfort and familiarity, where all personal needs are met. Baudrillard writes, "Man never comes so close to being the master of a secret seraglio as when he is surrounded by his objects."[212] A loss of power and security is reflected directly in an attempt to fortify the home, the ultimate symbol of security: "Because he feels alienated and abolished by a social discourse whose rules escape him, the collector strives to reconstitute a discourse that is transparent to him, a discourse whose signifiers he controls and whose referent par excellence is himself."[213] The collector, like the storyteller evoked by Alessandro Portelli, builds for himself a filter through which he may experience the world, the unfolding of time, and inevitably death under the comforting illusion of control:

> To tell a story is to take arms against the threat of time, to resist time, or to harness time. The telling of a story preserves the teller from oblivion; the story builds the identity of the

[211] Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London: Verso, 2005), 91.
[212] Ibid., 94.
[213] Ibid., 114.

> teller and the legacy which she or he leaves for the future. In order for the teller to recover himself or herself from time and to move ahead into time, the tale must be preserved. This applies to individual as well as to collective tales: to the myths which shape the identity of a group, as well as to the personal recollections which shape the identity of the individual.[214]

Whether the hoarder is as actively engaged in the *curation* of his objects as a 'serious collector' is not interesting to me. Here I saw an opportunity, to try to *listen* between the lines and to look into that claustrophobic space enclosed by objects, to attempt to differentiate between their solid, collectivized presence as *hoard*, and attempt to see their unique, narrative potential.

As part of life story interviews, I asked my informants to share some of the objects which they had held onto for a long time, gifts they wanted as children, or things they hoped to acquire in the future. I asked them what they thought their possessions said about them, and because of the intergenerational nature of the story-tellers, what those items could reveal about my father. I did this in a clumsy and roundabout way at times, trying to balance my own relationships with these people with my urge to delve to the root of things as a historian. I felt greatly affirmed to hear some of the shared challenges which family members have encountered, not just about hoarding or my father, both of which faded into the background of our conversations, as my stepmother, my grandmother, my sister, my mother, my great aunts, and my uncle related to me their life stories, their memories of my grandfather, and the nature of change they perceived in the United States during their lifetimes.

Against the urge to read these objects in the abstract, as interpretive cues, it felt also necessary to acknowledge that people are often simply busy, exhausted, and in various minor and

[214] Portelli, 59.

major states of need, joy, and distress at any given time, often unable or unwilling to use narrowly gained leisure hours to organize or clean that which has become taken for granted. Despite a certain pastiche and falling hazard, many things are simply not to everyone's taste, and fall more into categories of kitsch or camp, mediated by vulgarity, irony, and distaste, rather than disorder or disgust. An old leather coat or a vintage album, for example, as part of my decently sized collection of LPs, becomes a signal of hip taste, an object of display, a marker of cultural capital, and a social and liquid resource, which somehow gains added value for having old, original pressings of David Bowie or obscure jazz artists and Nigerian high life music. In a place like my father's house or of my mother's house before and after it was abandoned, jumbled together in spaces intended for passage, storage, or sleep, these objects take on a disturbing quality due to their lack of similarity to the things around them, to the reduced functionality of a space, and to the absence of people making use of objects without purpose.

I focus on three broad categories of objects, whose names alliterate pleasantly for a snappy title: tools, toys, and treasure, all objects of utilitarian *and* symbolic value. Each a noun, but also a verb. I could have chosen "trinket" or "talisman" or "totem" or "tchotchke", but I felt these most apt, the least pretentious or culturally appropriative, and the most likely to be used in speech by members of my family. I define "tool" as something that serves a useful purpose, which may be a means of improvement, investment, or gain. A tool in a Marxian sense is anything with use-value in itself.[215] It could be a hammer or a box of nails or a car that carries you to work or a book that educates or informs. It could be a word that has an effect or a piece of propaganda or a tv show (is there a difference?) or a computer. A toy is anything marked by the quality of play and/or desire,

[215] Marx, *Capital,* 179.

and since many of the most pronounced memories come from childhood, I was interested in the kinds of toys and objects of play people had kept, whose use-value derived from their role as signifiers of memory, and which contain within the subjective and affective category of the gift, tending beyond the strictly utilitarian or economic. The symbolic nature of the act of giving and the qualities that objects hold for both giver and receiver bring to light talismanic qualities lurking within the mundane.

"Treasure" is harder to define. These are objects of symbolic, magical, and monetary value, but not necessarily all three. They may be priceless, both in the sense of being of inscrutable but possibly of infinite value. They are objects in which use-value and exchange-value may collapse, but in which some indefinable worth remains. If not displayed as furniture or décor, they tend to be hidden or kept in storage for 'safe-keeping,' and often their use-value derives from their function as something stored, such as a buried treasure chest or a gold ring as the main catalyst of a story. Here is the fetish, the souvenir, the heirloom, the keepsake as well as the sigil, the stamp, the brand, the storage unit, and money. For example, I usually carry a small coin purse with a crystal, a pendant of the Virgin Mary I took from my wife's jewelry-making supplies, and two small Filipino coins. I happened to have the two coins in my pocket when, several years ago, I told myself that I would marry my wife, while tripping on a beach in the Philippines. Every time I run my fingers across these coins, my mind returns to the liquid clouds and the purple sunset and the jagged limestone islands jutting out of blue water like shattered teeth, to the faces of my friend and my future wife in a tuk-tuk whose driver sped over green mountains back to town, to the faces of villagers lit by candle-light during a blackout, to the stall where we bought oranges that gave us all food poisoning that had us alternating between blissful abandon and projectile vomiting

throughout the night. The coins are worth both fifty Filipino Pesos and a priceless, crystalized breath of infinity with my name on it.

The definition of "priceless" is culturally coded in the West to mean a particular thing. In *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones,* a primer of classical Zen philosophy, the author shares an alternative view in a *koan,* a short didactic fable meant to aid in meditation, entitled, "The Most Valuable Thing in the World":

> Sozan, a Chinese Zen master, was asked by a student: "What is the most valuable thing in the world?" The master replied: "The head of a dead cat." "Why is the head of a dead cat the most valuable thing in the world?" inquired the student. Sozan replied: "Because no one can name its price.[216]

With hoarders, Kilroy-Marac writes in her essay on professional organizers, "These objects, some of which have not been actively handled or manipulated for years, stand not just as souvenirs or *aides-mémoires,* but as repositories of deeper memories and expectations that my trigger, like Marcel Proust's madeleine, a rush of past experiences, images, and feelings."[217] To this list of objects I could add others, but I have chosen these, because they're the things I have.

[216] Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki, eds. *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings* (Boston: Tuttle, 1985), 83.
[217] Kilroy-Marac, "Magical Reorientation," 448.

Pocket knife from Dad, 2019

Tools

According to my mother, I was supposed to be named, James Clark, III. She resisted, naming me, Bryan James—a slight acquiescence on her part—though she quipped that *her* grandfather, whom she loved dearly, was also James. My parents split before I was born; they never married. As I told Eliot Perrin in my own life story interview: "They were never together in my experience, and my dad... My dad lived like twenty minutes away in this town called, Chicopee...I would visit my dad's house like every week, every two-weeks… And I was pretty close with both families, but I lived at my Mom's and always lived at my Mom's." Upon hearing her stories over the years, I gradually

learned about how he cheated on her, about how my grandfather's infidelity and divorce from my father's mother changed him: he blamed his mother. Mom told me that she felt that my father was cheating on his girlfriend, also named Sheryl, with her. Before things became serious, he would drive her around and they'd drink and play cards. She only ended it with him when, eight months pregnant and having moved in with him, she found a stash of receipts in my father's boxes for an obstetrician-gynecologist and an abortion. The Sheryl on the forms had a different last name. Like everyone I spoke to, she still finds him funny. She told me how his parents got divorced in the early 1980s, and how he declined acceptance to the business school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to which he has only ever alluded to once, full of wistful regret—around the time he got divorced.

My paternal grandfather's reputation varies greatly, depending on whom you ask. "Conceited asshole," was one interviewee's remark. To others he was dear brother, respected friend, and beloved husband. I had mixed feelings. He had come from a big family at the eastern edge of Maine, and he had made something of himself. He was dedicated to service, particularly to his community, and he liked people to know that. At times, it felt impossible to be authentic around him, not because of animosity, but because he wasn't listening. It often felt like he was waiting for an opportunity to give advice, whether solicited or not. Grandpa could be fun, though. One summer he made a potato cannon out of PVC piping, a barbecue grill ignitor, and a can of hairspray that could launch a spud about two or three feet into the air. He took my cousins, my siblings, and me on frequent trips to the Mystic Aquarium in Mystic, Connecticut, where he was in the Rotary Club. Before my siblings grew up, I would join Dad and Grandpa on ice fishing and canoeing trips. Grandpa even wrote a twenty-page document detailing a canoe trip he took with

his younger brother, Larry, on the Allagash River in northern Maine. He was determined that we all get an education and agreed to cosign our college loans so it would be easier to do so.

I spent a great deal of time with my dad and grandfather as a child, and they took me on deep-sea fishing, ice fishing, and camping trips. We went canoeing and backcountry camping in the throughout New England, driving up rugged logging roads in my father's four-wheel-drive Jeep. In the summer, we would go on boating trips on a small island in the Connecticut River, north of Springfield, Massachusetts. They taught me basic carpentry and auto-working skills, how to swim, how to shoot and clean a gun. My dad gave me his green thumb, and he is a warm and strangely charismatic person, even now. Despite whatever parenting deficits these two men had, I am grateful to them, and I am grateful to my mother, who encouraged and sometimes forced me to maintain a relationship with both of them throughout my life, and she never talked shit about Dad or even told me the truth about their breakup until I was older. She offered me a space to not grow into the kind of austere, emotionally self-censoring man that they were by encouraging me to feel my emotions and to speak with authenticity from a young age.

When Grandpa died in 2017, my sister, Rachel called me and said, "Call Dad. It's Grandpa." When I asked what had happened, she repeated herself, "Call Dad. He should be the one to tell you." I was struck by the solemn formality in her voice. I had applied to the Master's program in History just three months earlier, with the intention of studying hoarding on my father's part, but I hadn't considered it as a feature that extended beyond him into the rest of the family. When Grandpa died, I drove down to Connecticut, to the beautiful home in the woods that he and his wife had designed and built themselves. Throughout the finished basement, the workshop, and two outbuildings with secondary workshops and storage, my grandfather must have owned

hundreds of screwdrivers, dozens of sanders, and multiples of nearly any wood-working or construction tool. There were framed photographs and memorabilia of Superman everywhere, which they collected in celebration of their last names, James Clark and Carol Kent.

My brother. Superman, Grandpa's House, April 2017

We arrived late, and my father and his brother and their partners had been into Grandpa's large liquor cabinet, my sisters and my brother were there. It was the first time we had all been together in the same place for more than fifteen years. We were there for the night. As we sat in the sunken living room, where we had celebrated many Christmases, my father retold a story about my grandfather from his childhood. In some versions of the story, it was just my grandfather and my father, and in others, my Uncle Larry was also there. As Portelli says, "Oral testimony, in fact, is never the same twice. This is characteristic of all oral communication, but is especially true of

relatively unstructured forms, such as autobiographical or historical statements given in an interview."[218] They were out fishing on a lake when the wind came up suddenly and capsized their canoe. They treaded water for some time, waiting to be rescued before my grandfather made the decision to swim for shore. To avoid drowning, he kicked off his boots and dropped his fishing tackle into the lake and told my father to do the same. My father must have been in high school at the time and said that he had just gotten his first job, spending his first paycheck on new boots and fishing tackle, and he refused. He swam for shore with his boots on and his fishing pole in one hand. The punchline of the story is, when he reeled in his pole, he had hooked his father's (sometimes his uncle's) fishing pole before it sank. I remembered his attempt to salvage the shoes that I had tried to throw away. Of course, there is no causal link between the story of the boots and the memory of the stairs, but they reflect a persistent linking of events and the formation of stories in a lifetime or a parental relationship, stories told so often they become part of the micro-culture of the family. The stories shift with the passing of time, retaining a general coherence, but evoking Portelli's words about the *incompleteness* of all oral history work: "Historical work using oral sources is unfinished because of the nature of the sources; historical work excluding oral sources (where available) is incomplete by definition."[219] Here we might add object memories to those stories, to create, if not completeness, then greater nuance and heuristic detail.

In 2012, I had a falling out with Grandpa, and I hadn't been to his house since long before then. I had seen him a couple of times before he died, and by then, I had let go of my grievances. So despite the normal sadness, I felt no major regrets. As I walked through the house, the familiar

[218] Portelli, 55.
[219] Ibid., 55.

smell and lighting brought back a succession of memories, but I was struck by how differently I remembered things. My memories focus much more on the clean, well-lit living room with the wooden stairs and the tall windows look out at the forest through which shimmers the surface of a pond. My memories never returned to the chaotic basement workshop overstuffed with unfinished projects, the several outbuildings stuffed full of half-repaired antique furniture, boxes of caster wheels, and the shells of rusted old cars, boats, and riding lawn mowers scattered throughout the woods around his property like skeletons. A year after Grandpa's wake, I returned to his house to interview his widow, Carol Kent, at their house in Canterbury, Connecticut. The drive from Massachusetts is beautiful: rolling hills, farm land, small, semi-suburban housing developments, and quaint towns with British names nestled among dense forests of oak, red maple, and white pine. Apparently, it has an ideal micro-climate for growing tobacco. I remember Dad speeding down this road to Grandpa's before my decade long lapse in filial piety, and some of the bumps still nauseate me.

Grandpa and Carol designed their house, they bought the land, and they built it, largely by themselves. It is an eclectic design: a single, multi-tiered main floor with two bedrooms and an office, an open kitchen with a counter top island, a large dining room next to a solarium that leads out to a wrap-around deck or down to a sunken, open-concept living room with floor to ceiling windows, a fireplace, a large painting on one wall, and the disassembled pieces of an organ that Carol's father built for a church in Erie, Pennsylvania sometime after the Great Depression on another. Everywhere throughout the house there are skylights. There is a huge, finished basement heated with a woodstove, a second living room, and a large woodshop that, despite Carol's intensive cleaning and decluttering with the help of numerous others over the past sixteen month,

remains quite full of old tools and building materials. My grandfather was extremely productive in his construction and home-renovation projects. Aside from the house in Connecticut, they built a small cottage in St. Stephen, New Brunswick, where Grandpa had dual citizenship; when he was born in Calais, Maine in 1938, the only nearby hospital was across the border in Canada.

Grandpa's shed, 2017

Carol's father, the organ maker, had died when she was ten, and she was raised by her mother, who was a clerk. Carol attended Mount Holyoke College, which was considered particularly prestigious at the time. She said that her mother couldn't understand her desire to go to college, preferring her to become a teacher or a nurse instead of pursuing moving out of State and going to grad school. Carol got her Masters in Social Work at Springfield College in nearby Springfield,

Massachusetts (where I was born), and she worked as a Social Worker and a Project Manager for local NGOs. She met my grandfather in the early 1970s at a professional development seminar. He ran a psycho-social outreach center in Bangor, Maine before relocating the family to Massachusetts. He and my grandmother seemed to have a very unhappy marriage, and they got divorced right after I was born, in the mid-eighties, and Grandpa and Carol got married in 1993. After their respective divorces and subsequent marriage, Grandpa and Carol did Social Work until retiring late, about ten years ago, though she continues to volunteer. On the day of our interview, Carol advised me that we had about three hours before she had to go table for the Democratic Party of Connecticut at a state fair, where many attendants would be die-hard Trump supporters. Carol and I sat outside eating pasta salad on a large deck that wraps around the whole house, pressed against the enclosing forest. This was exactly where I had stood with Grandpa and my cousin twenty five years earlier, and shot a russet potato out of a DIY projectile launcher.

The Organ, Carol's house, 2018

I spoke with Carol first in my sequence of interviews, for one because of logistics, but also because I didn't really know where to start, and I felt that she might understand because of living with my grandfather's many things, and also because she had done graduate school and is embedded with my extended family in ways that I am not. Carol proved an immediate resource in this regard, as before even beginning the interview, she suggested that I speak to my grandfather's youngest sister, Nancy Clark Dennett, of Berwick, Maine, since Nancy was a 'history buff' and had tried to

assemble a genealogy of the Clark clan. Carol and I conducted a two-hour long life history, detailing much of her childhood before I shifted to discuss the clean-up process after the funeral:

> B: So can you tell me about what you've been going through for the past year?[220]
>
> C: Well [audible sigh]…much of my focus has been cleaning out stuff, because I'm very aware that there are five children involved here, who have…really don't have a relationship with each other. My son…Todd has probably more relationship now, since Jim died, because he's been here when Jimmy and David have been here, and they've worked together, trying to haul out some of the *stuff* that's all over the place. But I guess, my main goal this year has been that I need to get rid of this and not leave this mess for these five kids, who've not been raised together, or not had to work together, and I don't think that that's fair. So that's been my mission over the last year. And also to move toward creating my own space, that's me, and not a merger of the two of us.
>
> B: When you say, You don't want to leave other people this mess, do you feel like you've been left a mess?
>
> C: Yeah!
>
> B: Yeah? How do you feel about that?
>
> C: Well, sometimes I've been pretty pissed. (Laughs) You know…it's just like…it's like peeling an onion, and you know, I find things I didn't…know…he'd purchased or knew were there. Other things I knew about. Umm. We had built a relationship where he had his stuff, and I had my stuff, and…you know…we worked together. And I think… you have roles, and…one takes care of something and one takes care of another…some other things. Now, he would get the lawnmower going and or anything or the power-washer and anything like that, and I'd use it, but I didn't have to start it. I didn't have to jump it if the battery was dead. Umm…and he just set it all up and I went to town. I mean, there's not much I won't tackle, but it's just that I didn't have the experience with a lot of it, and there's…

[220] Carol Kent, being interviewed by Bryan Gordon, August 27, 2018, at Carol's home in Canterbury, Connecticut.

Woodshop, Grandpa's Basement, April 2017

B: All the mundane stuff.

C: Well, yeah, but it's stuff that you have to deal with when you've got a house.

B: Yeah. And what kind of a mess did he leave you?

C: Well, we'll take a tour. But you could not walk to the end of the basement. It was impossible. I hadn't…I kind of used the first part of it, where the paint was and paintbrushes and all that kind of stuff, but the end of it—I never went back there. He had, at some point or another, used this saw—there's a couple saws back there, there's a drill press, there's umm…radial arm saw, a table saw, something else…anyway…(sigh)…He just let all the chips go into the air, and never cleaned any of it up, you know. So it was covered with saw dust all over the place back there.

B: Oh, a real mess.

C: Yeah, both stuff and dirt and physical mess.

B: What…

C: And part of it is, out here in this big shed, I discovered that—because he didn't fill in the eaves, and they were open, the raccoons got into the top level, and they used each of the three—there were three or four up there—kayaks as potties.

B: (Laughs)

C: And I had to throw away the seats and bring them down and clean out all that crap, and there's mice shit all over there, and it just doesn't smell very good. Now, I've had the eaves filled in, and unfortunately, Todd has pointed out to me that the guy didn't put any vents in, so there isn't any air circulating in there now, so I don't know what I'm going to do about that, but, umm, it's just one thing after another.

B: How…so, I'm not getting too caught up in labels, but how would you describe Grandpa's relationship to stuff?

C: I would describe it, not as hoarding, but as acquisition.

B: Mmm…why do you make that distinction?

C: Because it was very important to acquire things, to have things, to not feel…need…I guess. You might need this at some point, so I gotta have it now. It's on sale. Making a deal…getting a good buy on something overshadowed any kind of use the thing might have.

Toolbox, Grandpa's basement, April 2017

B: Yeah. Even if you didn't want something, really, or if you didn't…

C: We went to a lot of auctions, and he was always the one. Unless there was something that I really saw that I would like, he was the one who did all the bidding, and for instance, I had talked him into attacking that shed and getting rid of some of that stuff, probably in the Fall before he died. And he agreed to do that, whether he ever would have done it or not, I don't know, but he agreed to do that, and he said well, we should check out prices. Let's go to an auction. So we go to the auction, and we come home with four more chairs, a marble-top table, a chest of drawers—all because they were so cheap and such good buys! He couldn't resist. And all…I mean…I would have to physically grab his hand and…that wouldn't have gone over very well at all.

B: No? What would have happened?

C: If I tried to intervene? And made a public display of…ugh…he would get very angry, I think. He could get angry.

B: What would he do when he'd get angry?

C: Ugh…it'd be sharp. Verbal…but…nothing physical, but verbal.

B: Can you give an example of…how sharp? I never saw it really.

C: Mmm…I don't think so. Other than, I want to do this! Let me do this! This is something I have to do! You know…whatever. It's just…

B: Dismissive?

C: Clear.

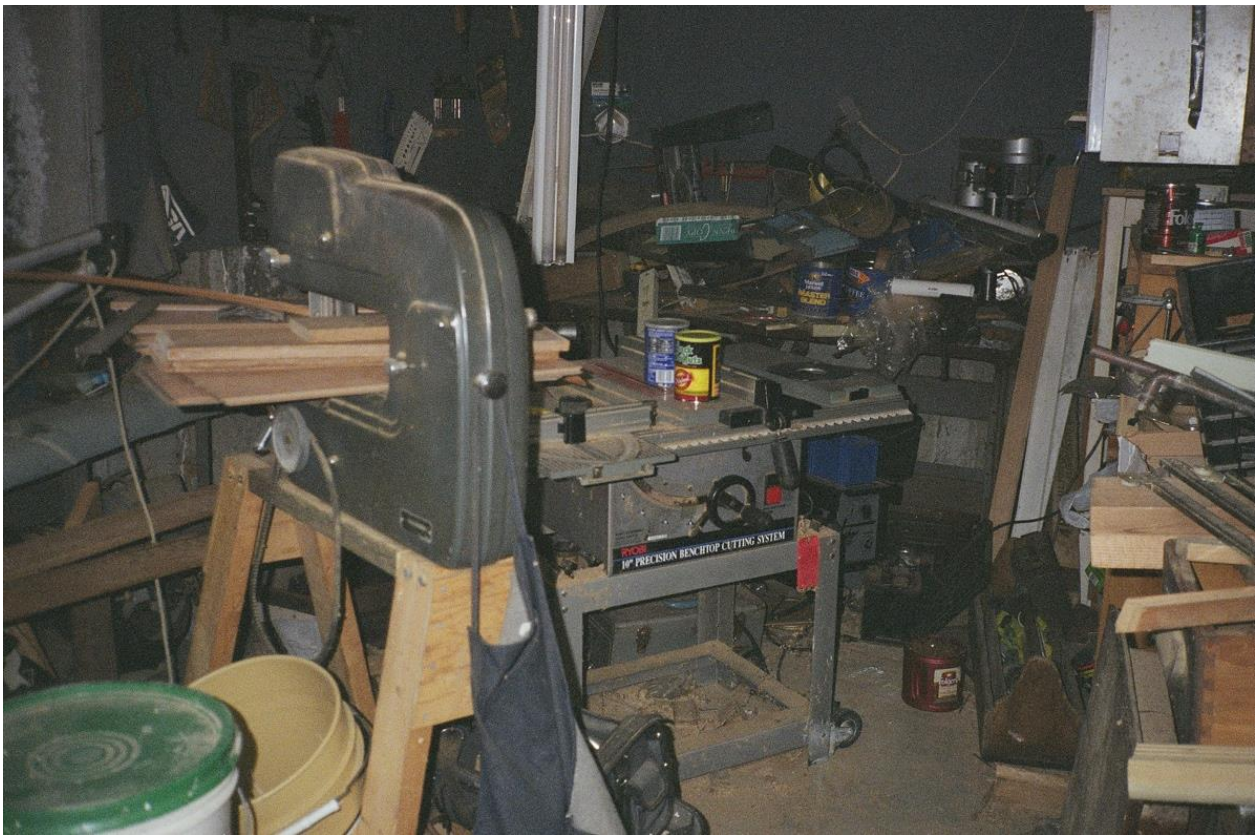
B: Yeah.

I could hear myself reading pessimistically into facts of my grandfather's life that were perhaps more neutral than I would like to tell myself, just ego and accumulation and relationships and love all interwoven in a complexity that remains inscrutable without a great investment of time and empathy. Carol saw herself as part of my grandfather's life, despite their respective roles, and her apparent comfort at having more control over her own space now that she lived alone in their home. She said:

C: Anyway, we did a lot of manual work. He taught me a lot of things about plastering, wall-papering, ugh…I did all the painting, I cleaned the stove, umm…but we did a lot of joint projects like that. We were partners in all that. And then, when we came here, I mean we built this house. We had people help frame it. We had framers come in, but we finished it all, and we did that together. We built the cottage [in St. Stephen, New Brunswick].

B: Yeah, those are pretty big projects.

C: Mmhmm. He had a lot of talent, you know. I think he…(sigh)…I think he would have enjoyed being a contractor or an architect, because he really loved building things. I mean, there are—aside from this [house]—three out-buildings on this property, the garage being the last one that he built. Umm…he also had a habit of not quite finishing things (laughs). Leaving out trim, or…you know…and I continue to find things. I had forgotten. There's a little corner in the room in there, you know, look around, peak around, and there's no wall-board on it, and I've got to do something about, you know, before…. At some point I will sell this house, and it's got to be fixed.



Woodworking, Grandpa's basement, 2017

Carol had sold or donated much of the antique furniture, tools, clothing, photographs, antique cookware, and my grandfather's $4,000 collection of vintage Winchester Rifle Co. pocket-knives. With the help of her children and my father, Carol had sold much of what she could, as she wanted

to greatly reduce the burden for when she inevitably passes. She seemed concerned to leave less of a trace for her children and my father than my grandfather had done for her. I wanted to know how the process of acquisition became part of their relationship, and for Carol, it was interesting when they were trying capitalize on my grandfather's woodworking skills and their shared love for antiques:

> B: So what part of that was something you shared? What part of that acquisition was something that you were…
>
> C: Well, when we were trying to sell things, ugh…I was very enthusiastic. That didn't…that lasted, maybe for a couple of years, that we were…trying actively to sell things. We had a big tent, and we did a couple…we did Brimfield [Antique Fair] once, and we went to…it begins with a 'P'. I'll think of it…another area where…we displayed them…and occasionally he would advertise in the local, little newspaper, and sometimes somebody would come and buy something.
>
> B: He never discovered Craigslist?
>
> C: I don't think that…Craigslist…this goes back fifteen years, twenty years. Craigslist wasn't a big thing then I don't think. Umm…besides, he would never. He liked to read his ads in the newspaper.
>
> B: Where do you think this urge to acquire come from? Or the urge to build, as well?
>
> C: Well, I think they're probably two different things as well. One's a creative process. Whether it was building or fixing or designing, that's a creative process to me. The acquisition comes in of…fearing that you might need this at some time, or you can't quite part with this, because, Who knows? You might wear it at some point. I mean, he had *lots* of clothes. I mean, I think you saw…I don't know if you were aware of…
>
> B: I pieced through it a little bit. I kept a hat.
>
> C: Did you?
>
> B: It's in the car.

C: But he had clothes in totes…Oh, he loved totes!

B: The plastic Rubber-Maid containers?

C: Yeah. Umm…

B: Kristina forbids those from our house.

C: (Laughs) Well, they keep the mice out. Umm…and…he never… I always said, "You never met a tote you didn't like!" It didn't matter the size. Some of them were little boxes. They're coming in handy now, because I'm sorting things! But in the attic, when we cleaned out the attic, I found a couple of totes that he couldn't have worn for at least five years. Never even opened them in the right season. They were just up there.

B: What has been the hardest thing to sort through and get rid of?

C: Pictures, maybe.

B: You've been getting rid of pictures?

C: Oh, yes. Well you are not of this era, but it used to be that you'd take a roll…say it was a roll of thirty-six, and for almost the same price, you could get two of each of the pictures. Well… (laughs)…you have doubles, you know, and I had *boxes* of pictures in the attic. I tried to, you know, pawn them off on people who I thought might enjoy some of them, and then I threw the rest away. I threw *lots* of pictures away! Lots and lots.

B: What was the most liberating to get rid of? Or has anything felt liberating to get rid of?

C: Some of the tchotchkes that weren't my tastes, like a series of colanders of different colors on the top of the wall in there, ladles, and more early-American…*stuff*…that he loved to hang up.

B: Where do you think that comes from, that home oriented…Why so much attention to 'home'?

C: He liked old stuff. He just liked old stuff. You know?

B: What do you know about his childhood?

C: Not a whole lot. I really don't. I know that his…his grandfather had a store. A grocery store of some kind, and he used to go there on occasion, and he remembers walking downtown with his mom and taking her hand. But she was having children every two years, so you know, how much time she could spend with him after a while…I don't know.

What manifests as hoarding has a past that is bound to 'legitimate' consumer behavior, which could arguably be seen as more wholistic and sustainable, since by repurposing furniture, one could ostensibly reduce waste. But it becomes distinctive depending on the class, race, gender, and identity of an individual. Grandpa was an educated white Baby Boomer, who had a big house, multiple cars and the shells of some old boats. He had quaint, antique cookware lining the shelves, which were some of the only things that Carol described in the interview as, 'not to her taste.' These objects exude aesthetical and nostalgic elements of what I knew of small towns in rural Maine. He also had Romantic reproduction paintings that Carol didn't like. They had two pieces of valuable real estate, marking a disconnect between small towns past and present. Interspersed with hallmarks of nostalgia, there were markers of class consciousness and upward mobility. Much of that was gone now, but his sheds were still full of chairs in various states of disrepair, vehicles used and abandoned in the forest, dozens of light-blue, oxford-cloth shirts and L.L. Bean sweaters, photographs of their world travels everywhere. Going into this project, I knew very little about the origins or history of my father's family, except that there were a lot of them and that they grew up in Calais. I had known my great aunts and uncles fairly well as a child, and I wondered if, continuing back from the line of his father, if there were other historian hoarders like me.

The family had been supported by the timber and paper industry of the Maine wilderness, but very little beyond that, except that those industries were largely in decline and that my grandfather's eight siblings, all but one, had left Calais after high-school. I wondered if by going down the line intergenerationally, I would more clearly sense Raymond Williams' "structures of feeling," the dominant cultural tropes, emotional possibilities, and ideological nuances that can shape the trajectories of societies, nations, and families in processes of change. As oral historian Steven High writes, these ways of life often change more slowly than the economic systems that sustain them, "once dominant cultures become residual in the aftermath of deindustrialization."[221] Despite being a driver and a social worker, my father and my grandfather had respectively maintained traditions of manual labor and home economy and thrift as structures of feeling within their lives. Without my father's perspective, Carol could not help me too much, as my father did not talk extensively about his childhood memories, either. She directed me to my aunt, Nancy, whom I called and arranged a meeting with for the following week.

[221] Steven High, "Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialization," in *International Labor and Working-Class History* (84; 2013), 145.

Grandpa's shed, 2017

My great-aunt, Nancy Dennett, lives in South Berwick, Maine, with her husband, John. They have two children, one of whom is a farmer and a teacher. I arranged to meet Nancy at her home, and I was surprised that she had also invited her husband, her sister, Janet, and Janet's daughter-in-law, Laurie to the interview. This made the difficult interview to transcribe, as the familiar relatives conversed *about* the interview while it was ongoing, but it also put everyone at ease and offered certain questions that I hadn't thought to ask, particularly from Laurie. Nancy and Janet proved to be an absolutely priceless connection to a family history that I had only heard about second-hand and piecemeal from my father, or heavily edited, from my grandfather.

Aside from stories, they also provided pictures, census data, and relics of my great-grandfather, Frank Samuel Clark, including his watch, his lunch basket, a bank book, a time-stamp card from his job at the Georgia-Pacific paper mill, and other mementos. Nancy had my great-grandfather's lunch basket, his watch, a time stamp card from the paper mill, and other mementos that she hadn't looked at in years. She also gave me access to a bank book, obituaries, a printed article about her great Aunt Ruth's general store in Calais, Maine, that had been printed in the local newspaper in the 'eighties. She had worked to compile a family genealogy, but it didn't extend beyond my father's generation, or much further back than her grandparents.

> Bryan: Maybe, Janet, you could tell me a little bit about where you were born and a little bit about your childhood. [222]
>
> Janet: Well, my parents had seven children. I'm third from the top. I was born in St. Stephen, New Brunswick. Grew up with eight siblings. Three brother…four brothers…three brothers! Four sisters…three sisters. Gosh! I'm nervous (laughs).
>
> Bryan: Don't be nervous.
>
> Janet: Umm…our family life was right full of a lot of joy. I don't know, Nancy maybe you could remember something? I'll interrupt you when memories…tryin' to think…. We always had big Thanksgivin's.
>
> Nancy: Christmas.
>
> Janet: Christmas was always…a big time in our family. Brother Jim would go out with my father and cut down the Christmas tree out in the reserves—game wardens and what not, they opened up the place for people to go cut down their own trees. That's a big memory.
>
> Bryan: Grandpa was born in what year? 1937 or something?

[222] Janet Clark Moulton, Nancy Clark Dennet, John Dennet, and Laurie Moulton, being interviewed by Bryan Gordon in Nancy's house in Berwick, Maine (3/9/2018).

Janet: ’38 I think.

Nancy: It’s some place on here [indicating a page of significant dates she had]…Jim was born 1938.

Bryan: Oh, here. 1938.

Janet: Yep. …Yep.

Bryan: What did your parents do for work?

Janet: My father worked for the paper mill up in Woodland, Maine. He worked there for thirty-two or thirty-five years. My mother was a stay at home mom. Umm…I should say that all of us went beyond high-school. We had to make a choice of what we wanted to do.

Bryan: Who encouraged you to do that?

Janet: Both parents, I think. Well, my mother more so, I think.

Nancy: I wouldn’t say, “encouraged.” I would say it was *expected*.

Laurie: …expected. Uh-huh.

Janet: It was…we always knew. It was expected in a small town like that, you just…everybody went on. And…you had to kinda make up your mind or not. It might have been made up by you…No…

Nancy: …somebody made it up for you.

Janet: …*for* you, rather. I’m sorry. Yup.

Coming from a large family with traditional American values, hoarding was not an issue in the family, though—after the Great Depression and World War II—thrift, respectability, self-sufficiency, and personal development were fundamental values practiced in their home. My grandfather became a Social Worker, Janet and her sister Ruth became beauticians, uncle Larry served two tours in Vietnam as an Army medic before following his father to the paper mill. Nancy

and her sister Barbara worked in a hospital as X-ray technicians, from which Nancy recently retired. She became a Master Gardener and now volunteers by gardening for her church and the town.

Frank S. Clark, time card, Georgia-Pacific, 2019

When I asked more about their father, they described him in glowing terms, but in doing so, they also revealed certain values related to buying quality objects, that would last, particularly things like shoes:

Bryan: I guess, can you describe for me your dad? Tell me about him?

Janet: Easy goin'.

Bryan: Easy going?

Janet: I thought he was *very* easy-goin'…

Nancy: My father…

Janet: …*but!*

Nancy: When you did something that upset him, you knew it.

Janet: You knew it!

Nancy: That only happened to me once in my life that I can remember.

Janet: Same here.

Frank and Doris Clark, date unknown, photo at Nancy Dennet's house, Berwick, Maine

Nancy: And I…my best friends…we're talking back in Junior High or something, but my best friends were twins. Twin girls. They used to sass their mother, it was…. So one time, my mother asked me to do something with the dishes, and I sassed her. My father told me, "Don't you ever speak to your mother like that again or you won't get back down to play with the twins!"

Janet: And banged on the table.

Nancy: And that was that. I think the only time I ever got really spoken to.

Laurie: But I think you find that even today, rather than back then, because different house, like you said, that was all…I don't know if that was allowed at the twins' house,

but you find that even today. Like my own kids go to someone's house, and they come home and try it, and it doesn't work in our house, but…so I think that's always been a generational thing….

Janet: It's always been there.

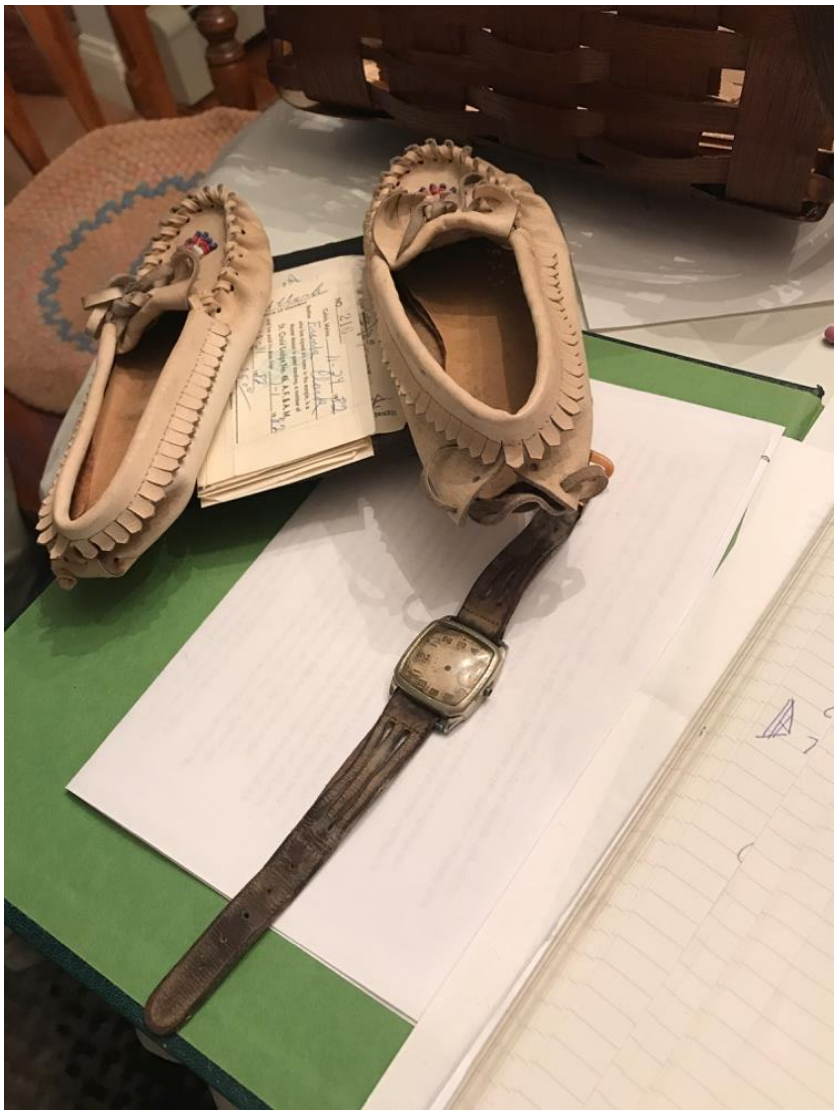
Laurie: Right.

Nancy: But Daddy was a very hard worker. He worked shift work up at the mill. Easy going. We never went without anything. We may not have all gotten brand new school shoes at the same time, and it didn't have six pairs, but we always got 'em. You know?

Janet: I remember one time I wanted a pair of shoes and mine hadn't worn out, so I took something and [inaudible][laughing] cut all the little things around it [laughing].

Laurie: And did they know it?

Janet: When he'd buy a pair of shoes, he bought a *good* pair of shoes. He didn't go down… He'd say, "You wanna go down to Grant's and get two pair then be my guest, but I'm not replacing 'em." But he would buy the best.



Frank S. Clark's watch, Nancy Clark's shoes, 2019

In 2020, the idea that a manual worker—even a well-paid one—could easily support of a family of ten on a single salary in respectable, middle-class comfort would be ludicrous. But there was also a denser, more interconnected social web in their small town than one might find today, and a relationship to objects that prized them for quality, durability, need, and rarity, rather than price or convenience. I learned that their aunt, whom their sister Ruth was named after, owned a store

in Calais that had been founded by my great-great grandfather, Willis, and then run by Ruth until her death in the 1970s. Nancy shared a write-up about the history of Clark's store from the local newspaper. Apparently the store was an epicenter of the small town's nostalgia, since it was one of only two places where you could buy candy, comic books, milk, and bread. They admitted that they had been sheltered by their parents from even the drama of their small town, not to mention the outside world:

> Nancy: And he grew up just around the corner from my Aunt's store, which my father was in all the time. What I'm getting at is, I think we were really protected from all that stuff. I never knew any of that. Some of my other good friends that were sexually abused by grandparents, and you can't tell me a small town like that that parents didn't know it, but it was not a discussion. There was no gossip like that in our house. I never knew any of that, but I bet you anything that umm the one who didn't have any heat or parental guidance, I'm sure that Aunt—we called he, Emmy—Aunt Ruth and my father, I bet they gave 'em milk and bread, to help out, but we never knew that. So we were really protect—we were really naïve when we moved outta town.

When I reconsider the story of the boots my father refused to kick into the lake, or the shoes I tried to clean from the base of the stairs, I surmise that my father dwells amid several structures of feeling related to objects, a residual one from the middle-class industrial work of his grandfather, the upward mobility and increased expectations of his father, also reflecting a shift in American culture towards mass consumption, big box stores, planned obsolescence, and a socio-economic discourse centered around *price* rather than quality, a topic discussed at length by Jane Collins in "Walmart, American consumer-citizenship and the erasure of class:"[223]

> Walmart's consumer-citizens exercise their citizenship through consuming, not in order to keep factories humming and employment rates low, but simply because that is the best way to pursue their own interests and those of their families…They do not think about the effect that buying from Walmart will have on the small grocery down the street, or whether their

[223] Collins, 93.

> purchases will contribute to the health and strength of the local or national economy. They simply compare prices.[224]

The value of most tools is not stable over time, despite very simple tools remaining adequate to their original purpose. New economic modes and new technological developments create different types of consumers, and technological innovations supplanting last season's big gadget will often create new categories of worker, even as it may render older ones obsolete, depending on the interests of capital.

Commodities, tools, and objects of use-value are reduced to a monetary value whereby its fundamental uniqueness as a product of labor dissolves into the abstraction of exchange: "Today the product satisfies a social need. Tomorrow it may perhaps be expelled partly or completely from its place by a similar product."[225] A hammer remains a hammer, despite technology becoming smaller, digital, and automated, and less in favor of brute force. When my grandfather died, that weekend, the first thing my father took was a hammer with a red handle, that his father used on the childhood farm in Hermon, Maine. Later he would bring other things up to Bangor in the bed of his pickup: bins of clothing, chairs with solid wood frames and seats in need of reupholstering, which he is quite good at doing, when he gets the time. He brought the liquor cabinet.

[224] Ibid., 97.
[225] Marx, *Capital*., 201.

Grandpa's obituary, 2018

Toy

When Grandpa died, Carol encouraged me to take some of his clothes, but I didn't take much. So much of it had been forgotten in storage or wasn't to my taste or size. My grandfather was huge: six foot four, with huge hands and feet. I took a hat and some old mittens that he had clearly darned repeatedly over the years. What I really wanted though, was the kryptonite. In the Superman comic universe, kryptonite is Superman's one weakness, a green crystal whose radiation causes pain and eventually death to Kryptonians, and my grandfather had a box of toy 'kryptonite' that was a rock painted with some glow-in-the-dark paint. I relayed the story of it during an interview with my colleague Eliot Perrin in the winter of 2019:

> Eliot: Now, did you like being around everything your grandfather had as a kid? Did you have a relationship with it?[226]
>
> Bryan: Not his stuff, really. He had…I liked going to his house, 'cause usually we'd go twice a year for like holidays, and I'd get little gifts, and they traveled a lot. I brought some of the gifts that he would…this is actually a good time to talk about these things.
>
> E: Yeah so whichever you want to start with.
>
> B: Well this Superman thing, it's called, Kryptonite Rock, and it's the one thing that I asked to keep when he died, because this was actually the thing I looked forward to the most when I would go see my grandfather.
>
> E: Oh, okay.
>
> B: Apart from whatever dislike I accrued over time, when I was a kid, I was always excited for this part, because he had all this Superman stuff, but he found this, which was basically…the least interesting toy in the world (laughter). It's just a rock painted green with some like probably seriously toxic 1980s-style glow-in-the-dark stuff. But when I would arrive at my grandfather's house, he would take me, and then like my cousin and my sisters to the attic, which you had to climb this ladder and move things out of the way, so it was always fun and exciting, and he would take us up into the attic, turn on the light,

[226] Bryan Gordon, being interviewed by Eliot Perrin, the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS/CHORN), February 11, 2019.

hold this to the light, and then turn off the light in the darkness of the attic and it was always like, Wow, he's got actual Kryptonite!

Kryptonite Rock!!, Montreal, 2019

B: So I always liked that, and that's the only thing I kept from him after he died. Also, they were pretty good at giving gifts and like always like educational gifts like books on volcanos, or history, or whatever. When I started to express an interest in studying History and studying Literature, they'd give me books on things I was interested in. They also traveled a lot, so I got this thing from Germany which is a little, funny-nose man.

E: Oh, it can make different nose shapes.

B: Yeah.

E: Oh that's a pretty cool gift.

The Funny-nose Man, 2019

I've always loved toys, but what appears as a simple, childhood memento may in fact reveal itself to have other connotations. A gift is rarely simple, but may represent the ideology of the giver, the social obligations of giver and receiver to one another, and the linguistic, cultural, gender, or religious prerogatives of the society in which the individual item and the individual subject have been brought together. I admired Carol and my grandfather for their constant travel, by car and plane around North America, canoeing in the Maine wilderness, as well as longer trips to Alaska and Europe and Egypt. Aside from the American public education system and Mr. Rogers, movies like *Indiana Jones* played an outsized role in my childhood imagination, and for me, my grandfather's trips around the world to Rotary Club meetings seemed an exotic voyage.

> B: And then this, I don't know what this is, if it's bone or tusk or ivory or whatever, but it's just something…they traveled…maybe they got this in Egypt or somewhere, Indonesia or something…just a bead, but for me, I always had it, and it was this exotic thing I didn't know where it came from and it was exciting to me that they had been wherever this had come from.
>
> E: Yeah absolutely.

B: But it was probably like a dollar at some airport.

B: I also have this, which is another gift they gave me. They gave me tons of puzzles, or little educational inserts like, How to Make a Perfect Paper Airplane, or like just those wonder, Science Wonder like book where each page has facts about rudimentary science. And then this puzzle, which is actually quite hard, where you take all the geometrical pieces out and have to put them back in. And thinking about puzzles, it's like…I feel like he…I don't know if, if it was just like…I'm sure it was totally innocent, but I feel like it captures like this sense of: You need to prove yourself. Prove your worthiness or your ability to figure things out on your own, but…I don't know…I've kept these things. And also, I have this Rotary pin. One of the other things I have that I should have brought is a hat, that I took when he died, that's off the Rotary Club. He was a very dedicated Rotarian, which is still like unclear to me…

E: (Laughs)

B: …what that means. But you know it's like Elks Club or these kind of like civil…

E: Or like Masonic lodge, or…

B: Yeah, it's the same kind of thing. Like, community organizations, very like male, but they were both involved and they did a lot of traveling and like charity work with them, so that's nice, I guess. Umm, but yeah, the Kryptonite is the one that like…He had a lot of nice things, like a nice telescopic kaleidoscope, or like crystal eggs, or like…different, special toys that were just kept at his house, so I always looked forward to being interested in them…going there to play with them.

As hilarious as it is to conflate Indiana Jones and a Rotary meeting, it is interesting for me to track my grandfather's dedication to higher education, self-development, building things, volunteering and social services, the last of which strangely seems to have skipped my father's generation entirely. I am the eldest child, and as I finish my Master's degree, I cannot help but feel drawn now to a profession in psychology, therapy, and academia or some combination. All of my paternal siblings through are in university for Speech Therapy, Psychology, and Social Work, respectively, and I feel we inherited an urge to make the world a better place.

A childhood gift can often be a symbol of what you are expected to become. I received many weapons and tools from my father. A work bench, Erector Sets, chemistry sets, rock tumblers, a motorbike, a battery-powered Jeep Power Wheel that was absolutely incredible: these were amazing gifts. We had some great toys. When I was about ten, Dad gave me a Red Rider BB Gun—the same one featured in the film, *The Christmas Story*. Rather than saying, "You'll shoot your eye out!", my father drove us to the shooting range. He taught me how to fish and to camp and to swim and to sharpen a pocket knife he gave me one year in my Christmas stocking. The next year, he gave me a bolt-action rifle. What makes me feel that these were somehow more culturally embedded than a simple gift was that I never asked for them, or even used them much once the initial thrill of shooting wore off. Guns don't hold any allure for me, but as a child I imagined becoming a soldier.

As a teenager, I was shy and bookish and fat. I liked video games and fantasy novels and I hated sports and socializing. My father didn't know this, but I was mentally struggling with the effects of childhood sexual abuse, and despite a near constant anxiety I experienced silently throughout my adolescence, against that backdrop came a certain kind of patriarchal upbringing, spread out across disparate weekends and mediated by gifts and tasks and projects. We shingled the roof, went to swap-meets for vintage car parts, and I would ride my small trailbike through the woods around my grandmother's house, where my father would work late into the night on his cars under the flood light from his mother's imposing colonial house in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, bringing me back to my mother's house late on Sunday evenings. On the one hand, these are the skills my father has: carpentry, auto-mechanics, construction. On the other, all the physical labor,

the hidden but obvious ubiquity of pornography in his house, and the gift of weapons from my father felt laced with a certain insistence that I toughen up and be a certain kind of boy.

While I value the skills I learned from him, the history of my own life shaped and changed the course of my relationship with my father and his parents. During my interview with Eliot, at first, I was reticent about sharing key facts about my life, while simultaneously eager (in asking him to interview me for my project) to tell my story in a way that I had less control over, but total freedom to speak about things which are difficult to speak about. In short, I was sexually abused by a neighbor, which precipitated PTSD and depression, particularly when I had to leave my mother's house on the weekends to visit my father. I discussed this particular struggle with Eliot, who was a compassionate listener. It was interesting to hear myself deflecting the very question I had set up the interview to discuss:

> Eliot: Was it just a feeling, or did you have any…do you know why?
>
> Bryan: Umm…it's a feeling. It's one…It's one that like multi-layered and like kind of like something that's come out in doing this interview project with different extended family is like there's multiple layers of various kind of emotional or relational trauma, and then from my own like psycho-social sort of history, personal history, it definitely spiked some difficulty and difference between us, almost, but I guess…I guess it really started…*I don't know when exactly…what was your question, exactly?*
>
> E: Well, I'm curious if you knew, if you understood it as a child, or if it was just some transient kind of feeling.
>
> B: Yeah, I did, but it didn't really bother me as a child. I remember when it started to bother me and I was around eight, and I was like…it stemmed from abuse that I suffered as a child, like where I was abused by someone outside of the family.
>
> E: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.
>
> B: It's okay. But one of like the psychological responses that I had was not wanting to be away from my mom's house. So once that started, those visits to my dad's parents or my

dad's house became hard for me, and that was never talked about. Like that was a change that happened and everyone dealt with it in their own ways.

E: Right, okay.

I was eight years old when this occurred, and by all admissions, I feel lucky, but also guilty still about what happened to me. Guilt and trauma seem so interwoven that no matter how healed and well-adjusted you become—and I feel very healed and empowered to speak my truth—it is always there, like the muscle memory of riding a bike, guilt about the initial abuse and secret keeping, but also at the way it silently distorted my perceptions, reshaping my relationships with others, particularly with older men like my father:

B: I know that part of my response stemmed from the emotional climate of those places as well. Where my dad's parents were divorced, I think like…it's foggy, because it's something like there's this veil of silence about…around, because my dad's father had been like cheating on his wife for like a long time. I don't know how long exactly but…

E: A substantial amount of time…

B: A substantial amount of time—like a decade.

E: Okay.

B: And with the same person and so he basically had this whole relationship going and my grandmother…I always remember her as being just very sad. Like from a very young age. Which like obviously this was going on, so I didn't have a sense of the damage that was being done to her, or whatever, but she sank, from early in my life, into almost like a victim role. And she *was* kind of a victim in a way. She just drank and smoked and sat in front of the TV or read like paperback, John Grisham or whatever, novels and became like, just this kind of darkness settled over her, and then sometime, I think it was before I was abused, or around then. It was right around the same time that she had like an injury. My grandmother. My dad's mother, Doris, had an injury where she fell, broke her shoulder, and then had several complicated surgeries where she was basically like frozen, in her arm.

E: Oh, my gosh.

B: So this sad woman becomes even more reclusive and afraid to leave her house and like…nitpicky about all the rest of us, and kind of projecting her sadness outward, and this is definitely something my dad shares with her. And so…As a kid, I remember my dad being really fun, and I really liked spending time with him and we did a lot together, especially before my siblings were born, cause he was basically like still a big kid, and he's like a…I mean, he still is a big kid, but he's got like…he's like a motorhead. Like he fixes cars and always drove like a Camaro or a Mustang or like a T-Bird. Always when I was a kid he had some muscle car and loved talking about…. Cars are very significant with my dad, because it's like so much of our relationship was like those two days, every two weeks, and it was like an hour drive to and from my mom's house, so most of our solo times were these drives, in one of these muscle cars, that were always in various states of disrepair, because he typically has like three or four of them in his yard.

E: Right.

B: Or in my grandmother's yard. I think he still has cars in her yard from like twenty years ago, like a Corvette that's just like decomposing in her basement garage or something but that he's kept. I don't know if they're still there. He might have gotten rid of them.

E: What…Was he…Was there a purpose to…like a resale? Or was it just a hobby?

B: He just has like proj…he's a hoarder first and foremost of projects. He has a list of things he needs to do. He's constantly adding things to it. I think because he insists on doing everything himself. He's adding things to the projects, but when I was growing up, my step-mother was always adding things to the project, and he also worked full-time, and is distracted, and a normal person whatever, and so never did everything. And so each was something that like just needed to be fixed and then it could be sold or just need to be fixed, and then it would be like, 'oh you have a Camaro for a deal.' He loves deals. So if he could get a car that just needed a little bit of work that he could personably…personally do, he would probably spring for it.

E: Right.

B: So now his driveway has like, I know it has a Camaro, a Mustang, maybe another car or two, and his truck that he drives and his girlfriend's car. So there's always been like five cars in his driveway. I think he went to vocational high school, semi-vocational high school, so he was just like always working on cars and always fixing anyone else's cars. In the family, if anyone had any car problems he would be the one that would insist to do it, and he *is* good at doing it, like he can really…he can weld, he does electrical work, he does carpentry, and all that stuff as well.

E: So it's not like delusions of grandeur in terms of achieving things.

B: No, he's very practical. Like he's not a romantic…except, maybe he is inside, but he was always like, 'I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna either be able to sell it or drive it or my wife can drive it or….' I imagine he has this sort of, he has a lot of like, he said a lot of things like, 'I'll be able to give it to you later.' Like, 'You'll be able to have it when I'm gone and stuff.' But he's been saying that our whole lives. Everything he values, he presumes we'll want, but yeah.

E: Before we go further on that, did your relationship with your grandmother change as you got older?

B: With my dad's mom?

E: Yeah with your dad's mom.

B: I…you know it got…umm… kind of just scared of going out of my mom's house. You know, this person who abused me, basically threatened, like used the silence of…used, used the threat that like if my family found out what was happening—it went on for like a month or two. Not very long. And I was more or less spared like really bad sexual abuse or something, you know it was preliminary grooming and stuff, ugh, but psychologically convinced to keep this kind of secret.

E: Okay.

I had been convinced by my abuser that if the secret were found out, "our secret", then my family would abandon me. At the time, I only had one sibling, Sarah, my mother's daughter, but I was fiercely protective of her, and part of me took on feelings of hyper vigilance and protection combined with a terrifying fear that my mother or my sister would die if they were out of my sight.

B: …and [he] played as my friend…this old man…and ugh basically insisted that if anybody found out my family would leave, and but so then, he got caught like abusing his ugh his niece or something, and they found out, like for sure he did something to her. I don't know what, but then he was our landlord, basically, where I lived with my mom in this town, Ludlow. And he got arrested. I got picked up that night by my grandmother, my Nana, and driven home and something was wrong. My first sense of like a time of realizing something's wrong and somehow it's about me, but I don't know what it is, but I'm not in trouble. And it was always my mom who picked me, as well, from this place, from the…it was the Boys and Girls Club after-school program. And so we're driving home and my grandmother's like trying not to cry and ugh um, I get home and everyone's around the table and I don't know if there were police there or whatever, but like my mom runs over

> and she's like—doesn't even say anything else, she's just like—'Did he do anything to you?' And I was like, "No." And just kept a total secret for like ten years.

We had to move out in the middle of the night. We moved to my aunt's house for two or three months while my mom and stepdad found a new apartment. School became difficult, especially after the next year, when we moved to a town an hour away. Going to my father's parents' respective homes became challenging, for whereas my mother's family exuded an environment of attention, warmth, and support, if not knowledge or understanding of what was happening to me, my father responded to my changes with frustration. He had a home full of weapons and hoarded things and the same kind of pornography that my abuser had secretly given me during the grooming. My dad's parents were distant and neglectful, however benign and well-intentioned. I would have panic attacks, shaking and crying and screaming, where I had never done that before. In a short story I wrote years ago entitled, "Fabric", I wrote about my anxiety:

> The first time that it happened, I saw my father's big, blue Jeep pull into the driveway, and I tried to lock myself in my mother's bedroom and to hide under her bed. They pried me from under the bed, kicking and scarlet with fury and fear and exertion, and they did not know why. Dad finally got me into the Jeep, strapped in and sullen and silent. He was distraught, and to fill this new silence, he had said, "Why don't you want to go to Grampa's house? You know he loves you. I had either said nothing or sniffled and said something about my mother but I cannot remember, except what Dad had said and the pervading fear that John would kill my mother.

From this point in my childhood, I began to fear my dad's, his mother's, and his father's respective houses, but I would still have to go there regularly, sometimes for as long as a week or two during summer vacations. After our landlord's arrest for abusing his niece, we relocated to Charlton, Massachusetts, about an hour away, where I lived as a teenager and young adult:

> Bryan: …after that I think I went through PTSD basically. I had nightmares, really bad nightmares and when it would come time to go to my house, um my dad's house, I would start crying. And especially if I was gonna be like…before, when I was younger, if one of

> my parents was busy I would just get dropped at one of the grandmothers' house, and my mom's mother's house was fun and I got a lot of attention there, a lot of like toys and gifts and a lot of just one-on-one time. [My mother] also had two younger siblings that were very involved in my young life, so it was like, it really felt like I was in this home, this protected place, but at my grandmother's house I was basically just neglected with this sad woman, and had a lot of freedom to wander. She had a big house and a big property and so I got to play outside a lot and whatever, but once that sort of fear came in, it was like just like a big, unprotected, empty house, and so I didn't really wanna go there, but I also couldn't really say.
>
> Eliot: Right.
>
> B: So I was still dropped there, like nothing actually changed except that I would be like crying all the time. Um…and after that persisted for a while, I just…I think…I stopped kind of going or stopped going as much gradually gradually gradually. Um…but because right around that same time, my grandmother had her fall and then those surgeries, and she'd already been like demolished by this long decade of like cheating. She's a very like…she was always a very like, like I said, like sad person, but also just like sniping, very cheap. And insistently cheap, and ugh just like her…and my dad's a drinker too, and they would just like get drunk next to each other and be mad at each other and so like a lot of that time around like becoming a teenager, I'm dealing with this PTSD and it's just like, we moved, you know we lived in that same town for another year at a different apartment, and then we moved, my parents bought a house, my mom and step-dad bought a house in a small, very rural town like an hour away.

As I grew older, the distance grew between me and my dad and his extended family, our visits continued regularly of course, and Dad and I would go camping and driving and we would work together on his house. It was around this time, my father began collecting. It began with toys.

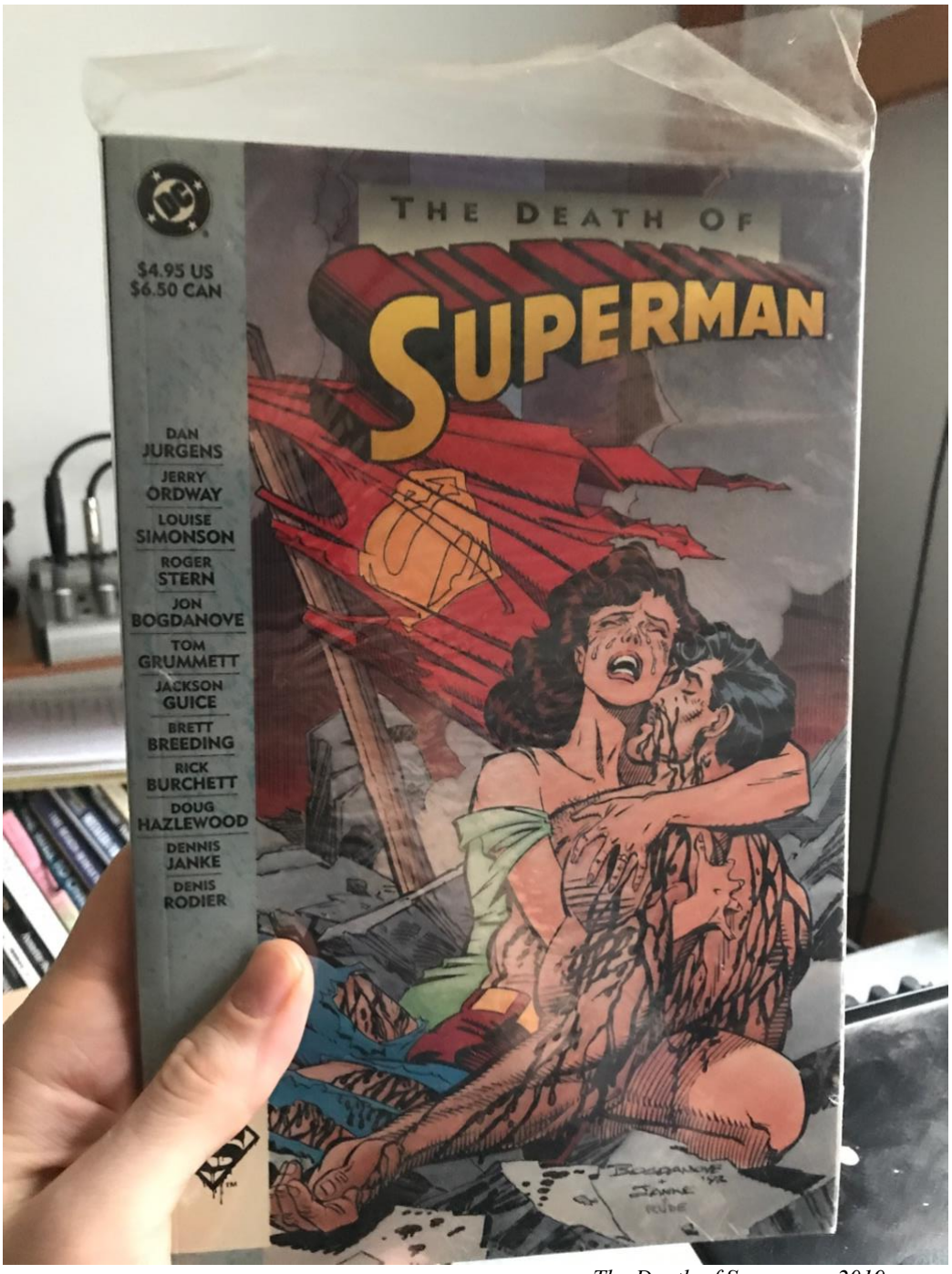
As a kid, I loved toy cars, and ever eager to share his automobile affinity, he would buy them for me, as well as the tracks and a city-scape carpet that you could "drive" them on. But, around the same time, Dad's best friend's brother had had a robbery in his home, and my dad explained to me, surely on one of our rides to his house on a Friday night, that all the robbers had stolen was Hot Wheels. $12,000 worth, or something outrageous like that, and I remember liking the idea, conspiratorially shared with me, that we would now begin buying *lots* of Hot Wheels, not

quite understanding that we wouldn't be playing with the Hot Wheels, however, but we would store them in Rubber Maid containers in the attic to accrue value. This was my father's investment portfolio, and we did this together. He got trade magazines of rare models and reliable deals, and we would visit pawn shops and Walmart looking for them. It was fun for some time. As I relayed to Eliot in our interview, to my own amusement:

> Bryan: He was like, We're gonna collect Hot Wheels cars. I think his brother's friend collected Hot Wheels cars, and had a massive collection of them, and rare ones, so it was like worth a lot, and I think someone stole some of his Hot Wheels cars, and when he told my dad how much had been stolen in like two shelves of Hot Wheels cars, my dad was probably like, I'm gonna get rich quick on Hot Wheels.
>
> Eliot: (Laughter)
>
> B: And this just became such an irritating feature of my late-childhood was like, my dad always, we'd go out to the store, and my dad, like his father and his mother, was just kind of cheap on the everyday level. And so I'd want a toy, but no. But at a certain point, it was like, Okay, we can get twenty Hot Wheels, but you can't play with any of them.
>
> E: (Laughter)
>
> B: You have to keep them in the bubble wrap.
>
> E: Okay, I was about to ask. So they actually stayed in the package?
>
> B: I'm sure he has them in a Rubber-Maid container, like in his attic, probably like destroyed by water or kept in perfect condition or something, but…toys…like this picture has antique toys, tools. This is one of three workshops on my grandfather's property with like, I just noticed that there's like four kinds of trimming sheers hanging here (laughter).

We built a mirrored display shelf for my favorite cars, among other carpentry projects, but I also began to want some of the cars and I would sometimes steal them from the Rubber Maids, hurriedly stashing them into my overnight bag, to ashamedly bring back to my mother's house, to bring to school to use as baby social capital during recess, in lieu of my father's long-term investment strategy. I'm sure he still has them.

He would periodically extend this to other things. One year, I came to his house one night and he had ten copies of the same issue of *The Death of Superman*, a deluxe edition in which Superman is killed by the villain, Doomsday. Dad wouldn't even let me handle one to read it because of the oils in my hands. Years later, when they were relegated to a box in the dank, poorly insulated corner of the attic and forgotten, I stole one. I still have it. Recently, I helped a friend move and he offered me a pile of off-brand comic books that his father had foisted on him years before, insisting that he keep them. My friend said, "Take them! They make me feel guilty." When I checked the comics out on eBay, they were worth less than the cost of shipping. I wonder who informed this type of contemporary father to insist upon their children trash memorabilia in lieu of loving attention and honest communication. "Toy" is also a verb, meaning, to manipulate and control.



The Death of Superman, 2019

Around this same time, Dad bought his first house, on Helen Street in Chicopee, Massachusetts. The house was located next to his apartment building, and he got it for next to nothing: the previous owner had been a hoarder and a shut-in and he had died inside:

> Eliot: But there was a difference then, between his collection, hoarding, and how you felt about that versus your father's?
>
> Bryan: Yeah, I never thought of my grandfather as a hoarder, and even now, I think it's only 'cause I'm doing this project that I'm like, Oh, you were totally…You've totally got this same like accumulating/inability-to-get-rid-of-things tendency, it's just that his house was much nicer. He was wealthier. The stuff that he was keeping was nicer, and he had much more space to disperse it, so it's not evident, but my dad's house is different.
>
> E: Yeah, so he bought this house next door, and it was full of stuff already?
>
> B: My dad.
>
> E: Yeah. Was he showing a tendency to hoard prior to purchasing this house.
>
> B: Definitely. Definitely. For me, I had no sense of real…the house was always…it was just the way his house always was, but it was always like every staircase has stuff on it, like bags of nails, tools, things he's found. He would go dumpster diving and come back with soccer balls, so like at a certain…I'm sure his garage is full of various soccer balls that he would just come…he'd go out in the middle of the night, come back with a soccer ball and be like, Here you go! And it's like…I never played soccer. I never wanted…I played soccer for one season and I was kid the kid who would just wander off and go pick flowers. Much to the…I don't know what I'm trying to say. Um.
>
> E: So the transition to this house.
>
> B: Okay, yeah. So he bought that house, and then…
>
> E: Did he…It was already full.
>
> B: It was already full.
>
> E: I assume he didn't like disperse with that.
>
> B: The stipulation, I think my step mother was under the impression they were going to quickly have a bunch of tag sales, just throw away a bunch of stuff, and then save a few things that would be repurposed or used, 'cause a lot of it was nice, um, but most of it

would be gone, and then there'd be…The basement was packed full, like floor to ceiling. It was a pretty big basement, and some space had been cleared out after a few tag sales, my dad had a wood-working shop down there, where we did stuff as a kid, when I was a kid…. And spaces were cleared. There was always a path. Things didn't really become clear that there was anything problematic about it until I was older when…I mean…I first had this sense of like, holy shit!, when I was like…just a few years ago.

E: Oh that recent?

B: Yeah, it was always like, I didn't want to be there. It was dusty, but my step-mother is a very sunny person, and always did a lot of arts and crafts and like…she's just like a good mom, and so she had like…she would decorate the house and put up kind of folksy wallpaper and stenciling and do little slate paintings and…it looked nice. And I didn't realize this until I interviewed her, but she would cover piles of stuff with blankets or sheets, so there were always these piles of sheets or piles of stuff covered in sheets in his house. And so like in my mind there's just this shadow space in the house. It's not even…You're not even seeing furniture in your memory. You're seeing this kind of absence of something. And when I was a kid I remember playing this little game where I would see how many times I would sneeze in a row…

E: (Laughs)

B: …because it was so dusty and I've always been asthmatic. So it was just twenty sneezes, fifteen sneezes, ten sneezes. I didn't really think of it as like strange necessarily it was just…it was strange, but it was just the house I was in, and it was different from my mom's house, but my mom's house wasn't like…I wouldn't say it was messy, but she…both my mom and my step-dad worked full-time. My sister and I were both in school and we went to after-school programs and stuff. The house…and my mom's not a…she doesn't really care about cleaning so much. It's not messy, but she's just busy, so like normal level of American house mess, but, for your average American family, there's so many toys and so much stuff that you actually have, if it's actually disorganized, it's not gonna look that much different from someone who's like a hoarder but it's being kept managed by his partner.

One alternative to parenting is to push your children to do a better job than you did. Children are given tasks, put to work, toughened up: creating for oneself a workforce, and preparing children with the fine motor-skills and social ticks "to make it." I did fairly well, academically, emotionally, etc., all things considered, but I struggled with recurrent depression, without the terms nor much of a forum in which to seek advice, and as someone who has clearly never even admitted his own

depressive cycles to himself, my father often did more harm than good. I had good friends and loving parents, however ill-equipped and overworked they were to fully see what I was going through. I began smoking weed at fifteen years old, and then my personality began to clash more with my father.

I reacted to depression with utter nonchalance, pretending not to care, devoting minimal effort, and behind an air of ease and stoicism, I guarded my feelings. I have never liked being told what to do, however, and as I became an adult, both my father and my grandfather became increasingly outspoken and controlling toward how I should educate myself, what pursuits I should dedicate myself to, and who and how I should date. Both of them took interest of the fact that I did well in school, effort applied or not, and that I showed promise—*if* I chose a "sensible" career path. Much to their dismay, I took a liking to literature and music. For every iota of pressure they pushed at me, I would retreat further and further, reading, disengaging, nonchalantly, until I moved to rural Quebec when I was eighteen, where I could smoke weed in the park and listen to Neil Young and read novels in peace. Against the backdrop of the war in Iraq, I spent 2003 through 2007 escaping, as best I could, from the United States and out of the orbit of my father. My sister echoed this sentiment is echoed during her interview:

Bryan: What's your relationship with Dad like?

Danielle: Rocky.

B: Why?

D: A lot of our relationship is him criticizing…

B: Mmhmm.

D: …me for a lot of different things that are positive, so I'm not sure why I'm being criticized for them.

B: Like what?

D: Like, at the moment I'm managing a coffee shop. I'm very, very happy with that. I've always loved coffee, and I've always been wanting to work in a coffee shop as a barista. So to manage it, and be a barista is kind of like a dream, but he's asking, Okay, but what about becoming a bank teller? Why don't you work in a bank? You'd get benefits, and it's more practical, but there's no passion working in a bank. There's no happiness working a bank. I'm not interested in banking. He mentioned banking because of a job opportunity I had over a year ago. At this point, it was over a year and a half ago.

B: Yeah.

D: Where I tried keeping it a secret from him, because I knew that if he caught wind of it, he would turn it into something that it wasn't.

B: Yeah.

D: Which was just a simple, little job opportunity, where I didn't want him to know unless I got the job. When I didn't get the job, and he had known about it, he was disappointed in *me* for not getting it. And then I was disappointed that he was disappointed. It's a very vicious cycle, and I'm not sure why it exists. I think part of it is because he's trying to make sure that I have a better life than he did, umm…so he's coming from a place of love at wanting me to have the best life that I can, and he wants me to be making—for him, this means making the most amount of money possible, so that you don't have to worry about any kind of finances. For me, it's less about the money and more about doing something that makes you feel content in your heart.

B: Mmhmm.

D: So, when I tell him that I'm doing a drawing for somebody, he's like, Okay. That's really, really great…but what about being a bank teller? Or what about doing this where you get benefits from it?

B: I found that attitude to be very damaging personally.

D: It's damaging. It's like, I guess the best way I can describe it is as a claustrophobic feeling, where you just feel like you're being squeezed into a tiny, little box.

B: Yeah.

D: That you know that you're better than. So, I'm better than being a bank teller. I know that.

B: Yeah.

D: I know that I'm doing the right thing by pursuing things that I'm passionate about, rather than things that'll make me the most amount of money, which, first of all, I don't think that being a bank teller is going to make me rich (laughs).

B: No.

D: He was thinking, I think, I feel like he was thinking more, "Become a bank teller, because they you can work your way up to being the manager of the bank, and then…."

B: Still.

D: Still, that doesn't sound exciting.

B: I feel like he thinks working in a bank means you have like access to the vault and you just to get to like (laughs)…

D: Take the money for yourself.

B: Yeah, I feel like that's his kind of… It's like a Monopoly board, I think, in his head or something.

D: I don't get it. I feel like it's because he's older, so he's used to a different way of life that we're used to.

B: What would you say? Let's talk about that a little. What would you say is the gulf of values between you and him, or your generation?

> D: Well, for him, the most valuable thing is money, because money is what buys you the things that'll make you feel happy, like a new car or a boat. And for him, it's about acquiring things. Without money, you can't buy things, and without things you can't fill your house or your garage or numerous storage units. For me, happiness is a job where you don't feel like you have to go to work, where you feel like you are happy to go to work, and while you're at work, you're not unhappy to be there, or unhappy to be doing what you're doing. I think that, just the way of life is so different. I don't know what it is.

I don't write any of this to talk shit about Dad or my grandfather, nor to drag them through the mud, but to repay the debt of their gifts, to make use of the hoard, and to make productive those intergenerational talents with which I came to this task. In writing about the family, as in writing from the vantage point of History in the "post-truth" age, authenticity and honesty feel like the only way to build trust, albeit slowly, painstakingly, and imperfectly. I am sure my father would be hurt by my candor and my tendency to use words on the attack, but I refuse to write a nostalgic jeremiad to the processes that produce such emotionally stifled men. Sociologist Tim Strangleman writes, "Those of us interested in labor and working-class history also have to confront this danger of sentimentalizing the past."[227] Oral historians such as Steven High, Christine J. Walley, Ann Laura Stoler, and Arthur McIvor concur. McIvor writes, "Overly sentimentalized and nostalgic representations of deindustrialized workplaces have perhaps contributed to a neglect of the multifaceted impacts of industrial work and its loss upon workers' bodies."[228] Like these workplaces, overly nostalgic notions of family can obscure the lasting traumatic effects that homes can have on our bodies, both as sexual, physical, and emotional scars, but also as traces of flame

[227] Tim Strangleman, "Smokestack Nostalgia,' 'Ruin Porn' or Working-Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation," in *International Labor and Working-Class History* (84; 2013), 23.

[228] Arthur McIvor, "Deindustrialization Embodied," in *The Deindustrialized World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places,* Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard, eds. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 40.

retardants, heavy metals, and hydrofluorocarbons in our bodies, which as McIvor write, "bear witness."[229]

Nostalgia can be a landmark or a narrative signifier of a context no longer present, of a world that has moved on, except in memory. Rather than sentimentalizing or pathologizing, I use photographs, oral history, and my life story to develop, as Strangleman encourages, "an adequate language for dealing with the complex ways in which industrial [or family] culture is marked and remembered, concealed and erased, recognizing that this memorialization is the work of many hands across time and space."[230] In *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination,* author Annette Kuhn uses a mix of photography, anecdote, and self-referential oral history to reclaim memories of her own history whose meaning was colonized by her mother: "as an attempt by her mother to force others' memories into line with her own, however off-the-wall they might be."[231] She adds:

> Photographs are evidence, after all. Not that they are to be taken only at face value, nor that they mirror the real, nor even that a photograph offers any self-evident relationship between itself and what it shows. Simply that a photograph can be material for interpretation—evidence in that sense: to be solved, like a riddle; read and decoded, like clues left behind at the scene of a crime.[232]

The memories that emerge from a person's relationship to a photograph or a dusty tchotchke are not obvious, nor are objects forthcoming (without a human interlocutor) about their histories, their chemical composition, their carbon-footprint, their means of production, the modes of labor employed, nor the quality of life of the laborers who produced them. They are, at best, amalgams

[229] Ibid., 41.
[230] Strangleman, "Smokestack Nostalgia," 25.
[231] Annette Kuhn,. *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 2002), 17.
[232] Ibid., 13.

or processes-in-motion of vast supply chains and circumstantial, interdependent events. These stories are not told consistently or without contention: "Thus can a simple photograph figure in, and its showing set the scene for the telling of, a family drama – each of whose protagonists might tell a different tale, or change their story at every retelling."[233] Each person and thing and moment of exchange "are generated in a network, an intertext, of discourses that shift between past and present, spectator and image, and between all these and cultural contexts, historical moments."[234] In a family's stories, just as in those of a nation, a dominant voice may alter the course of idea-object worlds in the process of creation for many others.

This process of truth telling and revelation does not come without its costs, internally and externally. As we discussed Danielle's grandmother's death during high-school, following by the subsequent fall-out of her mother's illness and her parents' divorce within the same year, Danielle evinced a common trait of teenagers and children forced to grow up early: to excuse and take responsibility for the actions of others. We share this urge to make excuses for my father's emotional immaturity, to rationalize it, and to adjust what we know of him against what we *think we know* about the childhood and early parental relationships, particularly with his mother, his parents' divorce, and his decision to decline acceptance to a top-tier university as a young man.

[233] Ibid., 16-17.
[234] Ibid., 14.

Treasure

If I were writing a bildungsroman based on my life, I'd begin with a montage of drives in the car—my mother's car or my stepdad's or my father's—on the revolving weekend trips to my dad's. Chicopee Falls is about an hour drive from Charlton, Massachusetts, where I lived with my mother, stepfather, and sister, Sarah. That stretch of I-90 or of Massachusetts Route 20 are imprinted into my mind-hoard of memories like photo-negatives found in a drawer. In these windows of time, my parents dispensed their wisdom and family dramas played out in the attenuated way of informal, shared custody. My mother never took my father to court for child support, though he occasionally payed some. The economic situations in the homes were different. My mother worked her way up to a comfortable but demanding career in insurance. My stepfather worked as a skilled machinist in small-scale manufacturing, enjoying steady overtime for most of my childhood, usually working between sixty and seventy hours per week for twenty years outside of of his time being laid off after the shop closed and his replacement job was also outsourced to Mexico.

My sister and I wanted for nothing as children, living in the delirious lap of luxury that was middle-class childhood in the 1990s. Christmases were obscene, but they were also irresponsible with credit and refinancing their house. At Dad's, the environment was different. He and Carol had three children in rapid succession, Rachel when I was eight years old, Danielle when I was eleven, and Dylan when I was thirteen. Because of the unfinished nature of my father's home, there were tools everywhere. Belt-sanders and planers and lathes and hammers saws of all kinds and boxes of powdered screws and nails. Lining the stairs to the attic, where my father worked, and where I had a 'play room' that was an unheated dormer window with insulation that was the only real privacy I had at my dad's. All the toys I had received as gifts from him and Carol had to

stay there, at Dad's insistence, for when I would come over to play. With so many children in a small, unfinished home, it was impossible to have alone time, which I need a lot of.

The difference now is that my father has held onto much of my childhood memorabilia in his house in Bangor. According to my stepmother and my sister Danielle, when they moved from Massachusetts to Maine, it was then they felt that my father's relationship to objects might be abnormal. As I wandered through his garage, the shed, his derelict camper, and my sister's semi-preserved room which is now storage, I see the edge an old toy dump-truck stick out from under an unused bed, a toy that I had played with next to the Rubber-Maid containers full of Hot Wheels, in the dormer which my father had built, which I had helped him shingle. He brought them to Maine, and I can't help but see his attempts to hold onto *things* as the desire to cling to *us*. I asked Danielle about this:

> Bryan: When would you say that you first noticed that, or thought like, you know, you know, my house might not be like other people's houses.
>
> Danielle: Consciously? When we moved from Massachusetts, and our driveway quickly filled up with things, and the garage has never been used as a garage—more of a place-holder for his stuff, along with numerous storage units that are just filled to the brim with boxes of things that we had from the move, I think. Last year, he brought a box of spices to [our sister] Rachel and [Rachel's boyfriend] Michael's house that he had put in a storage unit from when we moved here in Massachusetts, that just kind of went forgotten about and…they were from 2006. They were not still good. And he had them for some reason. So I don't know if he knew about it, or if it was just one of those things—out of sight, out of mind. You don't remember that you have it.
>
> B: Mmhmm.
>
> D: I'm not sure, but…when I was little, I saw that our garage had a lot of stuff in it, but it never really processed, Oh! This might be a thing—where we have too much stuff.

B: Yeah. Do you think that was like his…like he was hoarding less at that time, or do you think that your mom was holding back the flood?

D: Both, probably. I feel like, in Massachusetts, he might have been comfortable, because he had his stable job, driving out of state, and he had the knowledge that my mom had the salon. She was doing a great job at taking care of us while he was away. When he was in town, things were nice. And then, I don't know if moving here was like a trigger for him, to kind of bring all of his stuff, and I don't know if he had storage units in Massachusetts. I was too young to know that, or… I don't know if he had all of this extra stuff in Massachusetts, but once we came here, I understand that a lot of the stuff that we had, didn't come with us into the house. Even though the house was immediately filled with things. So I'm not sure if that was a coping mechanism for him, umm from having such an abrupt move.

B: Why was it abrupt?

D: I don't think it might've been. I think that they had just found the house that Sis used to live in. Sis is some weird familial relation. I don't think we were actually related. I think she might have just been a really good friend of my grandmother—maybe some distant relation. I'm not sure. You'd have to ask Rachel or Mom about that. So, Sis owned this house, and we were able to buy it from her at a decent price.

B: Dad's house.

D: Yes. So the current house that he still lives in. We were able to buy from Sis. She had it on the market, and after we bought it, we came up and lived and Gram and Papa's house for—I think it was around a year. My dad was still driving out of state and was fixing up the house in Massachusetts, so he wasn't around for most of that. He was just not there. So we lived with Gram and Papa for—I think it was around a year, but you'd have to ask about that, again, I'm not sure. We were able to move in after things in the new house improved and we were able to move in safely and have like, running water in both bathrooms and sinks and things.

The next day, Danielle and I interviewed Carol, her mother and my father's ex-wife, to ask her about this time. The following interview was conducted on August 29, 2018 while driving in rural Maine. We spent the day walking along the harbor pier in Bucksport, Maine, before heading to

Carol's favorite lake. She and my father got divorced about eight years ago, but we are still close. My sister sat in the back of the car looking at her phone and listening. I had interviewed her the day before and she had helped organize this visit to facilitate the interview. Carol is a nurse's aid and a Reiki Master. We hadn't spent that much time together since the divorce, and we spent the day swimming and she gave me Reiki, which caused both of us to twitch incessantly during it, which is apparently common. Carol laughs at herself incessantly, and her accent is distinctively 'down east'—from that region of Maine both she and my father are native to, which runs east along the Atlantic coast from the state capital, Augusta, through their home city of Bangor, east to the Canadian border at Calais, where my dad's family settled after England or wherever. The accent sounds how, I imagine, early European settlers from the British isles spoke in Massachusetts three hundred years ago Maine was inhabited for millennia by Algonquin-speaking peoples before they were largely displaced or wiped out by European settlers, who began establishing fishing communities along the coast in the 1620s; it remained part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts until 1820, when it seceded to become the twenty-third U.S. State. The accent is a blend of Boston and something peculiarly southern, with a non-rhotic 'r', a dropped 'g' at the end of gerunds, and a drawn out 'au' sound in words like 'god' and 'awful' that almost rhymes with 'or'. Most of the interview takes place in the car, with my sister listening silently in the backseat, and then on the stoop of Carol's father's house, where she has lived since her divorce. Carol is a humble person whose intuitive wisdom hides behind smile-lines and unassuming good looks of a small-town, mother of three (or four including me). She laughs and constantly yells, "Oh, my God!"

Carol and Dad ran several businesses together, two nail salons, which she ran while my father either drove trucks out of state or worked as a mechanic. She told me about how they met,

about my father's determined courtship, about how she moved from Maine to Massachusetts only to find his family rather cold toward her, and toward everyone in general.

> Bryan: How would you describe your marriage? …If you feel comfortable.[235]
>
> Carol: Well, I don't really know how to describe it. It was a big learning thing for both of us. I mean when we were dating, there were red flags for me, but obviously I was meant to be with him and move there, because otherwise it wouldn't have happened. I'm a big believer in Fate, so…umm. When I moved down there I was terribly, awfully homesick for just *here*, you know for Gramma and Papa [her parents] and *just being here*.

Carol's stories revealed to me that it was probably not Grandpa who the depressive aspects of hoarding originated with, but with my father's mother, who continues to live with my Aunt in their childhood home, in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, but she suffers from advanced dementia.

> Bryan: Yeah you have a pretty tight community here. And what did it feel like entering into his family?
>
> Carol: Well, Grandma [my father's mother, Doris] (awkward laugh) well…not so good. Cause she's like, she was out there even then, cause she was always, sadly enough, she had good intentions, but she was very much a 'Poor me,' because poor her, because Grandpa [my father's father, James Sr., deceased] found someone else. I think he was with Carol for like nine or ten years, before…
>
> B: Before that.
>
> C: Yeah, before they got divorced. So it wasn't like a sudden thing. It wasn't like a quick, whirlwind thing, it was like a…
>
> B: A long deceit.
>
> C: It's funny. I mean I imagine it was deceitful in the very beginning, but I don't think it ended up that way, because I think he just ended up just keeping Grandma just because of guilt.

[235] Carol Clark, being interviewed by Bryan Gordon, in Carol's Car in the driveway of her home, Bangor, ME, 1 September 2018.

B: Yeah.

C: But I'm guessing like in his mind, he left her long before he did.

I appreciated her sensitivity, not only to my grandmother's emotional world, but to rereading the extramarital relationship, not as a hurtful, deliberate, action, but of the slow, banal burn-out of one relationship and the blossoming of another.

B: Yeah, for sure. I mean, it's definitely like… I feel like him and Carol [my grandfather's widow, Carol Kent], for all like my kind of sometimes …mixed feelings about them, I feel like they…fit together?

C: They fit together in a way…. Well, it's funny, and it's very sad, because Grandma felt like a huge victim. So she would just sit in her house and smoke butts and drink her wine on a very constant basis, and I think she just got stuck in that 'poor me' zone and she just never came out of it. And she umm… God! For my entire marriage, she still had his clothes up in her bedroom, in boxes. Just couldn't bring herself to bring them to Salvation Army or Goodwill.

B: Jim's clothes!?

C: Jim, Senior's, yeah.

B: Oh man. Whoa. So she was…I mean she was definitely a hoarder, or she is a hoarder.

C: I guess so. I mean… I guess so because she wouldn't even throw away her wine bottles.

B: No, I mean her basement was full of stuff and her house was huge so it kind of like gave the appearance of like a big space, but so many like antiques and heirlooms and clothing. I remember being really fascinated by her bedroom as a kid cause there was so much stuff in there and it led to the attic, which was this other space full of stuff, like old toys and umm. What about impression of Grandpa that he gave you when you met him?

C: Just a conceited asshole. That feeling (inaudible).

B: What?

C: That feeling never really went away.

B: Can you tell me details about that, or a memory that stands out?

C: I don't honestly remember the first time I met him. I don't remember that at all. I just remember the general air about him. And the first time I said to your dad, umm…(sigh) I was saying something bad about Jim [Senior] and Carol [Kent], about how awful that was that he cheated on Grandma. And he said…his thought was kinda like… 'Oh, don't be too harsh on him cheating, because would you wanna live with *that* every day? Meaning Doris. Meaning Grandma [his mother].

B: Yikes.

C: Because she just had this very sad existence.

B: Yeah.

C: And I don't know if that was like her…maybe that was…maybe she was a drinker from when he was young, but he's never really spoken about it. He's never complained about them [his father and step-mother] once. He's had his dad on a pedestal.

B: And he seemed to blame his mom for a lot.

C: Yeah.

B: What…

C: Well, I mean if his dad was always away on business, then she was the one who would be natural to blame, because she's the one sitting at home. Just bitching non-stop. You know? So it'd probably be natural to blame her more than the dad. Cause he came home and everything was all good times. I'm guessing.

The last time I saw my grandmother was fourteen or fifteen years ago, as of 2020. I was visiting Massachusetts after my first year in Montreal, and I was trying to tell her about it, knowing that my Dad was listening and that he disapproved. She wasn't listening. We had gone over to bring

her a bottle of vodka, and they sat there drinking together, bitterly arguing about whether or not she would pay her medical bills, while I stood waiting. There was no thunder clap tragedy, but I never went back after that for some reason I still don't understand. When I told Nancy that I hadn't seen Grandma since before her dementia started, she suggested that it was probably for the best, all things considered. I asked Carol where she thought my father's urge to acquire originated, and she began by discussing a time when she *liked* the random inflow of items, plucked from beside a dumpster or from storage containers owned by dad's friend, Mark.

> Bryan: Yeah, and you live now with your dad in your childhood home, so I guess when you think about the word 'home', you probably definitely think about that house.
>
> Carol: Well, I think you can make any place home. Like in Chicopee, that was my home. And…your dad's piles of shit, I would just try and cover…you must remember this, I would just cover them up with sheets and whatnot.
>
> B: Yeah. When did that start? Was that always there?
>
> C: Yes.
>
> B: Always there?
>
> C: Yep. Our first apartment, yes. I had…I covered stuff up with sheets on Belmont Avenue in our very first apartment.
>
> B: Why? Can you describe your thoughts or feelings with that stuff?
>
> C: I don't honestly remember. It was just piles of shit, and I was always like, Oh my God! Why!? Why!? What!? What can we do with *this*!?
>
> B: Where did things come from?
>
> C: I-I-I don't even know. Mark and Kristin, they got a storage, I mean their family bought a storage unit. They built them. So when people would leave, you dad and Mark

would go through them and he would bring home stuff… And it was fun, like getting free stuff and looking at it.

B: Yeah.

C: Seeing what you could use and make better and that was unique and whatnot. So it was fun, but it just never went anywhere.

B: Yeah. Where do you think that comes from? What do you think drives that urge to like acquire and keep?

C: Well, I think part of it is that he's broken and feels like he brings home broken stuff to fix it, to make it better, to sell for more money. It's just a desire to want things to be better…but it just doesn't happen. He gets it home and he gets stuck, because he has so much stuff that is there already that he doesn't know where to start, so he doesn't, because he can't. Cause he can't put that one foot forward.

B: Do you feel like it stayed about the same while you were together or that it got worse or like…changed?

She admitted that she played a part in enabling my dad's behavior, but she returned to the story of the move to Maine, where my father ended up moving most of his hoard from Massachusetts in a large trailer, without consulting her:

C: Well, (sigh) let's see. When we moved to Maine, I thought everything was cleared out of the house and he felt wonderful about it. But the day of the sale…I didn't go down, we'll say maybe for two or three weeks, and I thought everything was totally gone. And, ironically enough, we bought this house in Bangor in the same situation. There was just a shit-ton of stuff in the garage that when we'd buy the house we had to buy the stuff too. It just came with the house. So it was up to us to get rid of it. And…umm…so we sold the house in Chicopee and he said, I have to bring a trailer down for whatever's left over. And I was picturing like a couple trunk-loads of stuff, and he, god, he pulled down onto Sydney Street [the new house in Maine] and he had a car-trailer that was heaped, full, like car-height full, from front to back, and I'm like, What are you doing!? Oh my god! (laughs) Oh my god! Cause I thought that that was done, because…

B: He had a trailer to bring stuff from like there to here?

C: From Chicopee to here, yes.

B: Oh my god.

C: And it was just insane, because I thought that we were over with that. I thought that that was just done. Cause he felt so good having Chicopee be cleaned out. You know what I mean?

B: What did you see as your role in all of that?

C: My role, well maybe if I were a different person or had a different personality, we would have worked through it somehow…

B: What do you mean?

C: About the stuff. If I had handled it differently.

B: What do you mean?

C: My inkling was just to make him feel like shit for having so much shit. So maybe if I had behaved differently, he would have behaved differently himself.

B: Probably not. I don't think that's your responsibility.

C: No, but…well I mean, Smart You knows that, but Heart You doesn't.

B: Yeah, especially if you've been told that things are your fault for so long. I feel like he kinda does that.

C: I just ignored it I think, as much as I could.

My sister equated the urge to acquire with the desire to compensate for a childhood home that no longer existed, as well as for a family that had decohered from normalcy to catastrophe in a sudden flash. She equated our grandfather's absence and our grandmother's chill despair as the two

determining 'structures of feeling' that shaped my father's adolescent life, without necessarily choosing those terms:

> B: And with Dad and Grandpa, they've always had a knack of, just like…
>
> D: Being so stoic.
>
> B: Being stoic, and also just saying stuff that's inappropriate, or not their business, or which reflects a certain fear or anxiety they have, but it's never expressed as, "I'm worried! I'm worried." It's more like, "You're fucking up!"
>
> D: Yeah.
>
> B: …and deep inside [they're] worried, but [they'll] never *say* that.
>
> D: Right, exactly. I think it's too difficult for them to.
>
> B: Umm…
>
> D: No, it's not something like, either of them really understood how to do is understand how to empathize with other people. I think to a certain degree they can empathize, but I really, really don't believe that Grandpa was a person that was actually capable of empathy or compassion. I think that he was *so* consumed by his image towards others that he let that go to his head far too much, and so everything that he did revolved how he would present himself to other people, and how other people would perceive him, which is obviously not the most important thing, but to people that think that it is, it is.
>
> B: Well, it's interesting that like, he, in a way, lived such a life of service, particularly for women, but then was so clearly such a misogynist.
>
> D: I think, again, that comes into play: the idea of doing something so that people think a specific thing about you. Not so much taking care of women and protecting women's rights and being a Democrat because those are things that you believed in, but because you thought those were things that people would admire you for believing in. So he didn't want people to think, Okay, he's actually an amazing person. No, that's exactly what he wanted people to think, even though that's not how he felt. He may not have been a true Democrat. He may not have been truly liberal or really, really care about women's rights or equality for anybody. I don't know how he felt about gay people, truly. I don't know how he felt about people of color, truly. I don't know how he felt about anything truly. I know that, on the outside, he cared about everybody equally, because that's what he wanted to portray as, himself, as being the perfect person. Put that in quotes.

As I transcribed the interview, Danielle articulated feelings that made it apparent that she too had been thinking about these things for a while. I share with her a certain struggle to be authentic with my father:

> B: Okay. Where is your community?
>
> D: I don't know. It's hard to say. Right now, I would say, my family, and by 'family', I mean, my mother's side of the family, where people are a lot more accepting and generous in the things that they want to help you with. Again, on the father's side, it's more defensive. It's more scary to ask for favors or support on something.
>
> B: Just to open up about anything is scary.
>
> D: Right. Like, I still haven't told Dad that I'm gay. Not because I'm afraid of what he would say. I don't care. If he doesn't like that, fine. It's not gonna change my gayness (laughs).
>
> B: No (laughs).
>
> D: I felt comfortable telling Mom, four or five years ago, because that's when I realized, and I was like: Oh, okay! Now let me tell my mom, because that's something that I know about myself. It's more like, the people I'm comfortable being around. I'm comfortable with Dad, but not to the point where I'd chat with him the way that I would with an old friend.
>
> B: Authenticity.
>
> D: Right.

I asked Danielle what she thought she had inherited from our Grandfather, and at first she said, "I'd like to say nothing." But then she reconsidered, that she did respect his work-ethic and that of our father's, but decried the fact that they couldn't see *her* actions as a graphic artist as *work*, and thus none of them supported her desire to go to school for Graphic Design in Boston. There is a divergence growing, not only between people, but between values, cultures, and traditions:

B: What are some traditions from your family that you would like to see carried on, or ways of being, or…?

D: I can't really think of any traditions that we have at all. Umm…we used to go camping every year, which I would appreciate doing, because I like the idea of just doing something, at least annually, is taking the time to be a family, and to like, just spend time with each and appreciate the time that you have to spend together. After we stopped doing that, I can't really think of any traditions that we've kept.

B: Mmhmm.

D: On Dad's side, I honestly can't think of a single thing. Nothing has been consistent, and part of me is wondering if that's where some of the discomfort lies.

B: What do you mean?

D: Like…if you had to pick between hanging out with my dad for the day and hanging out with my mom for the day, a lot of the times people would just pick hanging out with my mom. If you're just someone that doesn't know the family, it might just be a superficial thing, like, she seems more fun. If you're someone who knows the family, like yourself, or like, me, with my dad, you never really know what you're going to get when you hang out with him. If it's gonna be a very…judgmental-toned visit, where he criticizes a lot of the things that you're doing…

B: He has a way of asking very critical questions.

D: Right, but apparently he's just curious, and he just wants to know how you're doing, but he doesn't come off that way at all.

B: It doesn't seemed asked in good faith, but like…

D: Looking for the *right* answer.

B: Yeah.

D: And oftentimes, the answer that you give is not the right answer, which is: "I'm making a lot of money."

B: Yeah.

I can't help but feel guilty for writing about my father in this way, and I would not like to condemn him, but I share a feeling expressed by bell hooks in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, where she expressed her frustration with her father's overbearing physical violence, emotional distance, and casual misogyny, which she could not even confront until realizing that *his* violence toward *her* originated in a wound, which he—as a man—had done first to himself:

> The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves…Women demanded of men that they give more emotionally, but most men really could not understand what was being asked of them. Having cut away the parts of themselves that could feel a wide range of emotional response, they were too disconnected.[236]

My father has never been a religious man, or at least he has never uttered a religious word to me or any of us, but beneath this agnostic exterior, lurks a superstitious mind that worships money and things, themselves analogs of memories, a longing for meaning and for relationships that have changed, dissolved, or which hang by a thread. As I followed him around during the week of my interview, he showed me broken picture frames with some old Kodak slides of sepia landscapes and industrial sites.

[236] bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Washington Square, 2004), 66.

Broken frames, 2018

Some of the frames were broken, but he was keeping them in the back seat of the car, for Danielle, because she could put her pictures inside. This project emerged out of a sense of urgency regarding the newly-found political inclinations of my father, whose four children are all some shade of queer and progressive. He voted for that paradigmatic symbol of the worship of the extreme

hoarding of wealth, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, and I can say equivocally that nothing he has ever done has offended me more:

> B: Ugh…Do you know who Dad voted for?
>
> D: Dad voted for Trump.
>
> B: Why?
>
> D: Because, why not? I think that, because Dad is a regular, (sigh) average Joe, that wanted change, and the only person who was suggesting any sort of change and who looked like he might be able to change *anything* was Donald Trump, strictly for the reason that he's *not* a politician, strictly for the reason that he *doesn't* blend in with politicians like Hillary did. She blended in, with well-spoken sentences and, you know, made sense in all of her arguments—had answers for questions, but Donald Trump was so different in that *he doesn't have any answers for questions*, and he just kind of turned the questions back around on the reporters. He would make fun of people for having a disability. He just seemed more relatable. So people wanted that for President, and I guess my father just kind of got sucked into it. I'm hoping that he's regretting his decision. I don't know if he is or not. I'm disappointed in him for his decision.
>
> B: So disappointed.
>
> D: Yeah.

I can't help but feel sad that it seems he doesn't know how to change, that he seems to grasp now even harder at straws of spite and xenophobia. Without damning my father's political choices too strongly, as I have done repeatedly to myself for long enough, I have also listened to bell hooks' advice: "Men cannot change if there are no blueprints for change. Men cannot love if they are not taught the art of loving."[237] Part of learning to love someone like my father is learning how to read between the lines, to find the subtext and to honor it, regardless of the momentary criticism or

[237] hooks, xvii.

disdainful remark or mean joke. This kind of doublethink is a useful practice, but it can also become a trap of its own: constantly shifting one's internal balance to retain a firm footing on the heaving foundations of the turbulent emotional sea within a distant, depressed, addicted parent.

As I followed my father around Bangor, trying to work our interview into the conversation and to feel him out, he ended up revealing qualities of himself in ways that were not necessarily as straight-forward as I would like, but which nonetheless hold a certain weight. Danielle expressed guilt over discussing my father's apparent faults, which I took as an interesting admission, since we complain mutually about him all the time. In front of the recorder, however, I understood Danielle implicitly when she said:

> D: I don't want to be the one to throw anybody under the bus.
>
> B: No! I don't think that's throwing anybody under the bus. I think…umm…you love both your parents, and it's just…it's not about…I don't think you've thrown anyone under the bus by anything you've said.
>
> D: It feels like it though: listing…
>
> B: Why?
>
> D: …listing negative things about one parent and not about the other makes me feel like, first of all, I'm picking favorites, but secondly like, the other parent isn't good enough or they have more flaws than admirable traits, and I don't want that to come across…
>
> B: Well…
>
> D: …because it's untrue. Sometimes pivotal moments in your life have a pattern on who is acting a specific way.
>
> B: Can you elaborate on that?

D: I think that my mom has a much higher level of empathy and compassion towards others, and I think that that's probably stemmed from the way that she was raised by her parents, who were both very traditional, very chivalrous, respectable people.

B: Extremely loving.

D: Yeah, exactly! Versus like… A very welcoming household… compared to my father, who was raised in a household where his father was not faithful to his mother, where he…I don't think that he was disciplined as well as he should have been for the way he treated his mom.

B: Mmhmm.

D: I guess, my mom said that one time, he told Grandma…he kind of barked at her to shut up about something, and my mom said that should have been like a red flag for me like, Turn back! Turn back, now! But…so I think just the way that they were brought up had a massive impact on how they respond to different situations in life, and my dad tends to react defensively and I feel like that puts him…almost at a disadvantage.

B: Definitely. It's a very fraught situation, because it's like, like to deal with it, you have to almost place yourself in this place apart from him, where I feel like you become this parental figure to this vulnerable force that—you know you can feel that vulnerability. Anytime I'm in his presence, I feel it so strongly, but it would never be something you could talk about in those terms.

D: No, never.

Bell hooks writes: "To claim my power as a woman, I have to claim him. We belong together."[238] Hidden within my own hoard of sentimental objects, nestled within the history of hoarding, I found compassion for my father that had not been forthcoming. Within this wooden box, in which I keep a pocket knife, toys from Europe, and small puzzles, along with the Kryptonite Rock, I found

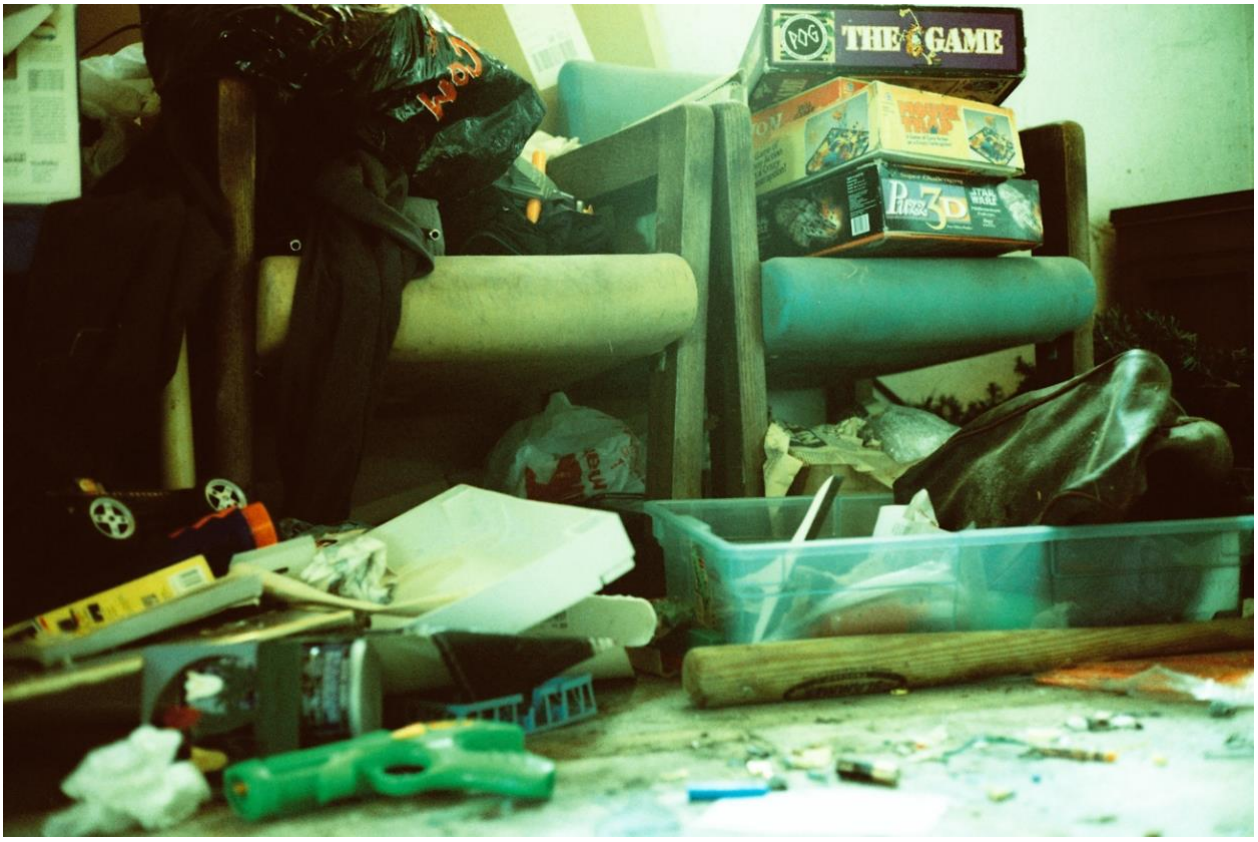
[238] hooks, xvii.

vantage points into my own history that I might have overlooked without my own urge to hoard these dusty trinkets.

Treasure Chest, Montréal, 2019

A defining feature of treasure is its rarity and it value, but also its hiddenness. The hoarder dragon of Beowulf and the dragon Smaug of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* hide their treasures away in dark caves and remote mountains, while the creature, Gollum, arguably the most important character within

The Lord of the Rings, is driven mad by his obsession for his *Preciousss*, forsaking kin and the Sun for a life of darkness and solitary desperation, chasing the false promises of a cursed, golden ring deep in a cave, going hollow.



. *My abandoned toys, before the foreclosure 2015*

Objects are transitory and life is short and fleeting. When my mother and step-father lost their house, and when they abandoned it a few years ago, most of the toys that had been in the basement went with it. I couldn't bring myself to sort through and salvage boxes of Pogs and Nerf guns and knickknacks I had kept. The forlorn books and VHS tapes strewn across the floor with heaps of

detritus, piles of beads. I had a tripod and a few rolls of film, and on my last visit to my childhood home I took some long-exposure shots before they returned the keys to Well-Fargo.

Self-help tapes, before the foreclosure, 2015

Before this project, I wouldn't have called my mother or myself a hoarder, but there are the photos—a moment frozen when her and my step-father moved to their rental on the pond, thirty minutes down the road. She couldn't bring herself to go back, but I could see the traces of frenzy and desperation: despite her and my stepfather working more than fifty hours a week at decently payed jobs, they could not afford their mortgage, which had metastasized by over $3000USD per month in the years following 2008, plus $1000USD per month for an inefficient propane heating system the previous owners had installed. They had been working endlessly just to stay in the

house that they had no free time to care for or maintain when they made the difficult decision to walk away.

Mirror, before the foreclosure, 2015

I had been in Taiwan. My parents were happy to be declaring bankruptcy on one hand, at least they wouldn't die in the house they couldn't afford and seemingly could not remember wanting. But in 2015, these things were strewn across the floor as if they'd been abandoned by another family, I think we were too struck by what was happening, by the banal formality of it, and I know I couldn't pick up the Lego blocks from the basement floor or the toy guns I had played soldier with, long ago with my friend who died in 2010, during the American occupation in Afghanistan From the closet in my childhood bedroom, I took some clothes, some boxes of books, but I hadn't been living on the continent, and I was kind of in shock. I did take this box that my father had

given me, along with photos of the home in which I had grown up, in which I had lost my virginity and learned guitar and buried my cat in the backyard. It's hard to be a voluminous hoarder after moving constantly, changing countries, renting apartments, and not having the same sort of parental home base as I grew up with, but what I lack in quantity, I make up for in kind.

Beads, before the foreclosure, 2015

Since then it has been hard to imagine putting down roots in America again, or to pitch my economic sails to the turbulent winds that blow south of the forty-ninth parallel. On the other hand, these objects reflect a certain orientation of return that has been brought about by Trump, by the chaos and xenophobia that has subsumed people like my father. I wish to rescue some of the treasure of my past from the grip of an ugly present. These photographs are a record and beautiful

to me, despite the eerie emptiness. Through them, I remember playing with those discarded, forlorn toys—I feel a deep pang of regret for not taking the LEGOs. I can hear my family and feel the fur of my childhood pets running through the house, I remember lifting weights and hiding in the bulkhead to smoke weed, in a house that has now been resold.

Epilogue: Unpacking

Criticisms are like homing pigeons. They always return home.

-Dale Carnegie, *How to Make Friends and Influence People*

All that you touch/ You Change. All that you Change / Changes you.

-Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

I often feel I am trapped inside someone else's imagination, and I must engage my own imagination to break free. All of this imagining, in the poverty of our current system, is heightened because of scarcity economics. There isn't enough, so we need to hoard, enclose, divide, fence up, and prioritize resources over people. We have to imagine beyond those fears.

-Adrienne Maree Brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*

In the Attics of My Life

This project historicizes three concentric periods, with myself at the center. I attempted to demonstrate a broad cultural history of hoarding's *long durée,* going back to Byzantium and *Beowulf*, to early-modern political economists, to modern Socialism, and ending with the supposition that neoliberal billionaires are hoarders, too, but they escape scrutiny due to their power, the quality of items they are able to buy, the means they have to store and organize these products, and a gradual but significant cultural shift in favor of selfishness and scarcity economics over other modes of life based on reciprocity and thrift, themselves two major obstacles, supposedly, to the accumulation of capital. Next, I contributed an oral history of my family, moving back intergenerationally to the mid-twentieth century, tracing object relations as they evolved from my great-grandparents' generation, to my grandparents, to my father, to myself. Here I found in my own amateur hoarding, objects that I used to evoke some of own life's magic and history. This reflexive, experimental style deepened relationships within my family, encouraged my personal and psychological development, empowered me to tell my story, and connected me to unknown family histories, and revealed how aspects of popular culture have changed dramatically in America, as elsewhere, where a world of simpler, but reciprocal abundance, was gradually replaced by a rush for consumer fads, shallow opulence, and a more alienated form of economic moving away from extended families and tighter communities—though these tight communities do continue to exist and even thrive in many ways. As thrift is a part of this world, the sheer flow of consumer goods renders many Americans into hoarders, if we follow the strict definitions of the *DSM*. In the third loop, I related these histories to a reflexive and emotional history of the past ten years and this project's creation and culmination. On the one hand, hoarding

has been mired in a naturalized (but unnatural) perception of pathology, deviance, and poverty. On the other hand, hoarding may serve to better understand certain contemporary conglomerations of power and material that unto now have only been labeled, "hoarding," on the fringe of the Internet.

How did I get here? Certain significant facts happened in the past decade that bear a moment of thought. Ten years ago, I slipped on a book and stumbled down the stairwell in my father's home, unknowingly beginning this project. That same summer, my childhood friend, a Marine scout sniper, the son of an elementary school teacher and a trash-collector like my father, was shot and killed by a Taliban sniper in southern Afghanistan. My dad got divorced later that year. Toby died. Two years later, I moved from Canada to Taipei, where I lived until the election of Donald Trump. During that time, in 2014, my mother and stepfather gave their keys back to Well-Fargo and declared bankruptcy because they could no longer afford their mortgage. In 2017, my Dad's father died of a stroke, and at that same time, I was preparing to begin my Masters degree at Concordia to complete this project, that is now complete, a year off schedule. During that time, I confronted aspects of my father's hoarding, but not my father, instead turning inward and revealing my own traumatic life stories, my own hoarding behavior, and my own relationship to things. All these catalysts prompted me to capture this unorthodox story in my own terms, but how do we read class in this story?

I had a middle-class childhood. I'm a white, cis-gendered, man from a predominantly affluent, semi-rural, Massachusetts suburb. My parents gave me nearly everything I wanted as a child, LEGOs and books and video games and musical instruments. They drove me to guitar lessons, and supported me to move to Canada and study English Literature. I read about thirty to fifty high-brow books a year, lease an rent-controlled apparent in a wealthy Canadian city, I speak

French and a little Mandarin Chinese. I will soon have a Master's degree, and my two grandfather's went to college and worked in the professional-managerial class for most of their lives. I am middle class—culturally, but not *economically*. My dad is a garbage collector who never paid much child support. He drove trucks, worked in auto-parts retail, and as a mechanic, while my stepmother worked part-time, raised their three kids, and ran their nail salon before it went insolvent. My dad discusses money constantly—the price of things, how you will pay for something, etc. He expresses anxieties as unsolicited advice. If something breaks, he is the person to call, but his personal list of projects is forever growing. I see now how much of that urge to salvage the disposed of, and repair the things in his house might be a sublimation of loss and a desire to make things better, but lacking in the right tools. I felt a vivid sense of empathy when reading Christine Walley's description of her own father:

> Even when I was a child, his anxieties were often projected onto our family home. When things broke around the house, he flew into rages, terrified that his world was spinning out of control. Yet he felt too incapable to try to fix them, a damning indictment in a working-class world in which a man's ability to care for a home was often as a proxy for his ability to care for a family…Although my father loved me, I didn't want to acknowledge that I felt betrayed that he hadn't been able to be the protective father figure our society expects. One of the injustices of class is how hard it is for those with limited resources and scarred by difficult lives to be the kinds of parents others (and they themselves and their kids) desire them to be.[239]

When I was born, my mother was twenty, single, and worked full-time at McDonald's. Growing up, she worked office jobs before working her way up to an insurance account manager, but her job is very demanding, and now that my stepfather has been disabled, she is the sole breadwinner.

[239] Walley, 161.

She also raised my sister and I, and along with my grandmother, their very caring love, generosity, and selfless unpaid labor is probably the biggest single gift that I have been given in this world.

My stepfather gave me my first two jobs, first as an assistant while he plastered home interiors on the side, smoking Marlboro Reds, standing on stilts, doing the work of three people by himself. When I was sixteen, I expressed that I didn't want to go to college to my mother, but that I wanted to open a book store and smoke weed all day, and she insisted that I work at the shop, to learn what my life would be like without a degree. I started as a janitor, though I spent so much time hiding and slacking off to read *Dune* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* that my stepfather made me a burr hand. In the world of CNC machines used for milling, drilling, and precision lathing of large industrial metal parts, a burr is a shard of milled steel, aluminum, or other metal. When you drill a hole in a plate of steel, it comes out as a razor sharp coil, purple with heat, though depending on the hardness of the alloy, the chips may be short, sharp, and brittle. My job as janitor was to shovel these coolant-soaked chips by the barrel into a dumpster, with Walmart boots and a inadequate paper mask. As a burr hand, my job was to use hand tools to clean and polish the cut holes of the steel plates used to house industrial sized air-conditioners, breathing in fumes of coolant, solder, and solvents we buffed into the steel to prevent rust. I worked with my stepfather, his father, and their extended family in the shop until it was outsourced and I moved to Canada. This is not a common experience of the affluent, I don't think.

During the years working there, I did come to appreciate the education I went on to receive, but I was also inculcated into economic and social modes of life that are distinctly working class. My coworkers were most ex-military, some recovering alcoholics, others burgeoning ones. We smoked pot out of plastic Coke bottles, ate fast food multiple times per day, and rifled through

sooty porn mags the old timers stashed in their tool boxes. We said, "Fuck," all the time. Even now, after working full-time for ten years after my Bachelor's and getting a Masters, I still own about 40,000$USD worth of debt and I earn about 1,600$USD a month working as an ESL teacher, though whenever the Chinese economy changes, such as during the ongoing Coronavirus outbreak in early 2020, my earnings can suddenly change to less than half, to which I have no recourse, since the freelancing world of ESL teaching is whimsically unregulated. My parents lost their house, despite working full time, and my dad voted for Trump. I've worked as a burr hand, a dishwasher, a preschool teacher, a bartender, and a busboy. This isn't a pity party and I feel truly privileged and fortunate. I feel middle class, I suppose. But is *this* a middle class story?

In short answer, yes. But it's also not so simple. Between the social expectations and culture of my grandparents and the economic realities in the United States today, there is a wide gulf, into which have fallen countless casualties of the decade following the financial crash, in the two decades following 9/11, and in the half-century since the advent of Neoliberalism. This gulf is felt most at borders, between urban and rural zones, and between the haves and the have nots. At changing interfaces of privilege, such as the stock market, the Internet, within technocratic corporate entities, or within a university, where one's class may be a prerequisite for entry or a stigmatic reminder of difference. As we move geographically these zones of privilege, we find ourselves within contexts in which preconceived roles and identities can change dramatically, as a refugee, as a religious or ethnic minority, as someone diagnosed with a psychological condition, or as an economic migrant with diminished rights. In the United States, as elsewhere, some of the traditional sign-posts of these interfaces have changed, though unevenly and often in tandem with traditional dividing lines such as class, gender, and race. Now, those twentieth-century modes of

differentiation have shifted, and "traditional methods of transforming class antagonism into racial [or gender/sexuality] difference are beginning to reach a sort of saturation point, as unemployment, mortality, and morbidity rates all start to overspill their historically racial boundaries."[240] Now geography (nationality; postal code; urban/rural), education, and income determine life outcomes in ways that many aggrieved, white, rural voters elected Trump to address:

> Despite being a rich urbanite whose occupation is little more than the pouring of inherited wealth into gaudy, gilded palaces, Trump himself has become a sort of strange, terrifying specter of the starved heartland, a golden-fleshed death god summoned by deindustrialization, his distance from this devastation a mark of his own grim divinity.[241]

The economic world of small towns, small businesses, stable climate, and strong communities has given way to a jagged, confusing world. Neel writes: "The planet created by global capitalism is a serrated one…Economic activity shapes itself into sharper and sharper peaks, centered on palatial urban cores which then splay out into megacities."[242] As gains were made over the past quarter-century of justifiably addressing urban social problems that were the result of centuries of systemic violence and racism while rebuilding cities around government, education, logistics and transport, and connectivity to global supply chains, new inequalities have emerged, of which Trump is merely a catalyzing harbinger, making my father's vote for him make more sense to me.

Trump's election day was, for a variety of reasons, a terrible day, but his election itself felt unsurprising. Earlier that year, I had read Octavia Butler's post-apocalyptic novel, *Parable of the Talents*, in which a religious fundamentalist promising to 'make America great again' becomes elected in the midst of a climate-change-induced apocalypse, and when Trump announced his

[240] Neel, 80.
[241] Neel, 79.
[242] Neel, 9.

candidacy, I remember thinking, from my bed in rainy Taipei, that somehow he would win. America seemed ripe for a demagogue to answer all the problems we created for ourselves in the wake of September 11, 2001, and in the contemporary glorification self-serving, primitive accumulation. While Trump's election did not shock me, I *was* shocked that my father had voted for him. To be more precise, I was shocked that he had voted at all. I was not surprised by his taste, but that at age fifty-five, he had suddenly found a civic identity. As a car salesman and a truck driver, and a parent to several socially-progressive, LGBTQ children, he seemed, from my perspective, to have awoken his political consciousness only to vote against his own interests.

As I worked through these stories and oral histories and histories of hoarding, I felt that a class consciousness of unfulfilled expectations and ungrieved loss lay beneath the superficial animosity my father vocalizes towards outsiders. I met my own internal resistance at nearly every step once I left the classroom. The very unresolved emotions that I had considered settled, bubbled up, presenting a mirror of my own reactive patterns within the role of 'black sheep' or 'outsider son,' a role I had adopted and stylized in opposition to my father. I felt the presence of frustration with him colliding with a desire to avoid sensationalizing or pathologizing him or of turning my family into a spectacle. But as I listened across the generations, learning that his grandfather had been a lifelong unionized worker in a paper mill, followed by his father who had left home, gotten a Masters and lived in comfortable affluence until his death. I encountered certain challenges in experiencing a shift in perspective that these stories facilitated.

My father's world is different. He has a stable paycheck, and he usually has, but he hasn't always, and his material existence is not the same as his parent's generation in many ways, and the same could be true of any intergenerational comparison. Coming to terms with yourself has a

softening effect, and I feel that now with my father. He's a very warm person. The last time I visited, after a year-long hiatus while working on this project, he reached out as I walked past to gently kiss my hand. In *Exit Zero*, Christine Walley writes of her own father in a way that seems to reach through the miasma to show me an image of Dad:

> …underneath the tough-guy exterior he was a sensitive, even fragile man, one wounded in so many places that it was impossible to patch him up. A difficult life as well as his own father's harshness had fatally damaged him…I suspect that, secretly, my father longed for a quiet, even reclusive life—having to live up to a veneer of self-assured masculinity was a heavy weight to bear.[243]

The sheer intimacy with which Dr. Walley describes the most painful period in her family's history is remarkable and inspired me throughout this project.

Employing the concept of 'class straddlers' outlined by Lubrano, Dr. Walley's work demonstrates how, "The possibility, even the probability, of upward mobility lies at the heart of what the United States has symbolized as a nation for both its citizens and for others."[244] Despite the mythology of upward mobility in America, many people get cause in class identities that shift—one day belonging to the well-paid industrial working class, the next day belonging to the mass of unemployed and underemployed service employees living paycheck to paycheck. After several generations of deindustrialization in manufacturing, and the reindustrialization of education and high-tech industries, for millions the myth of social mobility has ossified into a cruel fantasy or a stolen dream: "there was room for little other than individualized despair and bitterness at being ejected from the American dream. Years later, I would hear my father mutter, more to himself than anyone else, 'Yeah, we thought we were middle class there for a while. We were

[243] Walley 59-60.
[244] Walley, 89.

almost middle class."[245] The kind of class straddling my life is not identical to mine, but Walley's work is brilliant for her multi-perspective approach, using her family, regional history, anthropological training, and her physical body as a fulcrum, to dissect the complicated reality of class in America today.

In one chapter, she traces the history of her grandfathers through upwardly mobile jobs in the steel industry. In the next chapter, she describes how deindustrialization in that industry crushed her father when the plants shut down in 1980. To escape the economically and emotionally depressed environment of her home, Dr. Walley escaped by applying to a scholarship for underprivileged, gifted children to attend the prestigious Philips-Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. As an MIT professor, she avoids any triumphalism towards her experience of 'classing up' into the middle class by highlighting the ambivalence she felt through her educational experience, which she describes as both rich and alienating: "the path of individual upward mobility may be strewn with conflicting emotions, painful shifts in relationships with family and friends, and disorienting conflicts of identity."[246] She realized that her family had lived through two forms of social mobility: first, her working-class grandfathers had built a comfortable, middle class material culture through work that was difficult and dangerous, but which provided a form of general, collective prosperity that evaporated when the jobs left. The second type of upward mobility was experienced personally, my Dr. Walley alone, through her education.[247] This left her isolated, caught between the working class world of her parents and the educated, upper-middle class world of elite academia, drifting between both worlds and at home in neither.

[245] Walley, 71.
[246] Walley, 90.
[247] Walley, 91-92.

Hoarding has been a means of tracing my own class straddling in strange and unexpected directions. My earliest research question was, What kind of monuments does a hoarder leave behind? And my answer now is: an oil spill, a defrauded pension plan, a Ponzi scheme, a shareholder's bonus, a community decimated by deindustrialization and addiction, or an untraceable series of numbers leading to safety deposit boxes in Switzerland or the Cayman Islands. Trump Tower. My father may be peculiar, but I question even calling him, a hoarder. I'm not saying he doesn't aspire to it, but on a scale of value curved by the inflating presence of billionaires and millionaires, how do we even determine value for everyone else? If we consider hoarding to be something done of *valuable things* and not simply refuse, then it is the wealthiest hoarders who seem the most dangerous. At the very least, in defining "hoarders," we should include them.

We need to rethink the scale of hoarding, moving beyond lurid and alluring private collections, whether rich or poor, and see how the abstract meaning behind collections and the fact that nearly all human beings throughout history have hoarded to a certain degree, though the various systems of management of the common stock have been differentiated, ranging from reciprocal or customary practices of exchange, potlatch, wealth-in-people, or bartering. While forms of capitalism based on money, colonialism, and social hierarchies stratified by race, class, and gender, have encompassed *most* of the Earth's surface, they do so in ever evolving ways that are not uncontested. They are not the only forms of relating to objects at play in an average person's material world. While economic theories emanating from universities and think-tanks dictate norms and make themselves real in the lives of people, they are not the only discourses, whether within the chaotic diversity and economic bubbling of global cities, the endless sprawl of suburbia,

or the rural hinterland—religion, local custom, and political and social context determine the hoarding practices therein. As we find older economic forms nestled in the present like buried treasure, we might consider how, despite processes of primitive accumulation and enclosure, actor-networks or human beings and non-human actants continue to function as a sort of commons.

In my father's world, there is the mass consumerism of Walmart and Amazon, but also the Thoreauvian urge to return to the land, to own a plot on an isolated pond, to return to a simpler time of blissful ignorance, when history seemed like something far away, when one's neighbors knew one's name, when relations that weren't dictated by capital, and when relationships with time, nature, and our subjective selves were less fraught with danger and the infinite, immediately accessible pleasures of the market (if you have the money). Here the urge to enjoy one's time is in direct conflict with the consumer goals of planned obsolescence, technological innovation, and fashion trends that demand constant consumption, constant re-education, and the knowledge to make discerning choices. In fact, the compulsion to gain and grow status through work and property is in direct contradiction with the ethos of Thoreau, who wrote in *Walden:*

> Men have an indistinct notion that if they keep up this activity of joint stocks and spades long enough all will at length ride somewhere, in next to no time, and for nothing; but though a crowd rushes to the depot, and the conductor shouts "All aboard!" when the smoke is blown away and the vapor condensed, it will be perceived that a few are riding, but the rest are run over -- and it will be called, and will be, "A melancholy accident." No doubt they can ride at last who shall have earned their fare, that is, if they survive so long, but they will probably have lost their elasticity and desire to travel by that time.[248]

[248] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Ebook online) [https://www.fulltextarchive.com/pdfs/Walden-by-Henry-David-Thoreau.pdf], p. 54-55.

He mocks the Anglo-American ethos of working to earn more money without a thought to its use or enjoyment as, "Spending of the best part of one's life earning money in order to enjoy a questionable liberty during the least valuable part of it."

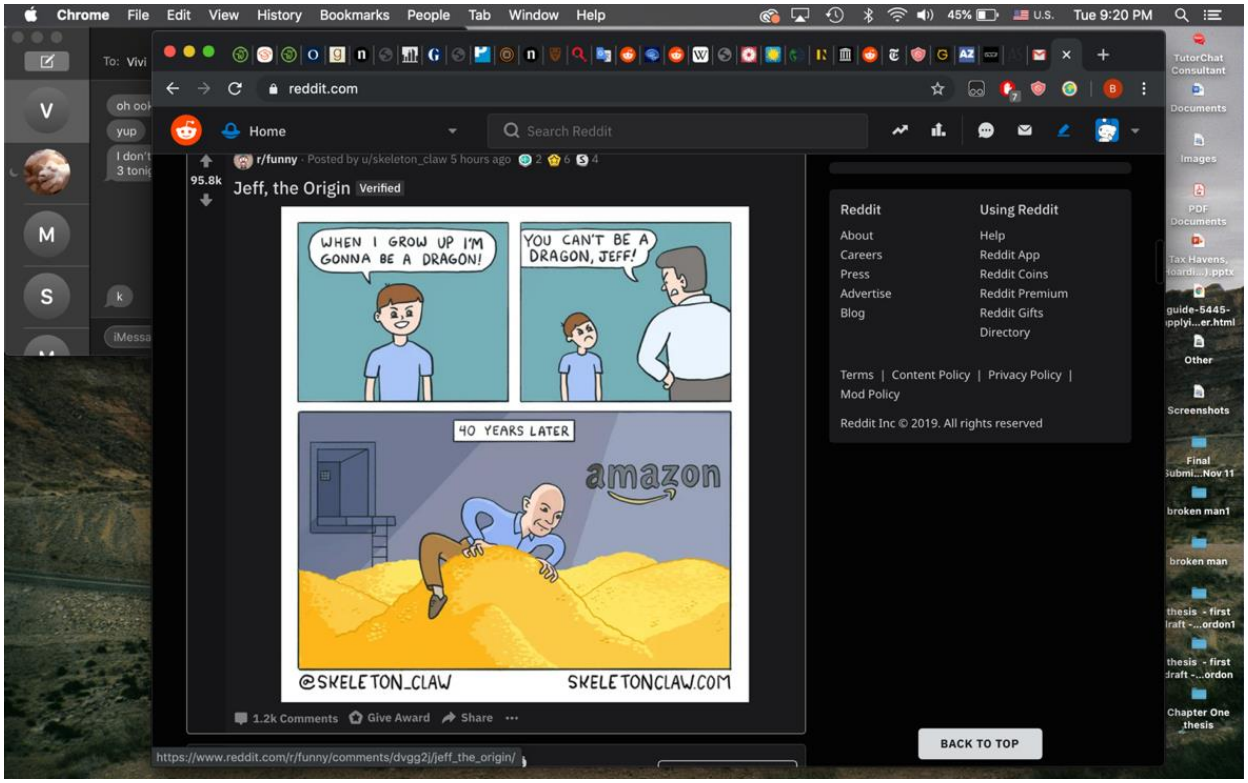
Perhaps, if we consider hoarding as an economic mode of making a living, then some of the stoppages that prevent the normal cycle of consumption and waste from completing itself would appear less anomalous. According to Guyer, within historical zones such as West Africa during European colonialism, spaces and times of tenuous political or economic stability: "quantity was a form of quality:"

> Number and kind were both scales, among others; none was anchored in a foundational invariant; all were at play. Quantity was a form of power, available for use as a qualitative weapon, as when amounts in circulation were deliberately driven either high or low enough to cross quite-well-understood thresholds of function or conception. Disjunctures and thresholds were treated as resources in practice, even if in theory the West's emerging official and academic doctrines rested on the quality of money as invariant and quantity alone as variable. Although a quantity theory was developing in Europe, monetary multiplicity and other futuristic ideas, like fictional units of account (the "trade ounce" and the "pawn"), were all being developed as Western merchant policy and practice in Africa as early as the eighteenth century. In thought and in practice, there was one theory of money and commodity exchange in the metropole and another at the interface.[249]

If a thrifty person keeps things as an investment, to make use of later or to offer as a gift to gain social capital, rather than due to a pathology or a neural tick, then we can relate her analysis of West-African peripheries to rural and deindustrialized hinterland throughout the developed world. It is helpful to view the American heartland as a colonized space. Colonized many times over, the sedimentary layers of power crusted and crumbling, here exposed like the dynamited strata of the hillsides through which cut the US Interstate highway, there hidden like the buried millions of

[249] Guyer, 12-13.

uncounted native Americans, enslaved Africans, and impoverished waves of hopeful migrants brought to heel under the crushing weight of police batons in one generation, and of quarterly portfolio reports in another.



Jeff, The Origin, spiderclaw.com, November, 2019[250]

In *Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict,* geographer Phil Neel writes that in rural areas such as southern Oregon and 'Downeast' Maine, shadow industries are the inevitable result of the economic violence wrought by deindustrialization and the unjust privatization of natural and social commons: "When jobs evaporate, but people are still forced to buy food on the market and pay off taxes, rent, and their many debts, the economy is actually in a state of partial

[250] Skeleton Claw, *Jeff, the Origin* (meme online at skeletonclaw.com).

collapse. In such conditions, black and gray markets emerge to fill the vacuum."[251] As Neel writes, "Even prior to recreational legalization, the available data suggested that marijuana was the biggest cash crop in several states, including California, and likely one of the biggest cash crops in the country."[252] Marijuana, which my father started experimenting with growing after Maine legalized in 2017, is one such grey market which he invests in to adapt to changing laws and norms. Hoarding may be another. While economies in cities have flourished in the wake of deindustrialization by aligning with logistics, IT, finance, education, high-tech manufacturing, and luxury real-estate, rural regions have been largely sidestepped by whatever recovery has followed the 2008 financial crisis, leaving rural areas eviscerated in ways similar, but different to the deindustrialization of manufacturing industries in the 1970s and 1980s, as it is reinforced by climate change, social media, resurgent far-right politics, and massive inequality: "The way of life has been destroyed in a devastating, irrevocable fashion, essential industries torn out from under us, ecosystems razed, and everyone left suffering not just material deprivation but an expansive social and cultural collapse that can only be characterized as apocalyptic."[253] Beneath the superficial detritus, people are trying to carve out lives, not only of dignity, but of material plenty they assumed to be the byproduct of hard work and playing by the rules.

In the brilliant graphic novel, *Lint*, illustrator/author Chris Ware portrays the life of one man, from conception to death, in a series of page-long, four to eight comic panel vignettes of each major memory of this man's life, as he progresses from child to adult: each disappointment, each win, each feeble attempt to exceed a stifling father and a series of poor decisions until suddenly,

[251] Neel, 76.
[252] Neel, 77.
[253] Ibid., 63.

he's a reactionary asshole and nobody loves him. If we could indeed see through the face of each person a whole montage of all the joys and pains and ungrieved, inherited wounds, it would be very difficult to pathologize or to feel contempt toward anyone. In method, I was drawn to oral history as tool for diving deep into histories that are still in motion. I see oral history as an epistemological equalizer and as a practice of building empathy, and when my project began to feel problematic in terms of my relationship with my father, I shifted to take my approach in two different directions: On the one hand, I would use myself as a subject and focus on the subjective experience of living *around* hoarding, of having it shape my concept of home, of personal space, and of my own relationships to objects. I entered myself into the archive of my research in order to place myself in conversation with the strong members of my family who happen to be mostly women, and as they have throughout my life, they guided me to the right stories and the right way of seeing, which was not that I was making a lot of money, but that I was finding value in places forgotten, where I had left it, overlooked. I used my cache of sentimental objects to interrogate and curate my life history using memories associated with those objects, and I used the histories of my own experiences of sexual, emotional, and economic violence as an offering, to ensure that none of my participants would be asked to become vulnerable in any that I wasn't also willing to do. This helped me narrow the range of stories, while giving more space to positive memories that I might have overlooked due to aversion or anger, forcing me to look into the mirror.

I was not prepared for how deep this went, but I benefited immensely from it. Following a workshop with Dr. Walley on writing autoethnography, I tried to approach my interviews from multiple angles in writing, first as a direct participant of the event, writing the memories as vividly as they happened to capture aspects of raw emotion, then writing about the same experience as

myself-observing-myself, from the outside or with the benefit of hindsight. Finally I tried to write about the piece of writing I had produced, after the fact, as a detached, outside, academic voice. I didn't do this with every scene, but the multivalent way of seeing proved a useful complement to practices of meditation and psychological therapy, which have been absolutely essential in overcoming the depressive writer's block that followed the production of these interviews, and which I'd recommend to anyone who tries to unpack their family heirlooms in this way. At times, it was too painful, and I wanted to forget that I had put myself in the position to write about these things. I am also a terrible procrastinator, so in the spirit of an unreliable narrator, I also felt inspired in my avoidance to seek further afield for hoarding, toward a global and a culture perspective. Reading more and accumulating new sources became a strategy of procrastination from writing, which felt more like hoarding as time wore on.

In an article published in a phrenological journal in the late nineteenth century entitled, "Thoughts are Things: How Results are Said to be Obtained Through the Force of Thought and Silent Power of Mind." The author seemed to be filled with a sort of evangelical fervor, making every other word feel shouted. The author wrote, "thought is a real element, constantly put out or received by the mind; and that on the government and regulation of this element depend health and fortune, success of failure in life."[254] I felt this during my project as I accumulated interviews of personal memories, my own personal thoughts and sentimental tchotchkes, confronting my own history in terms both personal and global. The author goes on to argue that "It is a law of riches

[254] George J. Manson, "Thoughts Are Things: How Results Are Said to be Obtained Through the Force of Thought and the Silent Power of Mind," in *The Phrenological Journal of Science and Health* (March 1890; 89, 3)[American Periodicals].

that use brings gain; hoarding brings loss. If the tree held stingily on to last year's fruit and leaves, and refused to drop them, the vents for next year's fruit and leaves would be choked up." Despite the weird, eugenicist, imperialistic tinge to phrenology, the authors were not entirely off the mark in equating obsessive over-thinking with economic miserliness and antisocial behavior.[255] Through the unearthing of my own hoarded thoughts and memories, against a backdrop of more recent disappointments and miscommunications, grief and loss, I was able to connect with more positive memories of people, both mine and others', whose perspectives helped me to see my father and my grandfather in a new light, to reconnect with fond, but half-forgotten moments lodged within mundane ephemera, and to feel the density of the web of life in which I am inexorably entwined.

A functional system of genuine reciprocity and universal kinship would leave no need for hoarding, except on the level of the community, however large or small, but the obverse may also be true: the subconscious anxieties and motivations to hoard may project outward into the world, creating or intensifying the very terror which it arose to compensate for. While hoarding may be presented on TV and within a diagnostic category as fundamentally anomalous and Other, beyond the clinical and pop-culture definitions of 'hoarding', there are other semantic etymologies woven into 'hoarding,' whose unearthing offers insight into the systems of power to which racism, misogyny, and classism belong.

This thesis suggests that hoarding is a broad spectrum of human behavior. It is as natural as seeking nourishment and preening, as basic, adaptive, and relational as giving a gift, writing a

[255] George J. Manson, "Thoughts Are Things: How Results Are Said to be Obtained Through the Force of Thought and the Silent Power of Mind," in *The Phrenological Journal of Science and Health* (March 1890; 89, 3)[American Periodicals], 114.

contract, or wearing a particular style of clothing to work. My work suggests that as a secular practice, hoarding evokes magical, spiritual properties for those who do it. Whether as capitalists or as packrats, hoarders evoke commodity fetishism in its purest form, as the cult of money, as the *investment* of objects with power by human beings, and as the use of objects to project power and meaning outward in a reciprocal dance between the individual and the social. In the age of planned obsolescence, such behavior is treated like a Luddite's "backwards" worship of the past, while the waste produced by a single up-scale restaurant, a small manufacturing facility, or an open pit mine are accepted as standard business practices, despite producing a daily amount of waste that baffles those of us desperately clutching at compostable straws. It is easy to scoff at a hoard if you believe in the future promised by neoliberalism, but for those of us who don't, rather than pathological consumers, hoarders may be the 'canaries in the coal mine.' I think text-book hoarders are a warning, about the changing nature of economic life and of the appropriate strategies to cope, when we too find ourselves on the business end of the American Dream—on the other side of the wall. In the Classical and Medieval Western world, the line was clearly drawn between just and unjust uses of wealth, a tradition that has been put on the ideological backburner for too long, and begins to peak through in the popular consciousness.

I'd like to return to Jane Bennet's work, *Vibrant Matter*, and to the anecdote with which I began this story. The vibrancy of matter belies how objects move from inanimate to actant in the course of an object-human interaction, but if we consider the manner in which Life invests objects since, as money draws all commodities to itself as a universal form of exchange value and the ultimate use-value form, then we can recognize that all 'inanimate' objects made by humans come from nature. The shoe from a cow and an oil well and a factory and a logistical network, the disused

paperback's pages took pulp from trees and cotton, a window from a hundred-thousand grains of sand stolen from an eroding river bank in rural India, a cell phone's rare metals from mines in the Congo, where enslaved children use their living bodies so that wealthy children may watch Peppa Pig on YouTube, or learn English as a Second Language from me on a tablet in New York City or Beijing.

Pure Gold, Grandpa's shed, 2017

This energy resides in hoards of all forms, as the cumulative prosperity of past, present, and future, held hostage in both over-consuming homes the world over and in massive and tremendous capital hoards, thriving as privatization and neoliberalization has allowed the collective capital of most nations to flow into the lives of wealthy people as cheap products, and outward to spaces beyond national or international jurisdiction, though they are, by their nature, not self-evident. Consider

New York City, for example: the sheer flow of life in and out like a toxic lung, the flows of money and goods and people, the exalted home of an empire built of stardom, stocks, and shopping. Even within the spectrum of capital hoarding, we have the illusion of the Cayman Islands or secretive Swiss banks being the quintessential place of 'dark money,' when in fact, New York is the world's largest tax haven by volume, followed by the City of London. It is not just Americans or British people using these systems of course, as each global, economic powerhouse has preferred partners for tax and regulatory evasion. While New York serves global oil magnates, southern-hemisphere dictators, and flows of capital from Europe, American business send its cash south to the Caribbean, or utilizes services such as low-tax Ireland, flags of convenience registries in Liberia, 'free trade' agreements between Canada and Mexico, Special Economic Zones on the militarized southern border, exploiting the stream of north-bound refugees for cheap, pliant labor—those migrants fleeing American supported dictatorships in Central and South America.

The global events of climate change, militant extremism, and economic inequality have their roots in hoarding, making the spectacular entertainments and diagnostic categories that obscure the class spectrum of it particularly egregious. We are living in the unanticipated consequences of hoarding on a scale no human civilization has ever experienced, just as that same behavior has created the collective space and political conditions making the world ripe for a truly global paradigm shift concerning justice, redistribution, international taxation and regulation, and a collective response to climate change. This history has tried to capture the interconnectedness of hoarding behaviors across a broad spectrum of objects, values, human beings, and historical contexts. Every object, plant, and person requires a tremendous amount of complexity, of water, shelter, care, calories, and energy to be alive or artificially produced, but under current economic

models many of these people and things are likely to go to waste, and nonetheless to play some role in altering the course of many lives. As we recognize that there is no 'outside' in the world we live in, except the vastness of space and the richness and diversity of inner subjectivity, as Bennett writes, "If we have a humanistic interest in a richer kinship, marital, or civic life, we had better pursue a more ecological sustainable relationship with nonhuman nature."[256] In the sense that all commodities, including human beings, land, gold, come from the Earth, which itself is drifting through space, *nothing* is unnatural, certainly not human beings and their manifold ways of keeping, though things may be done out of sync with the larger patterns and cycles which are integral to our being. All things are interconnected, the lowest common denominator being the simple fact that all things move, all things change. In the interest of 'shaping the Change', to borrow a phrase from science fiction author, Octavia Butler, I wish to propose a further reconsideration on the scope of hoarding, and the possibilities for finding ways of life that prioritize solidarity and sharing over scarcity economics and selfishness.

[256] Bennet, 113.

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