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Spectacles of Waste[1]

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In her book *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, Guliana Bruno points to various currents within contemporary cultural analysis that have converged to address what she calls the "shifting grounds of socio-cultural mobilities" (2002, 15). This convergence is an interdisciplinary development, extending beyond the boundaries of what John Urry has labelled a "mobile sociology" (2001, 186). Across the study of the visual arts, cinema, literature, architecture, and communications media, one finds a broadly shared concern with the experience of heightened movement and speed, and with the birth of this experience in the emergent modernity of the nineteenth century. If there is a coherence to "mobility studies," it stems in part from its preoccupation with phenomena that are urban in character. The renewed interest in the work of Georges Simmel and Walter Benjamin has been an important influence here, through its sustained attention to the interplay between speed, urban space, and modernity (see, for example, Simmel 1997, Benjamin 1999). The experience of urban modernity is now offered as the privileged background through which one might understand such phenomena as the origins of cinema, collage-based painting, or the structures of the twentieth-century department store. These cultural forms are themselves now treated as transformative interventions in the social organization of movement and speed.

In 1985, in the revue *Communications*, Henri Lefebvre offered the outline of a field of social research to be called "rhythmanalysis": the study of the rhythms and cycles of urban life (Lefebvre and Régulier-Lefebvre 1985). While "rhythmanalysis" might seem central to the project of "mobility studies," Lefebvre's influence within

such a project has remained relatively minor. As Kofman and Lebas note (1996, 30), his short book *Elements de rhythmanalysis* was not published until 1992, following the author's death and amidst uncertainty over the work's quality. In the anglophone academic world, Lefebvre's claim that rhythmanalysis might offer an alternative to psychoanalysis has seemed of little pertinence to an interdisciplinary field (that of urban cultural studies) wherein psychoanalysis has exercised little influence anyways. In the context of the Culture of Cities Project, the collaborative interdisciplinary endeavour on which this volume is based, the notion of a rhythmanalysis has come to exercise a steady if secondary influence. It has given us a vocabulary with which to contemplate the relationship of stasis to movement at several levels of urban life, from the quotidian experience of public transportation through the patterns of renovation and reconstruction by which buildings and neighbourhoods are being transformed. In pursuing a rhythmanalysis, we are constantly led back to the question of the city's essential relationship to time. This question in its simplest and most idealistic form asks whether the city is a mechanism for perpetual motion or a force for stasis and immobility. In the language of contemporary sociology, this question is posed as that of the relationship between mobility and stability, materiality and fluidity (Pels, Hetherington, and Vandenberghe 2002).

The rapid turnover of things and ideas and the concomitant erasure of historical sensibility have long been diagnosed as defining features of urban life. This diagnosis has been central to theorizations of modernity within the social and human sciences, from the work of Georg Simmel through that of Marshall Berman (see, for example, Simmel 1997; Berman 1982). As Robert Beauregard has suggested (2003, 999), numerous works of contemporary urban cultural geography strain to express, often in quasi-poetic form, a sense of the city as characterized by "continuous novelty and virtualities … by its circulation, hybridity, and multiplicity." The ongoing imbrication of the urban and the modern within accounts of each other, and the invocation of mobility and speed as definitive of each, have marked numerous studies that labour to capture the effervescence and restlessness seen as emblematic of the modern city (see, for example, Vasudevan 2003; Donald 1999; Schwartz 1998).

Alternative accounts of the city's relationship to time have been more scattered and less totalizing in their theoretical claims. Across

a range of writings, nevertheless, one finds descriptions of urban culture that stress its slowness or immobility, that see the city as a place of dense and almost imperceptible accumulation. In these writings the city is a space in which artifacts and other historical residues are stored and movement is blocked. Here, the city is marked by stasis and the persistence of the past, by the tangible presence of history rather than by its constant erasure. Lefebvre, for example, has suggested (1984, 123) that the democratic character of city life may have as much to do with its accumulation of historical artifacts available to everyone (which allow every city dweller to "reap the benefits of past glories") as with the challenges to entrenched hierarchies more typically embraced by those who revel in the city's impermanence. The city's capacity for accumulation thus makes the city a repository of collective resources whose abundance obscures or balances its social divisions. Some twenty years ago the sociologist George D. Suttles called for scholarly attention to the "cumulative texture of local culture" (1984, 283), to the ways in which local identities take shape in the piling up of sentiments and materials. In a book of architectural theory entitled *Anytime*, Mennan et al. suggest that urban space is a "delay mechanism," a structure marked by its resistance to change (1999, 71). Culture, they suggest, "by definition builds upon a set of procedural and behavioural codes that transform it into a machine for delay" (ibid.). The city is a machine for delay in part through its capacities for storage, through the spaces of accumulation (like pawnshops and used book stores) that take shape and proliferate within it.

The tension between these ways of grasping urban life and experience – one insisting on the city's endless mutability, the other stressing its tendencies toward stasis and inertia – runs through various sorts of urban cultural analysis. This tension is sometimes expressed as the difference between specific media or cultural forms. Thus, for Ackbar Abbas (1997, 64), the distinction between mobility and stasis is embodied in the difference between cinematic and architectural experiences within the city. The former best express the fragmentary, unstable experience of the city; the latter transform spectators into passive contemplators of a stable, touristic spectacle. The cinema thus captures and expresses the destabilizing impulses within city life, while architecture functions as the assertion of historical solidity. This comparison recalls Victor Hugo's account of the shift from architecture to the printing press as the

cultural form most expensive of urban life and its rhythms (for a discussion, see Stierle 2001, 299). In his own attempts to map the multiple aesthetics of urban life, Alain Mons (2003, 114) has noted a similar polarity. On the one hand, he suggests, urban photography and painting have given us dense, compact images of the city, filled with old structures and materials whose visual overlay renders the city solid and immobile. On the other hand, the contemporary cinema has come to favour fleeting, partial images of the city – of its fugitive *non-lieux* and lines of flight – which make the viewer's look upon the city ceaselessly mobile and disoriented.

USED OBJECTS

The analysis that follows retreats from these questions of a textualized urban aesthetic to examine tensions between mobility and stasis at the more mundane level of everyday objects and their lives. In particular, we focus on the fate of second-hand or used commodities within the city. Second-hand cultural commodities participate in urban mobility through their circulation within the city, a circulation that finds them imbricated within the broader rhythms of urban commerce. At the same time, second-hand objects typically move toward sites of disposal or accumulation, as they become disengaged in whole or part from these rhythms of commerce. In this disengagement, such objects pose a new set of questions for analysis. One of these has to do with their residual commercial value. What are the institutions, strategies, and markets that have taken shape so as to wring additional economic benefit from objects in the latter stages of their life cycles? Other questions are provoked by the range of ethical issues that have come to surround old artifacts, such as the ecological acceptability of their outright destruction, or the extent to which societies will tolerate an unregulated, unofficial commerce in used commodities. A third set of questions concerns the spaces in which old commodities are stored or offered for resale, and the proximity of such spaces to other regions of social and economic life. As we shall see, a commerce in used commodities may be ennobled by its proximity to middle-class residential neighbourhoods, degraded by its closeness to the urban poor, or rendered suspicious when implicated within institutions suspected of illicit activity, like the pawnshop.

A rhythmanalysis of the second-hand commodity is, at one level, an account of the commodity's movement in and out of markets,

but it requires as well an investigation of what Janelle Watson has identified as a given culture's "mode of accumulation." "What I am calling 'mode of accumulation' determines the fate of surplus material goods circulating in the economy, the way they are acquired and by whom, as well as how they are stored, displayed, and disposed of," she writes (1999, 40). We may characterize various parts of the city in terms of their role in these processes of accumulation. Urban spaces may be differentiated according to the extent to which they enhance the mobility of things (heightening the velocity of their circulation, for example) or may serve to render them static and immobile (by retaining them within spaces wherein their appeal is diminished or from which their removal is slowed). These processes contribute to those broader patterns of what Parkes and Thrift (following Jean-Luc Nancy) have called the "spacing of time": the organization of temporal processes as spatial differences or itineraries (1975, 653). A rhythmanalysis of the city is, in this sense, a "topics" of urban space – a study of the ways in which "temporal qualities [are] inscribed in spaces" (Lefebvre 1996, 173).

In moving through the city, objects move through space, but they pass as well through different stages of their own existence. As Michael Thompson has noted, objects have both physical and commercial life cycles, and these two cycles are typically asynchronous (1979). The physical life of objects takes them from the moment of their creation to the point of their material decay or destruction. This physical dilapidation is typically uni-directional, with occasional reversals (as when machines are repaired or books are rebound) and lengthy periods of relative stasis. The commercial life cycle of an object, on the other hand, may involve several changes in value and price, and while these too may follow a unidirectional decline, the occasions on which they undergo important reversals (by becoming rare and collectible, for example) are numerous. Thompson's distinction between the deterioration of an object's physical base and a decline in its social value is mirrored in Roland Barthes's theoretical separation between physical and semiotic dilapidation (1967, 298–301).

The relationship between these various cycles would serve to ground a rhythmanalysis of the artifact or commodity. We are more interested, however, in the ways in which both cycles serve to trace lines of passage through the city. An object's life cycle is intertwined with its physical movement, as it passes through potentially

limitless series of public and private spaces, and as it is subject to
varieties of use and treatment. In the movement of commodities
from the place of their first sale, into the contexts of domestic
ownership, and from there into the markets of second-hand com-
merce, things move across the space of the city. At the same time,
the movement of second-hand commodities is partially dependent
upon a variety of other rhythms rooted deep in the social practices
of city life: in the rates of turnover of households or businesses, in
the seasonal cycles of outdoor commerce, in personal or collective
rituals of disposal and replenishment, in the intermittence of eco-
nomic necessity, and so on. In the next sections we pursue a con-
cern with these cycles through an examination of different forms
of second-hand commerce within the city.

THE CHARITY SHOP AND
THE MAIN STREET BOUTIQUE

In their study of British charity shops – retail establishments that
sell second-hand goods to raise money for charitable causes –
Gregson and Crewe (2003) trace the efforts of shop managers to
find the appropriate place for such institutions within the broader
commercial geographies of cities. Charity stores were traditionally
situated in parts of cities marked by the stigma of transience: near
bus terminals, for example, or in neighbourhoods dominated by
renters rather than property owners, or along streets with heavy
automobile traffic. In part, this had been the result of charity shop
owners seeking rents lower than those typical in city centres. As
well, in large measure these locations were appropriate to the origi-
nal function of these stores – that of offering low-cost objects and
services to the poorer members of communities. As Horne notes,
this function of the charity or thrift store would change in the
1980s (1998, 155). Increasingly, these shops came to make their
money by selling clothes and other goods to hip teenagers or to an
educated class that recognized the signs of connoisseurist value in
older, discarded artifacts. These populations had become the privi-
leged customers of the charity shop. The services provided to the
disadvantaged clients of charitable agencies now come principally
from monies raised through the sale of goods to more prosperous
buyers rather than from the provision of the goods themselves As a
result, charity stores have moved closer to the spaces of middle class

commerce, severing their physical proximity to the poor or transient populations with whom they were traditionally linked.

In fact, as Gregson and Crewe note (2003, 20–3), stores specializing in second-hand materials have gravitated toward two sorts of locations over the past two decades. Charity shops (like the Oxfam chain) have sought locations amidst the legitimate, "first-hand" commerce of main street retailing. In doing so, they have acknowledged that their principal competition is with national retail chains, for mainstream customers. One effect of this relocation is that charity shops are drawn to employ practices of display and promotion typical of the commercial chain store, such as the seasonal sale or the window display. A limited number of attractive, contemporary-looking items are made available for viewing in the main areas of a store; excess stock is kept hidden in storerooms. In its mimicry of the mainstream store, the charity shop has shed an image that once haunted it: as a place of limitless accumulation, or an uncontrolled repository in which historical time (and any sense of the differential currency of objects) has been dissolved. While earlier charity shops made only minor distinctions between retail display space, workshop rooms for the repair of objects, and storage areas, the newer shops of British high streets have carefully segregated these various activities, often within separate buildings. At the same time, by locating itself in proximity to the chain store offering new goods, the charity shop mimics the chain store's imbrication within rhythms of fashionability and commodity turnover. In its distance from the households from which its stock derives, it mystifies its reliance on locally based practices of donation and disposal.

Other sorts of second-hand commerce have found their appropriate locations elsewhere within the city. Those shops whose merchandise is directed at a connoisseurist, retro-oriented clientele are more likely to seek locations amidst the cafés, music stores, and other institutions of urban bohemia. They are often located within or near old industrial buildings, which entrepreneurship and urban policy have transformed into signifiers of a rough, subcultural authenticity. Here the maintenance of stocks in seemingly unorganized or chaotic assemblages (such as piles of raw fabrics or textiles) serves both to distinguish these stores from commercial chains and to cast the experience of shopping as one of an exploration requiring expertise and determination (ibid., 73–83). The location of these stores next to older buildings and purveyors of antique furniture,

musical recordings, or books endows them with a museum-like quality that heightens their difference from the commercial strip with its relentless turnover of commodities.

In both these cases – that of the main street charity shop and the bohemian quarter retro store – second-hand commerce has shed its associations with geographical and social marginality. Most notably, these institutions have distinguished themselves from events such as the flea market or car-trunk sale, which represent to many a distasteful extreme among the institutions of second-hand commerce. Flea markets and trunk sales temporarily occupy unused parking lots or agricultural markets on the peripheries of urban life. While their popularity has grown significantly in the past two decades, these events have not shed the image of parasitism stemming from their exploitation of temporal gaps in the normal uses of these spaces (cf. Gregson and Crewe 1997, 108). The intermittent appearance and disappearance of vendors and goods, the use of automobile trunks to transport and display merchandise, and the absence of any of the usual signifiers of commercial stability (such as credit-card machines) all arouse popular and judicial suspicion against which these events must struggle. This suspicion is rooted in large measure in the fact that these events fail to balance the free circulation of artifacts with the stability of permanent architectural or entrepreneurial structures.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD YARD SALE

The yard or garage sale assuages these suspicions through its proximity to places of residence. Virtually unheard of before the 1970s, the *vente de garage* has emerged as a common practice in urban middle-class life throughout North America. Within it, the suspicion that attaches to street vending is minimized through the belief, implied by vendors and assumed by buyers, that the objects for sale originate in the residence directly behind them. We might take this belief as a vernacular equivalent of the significance accorded an object's provenance in the markets for old masters paintings or other fine art objects. In a rhythmanalysis of the yard sale, the primary relationship is that between the temporary character of these sales and the stability of the residential context that is their backdrop. One will find high variation, between neighbourhoods and cities, in the rates at which the occupancy of buildings change. In Montreal,

a city whose rate of home ownership is below national norms, the high number of garage sales is sometimes traced to the frequency of turnover of households. The occasions on which people move become pretexts for the disposal of goods through public sales, and these are more frequent in Montreal than in many other cities. A relationship between the rhythms of household relocation and the frequency of garage sales is, very simply, a relationship between the velocity of movement of people and that of objects.

Both such speeds will shape the "mode of accumulation" characteristic of a neighbourhood or other unit of urban life. The frequency of residential turnover in Montreal means that households within the city are less likely than those in more stable communities to become repositories of objects accumulated over long periods of time. The commerce of the *vente de garage* in Montreal thus involves a high number of sales offering commodities that have been acquired relatively recently. It is commonly shared lore among those who frequent garage sales that older neighbourhoods with stable populations are the best sources of antiques or other vintage materials. John Brinckerhoff Jackson has noted that "the age of the average American is greater than that of the house he lives in" (1984, 94). An extended rhythmanalysis of city life might compare the age of residences with the ages of the people who live within them. It might note as well the ages of objects within households and compare these to the duration of people's occupancy of any given home. Through these analyses, we might grasp the extent to which physical residences are institutions of preservation and stasis.

Garage sales throughout Montreal tend to offer commodities (such as compact discs or baby toys) whose origins lie within a narrow and relatively recent strip of historical time. This characteristic has made the Montreal garage sale the object of judicial and regulatory attention. When garage sales are dominated by objects only recently removed from the world of commercial retailing, they invite the suspicion that they are part of a traffic in stolen goods, or that they represent attempts to engage in commerce without paying the necessary costs of commerce such as retail licenses and sales taxes. Second-hand objects that do not bear the marks of age or the traces of extended prior usage come to be seen as direct substitutes for new objects; their purchase no longer seems to be driven by the sense of whimsical discovery or cultural preservation that the genteel, middle-class garage sale is meant to inspire. What is missing in

these sales is evidence of that two-stage process of burial that Kevin Heatherington has described as typical in the disposal of objects:

> Conduits of disposal often have this two-stage "holding" process through which consumer objects pass before becoming waste. The bookcase, the recycle bin on a computer, the garage, the potting shed, the fridge, the wardrobe, even the bin, are often constituted more as sites of first burial rather than of second burial. Items are held in them for a period of time while their uncertain value state is addressed (use, exchange, or sentimental value) before being removed into the representational outside where they undergo their second burial in the incinerator, the landfill, or unfortunately sometimes just fly-tipped onto the side of the road … If the intrinsic worth of a person is assumed to be their soul, the intrinsic worth of an artefact is its value – use value and sentimental value as much as exchange or sign value. Only when all forms of value have been exhausted or translated and thereby stabilized will the object be permitted to undergo its second burial. (2004, 169)

We may regard the respectable *vente de garage* as a "second burial," then, for objects that have typically lingered in closets or storage spaces (the space of their "first burial") before their final expulsion from a household through their sale to strangers or neighbours. The suspicions that surround certain forms of street vending now become clear. When it is obvious (from their newness) that the objects offered for sale have not gone through that extensive phase of domestic stasis – that "first burial" – wherein their value is allowed to quietly dissolve before they are cast off, garage sales invite the judgment that they are no longer casual rituals of household renewal. The case of a yard sale offering twenty boxes of shoes, cited in a debate over garage sales by members of Montreal's municipal government, raised the question of how one might distinguish between a legitimate yard sale and the operation of a quasi-permanent, household-based retail outlet. In Montreal, as in many other municipalities throughout North America, this has been decided through decisions that allow city dwellers to hold only two or three garage sales per year. (See, for example, Topeka, Kansas [no date]; Derfel 1997, A3.) The challenge, in the regulation of the yard sale, is to establish an acceptable frequency for such events that

corresponds to the slow rhythms through which household objects age and, in aging, slowly communicate their superfluity to those who possess them. The quick disposal of objects that have not moved slowly through these phases of domestic "burial" risks appearing as an act of commercial calculation or economic desperation. The respectability of the garage sale requires that it be motivated by an abundance of things rather than a shortage of money for those holding them. Sales must be scheduled, therefore, in a manner detaching them from any sense of punctual financial emergency. Garage sales are typically planned and announced long in advance of their occurrence, and at times of the year decided upon through neighbourhood consensus, tradition, or the seasonal rhythms of household cleansing. This scheduling functions to block and disavow any direct relationship between emergent financial need and the disposal of household artifacts.

THE PAWNSHOP AND ITS RESTRICTED INVENTORIES

The middle-class respectability and recent popularity of the yard sale distinguish it clearly from the pawnshop, a longstanding institution of second-hand commerce whose historical role within the rhythms of urban life has been very different. Jim Fitzpatrick notes that the pawnshop emerged to allow people to survive drops or gaps in anticipated income, such as those resulting from crop failures or the sudden need to move to find employment (2001, 10, 26). The pawnshop is thus associated with emergency situations, in which goods must be turned over rapidly so as to raise money. In virtually all respects, the pawnshop represents an inversion of the features of the yard sale. The pawnshops' exchanges are transacted in private, obscure spaces, and the purely financial character of those exchanges is acknowledged rather than disavowed. The yard sale locates itself amidst the rhythms and rituals of residential neighbourhood life, while the pawnshop is typically confined (by law or tradition) to marginal spaces within the city. For all of these reasons, the pawnshop has come to be linked in the public and judicial mind with illegality.

This link is reinforced by shifts over time in the categories of goods sold in pawnshops. In an earlier period, the pawnbroker's merchandise was dominated by household items marked with the signs of individuality and deeply personal attachment (jewellery,

household linens, family heirlooms). The pawnshop was more obviously a space of accumulation and relative stasis, deriving most of its revenues from the interest paid by customers. The sentimentality that attached itself to pawnshop merchandise (such as musical instruments or engraved watches) rendered pawnshops complexly layered archives in which were embedded the residues of important and highly specific occasions in people's lives. In contrast, the merchandise of the contemporary pawnshop is dominated by mass-produced home entertainment hardware and software, artifacts with much weaker affective links to the households from which they come. The perception that the pawnshop is one node within the economic circuits of criminality is reinforced by the increased homogenization of pawned merchandise. In recent years the inventories of pawnshops have been marked by an ongoing standardization of the objects for sale, as if one were witnessing the emergence of a limited system of alternate currencies. One of the most prominent of these categories has been the compact disc and DVD, commodities whose relationship to drug addiction and theft have been noted over the past decade (e.g., Fong 2003). Part of the economy of addiction in such cities as Vancouver, it is suggested, are second-hand stores and pawnshops through which funds for drug purchases can be quickly raised. Until recently, compact discs were considered one of the key commodities within this commerce, insofar as they could be easily stolen, converted into cash, and resold. The compact disc circulated quickly and relatively easily from retail stores to apartments, from there to pawnshops or second-hand stores, and then back into individual collections. Its movements through the city, therefore, led it through multiple spaces of accumulation and exchange; these movements joined together a variety of activities that were illicit and legitimate, casual and urgent.

   Montreal's municipal government took up the question of pawnshops most recently in the late 1990s, when the number of pawnshops in the city reached its highest ever levels (Montreal 2000: annexe 1, 2; see also Mainville 1999).[2] A report to the Ville de Montréal suggested measures to reduce the mobility of pawned objects so that thieves could not quickly raise money by exchanging stolen goods, and drug users could not have immediate access to funds to support their habits. These measures included the requirement that a pawnshop's hours of business be restricted (so that they not overlap the typical hours of theft or drug use), or that the sale of

pawned goods not be permitted until their original owners had been notified (to slow the turnover of merchandise and thus discourage the transformation of pawnshops into simple retail establishments) (Montreal 2000). Each of these requirements would have introduced delays in circuits of exchange rendered smoothly functional by the standardization of pawnshop merchandise over the past few decades.

The centrality of compact discs and DVDs (and of electronic goods more generally) to pawnshop commerce represents a reduction of the varieties of knowledge once participant in that commerce. Just as small-time thieves will seek objects that are available almost anywhere (rather than in specialized places of accumulation like private coin collections) and recognized widely as objects of potential exchange, so the inventories of pawnshops have moved toward higher and higher levels of standardization organized around objects of recent vintage. The prices of compact discs, DVD players, and digital cameras are easily calculable and relatively stable. There is little of the variation, based on factors such as condition and age, that required earlier generations of pawnbrokers to be connoisseurs in several fields. The compact disc became central to pawnshop commerce in the 1990s in part because its newness as a form meant that complex forms of distinction between the old and the new, the worthless and the treasured, had not yet settled upon it. A traffic in stolen books can operate effectively only at the level of the rare and precious, and thus requires complex knowledge about objects, potential buyers, and specialized markets. An economic return on books is thus much slower and less likely. In contrast, virtually all compact discs, from the time of the format's emergence until very recently, could be sold on second-hand markets at predictable prices. Most were sufficiently desired to guarantee a minimal price; none were so rare or obscure as to require expert evaluation of their worth (and the delays in sale that this evaluation might necessitate). The movement of compact discs and DVDs was sufficiently rapid that the spaces of their accumulation (such as pawnshops or second-hand stores) experienced regular renewal and turnover of their stocks. Few of these spaces were allowed to develop an archival depth or exhaustivity of the sort that characterizes large second-hand bookstores or repositories of old furniture.

The charity shop, yard sale, and pawnshop may all be invoked to support the claim by Mennan et al. that "urban space is a delay mechanism" (1999, 71). The city delays the disappearance of objects

by extending the itineraries through which things travel as they live out their life cycles. As an item of clothing passes from department store to domestic closet, to resale in a *vente de garage*, into new domestic contexts and, finally, to the mammoth spaces of the charity thrift store, its life has been prolonged by the multiplicity of steps punctuating its movement toward a final location. The economies of theft, pawning, and resale that take shape on the edges of the legitimate economy serve to further extend the life cycles of certain classes of commodity, within relatively self-contained, self-replenishing systems of constant movement. In this respect, the sedimented thickness of urban life is not just a function of the city's density and multi-levelled accumulation; it is the result as well of the city's circuitousness, of the innumerable destinations and itineraries it offers to the object as it ages.

SPECTACLES OF WASTE

The early phases of a commodity's life cycle are usually marked by its dispersion and disappearance from public space, as it moves from the places of retail display to the home or other spaces of private life. There is in these early stages a fragmentation of the commodity's public presence, as its multiple copies move in different directions.[3] While the experience of a commodity's novelty thus finds sustenance in large numbers of publically visible copies, commodities age individually, dispersed within innumerable private spaces and single examples. (This is not the case for buildings or monuments, of course, which age publically and in so doing produce a widespread collective experience of obsolescence and decay.) It is in the later stages of the cultural commodity's life cycle – near the end of what Ivan Kopytoff has called its "social biography" – that one typically finds its convergence back toward others of similar classes, in such sites of accumulation as the second-hand store or the flea market (1986). This convergence is the result of innumerable economic calculations and transactions, but it must be seen as well as an informal collective response to the question of how to dispose of cultural commodities. Unspoken resistance to the outright destruction of cultural commodities, and more overt ecological commitments to recycling, have led to the creation of complex itineraries along which such commodities typically travel in the final stages of their life cycles. When a used book store will not take

a book, it is offered in garage sales, then donated to thrift or charity shops, where its ultimate fate need no longer trouble its original owner. Typically, it will find its final stasis among large numbers of objects of the same category, now sold at uniform prices that express few differences from one object of its class to another.

One place of final (or near-final) stasis for cultural commodities could once be found within the Palais du Commerce, a large edifice on Montreal's rue Berri. Destroyed by wrecking crews in 2001, the Palais had been built in 1952, in an architectural style whose historical value was much disputed at the time of the building's destruction (Bronson 2000). Until the opening of the great shopping and office complex Place Bonaventure in 1967, the Palais was Montreal's principal commercial exhibition space. Its builders had intended the Palais to be a "*maison du peuple*," a community institution that would strengthen the cultural and economic significance of Montreal's Quartier Latin, the francophone area east of the city's central business district. To that end, the Palais served as the site of innumerable cultural and social events, including community dinners presided over by the Catholic leader Cardinal Léger, attracting six thousand people at a time. Over the three decades of the Palais's decline, since the 1960s, it housed a variety of marginal commercial or cultural enterprises: fast-food restaurants, markets for clothes, and a non-profit in-line skating facility. Indeed, struggles to maintain the complex's skating facilities in the late 1990s took their place within a long history of contestation over the space of the Palais and, more dramatically, of the Parc Emelie Gamelin to which it was immediately adjacent.

Just before the Palais was torn down, it served briefly as the site for one of Montreal's art biennales. In this final function, the structure underwent a sanctification of sorts through its temporary occupation by works of art. The 2001 biennale was devoted to the theme of time, and a concern with decay linked many of the individual artworks to the larger drama of the building's imminent disappearance (see, for example, Lamarche 2000). In one of the biennale's most striking works, a room was filled with several hundred old vinyl recordings strewn and stacked in haphazard fashion across its floor. Visitors to the biennale were invited to walk across the records in order to access the rooms beyond. This accumulation of discarded vinyl recordings appeared to most viewers as one more instance of the contemporary art world's preoccupation with

material artifactuality. Those familiar with the history of the Palais knew that the vinyl records referred directly to one of the building's long-time functions.

Since the 1980s, much of the space of the Palais had functioned as a graveyard for unwanted cultural artifacts. The Palais had contained within its enormous basement several interconnected warehouse-like stores offering for sale thousands of old books and records. One of these stores, which specialized in vinyl records, was called Le Fou du Disque; its companion was Le Fou du Livre. The abundance of cast-off commodities within both stores had long seemed emblematic of Montreal's long-term economic weaknesses, which had nourished innumerable informal markets and forms of second-hand commerce across the city. In particular, these stores seemed to epitomize the undervalued abundance that plagued Montreal throughout the 1990s. The huge inventories and large size of these stores were somehow typical of a city in which there were, until recently, too many unwanted things and too many underutilized spaces.

We may see Le Fou du Disque as condensing within itself a characteristic tension of urban cultural life. On the one hand, the store was emblematic of the mobility of things within the city; it was one step within complex itineraries that took material artifacts through a variety of commercial and domestic spaces. Le Fou was one node within the city's economy of pawnshops, informal markets, and second-hand stores, an economy through which artifacts travel along convoluted and usually uncharted routes. It offered itself as one of those institutions in which cast-off commodities are meant to rest, momentarily, before moving into other places of commerce or back into homes. In this respect, it seemed appropriate that Le Fou du Disque was located directly across from Montreal's bus terminal, and near the main intersection of Metro lines. This was (and remains) an area of the city marked by the predominance of the transitory and of cheaply acquired pleasures. (In fact, Le fou du disque could be reached from the Metro station or *terminus d'autobus* through a confusing series of underground tunnels.) Through its proximity to transportation crossroads, its own labyrinthian structure, and its place within the itineraries of discarded objects, the Palais du Commerce evoked what, several decades earlier, Pierre Mac Orlan called "*le fantastique social*": that atmosphere of secret itineraries and mysterious adventures that marks such urban

institutions as the railroad station or the seaport (1997). Its associations with transience, and with people and objects of dubious provenance, made it clear that the Palais had abdicated its original role as the site of collective assembly for a stable, locally based community.

At the same time, through its massive accumulation of seemingly unwanted commodities, Le fou was a place marked, more than most others, by the sedentary stasis of the things within it. Le Fou du Disque and Le Fou du Livre seemed like final resting places for commodities that were now immobile, for which social desire had withered. These were the places to which radio stations, libraries, bankrupt companies, and dismantled households sent their stocks when their continued possession was no longer feasible or desired. In this respect, the stores were faithful to the original sense of the term *d'occasion* (Sciardet 2003, 17). Each was a repository of artifacts that the dramatic occasions of personal or institutional biography had thrown back into the public realm. Within these stores, obsolete recording formats, failed or exhausted musical styles, and the products of long-defunct corporations piled up and found a certain kind of stasis. Alongside the undesired records, one could find old schoolbooks, interventions in long-concluded political debates, books from religious orders whose role within public life had faded, and landmark works from artistic careers now forgotten in their entirety.

In this accumulation, Le Fou du Disque and Le Fou du Livre were full of lessons about the richly varied popular cultural heritage of Quebec, and of Montreal in particular. The records and books within the stores resonated richly as parables of local and international exchange, as material residues of a lively urban commerce, and as clues to the trade routes that brought artifacts to Montreal from other places. Sounds and texts from elsewhere (the Tijuana Brass sound of the mid-1960s, or French Maoism of the early 1970s) arrived embedded within imported commodities or were adapted and reinvigorated by local creators who produced versions for the Quebec markets. In these forms, commodities lived out their life cycles as *things* long after the popularity of the words or sounds inscribed within them had passed. Stores like Le Fou du Disque reversed the commercial dispersal of these artifacts, bringing them together in quantities testifying to the depth of a local culture and its energies.

The status of stores like Le fou du disque within the lives of urban artifacts is both commercial and civic. Le Fou du Disque functioned

simultaneously within several different logics of accumulation and disposal. A tiny strata of its merchandise (such as the compact discs that began to appear in the late 1980s) turned over quickly, in the manner of objects sold in conventional second-hand stores. The bulk of its merchandise, however, arrived in large quantities, after extensive periods of "first burial" in the libraries or storerooms of individuals or institutions. At various points within its history, it received large collections of vinyl records from radio stations or from firms producing educational or industrial films. From the former came record-company samplers of their latest recordings, designed for air play and unavailable to the general public. From media production companies came stockpiles of so-called "library music," records of mood or action music intended to be used as soundtracks for films made outside the commercial feature film industry. In a cartography of local commerce, Le Fou du Disque was one point of convergence for materials rendered obsolete by broader industrial shifts of technology or practice. As such, it functioned at a broadly regional level, pulling materials from companies scattered within and around the city. It brought together, for public display and availability, commodities normally invisible to those outside the media industries that used them.

When I first moved to Montreal in 1978, I saw warehouse-like stores such as Le Fou du Disque as museum-like repositories of Quebecois culture. Here, a significant portion of the postwar legacy of Quebec cultural producers could be found, gathered in one place. Here, one found something typically lacking in the popular culture of English Canada: the traces of a long history of commercial, popular cultural production in which the failed and the successful, the ambitious and the exploitative, knitted together into a rich texture across which the visual languages of period styles and genres were visible. In this respect, these giant venues for the sale of old records and books helped to confirm the weight and monumentality of popular cultural production within Quebec. A yard sale offers a particular range of objects in some way homologous to the repertory of objects that make up the domestic household. A store like Le Fou du Disque fulfilled a similar function in relationship to local and national commercial activity. Within it the failed and the forgotten were allowed to accumulate, so that the enormity of local production was visible in the buildup that persisted beneath the rapid recirculation of the new or the perennially desired.

THE RETRIEVAL OF WASTE

Subcultural theorists, examining second-hand commodities like those just described, would rush to enumerate the acts of reappropriation that they make possible. Unquestionably, accumulations of old artifacts form part of the resource infrastructure of urban culture; they are one precondition for the practices of retrieval and recontextualization that bring these artifacts back to life in ingenious and often subversive ways. Studies of this retrieval in its earliest historical phases have concentrated on the resourcefulness of the urban poor, whose wringing of value from rags or discarded foodstuffs over several centuries is offered as a heroic example of urban inventiveness (see, for example, Sciardet 2003). These themes persist in studies of twentieth century tinkers who build or refurbish cast-off items of a mechanical or electronic character. Yuzo Takahasi has argued that the dumping onto informal markets of huge quantities of military communications equipment in Japan following World War II laid the groundwork for those amateur practices of *bricolage* and small-scale invention that later fuelled that nation's electronics industries (Takahashi 2000, 460–1). These examples presume that the capacity to find value in the discarded and rejected objects of material culture is most concentrated in those underclasses which typically have no alternatives.

The better-known accounts of retrieval in the twentieth century, however, have imagined it as an elite activity, one whose gratifications are principally aesthetic in character. A series of urban avant-gardes, from the surrealists through the situationists and post-punk subcultures of the present, have sought to find, amidst the refuse of urban life, the tokens of unacknowledged value. The encounter with old objects offered for sale in the city has quite famously been discussed in terms of its disorienting effects. Here is Peter Osborne, for example, summarizing Walter Benjamin's remarks on novelty:

> In its fetishization of novelty, Benjamin argues, fashion 'tirelessly constitutes "antiquity" anew out of the most recent past.' It thus constantly leaves its objects behind as 'outmoded,' reinforcing their independence, and thus their quality as fetishes, '*before they have been exhausted by experience*.' In their fetishized but outmoded independence, these objects thus come to subsist, their

novelty sealed up inside them, like time capsules … In an extraor-
dinary dialectical reversal, the outmoded becomes the privileged
site for the experience of novelty, and hence futurity itself.
(Osborne 1995, 136).

The surrealists regularly sought encounters with novelty that
would rejuvenate the aesthetic experience of the city and produce a
sense of estrangement. This estrangement was supposedly to be
found in the discarded or antiquated object, its brute persistence in
a world marked otherwise by ongoing rationalization and predict-
ability serving to revitalize perception. Adam Rifkin is one of the
few to offer a trenchant critique of this quest for the irrational, call-
ing it profoundly disingenuous. The surrealists' search for the dis-
orienting, cast-off object, Rifkin suggests, required a connoisseurist,
cultivated knowledge of urban artifacts that would only be pos-
sessed by an elite. Their deeply theorized anticipation of the found
object's qualities limited the surrealists' capacity to be genuinely
shocked: "This is the self-conscious infraction of the mundane that
became a social skill or habit for some groups of Parisian intellectu-
als of the 1920s in the shape of the Surrealist bluff of inaccessible
knowledge" (1993, 93).

CONCLUSION: OBJECTS AND THEIR ITINERARIES

It is my view that a preoccupation with these practices of resuscita-
tion diverts attention from the life of things before they are re-
claimed, when they have converged on places of accumulation in
which they very often remain for long periods of time. In these
spaces, I would argue, old artifacts serve as the raw material of an
informal pedagogy, offering an apprenticeship in historical styles
and values. While narratives of surrealist discovery focus on the sin-
gular, disconnected object, I am more interested in those cultural
processes that accompany the accumulation of objects in large num-
bers. This accumulation produces an empirical "thickness" within
urban culture, as the convergence of artifacts on a limited number
of spaces reverses their original commercial dispersal.
    The work of Orvar Lofgren invites cultural analysts to trace what
he calls the "national trajectory of commodities," those circuits of
movement that, by inscribing lines of movement within and across
national cultures, give such cultures their distinctive rhythms of
change and artifactual substance. These trajectories, Lofgren suggests,

work to produce what he calls the "thickenings of belonging" characteristic of a national culture (1997). It is easy to extend these ideas to the study of urban cultures, wherein this thickening finds multiple means and places for its expression and intensification. One kind of thickening takes shape in the regularized movement of objects through different spaces in the course of their life cycles. When compact discs purchased at an hmv store in Montreal move into homes, then to second-hand shops on Avenue Mont-Royal and, finally, to suburban charity shops or yard sales, they inscribe a trajectory of movement. The seemingly haphazard character of this trajectory obscures the fact that the direction of its movement is almost never reversed in its entirety.

As regions within the city come to be associated with moments in the life cycles of objects, and as these moments themselves come to ground distinctive forms of urban commerce, the urban dweller's sense of belonging is given added substance, made "thick." The pathways that brought record albums or books to Le Fou du Disque and similar stores were varied, but in their regularity they inscribed certain grooves and patterns within the busy dynamism of Montreal culture. These grooves and patterns concretized certain narratives of decline in the lives of objects – such as that which brought to Le Fou du Disque hundreds of sealed, unsold Quebecois recordings by performers who failed to catch on. By charting the typical direction of these lines, we may imagine the city's different spaces as embodying distinct destinies for the artifacts which make up urban commerce and culture.

NOTES

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2 By way of contrast, we would point out that the number of pawnshops in Dublin, Ireland, another of the cities studied by the Culture of Cities Project peaked in 1867 at fifty-three; in 2000 there were only four in that city (Fitzpatrick 2001, 1, 52).

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