UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Objects of Exchange:
Used Clothing as Commodity, Gift, and Waste in England and Poland

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

by

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2018

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2018

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a dissertation is only the last stage in a process that has often felt more like a comprehensive reprogramming than an education. It is as exhausting as it sounds and requires a great deal of stamina. Luckily, the process is as rewarding as it is difficult. Those who helped me through deserve my heartfelt thanks.

Every member of my committee provided valuable guidance as I went through this process. Thanks to Martha Lampland, Akos Rona-Tas, Rick Biernacki, Fernando Dominguez-Rubio, Chandra Mukerji, and Christena Turner. Thanks are especially due to Akos for patiently and reliably guiding me through years of finding my way, and to Martha for being enthusiastic about my project since its early days and for stepping up unhesitatingly to guide me through my last anxiety-ridden months of the process.

Thanks to Christena Turner and John Griffin, for welcoming me into their beautiful home as I bounced between San Diego and Europe, for the many conversations and celebrations, for authorizing me to use the espresso maker, for good cheese and wine, and dinners on a Barcelona schedule.

My fellow graduate students helped make this experience tolerable. Tito Brige de Carvalho, what good luck we had to be put in an office together in your first year. You've been a constant friend. Thanks in particular to the people I met through the Critical Realist Network, especially Tim Rutzou, Candice Robinson, Dana Kornberg, Danny Alvord, and Jonah Stuart-Brundage. I had fun.

Thanks to Jacek Nowak at the Jagiellonian University; Krzysztof Wieliński at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw; and Rowena Atkinson and Marc Ventresca at the Said Business School for inviting me to participate in seminars. To the Sociology of Economic Life group at the Polish Academy of Sciences, especially Marcin Serafin and Mateusz Halawa, for allowing me to be a part of the lively and stimulating intellectual space that they have created in Warsaw.

Thanks to my family, Elizabeth Pendzich, Thomas Greeson, and Matthew Greeson, for encouraging me and supporting me throughout. For coming to visit me as I lived the nomadic life, and welcoming me back home. To Catherine Read for her practical wisdom about what could make my life easier. To my extended family in Poland and the US for celebrating milestones. To Jan and Ula Miszczyńscy, for welcoming me into their home and family.

To Justyna Jochym and Anastasia Rotar, for being the source of feminine energy that got me through tough stretches.

And most of all, thanks to Miłosz Miszczyński, who has been there through it all: going to Warsaw with me to take the GRE, driving cross-country with all my stuff and getting our first California parking ticket within the first 22 minutes of arriving at UCSD, living with me through all the doubt and despair, ups and downs, putting plates of food in front of me when I was too distracted to do it myself, tolerating my piles of stuff when I decided I wanted to take over the kitchen table, but then giving me the good desk when I changed my mind, figuring things out along the way through our moves—Krakow, Cluj, Oxford, Warsaw—always finding us great places to live, and doing it all while being a loving son to his parents, researching and writing his own dissertation, navigating his own career, and being a man of many hobbies. You're never boring. Can't wait to start the next stage with you.

This research was also supported by generous funding, without which this dissertation would not have been possible: the National Science Foundation, USCD Frontiers in Innovation Scholarship Program, and UCSD Department of Sociology Summer Funding Grant.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Objects of Exchange:
Used Clothing as Commodity, Gift, and Waste in England and Poland

by

Emma Pendzich Greeson

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California San Diego, 2018

Professor Martha Lampland, Co-Chair
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This dissertation is a multi-sited ethnography of the valuation of used clothing in Poland and the United Kingdom (UK), along one of the world's major value chains of used clothing. The central question guiding this research is: *How is used clothing made valuable?* Economic sociology has long been concerned with understanding the workings of cultural logics of exchange and the social mechanisms that make economic valuation possible. Studies of valuation in economic sociology and neighboring disciplines are increasingly pragmatic and situated in concrete material contexts, focusing on the constitutive use of material devices and infrastructures in the production of value. This dissertation focuses on the objects of exchange,

how they are produced, and what role those material-semiotic objects play in relations of exchange, evaluation, and value production. Data are drawn from participant observation, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and informal interviews in sites of collection, sorting, and retail in the UK and Poland. Analysis is informed by theoretical approaches to commodities, gifts, and waste from economic sociology, anthropology, human geography and Science and Technology studies. Four empirical chapters trace the movement of used clothing from donation through resale. In UK charity shops, commodities and gifts are produced alongside each other in competing assemblages. The wholesale market for collected textiles produces commodities by balancing value production with concerns of waste production. In the Polish retail market, sellers must produce knowable and desirable commodities from heterogeneous things. Polish consumers judge the quality and value of used clothing in material encounters. In each of these spaces, used clothing is made valuable through its material and symbolic production as gifts, commodities, and waste. This dissertation contributes to economic sociological studies of commodification and valuation with a discussion of the valuation of heterogeneous, non-standardized goods. This is the first research carried out on the global used clothing industry in an Eastern European country and in a country that is a major re-exporter of used clothing.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Rags to Riches Story

What *really happens* to your used clothes when you donate them? This question emerges periodically in newspaper articles or television programs that expose the for-profit underside of the donation of used clothing. The story goes that unsuspecting, well-meaning donors in the Global North give their unwanted clothes to charities, who pass along donated clothing that they do not want or cannot sell to textile recyclers, who in turn sell the clothing onwards, usually to markets in poorer countries in the Global South, for a healthy profit. Increasingly, used clothes are also solicited by non-charity actors who emphasize the ecological benefits of recycling textiles rather than discarding them in landfills. As it turns out, however, these donations are also supply for the used clothing trade: the bulk of this clothing ends up being sold in distant markets. The trade in used clothes is a shadowy world, largely operating out of the public eye, which turns "rags to riches" and "trash to treasure." But do these stories—true though they may be—adequately answer the question of what *really happens* to clothes when they are donated?

Turning rags into riches is not as straightforward as it may initially seem. In the popular telling of the story, it is an ideal business model (though an ethically questionable one at best): convince people to give away something valuable for free, then sell it for a profit. But between rags and riches there is an entire ecology of value transformations. In order to be sold for profit, donated used clothes must be turned into a commodity. The global trade of used clothes is made up of a multitude of markets, in each of which the labor of buyers and sellers transforms the value of cast-off used clothing. Those markets are connected to each other along supply chains along which millions of metric tons of used clothing travel each year. The global trade of used

clothing is managed both as a recycling market—like those for other material waste streams, such as paper, plastic, glass, metals, and cardboard—and an aesthetic market in which the value of each individual item is a matter of individual judgment and taste, wider structures like the fashion industry, and political economies and histories. Turning rags into riches, then, is not simply a story of the exploitation of donors' charitable or ecological good will. It is also a story of market actors' negotiation of symbolic and material boundaries between gifts, commodities, and waste.

In order to understand the global trade of used clothing, it is necessary to consider the *production* of used clothing as gifts, commodities, and waste. Used clothing in motion between markets and geographies is also an *object* in motion: between modes of exchange, between material forms, and between modes of management and governance. The used clothing trade is therefore a story of transformations and heterogeneity. But it is also a story of stability and order. From billions upon billions of heterogeneous used clothing items, a global industry is made. A fully sociological account of the exchange of used clothing is one that does justice to the social, political, and material accomplishment that is the construction of markets from a society's cast-offs.

1.1 Research questions and case

This dissertation is a multi-sited ethnography of one of the world's major value chains of used clothing, connecting sites of collection, sorting, and retail in the United Kingdom (UK)[1] and Poland and onwards to other countries in Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. A fine-grained ethnographic view at a series of points along the path that used clothing travels provides

[1] Though I conducted my fieldwork in England, I usually speak about the UK, since trade statistics, market reports, and relevant regulatory frameworks (with exceptions that I note when applicable) apply to the UK rather than to England alone.

data to identify the transformations in value that structure the global trade of used clothing. The central question guiding this research is: *How is used clothing made valuable?*

The UK and Poland, and the connections between them, are ideal for studying the value of used clothing because the trade is extremely well-developed in both countries. The UK is the world's second largest exporter of used clothing, behind only the much larger United States, with the value of exports totaling more than 508 million USD in 2017 (UN COMTRADE 2018). Poland is among the world's largest importers of used clothing, though its position is falling. In 2017, Poland was the eighteenth largest importer of used clothing at a value of more than 64 million USD (compared to 9th in 2012 (Haussman et al. 2011)). In recent years, however, Poland has found itself increasingly high on the list of the world's largest exporters. In 2017, Poland was the seventh largest exporter of used clothing, at a value of nearly 180 million USD. By contrast, in 2011, Poland was only in eleventh place (Haussman et al. 2011).

Not only has the global trade of used clothing expanded several-fold since the early 1990s (Hansen 2000, p. 113), the trade between the UK and Poland is in a period of transformation. In the period when statistics of the trade of used clothing have been recorded, Poland has transitioned from being a net import country to a net export country (see Figure 1.1). Since the mid-2000s, the UK has consistently been the country from which Poland has imported the most used clothing, followed by Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavian countries (see Figure 1.2). Exports from Poland have steadily risen, with the most marked increase since the late 2000s to the Ukraine (see Figure 1.3). Rising exports from Poland have coincided with falling imports to Poland from the UK. From the mid-2000s until 2014, Poland was the UK's number one export destination for used clothing (see Figure 1.4). As I will discuss in Chapter 5, this is connected to changing patterns of consumption and increasing domestic collection of used

clothing. As opposed to most of the receiving countries where the used clothing trade has been studied (see Chapter 3), Poland is not a part of the Global South. The World Bank classifies Poland as a high-income economy (income stabilized around its current level in 2008; World Bank 2018). This case is an ideal opportunity to observe how value is produced, as markets and systems of management of used clothing are in flux and transitioning to new models.

It should be noted that all of these quantities, though often reported in dollar amounts, also represent metric tons of clothing items. For instance, the UK exported 371,319,327 kilograms of used clothing in 2017 (UN COMTRADE 2018). If a t-shirt weighs 130-150 grams on average (Griffiths 2017), this is approximately 7 t-shirts per kilogram. This means that the UK used clothing industry processed the equivalent of over two and a half *billion* t-shirts for export in 2017 (2,599,235,289 to be exact). Each one of the clothing items that is donated, collected, sorted, and sold passes through multiple hands. The quantities of reported exports and imports represent massive mobilizations of labor in the form of individual acts of evaluation, judgment, and categorization. Used clothing items are "snowflakes" (Rivoli 2006) – uniformly unique items that differ not only in terms of material, color, style, size, and brand, as in the firsthand market, but also in terms of the physical traces of wear that they carry over from their first life. The fact that relatively stable markets for used clothing exist is all the more astonishing, considering the fact that order is produced out of literally billions of heterogeneous elements.

I focus on the following specific questions to understand how used clothing is transformed from cast-off to commodity today in the UK and Poland:

1. How has the value of used clothing and used textiles changed throughout history, and in what social relations has used clothing been exchanged?

2. How are commodities produced from charitable donations in UK charity shops today?
3. How are mass quantities of collected used clothing turned into desirable commodities that are exported to distant markets around the globe?
4. How do Polish retailers deal with the heterogeneous nature of used goods to create valuable commodities?
5. Why do Polish consumers find imported used clothing valuable, and how do they evaluate items?

As I describe in the sections below, I draw on literatures on value and valuation, markets, waste, and materiality from sociology and neighboring disciplines (anthropology, geography, and Science and Technology Studies (STS)) to understand how used clothing is made valuable.

1.2 Value and social relations

Valuation is one of the "basic social processes" that comprises social life and one of the fundamental issues for the social sciences (Lamont 2012). Different forms of value coexist in social life, such as moral value, aesthetic value, or economic value (Aspers and Beckert 2011, p. 6). In this dissertation, I am interested in the value of used clothing in exchange. Exchange is a basic social relation (Simmel 2004, p. 79), the "substance of social life" (Thomas 1991, p. 7). Economic exchange itself creates value (Appadurai 1986, p. 3; Simmel 2004). One of the fundamental issues, both in this dissertation and for the subjects of my ethnography, is what sort of exchange relations used clothing is, should, or could be a part of. Controversies about the value of used goods arise regarding what social relations are the appropriate ones to determine the value of used clothing.

The way that economic exchange is organized can take a variety of forms. Polanyi (1944) identifies a variety of forms of exchange that have historically organized economic activity: householding, reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange. Gift exchange has been presented as a "primitive" kind of exchange present in archaic or undeveloped societies (Malinowski 1922; Mauss 1966; see also Thomas 1991). Whereas in market exchange, social relations are organized around the logic of the market, in gift exchange it is social relations that organize exchange (Polanyi 1944, p. 45). In this framework, gifts are constitutive of social relationships; they are inalienable from their givers; and gift transactions are obligatory: one must "give, receive, and return" (Mauss 1966, Bourdieu 1997, Gregory 1982, Strathern 1988, Carrier 1991, Thomas 1991, Weiner 1992, Callon 1998).

Some analyses see the gift relationship as fundamental in other forms of exchange. In Bourdieu's analysis, those social actions that appear disinterested are actually misrecognizing the nature of the obligation because of the time lag between the giving of the gift and the "counter-gift" (Bourdieu 1997). The return gift is "outside the frame" of calculation so the exchange appears to the giver and receiver to be disinterested, even if the social logic is actually one of obligation to return the gift (Callon 1998, p. 15). Gift relationships of trust, community, and obligation are actually fundamental in the supposedly impersonal sphere of the market, motivating workers to dedicate their time and energy to a company or organization (Caillé 2010, p. 183). Although their logics are intertwined and there are "dialectical continuities" between the supposedly pure gift and the market (Caillé 2010, p. 185), the analytic distinction between gifts and commodities continues to be helpful. It should, however, be detached from the opposition it grew out of: namely, the distinction between Western societies on the one hand and indigenous societies on the other (Thomas 1991, p. 4).

Gifts and commodities exist alongside each other. It is not always a settled matter which exchange relation should govern particular transactions. In social life, people negotiate distinctions between "intimate" and "economic" goods, the "marketable and the non-marketable" (Velthius 2005, p. 10) by creating appropriate relations of exchange (Zelizer 1985, 1994, 2011, 2012). Contemporary art dealers, for instance, prefer to speak of the art that they trade in emotional and intimate terms, whereas their own personal collections are presented as inhabiting economic realities (Velthius 2005). The exchange of human blood and organs presents a particularly interesting balancing act: the most personal, intimate, and human of goods is constructed by procuring organizations as a gift from donors to recipients, but they are solicited in large-scale infrastructures of procurement and under conditions of scarcity that would seem to lend themselves to impersonal market mechanisms (Healy 2006).

Exchange is always imbued with social meaning. Certain types of goods are considered taboo or off-limits for market exchange and remain in the realm of the gift. These include the human blood and organs in Healy's work, but also other types of things that are considered to lie in the realm of intimate, familial, or romantic relations rather than the impersonal market (Hochschild 2012; Sandel 2012). Whether particular objects qualify as economic or intimate, as commodities or gifts, is often a contentious matter. Meanings, furthermore, can be negotiated and shifted. Viviana Zelizer's work in particular has shown how the social meanings associated with particular types of goods or transactions are negotiated and re-framed over time, such as the changing economic and emotional value of children (1985) or the propriety of in-kind payments versus cash transfers as the currency of welfare (1994). Zelizer's (2012) approach is to show economic life as fundamentally a matter of constructing, differentiating, and maintaining social relations.

Understanding value, then, means understanding the cultural logics that govern various kinds of exchange in which value is produced. Starting with Appadurai's influential essay on the social lives of commodities, there has been a move towards thinking about the value of objects as situated in particular *regimes of value* (1986, p. 4). It is not the object that contains a particular value or type of value, but it is the context in which that object is situated that gives rise to value. The value of objects, in this view, is not fixed but mutable over the course of an object's life, as it moves from one regime of value to another. In contrast to the Marxian view that the production of things is the most important moment in their "life" and determines their value, in this framing, things are continually *becoming* (Kopytoff 1986, p. 73). Gifts and commodities are "things in a certain situation" (Appadurai 1986, p. 13). A commodity is not a commodity simply because it was produced for exchange, as Marx (1977) would have it. Objects move in and out of the "commodity phase"—becoming, at different moments, and for different people, commodities or gifts (Kopytoff 1986; Thomas 1991). In other words, what distinguishes a commodity from a gift is whether the "*socially relevant feature*" of concrete objects in concrete situations is exchangeability for another thing (Appadurai 1986, p. 13, emphasis in original).

The concrete, material relations in which an object is involved or enrolled are key to understanding the way that value is produced. Criticizing the regimes of value approach for putting undue emphasis on "structures or regimes, which affect value through (passive) intermediaries" Çalişkan and Callon call instead for a pragmatic approach which would conceptualize valuation as "a consequence of how competent and active people engage with specific things" (2009, p. 388). Value is produced in thoroughly material relations. Zelizer has developed the idea of *circuits of commerce*: a kind of social relation that comprises not only a network of actors, but also "distinctive cultural materials, particular forms of economic

transactions and media, as well as crucial relational work involved in the constant negotiation and maintenance of relations" (2011, p. 307). Rather than focusing on "the" gift or "the" commodity, we should be concerned with the "nuances of practice and history" that give rise to gifts and commodities in particular times and spaces (Thomas 1991, p. 27; see also Silber 2009). I now turn to the question of value in markets, and review the ways that commodification has been theorized.

1.3 Value in markets

Markets are "the central institutions of capitalist societies" (Beckert 2009, p. 245), but the sociological study of markets has developed only relatively recently. The subfield of economic sociology arose in the mid-1980s in an attempt to wrest the inquiry of "the economic" back from the discipline of economics. The disciplinary division of labor had been negotiated by what is known as Parsons' Pact: economists study the economy and sociologists study society; economists study value and sociologists study values (Stark 2000, p. 1). Whereas neoclassical economics is based on the idea of atomistic individuals making rational decisions, economic sociology has shown that economic processes like exchange are inherently social: they are embedded in social life.[2] One of the results of this move has been a renewed interest in markets as "fully social institutions" (Krippner 2001, p. 782). After a pointed critique by Krippner that the embeddedness paradigm had not produced a sufficient account of the market "*as a sociological object*" (2001, p. 778, emphasis in original), a great deal of scholarship has emerged that has taken up her challenge.

[2] The literature on embeddedness is voluminous and cannot receive a full treatment here; for classic accounts, see Polanyi (1957) and Granovetter (1985); for synthetic treatments see Beckert (2003), Krippner and coauthors (2004), Krippner and Alvarez (2007), and Gemici (2008).

The great mystery of markets, sociologically speaking, is that they actually work. Markets are relatively impersonal, alienated realms of exchange. Without entering into binding social relations, as in gift exchange, buyers and sellers transact on the basis of price. Rejecting the neoclassical explanation of the price mechanism, economic sociological approaches show that order in markets is actually achieved through social processes that allow market actors to overcome uncertainty and to coordinate economic activities despite disparate and sometimes conflicting motives and interests (Beckert 2009). In this view, the value problem must be solved —how actors agree upon the value of goods despite their competing and heterogeneous interests as well as the multiplicity of goods and their heterogeneity—alongside the other coordination problems of cooperation and competition. Beckert argues that the value problem brings the demand side of markets into view, which has been neglected by both more producer-focused economic sociological accounts as well as neoclassical economics (2009, p. 253). In his view, the value problem has to do with reducing uncertainty about product quality to the extent that producers and potential purchasers can distinguish between different goods on offer and judge quality distinctions between them.

The commodity provides a good vantage point to understand how market exchange is different from other types of exchange. As opposed to a gift, commodities are alienable: they are "property defined primarily in terms of use value and exchange value rather than the identity of the transactors" (Carrier 1991, p. 121). In Marx's (1977) view, commodities are distinguished from other kinds of objects in that they are produced in order to be exchanged. In his critique of the market logic encroaching on social life, Polanyi (1944) identified the "fictitious commodities" of land, labor, and money. These commodities are not produced to be sold on the market. Polanyi's insight, as well as those regarding the social life of objects (Appadurai 1986;

Kopytoff 1986), point to the fact that commodities are made in processes other than production as traditionally conceived. Commodities are also made through social processes. They are made by disentangling objects from an excess of social relations (Callon 1998) and by making them commensurable with other commodities.

Callon describes exchange as a process of "framing": in market exchange, "the agents and goods involved in these calculations must be disentangled and framed…a clear and precise boundary must be drawn between the relations which the agents will take into account and which will serve in their calculations and those which will be thrown out of the calculation as such" (1998, p. 16). Drawing on Thomas (1991), Callon observes that to make a commodity—and complete a market transaction—"it is necessary to cut the ties between the thing and the other objects or human beings one by one" (1998, p. 19). This is the difference, Callon argues, between a commodity and a gift: if the social relations are not disentangled, however momentarily and for the purposes of the market transaction, the thing being exchanged remains "entangled" and the buyer and the seller remain connected in a web of relations and obligations.

Commodities must also be made commensurable. Commensuration is "the transformation of different qualities into a common metric" (Espeland and Stevens 1998, p. 314). Commensuration in markets is closely tied up with the question of value. Buyers must be able to make distinctions between different products in a market or between different classes of products (Beckert 2009). Sometimes the common metric for a particular kind of good is a standard against which products can be judged (Aspers 2009). In other cases, however, there is no such standard of this kind. There is no single metric to which unique goods, like books, wines, or professional services could be reduced (Karpik 2010). In this case, judgment devices like rankings, expert opinions, and bestseller lists help buyers orient themselves and evaluate quality. For goods that

have no single standard, the social status of buyers and sellers can also act to orient actor to the value of goods (Aspers 2009).

Finally, markets are also thoroughly material entities. Work on the performativity of economics has considered the role of market technologies and market devices in valuation. In contrast to approaches that focus solely on the social basis of value, studies of the performativity of markets present value as socio-technical. Markets are conceived as assemblages of "people, things, and sociotechnical devices" (Berndt and Boeckler 2010, p. 560). These studies tend to focus on the functioning of financial markets (Knorr-Cetina and Preda 2005; MacKenzie 2006; Pardo-Guerra 2010), or other instances where a market was consciously constructed and the focus is on the processes of its coming into being (Holm 2007; Mirowski and Nik-Khah 2007; Rona-Tas and Guseva 2014). In this school of thought, questions about kinds (or frames) of value in a market are of less relevance than processes of valuation (Çalıskan and Callon 2009, p. 392). These processes take place with the aid of various market devices, including standards and measuring systems (Holm 2007, p. 234) economic models and theories (MacKenzie 2006), and market infrastructural elements (Preda 2006; Pardo-Guerra 2010 and 2012). Making things calculable – or uncalculable – requires a great deal of work, and always entails a material process and set of practices that can play out in any number of spatial and temporal frames (Callon and Law 2005, p. 719).

The above discussion refers to studies of the *functional rules* of markets (Rona-Tas and Guseva 2014): those conditions that allow a market to work. Markets can also be studied from the perspective of the conditions necessary to create them: the generative rules of markets (Rona-Tas and Guseva 2014, p. 4). Historical accounts of the emergence of markets, or particular types of markets, describe the changing cultural, institutional, or material conditions that make it

possible for a market to come into being. The nature of commodities in markets can also change over time. Aspers describes how the fashion market used to be oriented to standard principles of value rather than the status principles that structure it today (2009, p. 119).

1.4 Value and waste

Understanding the value of used clothing is not possible without a consideration of used clothing as waste. While it is a good that is exchanged in markets, it is also a cast-off, something that has been discarded by its original owner. Though many people intend for their donated clothing to remain useful and valuable, their intent does not travel along with the garments. Theoretical approaches to waste help make sense of the dynamics of the used clothing trade as a system.

1.4.1. Cultural understandings of waste

Whether something is considered valuable or waste is a fundamentally cultural matter. In her structuralist account of pollution and taboo, Mary Douglas argues that waste is a culturally constructed category, the realm of disorder, non-being, and death (as opposed to order, being, and life) (1966, p. 2). It is, in short, "matter out of place" (Douglas 1966, p. 41). Used clothing can carry a stigma of pollution: "Used clothes [in contemporary Western society]…serve as clear markers of the baggage and detritus of a culture. For some they carry negative and unsettling associations of poverty, immigration and displacement. Old clothes are also firmly associated with disease and death" (Palmer and Clark 2005, p. 3). Some countries, like India, invoke hygienic concerns as rationale for bans on the import of used clothing (Norris 2015, p. 2).

The ways that value is maintained and that waste is dealt with—the reuse, repurposing, and disposal of clothing—are historically and culturally situated practices. Anthropologists and historians have recently become more interested in contemporary practices of discarding in the West and how they fit into larger patterns of consumption and dwelling (Gregson and Beale 2004; Hetherington 2004; Gregson 2007; Gregson et al. 2007). In the industrial period in the United States, for instance, the work of sewing, repairing, or "making over" clothes often fell to the woman of the household and her servants or slaves (Strasser 1999). The idea of fashion and that clothing could be outdated was popularized in the US in the 1850s, and by the 1920s, American women no longer had to make their own clothes in order to keep up (Strasser 1999, p. 189). The more limited lifespan of a fashionable item of clothing coincided with the idea of the obsolescence of consumer goods and a move toward what has been called the "throwaway culture" of modern Western society (Strasser 1999, p. 199). But even within this supposed throwaway culture, things which are no longer wanted tend to circulate through multiple pathways of ridding (Gregson 2007), with significant effort made to pass them on to others who might want them (Gregson et al. 2007). The ways that clothing items can be given away are subject to cultural norms, like the caste system in India which prevents the "upward" movement of used saris in India (Norris 2008). In Soviet Russia, even underwear was passed down through family and among acquaintances (Gurova 2009).

1.4.2. Economizing waste

Before it becomes a commodity (again), used clothing is discarded by its previous owners. In other words, before it is a good, it is waste. Theoretically speaking, this makes used clothing quite interesting, because the social sciences have largely ignored waste. Neoclassical

economics conceives of waste as an externality: it falls outside the frame of calculation of the market transaction (Callon 1998, p. 17). Other social sciences have traditionally worked with the category of surplus more than they have dealt with waste. Surplus is different than waste in that it is excess value rather than a negative value. Marx saw that the by-products of consumption and production could be recovered and used as inputs in production processes (1993; see Chapter 3), and his theory of value turns on the concept of the production of surplus value. Gift economies are also dependent on the production of surplus (Gregory 1982, p. 18). Social relations in capitalist societies also turn on the use of surplus. The conspicuous consumption mechanisms that Veblen (1915) described rely on the demonstration of surplus income and corresponding class position.

Waste matter can be made the object of economic calculations. Fourcade (2011) shows how damages inflicted on nature in two oil spills – one off the coast of France, one off the coast of Alaska – were valued in a legal process. She details the technical processes by which two sets of "natural sensibilities," or two economies of worth applying to nature, were collapsed into economic value (Fourcade 2011, p. 1726). In a landfill, the "fungible" value of waste—as an aggregated mass of matter that facilitates economic calculations—and its "social" value are in competition, as workers practice scavenging and reuse despite official policies against it (Reno 2009). Waste can be refigured as a resource with economic potential, as was human excrement in 19th century France (Simmons 2006) and as it is in all manner of recycling economies (Alexander and Reno 2012).

As ecological crises and problems of pollution and global warming become more pressing, waste is not only increasingly foregrounded as an object of study—it is also receiving attention as a central category of social analysis. Bataille's (1984) classic analysis of the "general

economy" casts excess, rather than scarcity, as the fundamental feature of life. Bataille argued that the logic of society is to find ways to dissipate excess; he provides a colorful array of examples, from Aztec sacrifice to the Marshall Plan. Thompson's (2017) Rubbish Theory is an attempt to explain how waste can be made valuable and how waste matter is in fact productive (see Chapter 4 for a longer discussion). Recently other scholars have suggested that it is erroneous to focus on scarcity rather than excess. Abbott (2014) argues that it is excess—of information, of pollution—that is the basis of the major social problems of our age. Similarly, David Harvey (2010) has pointed to over-accumulation as the fundamental problem of the global capitalist system. Gille argues that we need to develop a view of waste as a material, symbolic, and political entity in its own right. As long as the economy is assumed to produce value, "waste will always be a *theoretical* by-product – residual, epiphenomenal, and inconsequential for the understanding of the social" (Gille 2010, p. 1054). These approaches aim to construct accounts of value production that start from the "trash heaps of old commodities" that are invisible to classical social and sociological theories due to their authors' historical and political-economic situatedness (Mukerji 1997, p. 300).

1.4.3 The value of global waste

The used clothing trade is not situated in just one market. Approaches that study the production of the value of used clothing across a global value chain (GVC, Gereffi et al. 2001), a global commodity chain (GCC, Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994), or a global production network (GPN, Henderson et al. 2002; Coe et al. 2004 and 2008) bring a wider system into focus. This research has been concerned with understanding value on an industry-wide, global level. Whereas a value chain approach "maps the vertical sequence of events leading to the delivery,

consumption and maintenance of goods and services," a production network approach focuses on relationships between firms that bind them together into larger groups (Sturgeon 2001, p. 10). In recent years, anthropologists and geographers have begun tracing the global flows that make up a variety of global recycling networks, including e-waste (Lepawsky and McNabb 2010; Lepawsky and Billah 2011; Lepawsky and Mather 2011; Gabrys 2013) ship breaking (Gregson et al. 2010), and used vehicles (Herod et al. 2014). Used clothing is one of those goods (see Norris 2012 for an overview). These approaches widen the traditional global commodity chain or network perspective by focusing on the "back-end of the value chain" (Gregson et al. 2010). Doing so is not simply an empirical addition to the literature, but a challenge to the theoretical assumptions underpinning it. Globalized value production for used goods does not fit neatly into models developed for the globalized production or circulation of new goods.

GVC, GCC, and GPN approaches tend to adopt a "linear view of the life of commodities" (Herod et al. 2014, p. 421). GPN scholars have suggested that there is a need to widen the focus of the approach to focus on material flows (Coe et al. 2008) and look at material constraints and possibilities at "beginning" and "end" points of networks (Bridge 2008). Used goods, however, destabilize the conception of clear, singular life cycles with beginning or end points. Value does not seem to ever decisively become waste but is constantly in processes of transformation as value and materials are made into other sorts of things. Lepawsky and Mather describe going to Bangladesh to study e-waste, but finding none: "We found used printers. Old monitors (tons and tons of them). Hard-drives from the US embassy and Exxon. Old silicon chips, motherboards and piles of circuitry. Amidst all this stuff we could hardly find any waste. Almost everything had value. Every object. Every component. Every material. They were being bought and sold, assembled, disassembled and reassembled. The material assemblages of people,

places and things proliferated" (Lepawsky and Mather 2011, p. 242). Instead of thinking in terms of beginnings and endings of value, Lepawsky and Mather suggest looking for boundaries and edges: where something becomes something else. Although actors dealing with things in the world (and we as analysts) act *as if* there are beginnings and endings, following used things beyond those end points shows that "there is a difference between acting as if the world is ordered in a particular way and the world actually being ordered in that way: actors and analysts enact different ontological orders out of the same moment, one's ending is the other's beginning" (2011, p. 246). Lepawsky and Mather suggest looking for boundaries and edges as places and moments when *transformation* happens. Instead of a linear view of an object's life, with value finally ending up as waste, value can be produced by connecting value regimes: moving what seems like waste in one context to another where there are markets for recovered objects or materials (Crang et al. 2013).[3] Framing waste flows in terms of transformations of value problematizes the common view that the Global North is simply dumping its waste on the Global South and reframes it in terms of valuable secondary resource flows (Gregson and Crang 2015).

We should be careful not to understand this focus on transformation as one object—a particular clothing item—traveling through a value chain that simply has different meanings and value in different contexts. The focus of GVC and GPN literature has been to trace back through the assembly of a "pre-figured point of sale commodity" (Gregson et al. 2010, p. 847)—for instance, how a papaya reaches a London household from its origins in Jamaica (Cook 2004). Insights from new materialist studies have been mobilized to understand commodities as *materials* (Crang et al. 2103; Gregson et al. 2010). A crucial insight of this literature is that the

[3] Crang and coauthors (2013) argue that this mode of value production is characterized by a brokered form of governance. In this sense it is different from a similar-sounding theory of value production through the exploitation of dissonance (Stark 2009). Brokerage is about passing information across borders; entrepreneurship relies on the fact that the border is replaced by a zone of overlap and creative friction.

material fixedness and stability of goods is a temporary accomplishment (an outcome) rather than a given: "the object is but a temporary moment in an endless process of assembling materials, a partial stabilisation and a fragile accomplishment that is always inexorably becoming something else, somewhere else" (Gregson et al. 2010, p. 853; see also Ingold 2012 and Domínguez Rubio 2016). Looking at value chains of used goods destabilizes the idea of a singular object circulating in space: "the thing is multiple, mutable, and material; and that the thing and the commodity are but moments in the circulation and assembling of material" (Gregson et al. 2010, p. 848). Used goods undergo "secondary processes of production" as they are re-made as commodities (Brooks 2013, p. 10), sometimes taking new object forms. This approach is inspired by Kopytoff's (1986) treatment of the commodity phase of an object as just one moment in an object's life (Gregson et al. 2010, p. 847). But the commodity status—the social understanding of a thing held by a particular person or group of people—cannot be assumed to reside in a particular, lasting material form. Commodity status in fact depends on the particular achievement of the merging of that particular identity with a materiality that supports it (see Domínguez Rubio 2016, p. 63). Investigating how value is produced through the connection of value regimes does not mean following *one object* through different value regimes; it means following materials as they are transformed and reconfigured as *different objects* as materials are altered and meanings shift.

Understanding how used clothing is made valuable, then, requires a theoretical orientation that does not simply transplant the ontologies of the production, exchange, and consumption of new goods into a secondhand context. In the next section I elaborate the distinction between *things* and *objects* that I introduced above, which is essential for understanding processes of valuation of used goods.

1.5 Objects and things

The distinction between things and objects has been made in a variety of ways in an attempt to capture the intersection between the material world and our understanding of it (Heidegger 1968; Brown 2001; Latour 2004). I follow the distinction made by Domínguez Rubio: "[t]hings…should be understood as material processes that unfold over time…objects are the positions to which those things are subsumed in order to participate in different regimes of value and meaning" (2016, p. 61). Things are material, physical, heterogeneous, always moving out of place. Objects are things that have been stabilized, at least temporarily, and made relational. In their analysis of the cultural field of museum curation, Domínguez Rubio and Silva (2014) note that the relevant actors are not only subjects but also objects. Each of these players takes their particular position. Object-positions are "the concrete socio-spatial locations occupied by physical artefacts within a given field, where they perform specific functions and roles, generating the articulation of particular relations within the field and the definition of boundaries demarcating the relative autonomy of one field vis-à-vis other fields" (Domínguez Rubio and Silva 2014, p. 163).

For exchange to work, *things* must be made into *objects* that can be exchanged in those particular relations. In a market, things must be made into commodities; in gift exchange, things must be made into gifts. In a market, things must be symbolically and materially stabilized in order to successfully occupy an object-position in which they are commensurable with other commodities. In gift exchange, objects are treated in meaningful ways that preserve and indeed produce their particular relational nature. Zelizer (1994), for instance, shows how gifts are personalized in order to make the intimacy of the exchange known, and money—the most

impersonal and fungible of commodities—can be made gift-like by enclosing it in personalized packaging, converting it to alternative currencies like the gift certificate, or earmarking it for particular uses in accordance with the giver's intent. Gift exchange and market exchange have their own modes of turning things into objects in processes of "objectification" (Keane 2003, p. 423). Paying attention to waste helps us see things being turned into objects. Domínguez Rubio argues that "we must not locate our enquiry at the level of 'objects'—i.e. positions—or at the level of 'things'—i.e. material processes—but rather in that space lying betwixt and between objects and things in which much of our lives take place" (2016, p. 64). Lepawsky has suggested that waste and discards are precisely that stuff "betwixt and between." Between moments of achieved stability, congealment into object-form, and alignment of meaning and form, are "those little gaps, those little discontinuities…that expose the possibility of having to find a way to jump those gaps so as to persist" (Lepawsky 2017).

The language of things and objects, more than the language of commodities and commodification, or that of goods and qualification, emphasizes the material nature of processes of production. Processes that produce objects bump into physical limits, produce leftovers and waste, and resist being made stable. The language of things and objects is meant to draw attention to the fact that materials only serve social functions as a result of human labor. To get the most purchase from this approach, we should not be concerned with whether an item "is" a thing or an object (because after all it always preserves its materiality or thing-ness), but with how things are made, more or less successfully, and more or less lastingly, into objects. I develop these ideas further in Chapter 2.

1.6 Plan of the dissertation

The theoretical approach developed above helps explain the functioning of social worlds and exchange in a way that is both socially *and* materially embedded. I do not mean this as a duality; in fact, the social and material are inseparable. In Chapter 2, I elaborate on the material-semiotic approach that informs my work. In order to understand what *objects* are being enrolled in value relations, and how they are produced, I use an assemblage approach. Assemblage should not be understood as a theory; it is a method. I also discuss data gathering and analysis in this chapter.

In Chapter 3, I consider the changing value of used clothing across history. Used clothing has long been exchanged in domestic and small-scale economies, serving as a stable investment; a liquid currency that replaced coinage in times of scarcity of money; a line of credit; or as an object that could be bartered for another. The global trade of used clothing developed in the 19th century along with the rise of industry that produced more plentiful, more inexpensive new clothing. I also consider the specific histories of the used clothing trade in England and in Poland. In England, the trade is connected to the development of the charity sector. In Poland, used clothing was imported as United Nations aid packages in the post-war period and in informal aid packages throughout the socialist period; after the transition, private traders began working with Western European wholesalers to sell used clothing in the newly-free market.

Donated items only have potential value. Producing value from donations in charity shops or thrift shops requires workers to sort through donated material, identify value and waste, and produce exchangeable objects. While there is a growing professionalism in the charity retail industry that manages the production of commodities, workers still often understand donated items as gifts. In Chapter 4, I discuss how these competing models of exchange are enacted in assemblages of sorting, preparation, repair, care, and discarding.

Textile recyclers are central to the functioning of the used clothing trade. They collect the clothing that charities cannot or do not wish to sell; they also service textile collection banks in partnerships with charities and local authorities. Whereas charities receive donated used clothing, textile recyclers must pay for it. In Chapter 5, I describe the dynamics of the market for collected used clothing. I describe two moments of commodification: the purchase of collected used clothing and its sale after being sorted and graded. The fine line between commodity and waste must be managed in the production of both of these commodities.

After passing through the hands of textile resellers, used clothing once again transforms to become an individualized retail good. In Chapter 6, I focus on used clothing retailers to understand their strategies for demonstrating the quality of the used goods they are selling. Quality is not inherent to goods but must instead by produced in processes of qualification (Callon et al. 2002). I draw on an assemblage approach to show how the infrastructures and tools of retail markets can produce used clothing as different sorts of market objects. Understanding why particular goods are valuable requires considering both producers and consumers (Beckert 2009, p. 256). In Chapter 7, I focus on Polish consumers of used clothing. I discuss preferences and taste as arising in processes of attachment. In their encounters with heterogeneous material things, shoppers sense quality, develop their taste, and form attachments. This approach allows for a reading of preferences as not simply differentiated in terms of status but also inflected with geopolitical specificity. Nearly three decades after the transition to a free market, used clothes still serve as an attractive alternative to what the dominant political economic regime is offering.

Sociology has long been concerned with understanding the workings of cultural logics of exchange. Studies of valuation are increasingly pragmatic and situated in concrete material contexts, focusing on the constitutive use of material devices and infrastructures. My dissertation

is an attempt to get inside the objects of exchange, understand how they are produced, and what role the objects themselves play in relations of exchange and the resulting production of value. The rags to riches story is one of symbolic and material transformations in an ecology of objects.

1.7 Figures

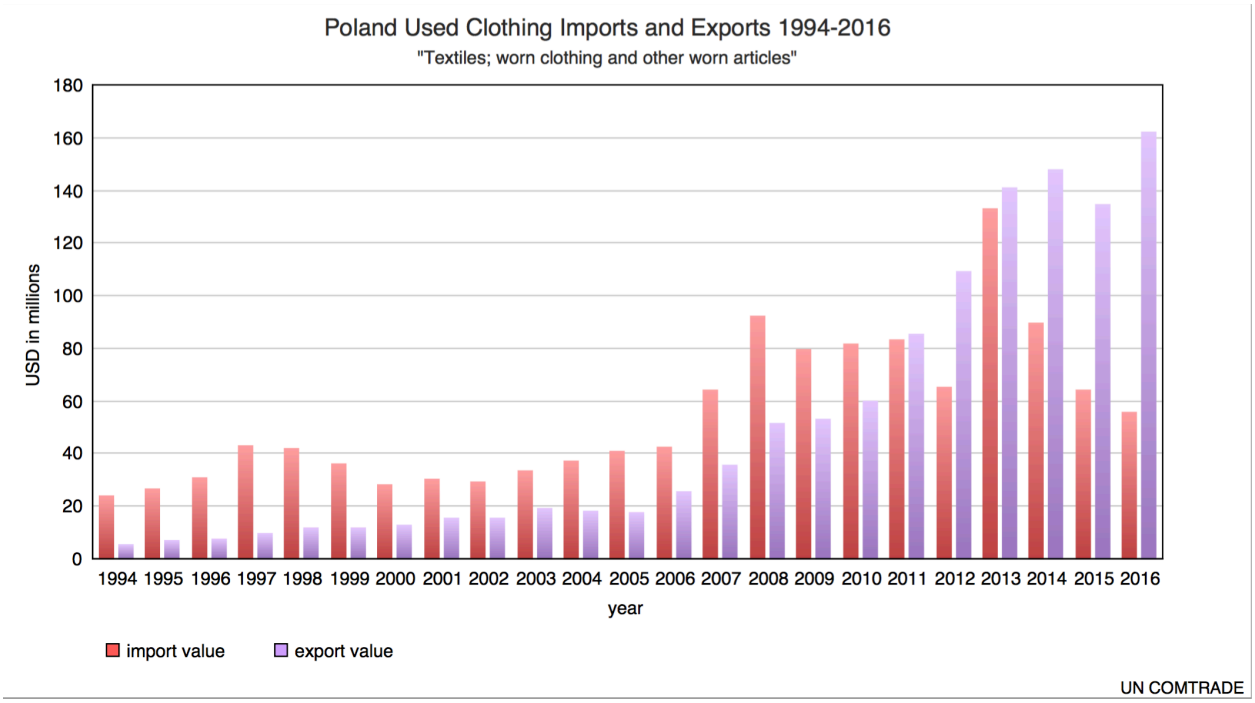

Figure 1.1. Polish imports and exports of used clothing, 1994-2016. Compiled by author from COMTRADE data.

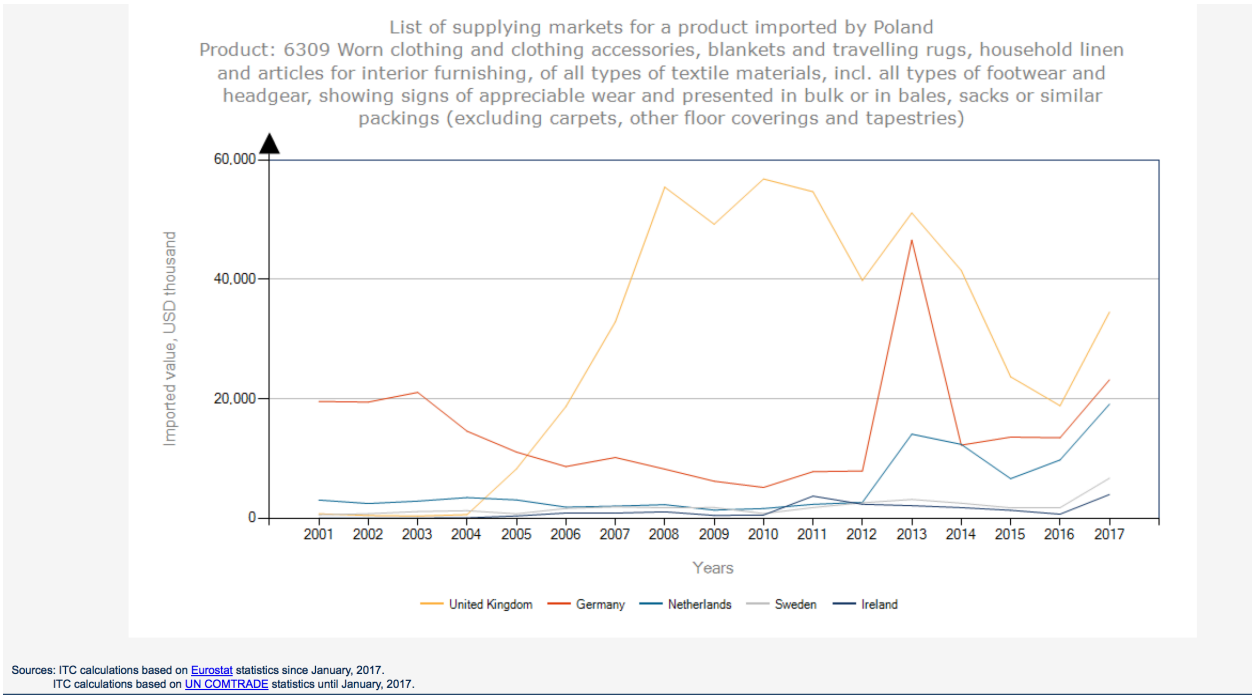

Figure 1.2. Polish imports of used clothing by country, 2001-2017

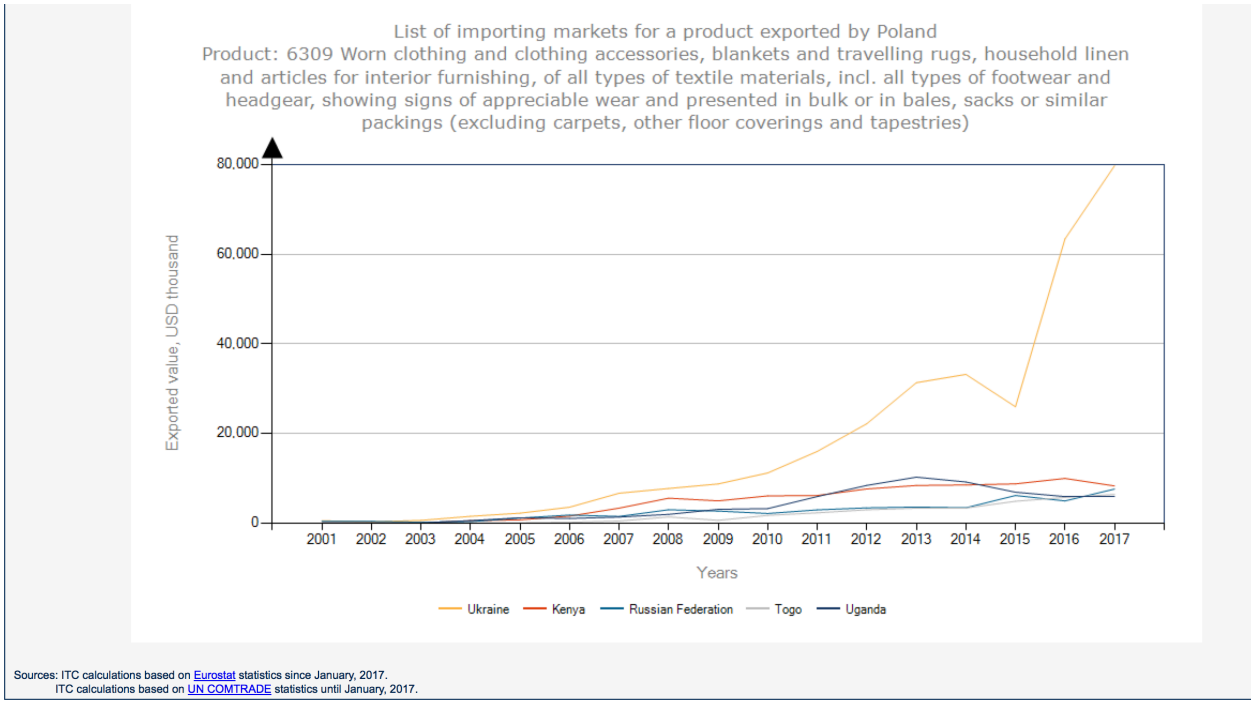

Figure 1.3. Polish exports of used clothing by country, 2001-2017

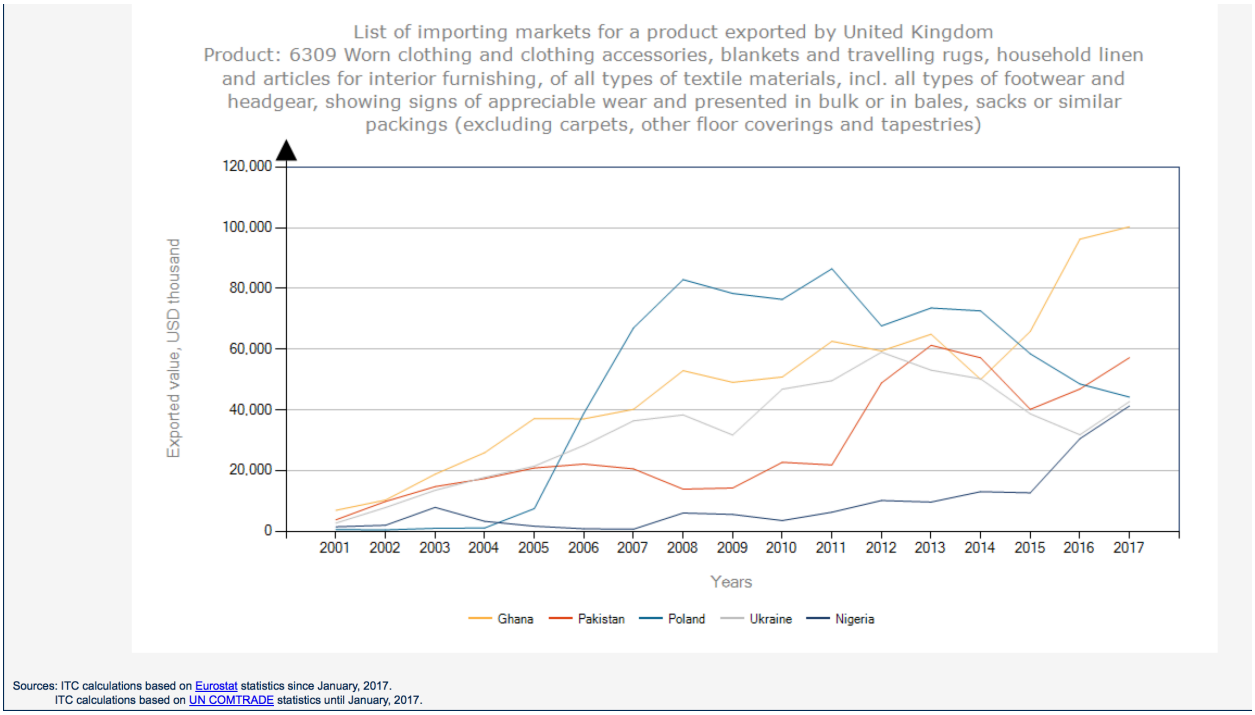

Figure 1.4. UK exports of used clothing by country, 2001-2007

CHAPTER 2

Methods and Data

This dissertation is a sociological account of the exchange and valuation of used clothing, built upon observations derived from field research and analytically organized and scaffolded by a theoretical framework, arrived at through an iterative process of inductive reasoning. I draw on the concepts of market, commodity, gift, and waste, as discussed in Chapter 1, in order to provide an account of observed phenomena. An assemblage approach ensures that these categories serve to create "a *map and not a tracing*" (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, p. 12, emphasis in original) of the production of value in the global trade of used clothing. In this chapter I describe my research methods: a multi-sited ethnography which "follows the things" to trace networks that enable the circulation of used clothing, in a material-semiotic approach sensitive to the enactment of objects. In doing so, I outline my vision of a post-positivist, post-critical, relational, and realist sociology. The rest of the dissertation is my attempt to bring this vision to life.

2.1 Multi-sited ethnography

This dissertation is the result of a multi-sited ethnography of the exchange of used clothing, in which I followed a value chain stretching between the UK and Poland. The idea of multi-sited ethnography was first identified by George Marcus in the mid-1980s to describe a type of ethnographic research that, unlike traditional ethnography, is not rooted in a single site. This emerging type of ethnography was concerned, he noted, with "an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive

investigation" (Marcus 1995, p. 96). Instead, it cuts across geographies to bring forth a vision of spaces, places, actors, and things that are connected. It is the connections themselves, and the objects and processes made possible by those connections, that are the subject of such studies.

Multi-sited ethnography should not be thought of as simply a spatial extension of traditional ethnography: not only is multi-sited work necessarily more uneven than traditional ethnography (some sites will be investigated in greater depth, access will be varied, and so on), but the logic of multi-sited work is closely tied to that of actor-network theory, the rhizome analysis of Deleuze and Guattari, and other post-structural tendencies (Marcus 1999). Other types of ethnographies can be global without sharing this theoretical orientation. The extended case method, for example, "treats the local context as an 'expression' or instantiation of systems that are always-already assumed to be there and fully known" (Go 2016, p. 158). Burawoy explains the macro-micro link in his approach as one of parts and wholes (2000, p. 27). Multi-sited ethnography takes a different perspective. As described by Marcus, multi-sited ethnography is "postmodern" in nature, (1995, p. 96) since it does not rely on a particular genre and set of theoretical assumptions like Marxism, political economy, or the world system as a "theoretically constituted holistic frame" (1995, p. 97). Marcus instead speaks of this type of research in cartographic terms: there are "various mapping strategies" involved (1995, p. 96); it is "an exercise in mapping terrain" (1995, p. 99); it "maps a new object of study" (1995, p. 101-2). Like feminist standpoint theory, multi-sited ethnography uses particularity as a starting point and "scales up" from there, to conceptualize and analyze larger structures or systems (Go 2016, p. 162). Rejecting the part-whole approach does not mean doing away with the idea of larger systems altogether or rejecting the idea that capitalism exists; it simply means that those systems

are not the starting assumption. In other words, the aim is not "extension of theory" (Burawoy 2000, p. 28) but its elaboration.

The comparative logic of multi-sited ethnography is a relational one. Marcus writes: "de facto comparative dimensions develop…as a function of the fractured, discontinuous plane of movement and discovery among sites as one maps an object of study and needs to posit logics of relationship, translation, and association among these sites" (1995, p. 102). It is these relations that become the argument: as they emerge during the course of the research, it is possible to develop "an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography" (Marcus 1995, p. 105). In his discussion of how actor-network theory orients itself to a study of colonizer and colonized, Julian Go writes: "rather than two separate sites that could be abstracted and compared, the textile industries of England and India occupied points within a wider heterogeneous network stretching across, between, and through England and India and beyond" (Go 2016, p. 135). This type of relational comparison brings the whole into greater focus. For Go, the whole he is interested in bringing into focus is that of empire, whose dynamics have permeated the history of the colonized and colonizers alike. For me, this relational comparison brings markets and capitalism into greater focus, as the movement of materials outside of markets—as goods going to another market, as gifts becoming parts of markets, or as waste—never falls completely out of the picture. Understanding what happens outside of and around markets is essential to understanding their logic and workings.

2.2 Following the things

The bounds of my study were defined through the technique of "following the thing" (Marcus 1999, p. 106). This approach has come to describe the practice of tracing the circulation

of a material object through value chains or through the course of its "social life" (Appadurai 1986). The value chain approach tends to show how disparate geographies, actors, and capitalist practices are brought together in the making of a global commodity like the papaya (Cook 2004) or hot pepper (Cook and Harrison 2007); the social life approach stresses the shifts in status that one thing undergoes. In order to understand valuation, I trace the exchange of used clothing by "following the thing" through different spaces of exchange, across different geographies. With this move I draw on the work of other scholars who have focused on the "back end" of global value chains and global production networks by following e-waste (Lepawsky and Billah 2012), end-of-life ships (Gregson et al. 2010), or used clothing (Crang et al. 2013; Brooks 2013). I followed used clothing from where it was collected, sorted, and exported or sold domestically in England, to the warehouses of the wholesalers who imported and sorted it in Krakow, then to retail shops.

As discussed in Chapter 1, following *used* things as they move through disparate geographies and through value transformations makes it clear that it is not just one *object* that is moving through these different geographies and spaces of exchange. First, when things are no longer new (or in the process of being made for the first time, as in the case of traditional global value chains), their materiality becomes salient. End-of-life ships, for instance, are "not just singular objects but simultaneously multiple, heterogeneous things and materials" (Gregson et al. 2010, p. 847). Gregson and coauthors criticize the follow-the-things approach for its tendency to "stabilise things in the still life of the object form" (2010, p. 853). Thus the relatively stable material form of an object should be thought of as an accomplishment, not to be wiped away by technical precision of mass production processes that can make it appear to us that things are stable. Secondly, following used things reminds us of the insights of the "social life" approach: it

is not just one object, but many different *kinds* of objects that are enacted in various ways, as gifts or commodities (Kopytoff 1986), or as waste.

2.3 Assemblages: stability as outcome

The stabilization of things *as objects* is a practical accomplishment, and one that has been at the center of research on what have been called assemblages. The concept of assemblage perhaps now most closely associated with the actor-network theory (ANT) of Latour (2005) and Law (2009), though it has roots in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1984) and has been taken up by a variety of scholar across disciplines, like DeLanda (2006) in philosophy, Sassen (2006 and 2014) in sociology, Ong in anthropology, and Collier in international relations (Ong and Collier 2005). Deleuze defines assemblage as "a multiplicity which is made up of heterogeneous terms…the assemblage's only unity is that of co-functioning; it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'" (2002, in Acuto and Curtis 2014, p. 3). Assemblage should be understood not as a theory but as a method: "assemblage is a way of reframing our inquiry, to grasp perhaps critical interacting elements that would help us in analysing what is happening" (Sassen and Ong 2014, p. 19). Law notes that actor-network theory is not a theory at all but "a toolkit…a sensibility to the messy practices of relationality and materiality of the world" (2009, p. 142). He goes on to say that actor-network theory, material semiotics, and assemblages (all closely related ways of talking about the same type of approach) can be understood as "a particular empirical translation of poststructuralism" (Law 2009, p. 146).

Rather than starting with a structure (like the market or value chain) which imposes its own boundaries and a cast of characters on the analysis of the exchange of used clothing, and instead by starting with the things that are moving around, and tracing the different ways that

they move around, a different picture of the social landscape comes into focus. Rather than one populated by markets, it is one populated by people and things in different arrangements: sorting, cleaning, repurposing, searching, rejecting, discarding, arranging, altering, accumulating, weeding, evaluating, collecting, carrying, storing, packaging, labeling, tracking, counting, weighing, auditing, exchanging, swapping, upgrading, making do, performing acts of care, discovering. This re-orientation means that the aim is to theorize the *emergence* of structures and phenomena rather than using structures as a point of departure. My aim is to understand a market or a value chain as an outcome, rather than as a frame to analyze what happens within it. Similarly, I seek to understand the creation of commodities, gifts, or waste as an outcome of relations between heterogeneous elements (human and non-human). John Law frames the counter-intuitive orientation of ANT this way: "Sociology is usually interested in the *whys* of the social. It grounds its explanation in somewhat stable agents or frameworks. Actor network's material semiotics explore the *hows*" (2009, p. 148). My focus is a synchronic account of emergence: the particular relational configurations that give a market its particular form, reality, and causal powers (Elder-Vass 2007).

In this sense this dissertation shares with other assemblage-centered work a move "away from reified general categories and ill-defined abstract concepts beloved of modernist thought (state, market, city, society and capitalism)" (Acuto and Curtis 2014, p. 2). Rather than starting with these modernist categories and building our research around them, or from them, assemblage thinking helps understand entities like state, market, or society as *effects* or *results* of assemblages—as relations of heterogeneous elements holding together. Though a city or capitalism may be incredibly stable assemblages, we should nevertheless conceive of them as "provisional…historically contingent entities…always transient and open, and in process, never

solidifying into a closed totality or system" (Acuto and Curtis 2014, p. 4-5). This reading of capitalism as assemblage is congruent with Marx's analytical approach, which was concerned with finding the "laws of motion" that produce the entities of capitalism, like commodities, in "a world in motion, in flux, in which all values are transitory and all relations are fleeting and indifferent" (Frisby 1986, p. 23).

The observation that it is not the same object moving through all the spaces of exchange means that we need a way to think about difference. Hart (2016) provides a reading of Marx that yields a method of "relational comparison" that resonates with the comparative logic of multi-sited ethnography as well as the logic of ANT, but goes a step further to think about how objects produced in networks might be compared. Rather than starting with pre-determined units and comparing them, Hart argues that the focus should be on process and on continuity and stability as an *outcome*: "Instead of comparing pre-existing objects, events, places, or identities—or asserting a general process like globalization and comparing its 'impacts'…the focus of relational comparison is on how key processes are constituted in relation to one another through power-laden practices in the multiple, interconnected arenas of everyday life" (2016, p. 4-5). Whereas multi-sited ethnography and ANT are often focused on tracing connections and drawing relations to make up a whole (or at least a network), I share with Hart the conviction that it is also necessary to make comparisons. The idea is not to compare generalities, like "market societies," "varieties of capitalism," or Poland with England. Instead, the aim is to make theoretical observations about how the processes whereby objects are variously produced and circulate.

2.4 Material semiotics and reality

In this dissertation, my aim is not to elaborate a "theory of objects" but to put the enactment of objects at the center of inquiry, as a way to understand how stable social realities are produced. In *After Method*, John Law (2004) lays out a set of concerns for studies using this methodological orientation: the enactment of objects; the partial connections between different objects; and the ways in which singularity is produced. Lynch (2013) proposes the concept of "ontography" as the empirical investigation of the way things come to be enacted in different ways. Rather than an *a priori* philosophical position about what exists, the idea is to "conduct empirical studies of specific instances in which ontological questions are 'in actuality decided through specific, historical, cultural, technological, scientific interventions'" (Marres 2013 in Lynch 2013, p. 459). In other words, rather than positing a particular metaphysics, ontography is a methodological orientation—consistent with the assemblage approach described above—that is focused on describing the ways that different objects are produced and relate to each other.

Law describes Mol's concept of multiplicity as wiping away the idea that there is one coherent reality at the end of a series of translations of the disease she studies. There is no "single coordinated network" or "single coherent reality"; where coherence and singularity appears, it is an achievement (Law 2009, p. 152). What is at stake in this sort of approach? Why is it important to show the ways that different used clothing objects, and different economic objects (like markets or value chains), are produced? Why not just say that there are different perspectives, or different frames, that people employ, leading them to see the world as divided up differently? The claim that objects and ontologies are *multiple* is different from claims of relativism or perspectivalism. Neither does it imply with the former that there is *no* shared reality and that we live in an irredeemably fractured world, nor does it imply with the latter that there is *one* reality onto which there are simply different viewpoints (Mol 1999). Rather than simply

producing a picture of a fragmented reality, or a deconstructive, critical approach, seeking to see beyond or through observed phenomena, this is an approach that focuses on how reality is variously constituted (see Latour 2004 and Felski 2015).

The accusations of postmodern nihilism frequently leveled at this sort of approach are likely a result of the fact that Mol, Law, and others insist on using the word "reality" to refer *both* to the achievement of "the social"—the world around us—*and* to the broader metaphysical reality that is the stuff of which the social is made. Mol takes pains to distinguish her approach from pluralism and the relativism that it implies: "if reality is *done*, if it is historically, culturally and materially *located*, then it is also *multiple*. Realities have become multiple. Not plural: multiple" (Mol 1999, p. 74). Mol's proposition of an immanent enacting of the social—with no larger frame within which the different enactments might fit—resonates with the poststructural vision of Deleuze and Guattari and the stubborn empiricism of Latour's actor-networks (and his insistence that there is no society *prior to* or *above* actor-networks). But Latour and Deleuze and Guattari do talk of that which is not (yet) the social: Latour calls it the "plasma" (2005, p. 241-246) and Deleuze and Guattari call it the "body without organs." Both of these concepts are used to speak about potentiality (Latour 2005, p. 246; Decoteau 2017, p. 262). In other words, there is no denial of reality in the sense of a single plane of immanence or potentiality. But as it is unformed, we do not and cannot know it; when we know or see it, it is no longer outside the social and has become one of those multiple realities.

The position that while there is one reality, realities are nonetheless multiple and *made to appear* singular, allows for consideration of what has been called "ontological politics" (Law 2004, p. 65; Law and Urry 2004; Mol 1999). If we are happy to only speak of one reality, which can be framed in different ways by different interest groups, we have come to a foregone

conclusion about the nature of the world. We have passed judgment about what exists, though we are ourselves—as social scientists and simply as people living with others—embroiled in the making of situated and partial realities. Though it is not possible to take a completely disinterested stance (Mills rightly observes that "[n]o one is 'outside society'; the question is where each stands within it" (2000, p. 184)), we can attempt to do justice to the reality of competing versions of the world and their inherently political nature (see Wight 2006 on politics as ontology). Our beliefs about *how the world is* cannot be separated from *how we come to know about it*: "what things are and how they are arranged (i.e. ontologies) are inseparable from how we go about knowing about them (i.e. epistemologies). Hence, the nexus between ontology and epistemology is an effect of relational processes that are material and meaningful or 'material-semiotic'" (Lepawsky and Mather 2011, p. 243). For these reasons, sensitivity to the enactment of particular ontologies is important both in the sociological analysis of the exchange of used clothing and in the practice of sociology itself.

2.5 A map and not a tracing

The performativity of economics—the extent to which the models, concepts, and ideas of economic theory shape economic processes in the world—is summed up by the title of Donald MacKenzie's (2006) book *An Engine, Not a Camera*. Economic theory is not a device that passively records the world as it is; instead it actively transforms the world in its image. I follow Law (2004) and Law and Urry (2004) in suggesting that we need to go a step farther to recognize the performativity of social (and sociological) theory, including economic sociology. In contrast to knowledge that purports to *represent* the world, Deleuze and Guattari propose a poststructuralist vision is of knowledge that is *immanent* to the world: "a *map and not a tracing*"

(1984, p. 12, emphasis in original). The logic of representation is one of tracing: it is analogous to what in reality exists. The logic of the rhizome, on the other hand, is cartographic: it is productive, it is always partial and always something *different* from the territory. Making a new map means blazing a new trail, making something new, not simply creating a faithful representation of what *is* (Massumi 1984, p. xvi). For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizomic approach is an attempt to circumvent the transcendental impulse that characterizes various kinds of structural thought and modernist ontologies.

Returning to economic sociology, the task at hand is not just to recognize the theories of the economists that we study as "an engine, not a camera." It is to recognize that our theories, too, are not just representational. Making this move to examine categories, so as not to reify them, is an attempt to "[p]lug the tracings back into the map, connect the roots or trees back up with the rhizome" (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, p. 14). This is in fact the essential move: "*the tracing should always be put back on the map*" (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, p. 13, emphasis in original). In this dissertation, though I am interesting in tracing actor-networks (assemblages), I do not dispense with economic sociological theories of markets, goods, and valuation altogether. It is not my intent to say that there is no such thing as a market, or that theories of valuation that have been developed in isolation from material considerations are *wrong*. I engage with those concepts and theories in an attempt to ground them in terms of the material and intellectual ground on which they become possible. Using the category of "market" unreflexively is using *market* as a tracing. The representation simplifies, reduces multiplicities and incoherence, imposes structure:

> …it is inaccurate to say that a tracing reproduces the map. It is instead like a photograph or X ray that begins by selecting or isolating, by artificial means such as colorations or other restrictive procedures, what it intends to reproduce. The imitator always creates the model, and attracts it. The tracing has already

> translated the map into an image; it has already transformed the rhizome into roots and radicles. It has organized, stabilized, neutralized the multiplicities according to the axes of significance and subjectification belonging to it. It has generated, structuralized the rhizome, and when it thinks it is reproducing something else it is in fact only reproducing itself. (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, p. 13)

Maps, on the other hand, leave possibilities open, allow people to find their way, even find new places. Perhaps it seems unreasonable to ask for radical skepticism about categories for every study of markets. I will not argue for this, as I believe that much is to be gained from building on previous knowledge. But I think that it is equally important that those categories be periodically revisited, subjected to deep scrutiny, evaluated for relevance in new places and times.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, the market has increasingly come to the forefront in economic sociology, to the extent that it is possible to talk about "market sociology." But, as I will develop over the course of this dissertation, study of markets continues to be largely dependent upon pre-existing ideas about what markets are, what their constituent parts are, and what sorts of things they do (Gemici 2012). Drawing on Latour's actor-network theory as well as his more recent work in *An Inquiry into Modes of Exisistence* (AIME, 2013), my aim is not simply to help us see the markets for used clothing more clearly but to help us *see ourselves seeing* markets. The aim of AIME is to move beyond the "e*xplicit metaphysics of the moderns*"—that is, "what we take for granted and resort to when pressed"—to the "*implicit metaphysics of the moderns*"—"what we live by in our various practices" (Hamalainen and Lehtonen 2016, p. 27). Latour's approach does not involve making ontological claims about what exists (the "furniture of the world"), but is rather a "'minimum-wage metaphysics', an 'experimental' or 'empirical' metaphysics that serves the purpose of opening the world anew, in conjunction with empirical research" (Hamalainen and Lehtonen 2016, p. 20). In other words, I want to break with the idea that markets exist as some kind of ontological given, but I want to

investigate the extent to which markets do nevertheless contingently exist *and* the way that market-oriented thought permeates our ways of thinking about them. This dissertation is not only about the exchange of used clothing; it is also about the concepts and theories themselves, what realities they arise from and what realities they reproduce.

In this sense the nature of what I am trying to do parallels Julian Go's recent case for bringing postcolonial thought into conversation with social theory. For Go, the project is not simply an empirical one "about empire," in which social theory should simply be expanded to include a consideration of empire; the project is also epistemic, investigating the extent to which our thinking has been *shaped by* empire (2016, p. 20). The aim, therefore, is not (only) to understand how waste and gifts play into the commodification of goods in markets, but to use waste and gifts as ways to examine the categories that we use to understand the commodification of goods and market exchange. In this sense my project builds on the work discussed in Chapter 1 that is concerned with the extent to which the logics of gift and commodity relations are intertwined.

2.6 Research design: Data collection and analysis

I carried out fieldwork to collect qualitative data between 2014 and 2017 in Krakow, Poland and Oxford, England. In England, I conducted a fourteen month-long qualitative study of the valuation of used clothing, wherein I traced flows of used clothing from points of collection through points of domestic resale or export. I volunteered in four charity shops in the city where I lived, totaling nearly 200 hours of participant observation. I conducted 26 formal interviews with actors involved in the buying, selling, and regulation of used clothing in England, as well as numerous informal (and not audio-recorded) interviews in the course of participant observation

and observant participation which form part of the field note record. Formal interviews were with managers and employees from other charity shops, with representatives of local authorities (city and council authorities) responsible for the collection and management of waste, and with individuals involved in the collection and circulation of used clothing and other used goods as part of various local organizations. I interviewed owners or employees of six textile recycling companies, and traveled to visit five of these facilities. Taken together, these six textile recyclers covered most of the area of England, as their collection reach spanned the country from its northernmost to southernmost areas. During site visits I was shown the labor process, machinery, and warehouse spaces necessary for creating value from collected used clothing (and books, and other items).

The four shops I volunteered in represent different types of charity shop models present across England and the United Kingdom. Cat Charity is a local cat rescue charity with just one shop location, run by a small cadre of regular volunteers and no paid managers. I spent the most time volunteering in this shop, and I generally worked with the same two or three women each time I went in. Pet Charity is a regional animal sanctuary with a few shop locations, which each have one paid manager, and a small handful of volunteers. Children's Charity is a regional charity with a few dozen shops and a highly professionalized managerial system, and a volunteer staff that was large enough for the managers to need to display a printed-out weekly schedule of who was scheduled to come in and for which hours. Health Charity is one of the UK's larger charities with hundreds of shop locations across the UK. In my time there I always worked with one of two managers and a fairly limited group of several regular volunteers. The fifth charity is Hospice Charity, a local charity with several shops spread around neighboring towns.[4] While I

[4] All hospice charity shops are local, as their cause is always to support a specific (and thus always tied to a particular location) hospice's operations. While in practice they operate in the same way as other local

did not do participant observation here as a volunteer, I did spend a day shadowing the retail manager as she traveled around the region to visit her shops, and an additional day with the manager of one of Hospice Charity's shops as we traveled to meet with a textile recycler at his facility several hours away. I also visited Hospice Charity frequently as an "observant participant", taking field notes about discussions or conflicts amongst the employees and observing customer dynamics. This method of observant participation at dozens of other charities complements the participant observation data I was able to collect during my time as a volunteer over the course of fourteen months at the four shops I mentioned above.

I had two rounds of fieldwork in Poland. The first was over the course of a year in 2013-2014, and the second was in 2016-2017. I have also lived in Poland for a total of around eight years, seven of which I have spent in Krakow, and this immersion has also informed my research. I conducted long-term, sustained participant observation in spaces where used clothing is exchanged (including not only retail but also swaps and charitable collection/exchange), and observation in sorting/warehouse facilities. I carried out 36 formal, semi-structured interviews. The people I interviewed are involved with used clothing in a wide variety of ways: shop owners, employees, and wholesalers; used clothing customers, vintage enthusiasts; a seamstress whose clients bring her clothes that are used; and people involved in various charitable sector activities involving the collection, sorting, and exchange of used clothing. The formal interviews ranged from 25 minutes to 3 hours, and were carried out in places suggested by my interviewees. When interviews were carried out in shops during business hours, I had the opportunity to observe their interactions with clients over an extended period of time. In addition to the formal

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charities with just a single or several shop locations, hospice charity retail is treated by the Charity Retail Association as a separate category when data about sales are aggregated and reported. This is because hospice shops often do very well due to the emotional connection people are thought to have to their local hospice, meaning that hospice charities do not usually face the same difficulties soliciting donations that other charities complain of.

interviews, I also carried out numerous informal interviews and conversations. I also conducted a consumer survey with 13 shoppers as they exited shops. These conversations lasted from about three to ten minutes (see Appendix for survey guide).

Interviews were recorded with my phone and later transcribed (in some cases, only in part). I kept field notes during the course of my observations, initially recorded in a notebook that I carried with me, and during later fieldwork written as notes on my phone. I wrote up full versions of these partial field notes when I returned home after an interview, meeting, or observations. I recorded answers to my consumer survey by hand as I spoke to people and wrote up longer versions, including details from the conversations that I remembered, when I returned home. During observation, and sometimes during interviews when we were walking through a sorting facility or shop, I took photos which I later transferred to my computer. I also consulted Polish, UK, and EU policy documents and popular press articles. I used MAXQDA, a qualitative data software program, to analyze my data. Throughout this whole process I was hard at work reading relevant literatures and producing preliminary or "test" versions of this dissertation in the form of grant applications, journal manuscripts, and dozens of memos written to myself as I considered the ways that the ideas I encountered on the page could be made to illuminate what I was encountering in the field.

CHAPTER 3

Used Clothing in Historical and Geographical Context

The trade in used clothing is not a contemporary phenomenon in the least. It does, however, take specific forms today. In order to understand the continuities and differences in the trade of this particular good, it is necessary to look at the way used clothing has been exchanged throughout history, under different political-economic regimes. The exchange of used clothing has formed a part of what Braudel has called "material civilization"—that "shadowy zone, often hard to see" beneath the well-documented world of markets and international trade—sometimes, but not always, intersecting with "economic civilization," the formal half of economic activity (Braudel 1985, pp. 23-4, 27-9). In other words, the exchange of used clothing and textiles has long formed a part of household economies and other informal exchange systems (Fontaine 2008). Alongside other mundane or everyday material objects which form the fabric of everyday life, the history of used clothing has been reconstructed as a way of understanding the "foundation for all the other manifestations of economic, social, and cultural activity" of which objects for everyday use, like clothing, are a part (Lemire 2005, p. 1; see also Palmer and Clark 2005; Fontaine 2008). Increasingly historians have focused on the trade in various types of used items, such as furniture (Edwards and Ponsonby 2010; Jones 2010) or books (Mitchell 2010). By tracing the history of the way in which used clothing has been exchanged, we can see a general historical trend of clothing shifting from a type of good which was used and reused, mended and re-purposed, to something more disposable. Disposability, however, does not necessarily indicate that clothing ends its life, falls out of circulation, or stops receiving care and management; it

simply means that responsibility for these actions and "phases" in the life of the object (Kopytoff 1986) is transferred to other actors and organizations.

3.1 Pre-industrial and industrial used clothing trade

The trade of used clothing and used textiles is one which is closely connected to changes in economic and social organization. Historian Beverly Lemire has argued that the trade of used clothing has developed alongside capitalism in Europe between 1600 and 1850, identifying three stages: transition from scarcity (the early modern era); growing abundance (beginning in the late 1600s); and industrial plenty (the industrial era) (Lemire 2012). The textile industry itself is intimately connected to the development of capitalism in Europe. Textile production was at the center of the Industrial Revolution and played a main role in the development of industrial capitalism. Textiles and clothing were a direct inspiration to Marx as he was writing *Capital* (Stallybrass 1998, p. 184). Later, this industry was also one of the main ones involved in the outsourcing of low-cost labor and the development of supply chains connected to globalization processes in the late 20th century. The trade of secondhand clothing has long been characterized by a wide variety of modes of exchange, with sellers of more or less specialized, or more or less expensive, types of goods, in formal and regulated industries, or informally or even illegally (Stobart and Van Damme 2010, p. 5).

Used clothing was relatively more valuable in the early modern period than it is today. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, cloth and clothing were among the most costly purchases that a household could make, with purchases often timed to major life events such as the birth of a child (Lemire 2012, p. 147). The more durable materials lasted over a span of several generations, and were repurposed over and over again. In the 17th century, heavy wools in dark

colors were no longer the most ubiquitous option, becoming displaced not only by lighter-weight wools but also by linens and cottons (Lemire 2005, p. 114). Mechanization of production, first of cotton in the 1790s (Smelser 1959) and then of wool in the 1830s (Glover 1961), played a role in the changing nature of the secondhand clothing trade. In the early 1800s, when British mills were producing larger and larger amounts of textiles, the secondhand trade grew but declined in status and became a largely working-class practice (Lemire 2012, p. 153).

As a significant and relatively rare investment for a household, used clothing could function as a line of credit for householders in need of liquidity (Lemire 2005, p. 17). (Today, on the contrary, clothing is rarely found in pawn shops.) Pawn shops were places where ordinary people could take their clothing, buying it back—with interest—when they had the money. Marx is known to have done just this repeatedly with his coat while writing *Capital* at the British Museum in London (Stallybrass 1998, p. 184). This practice has been shown to be widespread across the Mediterranean region and in Paris in the middle ages, as well as in Indonesia in the early modern era (Goitein 1983, Geremek 1987, and Guy 1998 in Lemire 2005, p. 228).[5] In England, initially both the rich and the poor bought and sold clothing from pawnbrokers, but over time, the upper and middle classes developed their own mechanisms for lending, and pawn became associated with the lower classes (Lemire 2005, p. 96). In 18th century England, for instance, there was a quite well-developed pawn sector, though one which was viewed with some suspicion as unsavory, due to the "probable legal and olfactory character of these wares" collected by brokers (Lemire 2005, p. 59). The secondhand trade appears to have become

[5] In the medieval era and even into the early modern period, sumptuary laws governed what people belonging to various social classes should or should not wear, but used clothing circulated nevertheless. Fontaine has suggested that the rise of the secondhand trade coincided with the appearance of less expensive clothing and that clothing and textiles no longer served the purpose of "storing value" (2008, pp. 2-3). In order to maintain value, clothing "needed to circulate and be exchanged in order to take on new value" (Rosenthal 2009, p. 461).

segmented by the 19th century, with some shops specializing in valuable goods from well-off clients in need of immediate financial support (Lemire 2005, p. 102). In industrializing and industrial societies, the trade in secondhand textiles, for recycling or reuse, nevertheless cut across layers of society (Van Damme 2010, p. 75).[6]

This type of credit based on pawn was sometimes, though far from always, connected to charitable attempts to provide the poor with low-interest loans. Clothing or fabric, as well as all manner of household goods, could be exchanged for credit of this type (Lemire 2005, p. 60) (though clothing and domestic textiles comprised the majority (Lemire 2005, p. 93)). From the 17th century onward there were even municipal or charitable pawn offices in Europe which specialized in low rates of lending, as opposed to the often high rates that could be found elsewhere (Lemire 2005, p. 60). Though this type of charitable arrangement was not common in England, in other parts of Europe there were pawn shops run by religious groups whose operation was geared to providing the poor access to low-interest credit (Lemire 2012, p. 149). An exception was the London-based Charitable Corporation, a pawn organization operational from 1707-1749, which was specifically designed as a charity, meant to provide affordable loans to the poor, doing this in a way that was profitable to the organization (Lemire 2005, p. 64). This is a setup that is parallel in many ways to the charitable retail of clothing today. And like scandals which erupt every so often with present-day charities due to the improper allocation of funds, the Charitable Corporation was shut down by a scandal, after which similar attempts to provide alternative loans were not revived until the 19th century (Lemire 2005, p. 73).

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[6] While the poorer classes would have had less clothing at their disposal than the richer classes, they were nevertheless able to participate in these secondhand textile economies. Though it would not account for all trade in textiles by the lower classes, textiles were often circulated informally from employers to servants. Clothing sourced through illicit means could also serve as a currency for potential exchange. In Bruges from 1841-1851, a decade of "hardship and starvation," the theft of clothing was more prevalent than theft of food or money (Van Damme 2010, p. 76).

Rather than simply as a commodity with exchange value, clothing was often exchanged for its use value or as an alternative currency. As there existed some surplus of clothing, beyond the garments that people needed to fulfill their most basic needs, used clothing became a common substitute for coinage at times when there was a shortage of minted money (Lemire 2005, p. 90; Fontaine 2008). In a process opposite to that of fungible money being disaggregated through various forms of earmarking (Zelizer 1994), heterogenous and unique clothing and textiles were considered "transmutable" enough, with an easily-enough assessed value and price, to serve as a medium of exchange in 16th century England when currency itself was lacking (Lemire 2005, p. 91), until the 19th century when this was no longer necessary (Lemire 2005, p. 102). Clothing and textiles were not only used to secure loans or credit; they could also be exchanged for other types of goods such as china or other household necessities (Lemire 2005, p. 93). In-kind charitable donations of clothing itself were popular in the 19th century until being displaced by a preference for cash transfers in the early 20th century (Zelizer 1994). The connection between charity and used clothing was connected to the growing number of garments in circulation in the era of "industrial plenty" (Lemire 2012, p. 156).

As production of textiles increased, the issue of how these materials could or should be managed became an issue for both members of industry and those observing industry. Marx wrote about how waste is produced in processes of production and processes of consumption ("refuse of production" and "refuse of consumption") (1993, p. 195). He saw that producers were already finding ways to reduce (through use of better production machinery) or make use of these waste materials (through processes of reclaiming and reprocessing for further use). He was critical of the wool industry's production of "shoddy" (reclaimed and reprocessed post-consumer wool) as a way of generating value from waste. Marx noted that while industry actors were

satisfied by the increase in demand for shoddy, consumers reaped questionable benefits as shoddy was used to make poor-quality garments: "By the end of 1862 the rejuvenated shoddy already accounted for a third of all wool used by English industry…The 'great benefit' for the 'consumer' was that his woollen clothes took only a third of the previous time to wear out and a sixth of the time to become threadbare" (1993, p. 197). Considerations of the value of used clothing must also consider the ways that used clothing continues on even after it ceases to be a garment. Material can continue to circulate as a source of value, but that value is inseparably connected to the qualities and affordances of fibers, textiles, and the ways that clothing items have been produced.

3.2 Globalization and the used clothing trade

Hansen (2000) suggests her own, more modern, three-stage evolution of the trade of used clothing, with significant shifts in the industry happening in the mid to late 19th century, in the 1940s, and in the 1980s. By the mid-19th century, used clothes were regularly exported to British ports in North America (Lemire 2012, p. 154). The charitable trade of used clothing was also responsible for the international nature of the trade at this point, with charitable or religious organizations soliciting donations of secondhand goods and textiles and shipping them to places deemed to be in need, notably Africa or the Americas (Lemire 2012, p. 156). The volume of used clothing moving through these channels was significant by this point, as evidenced by a transaction of fifty tons of "old clothes" exported from Britain to Cape Town by English missionaries in 1843 (Lemire 2012, p. 157). In the mid to late 19th century, the changing nature of domestic garment manufacture, with the cost of ready-to-wear clothing competing for the first

time with the cost of used clothing (Perrot 1994), meant that secondhand clothing was destined primarily for export.

In the 20th century, the development of the used clothing trade was closely connected to world wars and the charitable sector. After the two world wars, surplus army clothing was exported to colonial Africa from the United States and Europe (Hansen 2000, p. 10). Changing attitudes to charitable donations of clothing and the increasing industrial production of apparel contributed to the growth of the global trade. While in-kind of donations of charitable clothing had become viewed as unfavorable as compared to cash transfers to the poor, charitable organizations in Europe and the United States began retail operations which became extremely lucrative sources of income for them (McKinley 1995; Hansen 2000, p. 11). Hansen notes another shift in the 1980s with the emergence of for-profit retail proliferating in clothing stores which catered to middle-class customers, as well as subcultures like vintage, punk, and rave (Hansen 2000, p. 11-12). In the last decades of the 20th century, (firsthand) apparel production has been outsourced in what critics of globalization have called a global "race to the bottom" for the lowest costs of production. Prices of clothing fell, and production increased. A parallel, though delayed, process happened in the used clothing industry, as sorting was outsourced to Eastern Europe and the global South, where labor was less expensive.

The industry underwent massive growth in the early 1990s (Hansen 2000, p. 113) and at the beginning of the 21st century, with the value of the industry doubling between 2001 and 2009, from $1.26 billion to $2.5 billion (COMTRADE data in Crang et al. 2013, p. 17). More than half of the total volume of exports is generated in just five countries (the US, UK, Germany, South Korea, and Canada), while 15 countries make up half of the imports (Ghana, Poland, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Russia, Cameroon, Kenya, Benin, Tunisia, Angola, Ukraine, Canada,

Germany and Cambodia) (COMTRADE data in Crang et al. 2013, p. 17; see Figure 3.1). As discussed in Chapter 1, how value production should be theorized in this global trade has generated a great deal of discussion, as used clothing does not fit neatly into models developed for the globalized production or circulation of new goods.

Anthropologist Karen Tranberg Hansen was the first to extensively document the phenomenon of the global secondhand clothing trade. Her (2000) monograph *Salaula*, about the import, distribution, retail, and consumption of secondhand clothes from the US to Zambia, is the key text in the field. Since then, geographical locations near or at the end of value chains have generated a considerable body of scholarship, Hansen's own including work focusing on Zambia (2004 and 2005), Mozambique (Brooks 2013 and 2015), Benin and Nigeria (Abimbola 2012), India (Norris 2005, 2008, and 2015), and the Philippines (Milgram 2004, 2005, 2008, and 2012). To date there is still relatively very little focus on midpoint countries, places (like Poland) which are at once important importers and exporters of used clothing, and there has not been any research done in markets in Eastern Europe. The used clothing trade within "supply"-generating countries, at the "top" of the value chain, has received attention (described below), but not always necessarily in the context of eventual export and the global trade of used clothing.

Scholars have described the disconnect between the way used clothing is understood in the Global North and the realities of its trade in the Global South. Used clothing is framed in the Global North as an ethical commodity, one which is environmentally friendly and redistributes valuable resources to those in need (Norris 2012 and 2015). In this literature there is a focus on the fact that stock is collected by charities as donations: charitable collections are the single largest source of used clothing for the global market (Hansen 2000 and 2008) and textile recyclers are said to benefit from this arrangement as they pay relatively little for their stock

(Norris 2012). Despite its charitable origins, used clothing is not necessarily treated in the Global South as a "need" or a resource for the poor, and people in receiving countries consume it in ways that express their desires, local identities, and mores (Hansen 2000, 2004, and 2008; Norris 2005; Abimbola in Norris 2012; Botticello 2012, p. 167). There are also questionable ethical practices surrounding the trade once items have been exported and have been put "out of sight, out of mind" for policy-makers and proponents of the industry in countries like the US and the UK (Norris 2015).

One of the central questions in the literature is the process of "transforming cast-offs into commodities" (Norris 2012, p. 135). Used clothing items are "snowflakes" (Rivoli 2006), meaning that each item is unique thanks to the wear and use it has acquired in its "firsthand" life. Since used clothing is not standardized, and it is difficult to tell what is actually inside sealed bales (Hansen 2000; Norris 2005, 2012), there is a great deal of uncertainty in the trade of such items. Buyers and sellers develop strategies of overcoming the information asymmetry inherent in exchange (Abimbola 2012). Relations of trust create an alternative kind of "branding," where personal relationships between buyers and sellers mitigate uncertainty (Norris 2005). Buyers also often want "fresh" used clothes, which can be recognized in various ways, such as an unopened bale (Abimbola 2012, p. 188), or clothes which are wrinkled or have a particular recognizable smell, indicating that they have not passed through an extra set of hands and are "genuine" secondhand (Hansen 2000, p. 172). Sorting processes allow used clothing to again become commodities through "re-branding" by their sorters (Botticello 2013), and sorting processs that re-configure used items into new potentials (Botticello 2012).

Used clothing is tied up with questions of the global political economy and developing markets. It is sometimes argued that used clothing has played a role the collapse of domestic

textile or apparel industries (see Hansen 2004 and Brooks and Simon 2012), but it seems that used clothing is actually competing with cheap Chinese imports rather than domestically-produced goods (Abimbola 2011; Brooks and Simon 2012). There is a wide range of complementary jobs around the trade, including peddlers, tailors, and those who repair, alter, launder, or press imported used clothing (Hansen 2004; Baden and Barber 2005; Norris 2012, p. 136). While in some cases, the used clothing trade can be a source of livelihood and agency, especially for women (as shown in Milgram's (2004, 2005, 2008, and 2012) work in the Philippines), this is not always the case. Pathways out of poverty are not available to everyone in the trade, as Brooks (2013 and 2015) describes in the case of importers in Mozambique who act as gatekeepers and are able to profit disproportionately relative to individual vendors. It is also a matter of debate to what extent the used clothing trade is implicated in the structures of exploitation of the capitalist economy, whether in exacerbating inequality between developed and developing nations, or serving as an outlet for environmentally harmful fast-fashion production (Siegle 2011; Hoskins 2014).

3.3 United Kingdom

As described in some detail above, the history of the used clothing trade in England stretches back through many centuries. In the 20th century, the trade was closely connected with the charity retail sector, as well as the textile recycling industry (described in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5). This industry developed from earlier trade in used clothing which was, in the 19th century, connected to charitable collections and redistribution. The founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, wrote in 1890 that he believed that the struggling working class could be helped by taking advantage of the waste generated by well-to-do households. Members of the

working class could be enlisted to collect these items, and repair them when necessary, thus becoming employed (Horne and Maddrell 2002, p. 1). The first Salvation Army "salvage store" was in London, but by 1914 there were other locations open throughout England, as well as in the US and Canada (Horne and Maddrell 2002, p. 3). The caption under a photo in a 1908 Salvation Army publication from a "salvage store" in Leeds read: "By means of this store wastage from the homes of the wealthy is turned to profitable account in the service of the poor and submerged" (quoted in Horne and Maddrell, p. 1). By the First World War, there was a network of not only salvage shops in operation, but also a "salvage centre warehouse" at Battersea Wharf in London, which prefigured the extensive warehousing and logistical operations that underpin the operations of charity shops today (Horne and Maddrell 2002, p. 3).

The first "modern charity shop" in the UK was an Oxfam shop which opened in 1947 (Horne and Maddrell 2002, p. 4). After procuring a surplus of donated goods from the public following an uprising in Greece in 1946, Oxfam opened their Broad Street location in Oxford. This location is still in operation today, with a plaque on the facade commemorating the historic nature of the site. The Sue Ryder Foundation also opened shops in several English cities in the 1950s (Horne and Maddrell 2002, p. 5). Horne and Maddrell identify the "growth period" of the industry as the 1960s, as formal and informal charity retail processed growing numbers of consumer goods (2002, p. 5). Though there is not a great deal of data available to track the growth of the charity retail sector through the 1980s and 1990s, there appears to have been steady growth overall, and by the end of the 1990s, the larger charities had hundreds of shop locations each (for instance, looking just at the five largest charities, by 1998, Oxfam had 847 shops (excluding those in Ireland); the Imperial Cancer Research Fund had 465; Age Concern

England had 406; British Red Cross had 448; and Help the Aged had 380) (adapted from Phelan (1999) in Horne and Maddrell 2002, p. 8).

The expansion of the large charity retail operations was accompanied, and perhaps even made possible, by innovations in efficiency and logistics. In her history of the first 50 years of Oxfam's operation, Maggie Black describes how new Director Brian Walker sought to professionalize retail operations:

> Walker fully took over the reigns in September 1974. He was impressed by the calibre of the staff; their liveliness and degree of motivation; by the part played by volunteers; and by the projects he visited on overseas familiarisation tours. But he did not approve of what he saw as the blight of make-do-and-mend which permeated Oxfam's operational and institutional character. The shoestring mentality was natural to many working in the charity world, and it was laudable in its way, but lacked efficiency. (Black 1992, p. 203)

Walker brought in experts from the commercial world to improve the efficiency and operations of the three "key fund-raising areas" of the charity: Shops, Trading, and Appeals (Black 1992, p. 204). A National Shops Committee was established to modernize the retail operations, and a Shops Development Fund was established in 1975 with the aim of improving or purchasing shop properties (Black 1992, p. 204). Between 1973 and 1978, Oxfam shop income tripled to over £3 million (Black 1992, p. 205).

Another branch of the new strategy for Oxfam shops was the development of the Oxfam Wastesaver Centre, which opened in 1975. In a "derelict textile mill" in Huddlesfield, the Centre was originally conceived as a recycling center where all sorts of household waste could be processed (Black 1992, p. 207). Through a rocky first couple of years, in which prices of collection rose and the price of waste materials stayed static, the Wastesaver Centre failed to become profitable (Black 1992, p. 207). It was then decided that the Centre would be converted into a recycling center for one type of product only: the garments that Oxfam's 575 shops were

unable to sell (Black 1992, p. 207). This proved to be a valuable counterpart to shop operations, as shops now had a place to get rid of stock that they could not sell (Black 1992, p. 208). The Wastesaver Centre was moved to a smaller and more specialized location for the purpose of sorting textiles in 1979 (Black 1992, p. 208). By this time, in 1978-79, the income of the shops and general appeals reached £9.7 million (Black 1992, p. 208).

Today used clothing is exchanged in spaces such as charity shops (Gregson et al. 2002), vintage shops (Gregson et al. 2001), and car boot sales (Crewe and Gregson 1998; see also Gregson and Crewe 2003 for a consideration of all of these). Most of the secondhand clothing collected in England is currently sold in charity shops. UK charity shops report selling an estimated 192,400 metric tons of used clothing in 2010 and 213,700 in 2014, with this amount likely decreasing to approximately 186,800 metric tons in 2015 (WRAP 2016, p. 13). Stobart and Van Damme observe that academic interest in secondhand matters has increased alongside the "growing array of 'alternative' forms of exchange which characterize modern consumption: anything from car boot sales and 'swishing', to farmers markets and online retail sites such as eBay" (2010, p. 3).

Much of the literature on secondhand objects, spaces, and practices focuses on the dynamics of consumption. In some senses, secondhand consumption is characterized by the same dynamics as consumption in general: consumers may be trying to save money, to capture relative value by finding a "bargain," or to express distinction (Gregson and Crewe 2003, p. 11). But in other senses, consumption of used things provides alternative possibilities and symbolic potential. Used or vintage clothing can be used in processes of subcultural consumption (McRobbie 1989) or as a source of designer labels for people interested in "investment dressing" (Hansen 2000, p. 12). "Vintage" clothing is deployed by the artistic and avant-garde (Gregson et

al. 2001) to distinguish themselves from the "mainstream" (Crewe et al. 2003). Used clothing is sought after by other social classes, as well, in an attempt to establish originality in the face of "the globalization of enormous fashion chains at all price levels" (Palmer and Clarke 2005, p. 174). In practice, used clothing is shopped for and consumed in ways that distinguish it from new clothing. In contrast to shopping for new things, repetitive shopping trips are often necessary in order to find the things one needs or wants, and the level of wear that the items show is a consideration (Gregson et al. 2002). Used clothing is particularly prone to showing traces of the previous owner's use, so divestment rituals (McCracken 1986) are particularly important in making an item one's own.

3.4 Poland

Poland has long been part of global exchange networks of textiles. In the 19th century, fabric for making cheap black caps, worn by the working class, was exported from Britain to Poland, where they were produced locally (Lemire 2012, p. 155). Polish Jews, in Białystok in particular, manufactured shoddy-wool cloth (of the sort that Marx criticized) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Marcus 1983, p. 90). In the period between 1918 (when Polish sovereignty was restored from the German, Austrian, and Russian empires) and the outbreak of World War I in 1939, the Polish textile industry was dependent upon import of raw material for textile production, especially cotton, wool, and silk; only linen was produced from Polish flax (Jezierski and Leszczyńska 2003, p. 296).

Poland's textile manufacturing capacity was affected by the destruction of World War II, though not to as great an extent as in other branches of industry (Franaszek 2010, p. 412). In the post-war period Poland accepted a great deal of charitable donations from the United Nations

and from other non-governmental organizations. These "packages from the West" came in the immediate post-war years from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), the Polish War Relief, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and other charitable organizations (Tyrmand in Żłobecka 2017, p. 13). The packages from the UN were so omnipresent that people began thinking of them as from a sort of mythical figure:

> We used to receive UN packages and, believe me, those were magical packages. We increasingly believed in some sort of real Auntie UNRRA from America, sending presents—a kind of wartime Santa. In our minds UNRRA became a concrete woman, not an organization or an institution. (Kazimierski in Żłobecka 2017, p. 20, translation mine)

Although the sale of things received in these UN packages was strictly forbidden, with a punishment of up to five years in prison, there was a lively black market for these goods in 1945-47 (Zgłobica 2017, p. 65). American military clothing that came to Poland in UNRRA packages was popular in the post-war years, especially olive-green "battledress" jackets (Pelka p. 19; Szarota 2008). Throughout the socialist period, packages with clothing and other consumer goods arrived from NGOs as well as from private citizens, sometimes family living abroad, but also from strangers. As the economic and political situation in the country worsened in the 1980s, private citizens in Western Europe as well as NGOs from West Germany, France, and Norway sent packages to Polish families (Żłobecka 2017, p. 14 and 42-48).

Meanwhile, the domestic Polish textile industry was relatively vibrant during the socialist period. Production of cotton and woolen yarns and fabrics grew rapidly from after WWII until the end of the 1970s (Franaszek 2010, p. 413-414). During the socialist years, textile workers accounted for about ten percent of all industrial workers (Franaszek 2010, p. 415). The Institute of Industrial Design (*Instytut Wzornictwa Polskiego*, IWP) was established in 1950, and was one of the first bodies of its kind in Europe. Perhaps paradoxically, the early years of socialist textile

and clothing production were quite fruitful, as young designers were hired to work in the IWP, were connected with factories who could produce their designs, and as "no one was counting the money," a great number of designs actually made their way to production (Bochińska 2018). Łódź was the center of textile and fashion production, and despite having limited contact with Western European fashion influences, the fashion industry was able to maintain some degree of activity (Boćkowska 2015b).

Fashion and garments from the West, however, continued to be in great demand throughout these years. Fashionable items could be made by creatively re-purposing products of domestic production, like when designer Barbara Hoff suggested to the readership of "Przekrój" magazine in the late 1950s that a particular, widely-available soccer jersey could be worn backwards and dyed black, to look like what fashionable Italian women were wearing (Szarota 2008, p. 17). But the foreign clothing sent in packages to Poland from abroad throughout the socialist period, though more expensive than domestically-produced clothing,[7] was highly desired. Clothing acquired abroad in so-called "trade tourism" (see Figure 3.2), or sent in packages from family abroad, could be sold in consignment shops or in open-air markets (see Figure 3.3).

In times of shortage, open-air markets became important social institutions (Kurczewski et al. 2010). These markets provided fashionable Western clothing, competing with domestic production and with PeKaO shops,[8] where Western goods could be bought for foreign currency (Żłobecka 2017, p. 31). Despite the fact that the press wrote disparagingly about the bazaars,

[7] Domestic "high fashion," like Moda Polska, was of course much too expensive for the average consumer.

[8] PeKaO Bank (PKO Bank, *Bank Polska Kasa Opieki SA*) had its own shops, which later became PEWEX (*Przedsiębiorstwa Eskportu Wewnętznego*) shops. These stores sold imported goods as well as Polish-produced goods not meant for the domestic market in so-called "internal export" [*eksport wewnętrzny*].

discouraging people from buying "old stuff thrown out by people in the West," they continued to be important places for the trade of clothing as well as almost every other kind of item imaginable, from sewing needles to cars (Żłobecka 2017, p. 31). The bazaars became "not only fashion houses in their own right, but also sources of information about current Western fashion" (Pelka 2007, p. 22). Writer Agnieszka Osiecka remembers the importance of clothing from abroad—known as *ciuchy*, just like used clothing today: "A girl from my generation without *ciuchy* would feel like Cinderella without one of her slippers. Or even—without either of them. A boy who never had a real pair of jeans would probably land sooner or later at the psychiatrist" (in Szarota 2008, p. 17, translation mine). American jeans were an especially desired product, a symbol of luxury (Szarota 2008, p. 114), one that "signified that you could get something the system said you didn't need and shouldn't have…[that] conferred an identity that set you off from socialism" (Verdery 1996, p. 29).

3.4.1 Used Clothing in Poland after 1989

After the transition to a free market in 1989, the used clothing trade also began to transition to the form it has today. Used clothing from the West appeared in large quantities during the 1990s. Asked why it became such a big market, one Polish importer told me that the market was simply ready to absorb anything after transition: it was "starved." The growth of the used clothing market coincided with deindustrialization. Textile production had begun falling with the crises of the 1980s, and has never again reached the levels at which it was operating in 1989 (Franaszek 2010, p. 415). Nevertheless, when used clothing began appearing in large quantities in Poland, there was resistance from the domestic clothing industry. It was not only Polish clothing producers voicing concerns with the import of used clothing, but also competitors

importing clothing from China or Turkey (Metelska-Świat, Interview June 28, 2017). Competitors from the apparel industry were in favor of tightening regulations on the import of used clothing (especially the regulation of unsorted used clothing as waste, which would make import more difficult) (Gwiazdowicz and Wołodkiewicz-Donimirski 2002).

In the early 1990s, used clothing was imported from Western European countries, mainly the UK, Germany, Holland, Belgium, and Denmark. In the case of Germany, used clothing was sometimes collected *de facto* out of the trash, from so-called *wystawki* (in Polish), or *Sperrmüll* (in German): bulky waste set out to be collected. Hopeful Polish traders could find out the scheduled dates of bulky waste collection for particular cities, neighborhoods, or streets, and travel to collect used clothing or other items rejected from German households that could be sold in Poland.[9] Polish traders started out with little capital, with their own garages sometimes serving as warehouses and shops, purchasing imported used clothing from Western wholesalers with operations in Poland rather than purchasing abroad and importing themselves. Unsorted used clothing is considered waste and cannot be directly imported legally without permission, so in the early days of the industry, stock was bought from wholesalers who set up businesses in Poland. The Polish used clothing trade was a matter of small shops. With time, as Polish retailers accumulated capital, they were able to open additional shops, some eventually beginning to import and wholesale used clothing themselves. Textile recyclers and industry representatives say that they learned how to do the business by "looking to the West" and learning from how it was already being done in Western Europe.

[9] Bulky waste is no longer a viable source for used clothing. Firstly, used clothing no longer qualifies as bulky waste in many cities and must be disposed of through other infrastructures in Germany. Second, as described below, Polish consumers have become more discerning and require "higher quality" used clothing. German bulky waste still potentially yields other valuable materials that might be harvested, like cables that contain copper wire, but since 2012 collection of these materials has been officially disallowed (likely because the city is getting an income from their recycling).

The clothing being imported for sale in Poland in earlier days was, as many industry veterans remember, of much worse quality than what is being sold now. One textile recycler said that his first purchase in the early 1990s, made at a warehouse outside of Warsaw, was clothing that he would now consider not fit for sale—he would now throw it out as waste. But customers' expectations were completely different in those days, and Poland was a destination for poorer-quality clothing coming from Western Europe. Ewa Metelska-Świat, President of the Polish Trade Union of Secondary Textile Resources (*Krajowa Izba Gospodarcza – Tesktylnych Surowców Wtórnych*, KIG-TSW), described the used clothing coming to Poland in the early years of the transition as "really tasteful and a welcome novelty" compared to what was available in Polish shops at the time (Interview June 28, 2017). Polish textile recyclers recall being able to sell just about anything. Wiktor, a Krakow-based textile recycler, says that in those days clients would buy 70% of his stock and he could make rags out of the rest (see Chapter 5 for a greater discussion of the logic of sorting). In Chapter 5 I describe the current state of the trade and discuss what sorts of clothes are traded in Poland today.

The used clothing trade in Poland today is big business. There are currently twenty companies listed as members of the KIG-TSW. The days of being able to sell anything are over. Competition has increased: in the early 1990s there were a handful of shops in Krakow; today there are sometimes five or more shops next to each other on one street (see Chapter 7). Polish people are buying more clothes and discarding more, and the domestic collection of used clothing has begun (see Chapter 5).

3.5 Conclusion

The exchange of used clothing has been configured and reconfigured across history, in different circumstances of production, industrialization, excess and scarcity. Used clothing has held both use value and exchange value, has served as a currency and as a symbolic good. These different values have been parts of changing economies and relations of distribution. While to a large degree the circulation, flows, and value transformations of used clothes continue to be situated outside of "the economy" as unregistered transactions, increasingly the movement of used clothes is being made subject to regulation and governance. Today much of its circulation is managed by powerful actors in the charity, textile recycling, and waste management industries, as well as government actors (described in more detail in Chapter 5). In the next chapter I focus on one of the points where used clothing enters the secondhand economy: English charity shops.

3.6 Figures

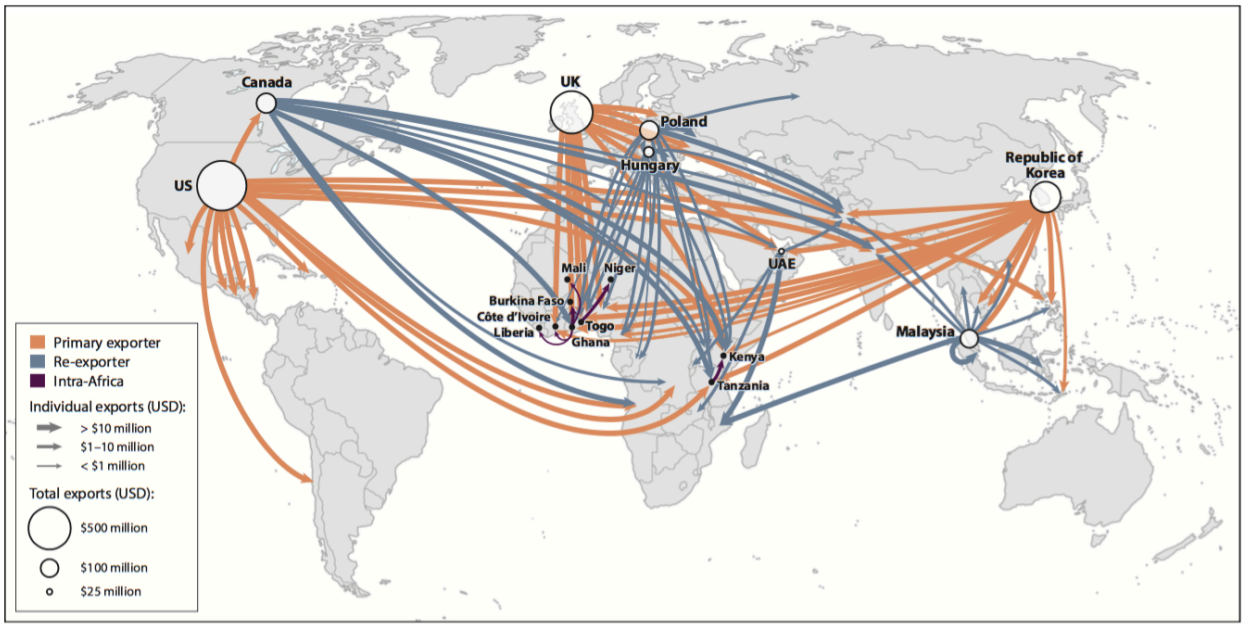


Figure 3.1. Global flows of used clothing (from Gregson and Crang 2015, p. 165)

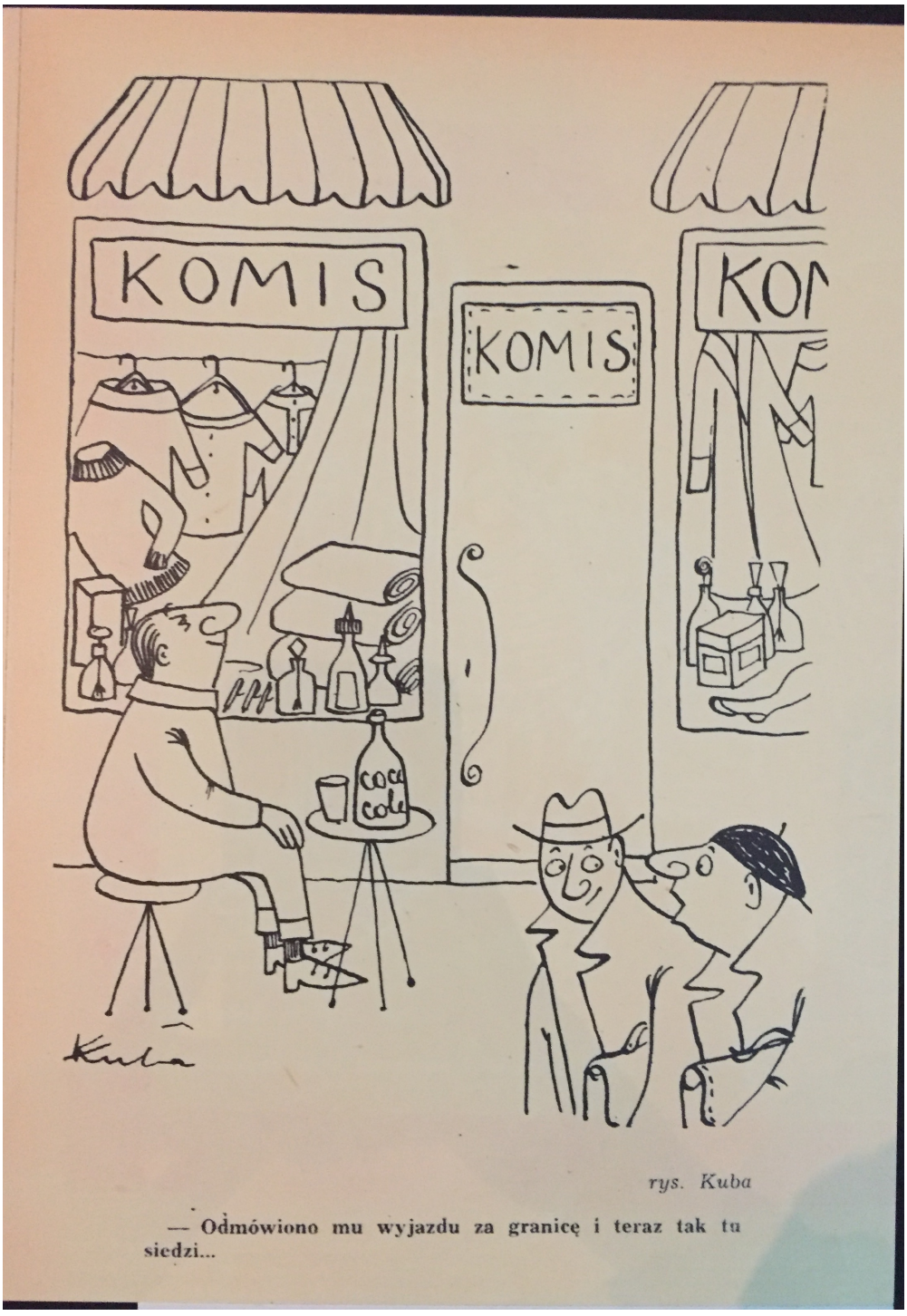


Figure 3.2. “He was denied permission to travel abroad and now he sits here like this.” Karykatura, Barbara Rutkowska (aka “Kuba”), “Szpilki” vol. 15, 1957. Photo by author at “Paczki z Ameryki” exhibition at the Museum of Poland under the Communist Regime.

Figure 3.3. “Consignment-voyager” by Henryk Chmielewski. “Szpilki” vol. 40, 1956. A play on words: “komiwojażer” is a traveling salesman; “komis” is a consignment shop and “wojażer” is a francophone rendering of “traveler.” Photo by author at “Paczki z Ameryki” exhibition at the Museum of Poland under the Communist Regime.

CHAPTER 4

Commodities, Gifts, and Waste in English Charity Shops

In this chapter, I consider the multiple logics of exchange in English charity shops. On one level, charity retail is a mundane and ubiquitous reality in England. At the same time that people are given a way to get rid of items that they no longer want or need, charities are able to raise money for the causes they support by accepting these cast-off items as donations and re-selling them. On another level, though, this type of exchange is far from mundane. It is enough to consider the recurring scandals surrounding the resale of items donated to charity to get a sense of the ambiguous moral and cultural meanings that attend it. These scandals often have to do with the proper use of the objects exchanged and the meaning of charity retail. One common complaint is that the items donated are not in-kind material aid for people in need, but instead generate profit for the charity. Outrage and concern also arise when it turns out that charities do not "really" sell all the items that are donated to them in their shops, but sell them along to recyclers, whose business is profit-oriented and no longer connected to the charity's mission. The astronomical salaries of charity CEOs contribute to the impression that the moral calculation of exchange is somewhat off. Further, charity retail would not be possible without the free labor of volunteer workers. All of these contentious matters surrounding the exchange of used goods in the context of charity are an indication that there is not simply one logic of exchange at work. Instead, the nature of charity retail is a "matter of concern" which contains a multitude of actors and often conflicting logics (Latour 2004, 2005).

4.1 Gifts and commodities

The way that exchange is organized and understood is one of the enduring questions in the social sciences. In classical anthropological texts, entire societies are presented as being based around "gift exchange." The implicit or explicit comparison is to "modern" or "Western" societies which operate on a contrasting logic of market exchange. Of course, this dichotomized view has long been abandoned. By focusing on objects, the more dynamic "social lives of things" have come into focus (Appadurai 1986). A commodity is not simply always a commodity; instead, an object may move in and out of a "commodity phase" as the cultural understandings of an object shift (Kopytoff 1986). Objects do not have essences, but are instead *made* in cultural processes of becoming. And because objects become what they are in social relations, one object can at the same time be multiple "types" of things for different people: a commodity and a priceless heirloom, for instance.

It has become common to talk about "regimes of value" (Appadurai 1986) or "circuits of commerce" (Zelizer 2011) where particular cultural understandings of value are shared and collectively created. Similarly, the abstraction of a "gift economy" and a "commodity economy" is a helpful heuristic device for understanding different ways of making value (Tsing 2013, p. 22). Sociologists have attempted to understand the ways that gift and commodity relations are negotiated; for instance, in the market for contemporary art sometimes exchange is framed as a form of gift-giving, while other times the art object is commodified (Velthius 2005). There is a sizeable body of work which seeks to understand how things that would normally be given as gifts—things which are part of intimate relations or even the substance of intimate relations, such as surrogacy or elder care (Hochschild 2012)—become objects of market exchange. In his study of the exchange of human blood and organs, Healy (2006) has framed the character of exchange as a "market" for gifts. He describes the organizational character of the large-scale procurement

networks that collect and redistribute these gifts of life, showing how the gift character of exchange is preserved despite pressures towards commodification.

But these sorts of approaches, focusing on the distinctions between regimes of value or logics of exchange, tend to downplay the extent to which different sorts of relations co-exist, and the extent to which they are mutually constitutive. Markets are often shot through with gift relations, like in-kind payments in the modeling industry (Mears 2011), the gifts that work as "human bridges" to create moments of intimacy in the global cotton market (Çalişkan 2010, p. 79), or the gifts that form the specific currencies of intimate relationships in the sex trade in Vietnam (Hoang 2015). Tsing summarizes this dynamic: "Actually existing relations of exchange are, of course, mixed and messy. Not only do self-described gifts and commodities nestle beside each other, but they also incorporate each other's characteristics, change into each other, or confuse different participants about their gift-versus-commodity identities" (2013, p. 22). She describes the way that mushrooms—the quintessential gift, not produced by anyone—are made into commodities and back into gifts as they travel along a value chain from the forest where they are gathered, through the hands of sorters and wholesalers, to commodities which can be purchased and subsequently given as gifts.

This sort of approach, focusing on the tensions and connections between logics of exchange, preserves some of the unsettledness—or even conflict— surrounding the nature of exchange that takes place in charity retail spaces. It is more helpful in this respect than the approach to understanding commodities more common in sociological approaches which tend to focus on only the logic of commodification. Callon's (1998) description of disentanglement, for instance, focuses on how a thing becomes a commodity through processes of framing: abstraction away from the web of social relations in which the thing is entangled, in order for it

to be at least momentarily alienable for the purposes of market exchange. A commodity must be demonstrated as having a particular set of qualities which distinguishes it from other commodities, and at the same time makes it possible for potential buyers to assess the good in relation to other goods (Callon et al. 2002). In their discussion of qualification of goods, Aspers and Beckert do describe conflicts around attempts to present goods as pertaining to particular categories and having particular sets of characteristics which distinguish them from other goods while still being commensurable with them (2011, pp. 14-17). But their analysis remains tied to an overarching concern with the dynamics of market exchange; these conflicts are between competing visions of commodities, rather than competing visions of the nature of exchange.

There is therefore a lot to learn about the interplay between commodities and gifts. However, unlike in the supply chain for mushrooms described by Tsing, items donated to charities do not become commodities and gifts in different spaces and in different steps along their path from forest to end consumer. Neither are gifts and commodities different sorts of objects, like a designer garment in lieu of cash as payment for a modeling job (Mears 2011). Instead, donated items become commodities and gifts through their enrollment in competing assemblages in the same charity shop spaces. Rather than speaking about the qualification of goods, which after all in charity shops are unique and heterogeneous, we should speak about their *enactment* (Mol 2002) as objects of exchange. What this means is that we "talk about a series of different practices…what we think of as a single object may appear to be more than one" (Mol, 2002, p. vii). Multiplicity[10] is the rule rather than the exception, and the task of the analyst of exchange is to preserve it rather than wipe it away into a singular logic. By making multiple logics of exchange the center of analysis, conflict and contingency are highlighted

[10] As discussed in Chapter 2, Mol's concept of *multiplicity* does not imply *plurality*.

rather than erased. Conflict arises when an object is, at once, for different people, a commodity and a gift.

By attempting to "discover multiplicity" in the form of multiple objects created through practice (Law 2004, p. 61) we are able to begin to see what Law calls "ontological politics", or a conflict between realities, where it is not yet settled which is preferred (2004, p. 76). The creation of a gift or a commodity in the context of charity retail can thus be understood as the enactment of a particular vision of what is right and good. This move towards multiplicity is also in the spirit of Latour's (2004 and 2005) call to attend to *matters of concern* rather than *matters of fact*. Though he spent many years explaining how scientific facts are constructed, Latour has shifted his focus: "Reality is not defined by matters of fact. Matters of fact are not all that is given in experience. Matters of fact are only very partial and, I would argue, very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern and only a subset of what could also be called *states of affairs*" (2004, p. 232). Matters of concern, on the other hand, are all those matters which have not become (or are no longer) taken for granted, black-boxed, undebatable. They are things which are gatherings, a multiplicity of entities gathered together, and should be described as such: "with their mode of fabrication and their stabilizing mechanisms clearly visible" (Latour 2005, p. 120). Matters of concern are not just *socially constructed* but are *materially, discursively, and symbolically assembled*, bringing together all sorts of agencies. Latour also stresses multiplicity when he writes: "this has nothing to do with the 'interpretive flexibility' allowed by 'multiple points of views' taken on the 'same' thing. *It is the thing itself that has been allowed to be deployed as multiple* and thus allowed to be grasped through different viewpoints, before being possibly unified in some later stage depending on the abilities of the collective to unify them" (2005, p. 116). This approach should help make sense of the

contentiousness of charity retail. However, to understand how commodities and gifts are produced in charity shops, it is necessary to consider a third logic at play: that of waste.

4.2 Assemblages of waste / the waste of assemblages

The best-known treatment of the relationship of commodities and waste is Thompson's (2017 [1979]) now-classic *Rubbish Theory*. He identifies two categories of commodities: transients (those whose value tends to depreciate over time) and durables (those whose value tends to appreciate over time). In an attempt to explain how value transformations take place over time, like how kitschy decorative items become expensive collector's items within the span of a few decades, Thompson introduces the concept of rubbish: a "covert category" of objects of zero and unchanging value which exist in a "timeless and valueless limbo" (Thompson 2017, p. 27). Formerly transient goods can be selectively plucked out of this covert category and made into durables by people with sufficient social status. Thompson's theory is mostly concerned with spectacular value transformations—how transients become durables worth huge amounts of money—and is almost entirely unconcerned with value transformations within the category of transient goods. In charity shops, however, the vast majority of items that are donated, wasted, or sold are transients: consumer goods whose value tends to depreciate over time as they wear out or go out of style. Thompson does, however, present a relevant observation about the nature of how value is produced, as he describes how creating value is a matter of arranging objects culturally and spatially.

Thinking about the way that things (material and immaterial) are arranged is compatible with what has been called "assemblage thinking" (Acuto and Curtis 2014). The notion of assemblage is a way of thinking about social groupings, or "gatherings", that bring together

heterogeneous entities—social as well as material *stuff*—which work together in some way (Latour 2005). Analysis of assemblage does not take conventional social categories (like "market" or "state") as its starting point but is meant to "bring into the picture pieces of what are, in more conventional thinking, thought of as fullyfledged institutions" (Sassen and Ong 2014, p. 18). When it comes to the exchange of used goods, the concept of assemblage is useful because it does not presuppose the type of exchange that is taking place, for instance by analyzing the "charity retail market", thus singularizing and homogenizing the types of relations involved. Rather, the task is to identify the human and non-human actors whose relations bring the social into being. An analysis of assemblage "focuses on relationality not just of actors, but actually relationality of things and people" (Sassen and Ong 2014, p. 24). This approach "allows us to think through processes of composition and decomposition…it allows us to see how different spatial forms, processes and orders hold together" (Acuto and Curtis 2014, p. 10). Assemblage is a helpful concept for understanding the competing logics of commodity and gift in the exchange of used goods in charity shops, since it does not require them to fit into a predetermined format, comprising particular sets of relations (as in the case of a market, where we look for the relations between and among buyers and sellers).

Assemblage thinking is particularly useful in identifying what the objects being exchanged in charity shops are and how they are made. Rather than describing the processes of qualification of a good which arrives at the point of exchange as a materially stable but perhaps culturally ambiguous thing, describing how an object is made involves attentiveness to processes of cultural as well as material assembly and disassembly. And when it comes to used items, the assemblage approach helps identify the ways in which things are enacted as different objects:

> Looking at the back-end of the value chain and at commodities of rubbish value does not merely extend the following of things over more of their social and

> economic lives. It is more profound than this. For what it does is to destabilise the thing itself. It shows that the thing is multiple, mutable, and material; and that the thing and the commodity are but moments in the circulation and assembling of material. (Gregson et al. 2010, p. 848)

Gregson and coauthors are interested in theorizing the commodity as assemblage, and to some extent my focus in this chapter is also to show how the object of exchange is contingently built from sets of relations. But I am also interested in describing the objects of exchange as *parts* of assemblages that produce them. Cultural understandings alone are not enough to turn a thing into a gift or a commodity, as the "spheres of value" approach would have it. Instead, gifts and commodities are made in assemblages, which consist of "an episteme with technologies added" (Verran and Turnbull in Law 2004, p. 41). Understanding the exchange of used goods in charity shops, then, requires not just a cultural explanation of what people believe to be true about certain objects, but also a description of how desired realities are enacted in material and technical processes of "establishing *and* severing linkages…incorporating *and* expelling people, places, and things" (Berndt and Boeckler 2010, p. 566). Processes of severing and expelling are not just productive of assemblages in which gifts and commodities are produced from things which might otherwise be waste, but they are also themselves productive of waste.

4.3 Production of charity shop goods

In charity shops, clothing items are collected alongside a variety of other types of items: bedding, shoes, bric a brac (housewares), electronics, books, furniture, and so on. Most charity shops sell clothes, but whether or not other items are sold depends on the size of the shop, the ability to store or display items, and in the case of electronics, the ability to carry out a PAT test (Portable Appliance Test) on each item in order to test its safety. The uncertainty of supply of donated goods (which in the majority of charity shops makes up the bulk of goods sold (Horne

and Maddrell 2002) means that items are prepared for sale in an ongoing manner by shop managers and the volunteers who staff the shops. This is done by way of sorting and categorization and involves such matters as deciding what is valuable versus what is rubbish, what is worthy (or not) of taking up shop floor or stock room space, what should be sold (or not) in the shop, and what alternative channels to selling on the shop floor are legitimate. All of these mechanisms are mediated through processes of ridding (Gregson 2007).

The nature of charity shops, as places where used and donated goods are resold, is that they are spaces that process a flow of heterogeneous material things. The items that end up in charity shops are not the result of processes of wasting *per se*, because they were not meant to end up in the landfill. In this sense, the objects that end up in charity shops do not arrive as waste. They can, and do, however, *become* waste, in processes of moving out of commodity or gift form.

There is an ambiguity about the nature of donated items which means that it is always possible that before any processes of qualification as a gift or a commodity can take place, the things will turn out to be waste. One of the most common ways that a potential gift or commodity becomes waste is through contamination. People often leave donations at the shop outside of operating hours, which means leaving items exposed to the elements (see Figure 4.1). At Pet Charity, its mission (to support a sanctuary for rescued animals) conflicts with the pragmatic concerns of supply and warehousing:

> A woman comes in and asks Barbara [the manager on duty] if we take duvets, that they can be useful because dogs like to sleep on them. Barbara says that we are full up at the moment, unfortunately! The problem is that we don't have a place to store them. It's a question of regulating supply, she says. They get wet because we don't have a place to store them [and they must be left outside]. But, she says, that the lady could ask again at a different time of year and we might say that we will take them. Barbara says that with sheets and towels we will always take them, because they're easier to store. (Field notes, April 19, 2016)

Barbara is aware of the potential of donations to quickly become waste if they are damaged by environmental contaminants like rain or mud—always a possibility in the wet English climate.

Because the success of a charity shop depends on the in-kind donations of its supporters that can be turned into cash that supports the charity's cause, it is important for charities not to discourage people from bringing donations. Thus the usual practice is for volunteers and managers to accept all the goods brought in without imposing too many limitations. Each shop has its own set of criteria for what should and should not be accepted as donations, and communicates this to the public via posted signage near the cash register or in an ongoing basis as people ask what they might or might not bring. Everyone must be thanked for their donation, regardless of the treatment the contents of the bag will receive once it is taken into the back into the stock/sorting area.

As noted in the 2006 manual *Setting Up and Running Charity Shops: An Essential Guide*, the dependence upon donors from the public for stock generation means that production of enough stock to fill the shelves necessarily involves accepting a great deal more than will actually end up being suitable. Potential charity shop managers are informed that "[a] typical shop turning over £1,500 per week will sell approximately 30,000 items per year and, assuming that 75% of all donations are rejected as unsuitable for display, it will need to attract and process four times that volume – that's 120,000 items!" (Tough 2006, p. 62). The moment that a new donation is examined is a fulcrum moment when it becomes clear whether items can go on to be sorted and prepared to be sold in the shop or whether they are "actually" waste, and should just be placed with the rubbish.

Subsequent processes of qualification in competing gift- and commodity-making assemblages are mediated through the category of waste. Thompson has described how value

transformations of objects require passing through the category of rubbish. The discussion below shows, instead, how transient goods can be exchanged as gifts or commodities through the creation of assemblages that conceive of and create waste in different ways.

In the charity shops that were part of my research, there were two main competing assemblages at work. One was oriented to production: the most important aim of charity retail was to support the charity's cause via generation of income. The other was oriented to the individual items passing through the shops: the most important aim was to ensure that things do not go to waste. Individual shops can be more oriented towards one aim or the other; individual volunteers or paid managers in charity shops can also have more of an inclination to one or the other orientation. Though these two orientations were not mutually exclusive (and ideally, both aims will be fulfilled), tensions did arise between them. This is because the fulfillment of one aim or the other is dependent upon the crafting of a particular kind of object. Whereas the production-oriented model is achieved through high levels of disposal, discarding, and ridding, the item-oriented model is more focused on repair and salvaging. These two models correspond to different logics of exchange. The production-oriented model, with its focus on profit, creates commodities. The item-oriented model, with its focus on the use value of particular objects and the relationships that they represent, creates gifts.

Two of the four shops I volunteered in employed a primarily production-oriented model, as larger regional or national charity shop networks with dozens or hundreds of shop locations. The other two employed a primarily item-oriented model, as smaller local charities with only one or a few shop locations. In one of these item-oriented shops, however, some of the volunteers were trying to move towards a more production-oriented model. It was in this case that the conflict between the two models of producing goods was most clear.

4.3.1 Production-oriented assemblage

The production-oriented assemblage is characterized by a focus on the profit that can be extracted from the total flow of items, regardless of whether they are sold in the shop, sold at auction, or sold onwards to other dealers, like textile recyclers. In shops where this orientation dominates, the focus is on aesthetics and presentation of stock. Health Charity and Children's Charity were managed by a production-oriented model. The image of the shop (whether it has a streamlined look, thanks to a professional shop fit or even matching hangers; whether it is tidy and organized; whether there is a well-planned window display) takes precedence. This image is achieved at the expense of individual items, which must often be rejected or sold via alternate channels (i.e., not in the shop). The focus in this case is the overall exchange value of stock rather than the individual use value of particular items.

To produce a proper object in the production-oriented shops, the most important task, which is almost never finished, is tidying. Clothes should be hung in their proper sections, with the hangers facing in the same direction, and the items will usually be arranged by size and/or color. As I was being given an explanation of what being a volunteer entails at Children's Charity, Mary told me that if I ever had nothing to do, that I should just tidy the shop.

To enact a production-oriented object, it is necessary for volunteers and managers to employ wasting, ridding, and culling mechanisms. In shops with an extreme production orientation, it is important to be sure that wet, musty-smelling, or otherwise soiled items leave the shop as soon as possible. Molly, a manager whom I interviewed at one location of a national charity shop network, told me that if an item smells bad—musty or rancid—she wants to get it outside as soon as possible. Once that smell gets in here, she said, it will never leave. Much care

must be taken to preserve the fresh smell of the shop, even at the expense of discarding or "ragging" items (i.e., separating them out to sell onwards to recyclers who sort them further, a process which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5) which might only need a wash in order to be acceptable.

Mark, a manager at Hospice Charity, had recently taken over a struggling shop and had introduced a more production-oriented approach. He says that the key to making profit is to be "ruthless" about throwing things out:

> I am ruthless. I don't care. If I don't think it'll sell it goes straight to skip [dumpster]. That works. Quantity is not key. Turnover is key obviously but if you put a lot out it hides the good stuff. (Before) they priced stuff expensive AND put high volumes out. Now I have only those tiny little thin shelves. Halved or more the amount of bric a brac out but more than doubled takings. (Field notes, May 24, 2016)

Mark says that he prefers to sort aggressively initially, making sure that only the "best stuff" goes out onto the floor, rather than allowing items to sit out and be removed later if they do not sell. He tells me that working this way is simply more cost effective, because if you sort out the less desirable items initially, you do not have to go back through it again later. He is also opposed to warehousing items to store for the future, explaining to me that he tells his volunteers, "we're not a museum, we're not paid to store anything." When he first took over the store, one of his first moves was to get rid of "all the boxes and things stored behind the counter area…[he asked his volunteers] how much are we getting paid for these things? Nothing."

In order to rotate goods through the shops, most charity shops employ one form or another of a culling system. When items are set out onto the shop floor, a "sell-by date" is written onto the tag by counting forward some pre-set amount of time from the current date. Depending on the size of the shop and the rate at which items are turned over, the culling period can be anywhere from two weeks to a few months. Shops with greater turnover, either because of

the volume of donations they receive or because they are part of a network of shops and receive rotating stock from other locations on a regular basis, have shorter culling periods, usually of about two or three weeks. Shops with lower turnover, and especially those that do not circulate their goods to any other shops, may have a cull period of a few months.

Shops which are part of larger regional or nation-wide networks employ a sophisticated stock-rotation system, in which items are transferred from one shop location to another on a regular basis. Other shops do not rotate stock at all, or do it on an ad hoc basis (managers communicate to each other when a need arises and attempt to arrange a trade that is mutually beneficial). In any case, keeping things moving is important. This is sometimes presented this as a way to make sure that things get used. On a day that she spent several hours in the sorting room at Children's Charity, Erica told me that she had been busy sorting today because it was a Friday, one of the two days of the week that people come to pick up bags which go to other shops. They do that to keep things moving, she told me: out to the shop floor, to other shops, to the rag bag which then goes to third world countries. "We try and use everything!" she says. Mary, who is another manager at the same shop, told me on another day that rag goes to someone who picks it up on Tuesdays and processes it on, "so it doesn't go to waste." She adds, "But if something is dirty, we throw it out."

At Health Charity, a national charity with a highly productive focus, I heard the phrase "when in doubt, chuck it out" used repeatedly to mean that items which are not in optimal condition should be either put in the recycling (textile recycling or general recycling) or if they were very soiled, put in the trash. In contrast to the level of care in item-oriented shops, at more production-oriented shops items were sometimes given a once-over by a wet wipe, if cleaned at all.

The difference in care afforded to individual items is understandable in the light of the "production plans" in place at production-oriented shops. These production plans are quota-setting systems which set standards that managers must meet of how many items are processed per day. Sheets for record-keeping as the day goes on are kept next to the door between the stock room and the shop floor, where the number of items put out are tallied. At Children's Charity, where Mary works, the production plan dictates putting out a hundred clothing items per day along with another hundred "hard goods," which include anything other than clothing: books, home goods, accessories (see Figure 4.2). Because all items are given equal weight, and the production plan dictates a certain level of output per day, the relative lack of attention given to items that are in need of repair is understandable. Processing two hundred items each day (sorting, cleaning, pricing, and getting them out onto the shop floor in the proper location) is enough work for a handful of volunteers, without the extra time and attention that would need to go into cleaning or salvaging individual items.

This need to process items quickly leads to frustration on the part of longtime volunteers when bags of donations come in which contain less-than-ideal goods. As I brought back a bag of items to the stock room that two women had just handed to me on the shop floor, Alice at Children's Charity asked me if there was anything nice in there. Saying that I haven't looked in the bag yet, I held it out for her to look into. She said frustratedly, "it all looks like a load of…" I shushed her because the women who gave it to me were still out on the shop floor and I didn't want them to hear how their donation was received. Alice walked away, saying "I want that nice bag of designer clothing!" On another occasion she moaned to me that she hates sorting kids' toys, she hates sorting ties, and hates doing pretty much everything except for nice clothes. She

said that it used to be easier in the past. You'd get donations that were bags of pretty much one type of thing, but now it is a lot of "this and that" and it's harder to know what to do with it.

4.3.2 Item-oriented assemblage

The item-oriented assemblage, on the other hand, is characterized by a focus on the use value of individual items. In shops where this model dominates, the focus is selling as much as possible of the stream of donations that come in to the shop. Pet Charity and Cat Charity were run primarily by an item-oriented model. These types of shops are characterized by customers and by people who work in other shops as "jumbly" or as "Aladdin's caves." Shelves are often full to capacity, racks crammed full with hangers, and shoppers are able to have a "real rummage" to see what treasures might be found.

Volunteers or paid managers with this type of orientation are focused on finding a home for items that come in. There is frequently a kind of provisioning occurring in the shop, with volunteers and managers alike doing work of matching items that come in with people who might want them. This item-oriented object is produced through repair and cleaning. In other words, proper goods are produced by salvaging rather than by ridding. Moreover, the goods in shops organized by an item-oriented model are not alienated from the people who donated them and part of the rationale for not throwing items out is to honor the wish of donors to have their items go to good use.

The item-oriented mindset can be seen in the level of attention and care given to items in order to make them ready to display in the shop. At Cat Charity, bric-a-brac was routinely given a full washing-up, complete with sudsy water and a sponge, in a sink at the back of the sorting area. Volunteers, including myself, often needed to spend hours by the sink with rubber gloves

on, painstakingly removing dirt and grime from dishware, toys, and ornaments of all kinds, and then setting it out to dry on a multi-tiered shelf that served as a drying rack. Clothing items that were slightly soiled but otherwise in good condition were sometimes taken home by volunteers for washing, drying, and ironing.

4.3.3 Conflict between production-oriented and item-oriented models

In practice, there is some agreement between the two models on how goods should be selected and prepared for sale. When individual items are deemed to be beyond repair, there is no conflict between the two approaches. Clothing items that are visibly unsuitable for wear due to rips or holes, heavy soiling, or deterioration of the fabric cannot be sold in the shop. These items can be thrown out or sold onwards to a textile recycler. The disagreement arises when there is a question about how much attention should be paid to a particular item. The production-oriented approach is much more attuned to avoiding contamination in various ways (not taking things that cannot be stored, not taking things that should not be sold, not taking things that cannot legally be sold; getting wet/smelly/moldy items out of the shop immediately, fighting moths, not putting out items for sale that are unattractive), whereas the item-oriented approach is focused on making sure that no donations with value are wasted.

One of the main conflicts between these two orientations is between the aesthetic appearance of the shop and the utilization of all or most of the items that come into the shop. On my first day volunteering in Cat Charity, Sam and Susan give me a run-down of the other staff, including a couple with whom everyone else finds it unpleasant to work. They care overly about how the shop looks. Susan tells me that they primarily care that the shop looks nice. “They do the window display. They just want it to look nice in here, they want to attract nice people, don’t

like it when dirty-looking people come in." Window displays, also, caused a disagreement at Cat Charity, as the more production-minded volunteers in charge of doing the weekly window displays would frequently collect items and put them away to use in a window for a particular holiday or with a particular theme. This practice was met by resistance from other volunteers who thought that nicer items should be put out on the shop floor and sold rather than "hidden" away for no good reason.

Because the supply of stock is uneven throughout the year and unpredictable, and off-season items frequently come in (after the winter people clear out their winter clothing, for instance) stock must sometimes be stored. In small shops, where there is very little storage space and sometimes just one single small room to manage stock that has been recently donated, oversupply of stock is frequently a problem. This problem is compounded when an item-oriented mindset prevents the ruthless culling of items. New donations come in every day and when the racks and shelves in the shop are full, there is nowhere to put out new items. Shop with an item-oriented mindset will frequently have sales in cases like this, pulling out older items to put on a sale rail, or pricing every item in the shop at a pound. Susan, the volunteer with whom I frequently spent days at Cat Charity, told me that she thinks that it is better to price an item too low, and sell it, then to have it not sell and go to rag. At Children's Charity, however, where the production plan specifies that 200 items a day go out onto the shop floor, they would rather not put anything out than put out low-quality items. A volunteer there named Jules tells me that men donate worse quality clothing so the men's section is quite bare. Managers in a charity shop chain with dozens of locations and a sophisticated warehousing system may decide to give up valuable storage space in the shop's stock room rather than sending away off-season clothing that they have collected in order to ensure that they will still have "the good stuff" next year

when it is time to display those items. This is what managers at Children's Charity did. At Cat Charity, a similar kind of warehousing practiced by some of the volunteers is regarded by others as "hiding" items. Sam and Susan frequently wondered to each other why this or that item was set aside for some later date rather than out on the shop floor where it might be sold, as its donors intended.

In some cases, the list of things that a shop will not sell is based on concerns of liability, or on regulations concerning certain classes of goods. Electronics are one such class of things. Unless a charity has the capabilities to PAT test every item and prove its safety, they cannot legally sell electronics. Since the PAT test requires not only specialized equipment, but also specialized training and up-to-date certification (each of which are not insignificant costs), many smaller charities are unable to accept electronic items for sale. Though they try to avoid having the items come into the shop, sometimes it is unavoidable. The production-oriented approach to such items is to test them informally for functionality, collect the working ones and sell them in job lots at an auction house, and take the non-working ones to the local Household Waste Recycling Centre, where the local authorities provide a means of disposing of electrical items. People with an item-oriented moral aim are scandalized to see perfectly good, working items set aside to be sold in bulk at auction. At Cat Charity, more than once I observed items being fished out of piles that were meant to be stored out back in the garage for a trip to the auction house, to be set out next to the till to be taken away by someone who can use it. This is not technically selling the item since they are giving it away and only ask that a donation be given for it; the item is, however, being passed along to someone who can use it or knows someone who can.

Where there are not pragmatic concerns but limitations on the types of items sold based on the ability of the shop to sell such categories of things, the item-oriented approach is at odds

with the production-oriented approach. Books, framed pictures, and furniture items are on the list of "Items We Do Not Sell" displayed behind the till at Cat Charity. A volunteer named Sam, who was often upset with the way that some of the other volunteers were running the shop, told me not to pay attention to the list: "Ignore it, we all do!...if it has value at all, put it out [in the shop to be sold]." Her message was that the most important thing is to sell things if you can, to raise money. In the case of worn out, damaged, or otherwise unsellable clothes, she is in favor of moving things through channels other than the shop. She went on to say that even things that are sold to the rag man make a little money. This fulfils the informal contract with the donors of the items, making sure that their things go to a new home, as well as with the charity, supporting the cause by raising money. But she draws the line at items which might be, unbeknownst to us, damaged and therefore unsafe to use, like children's pool toys, which might have a tiny hole in them that might lead a child to drown, or used children's car seats that are sold without the manual. Someone "might fit it in wrong and then get in an accident and the child would be killed and [we] would never forgive [ourselves]."

The item-oriented model is supported by a kind of provisioning mindset, where the flow of items coming through the shop can satisfy not only the needs of shop patrons but also of volunteers, and wherein the households of volunteers serve as a reserve storage, staging, or salvage area for items which cannot be sold in the shop. The money made on the item is less important in some cases than the fate of the item and the ability of the shop's customers to benefit from using a working item. One day in Cat Charity, Sam had found a working phone on a pile of items in the back room which were going to be taken out to the back garage and stored until they could be taken to auction or recycling (see Figure 4.3). She viewed this alternative route as the items being "thrown out." She asked each of us volunteers if we had a landline and

could use a working phone, saying that it is "perfectly nice, with all the bits." None of us could, but she found a home for the phone by asking someone who had just come in with a donation if she could use a phone. She could, and Sam gave her the phone. Sam was happy that the phone would be used: "Oh, that's made my day. Much better than having it thrown out. At least someone will use it!" Sam often "rescues" items from the fate of being destined to be wasted (whether that be via recycling or being sold in bulk at auction). One day she took home armloads of CDs, saying "they were just going to throw them away because there's no case!" Acknowledging that this is not an irregular occurrence, she said to me and the other volunteer present, "My house will be full of rubbish but it's better than it being thrown out."

4.4 Conclusion

Çalişkan and Callon have argued against an understanding of valuation grounded in the idea of regimes of value (or spheres, or systems), insisting that valuation is best understood as a pragmatic approach, focusing on the particular ways that particular people interact with particular things (2009, p. 384). This chapter has shown that the concept of regimes of value does, however, continue to be relevant, to the extent that organizational logics and conventions do continue to facilitate the production of commodities from donated used goods. From a bird's-eye view, after all, the charity retail sector in the UK is a powerful commodification apparatus. But the pragmatic approach that Çalişkan and Callon argue for is equally important in understanding the ways that commodities are produced, and in this chapter I have shown a contentious boundary between the production of commodities and the production of gifts that would not be visible from the regimes of value perspective.

If we were to focus only on commodification of donations in charity shop retail, we would wipe away one of the competing modes of enactment of the objects that are being exchanged. The production of gifts through item-oriented practices of care, repair, salvaging, and provisioning would likely fall out of view. The notion of concern in the enactment of objects of exchange, as opposed to the more economistic notion of interest, introduces connotations of "trouble, worry, and care" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 35). Concern is not only enacted in relation to gifts; it is enacted differently in relation to different objects. To be concerned for donated items as commodities means to care for their ability to make a profit for the charity efficiently. The production-oriented approach that produces commodities is attached to the more powerful assemblage of professionalized charity retail, which includes CEOs with multi-million-dollar salaries, layers of managers to analyze sales data and control the rotation of stock, warehouses and equipment that can move things around, and established methods of disposal for rejected stock.

Ongoing conflicts about the proper logic of exchange are connected with historical processes of the professionalization of charity retail in England. Starting in the mid-1970s, Oxfam director Brian Walker sought to eliminate the "make-do-and-mend" mindset of the charity's institutions, including its shops (Black 1992, p. 203). The move towards "improved professionalism" of the shops was a move towards a production-oriented organizational model: "Jumble and bric-a-brac in temporary, rent-free premises had been abandoned in favour of permanent sites in good retailing situations, with proper facias and attractive displays. The Shops Unit in HQ introduced a common 'look', and offered advice on pricing, staffing, publicity, and other management functions" (Black 1992, p. 205). Early charity shops sound in many ways like the item-oriented shops that still exist today, including a lack of stock rotation, "[l]ittle regard for

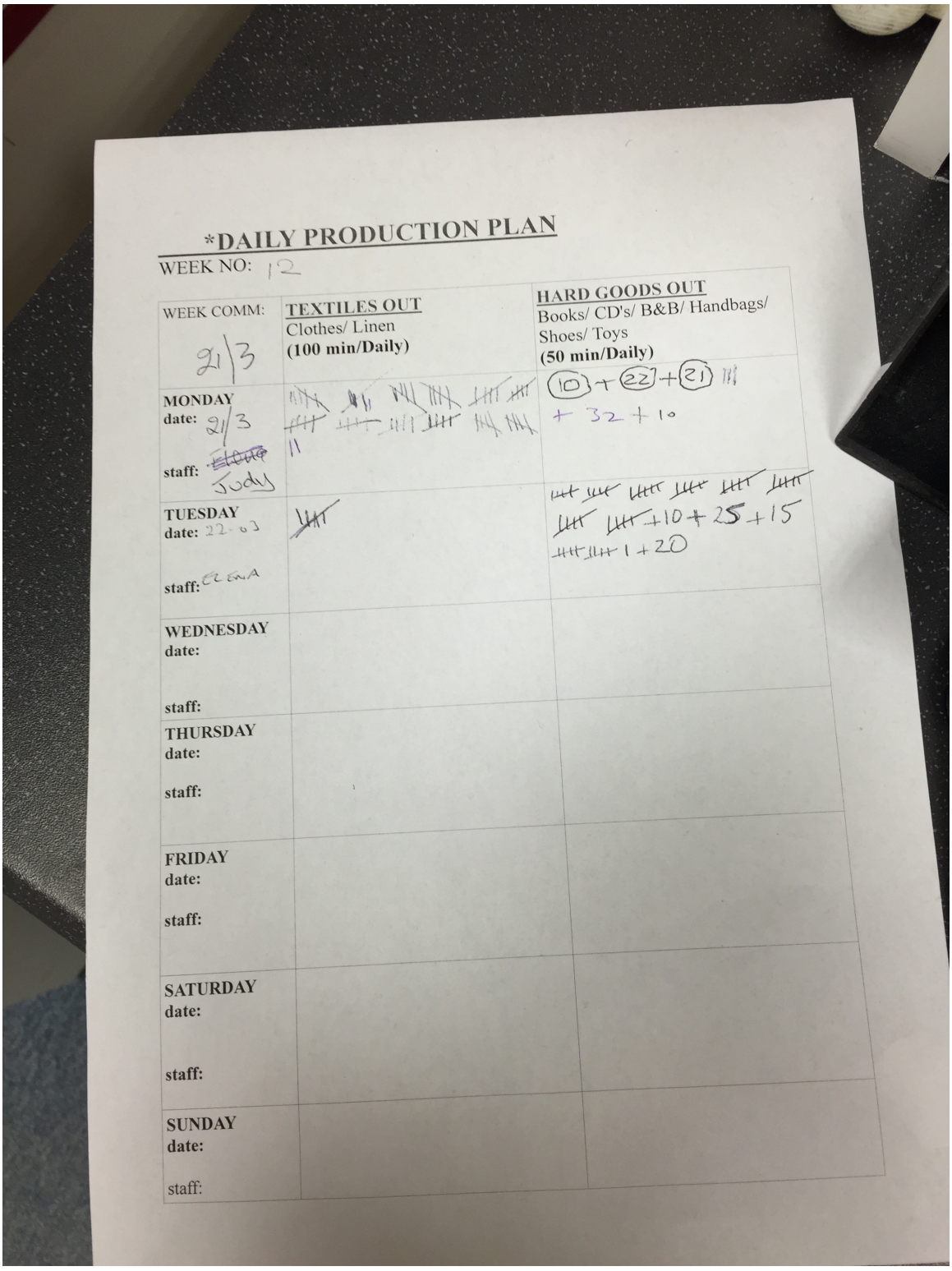
selecting only the best items for sale," "[p]revailing and extremely off-putting aroma of damp old clothes," and many "untested electrical items and other potentially dangerous items on sale" (Tough 2006, p. 10). Achieving a particular look and mode of functioning in charity shops is something that is still a matter of concern today.

Around the same time that he overhauled Oxfam's retail operations, Walker also opened a recycling center which eventually became a warehouse that was able to process items that shops rejected. It is also clearly a necessary part of the infrastructure in the revamped, more professional network of shops: "Wastesaver…turned out to be a useful adjunct to the 575 Oxfam Shops, themselves now spruced up and becoming more profitable. It absorbed all the garments shops were unable to sell, processing them for resale in special 'surplus' shops, or selling them off for rag. This released more selling space in the shops as well as helping to reduce the volume of low quality stock they were carrying" (Black 1992, p. 207-208).

The nature of the exchange of used items in charity retail is a matter of concern that has been reshaped and modified as charity shops moved towards a more professionalized operational model. The ongoing tensions between possible logics of exchange are articulated in recurring discussions in the public sphere of how donated items "should" be handled and in what ways it is legitimate to turn donated items into profit. But this matter of concern also plays out in individual charity shops, as I have described above. In light of the historical shift in charity retail and the ongoing debates surrounding the proper logic of exchange of goods donated to charity, these micro-level conflicts can be understood as manifestations of a much larger unsettled question about the proper nature of exchange of used goods.

4.5 Figures

Figure 4.1. Donations left outside the back door of a charity shop and rained on. Plastic children's toys are likely not damaged, but wet textiles are likely to end up as waste.



*DAILY PRODUCTION PLAN

WEEK NO: 12

WEEK COMM: 21/3	TEXTILES OUT Clothes/ Linen (100 min/Daily)	HARD GOODS OUT Books/ CD's/ B&B/ Handbags/ Shoes/ Toys (50 min/Daily)
MONDAY date: 21/3 staff: Judy	11	(10) + (22) + (21) + 32 + 10
TUESDAY date: 22.03 staff: EMMA		+10 + 25 + 15 + 1 + 20
WEDNESDAY date: staff:		
THURSDAY date: staff:		
FRIDAY date: staff:		
SATURDAY date: staff:		
SUNDAY date: staff:		

Figure 4.2. Production plan at Children's Charity. The sheet is used to keep track of totals as items are sent out to the shop floor.

Figure 4.3. A pile of items waiting by the back door to be taken out, either for storage or recycling. On this particular day the pile was so large that it had completely blocked the walkway. The sink used to wash up household items can be seen on the right hand side of the photo, and the wooden shelving used to dry items can be seen in the right foreground.

CHAPTER 5

Value Production at "The Limits of Waste":

Textile recycling, waste management, and the market for rag

Between the English charity shops described in the previous chapter and sale in distant markets in foreign countries, used clothing passes through many hands. Discarded used clothing items are transformed from individual, unique cast-offs to ordered, commensurable, and valuable commodities in the market for "rag"—bulk used clothing. In this chapter, I describe the major actors involved in the market for rag and the way they solve the major "coordination problems" of market exchange: cooperation, competition, and production of value (Beckert 2009).

In doing so, I pay particular attention to the role of textile recyclers. Textile recyclers often face criticism from journalists and academics, who argue that textile recycling has a particularly exploitative role in propping up the ecologically destructive fast fashion industry and encouraging overconsumption, and is ethically questionable (Brooks 2015, Cline 2012, Norris 2015; see Hansen 2004 for an outline of some of the ethical controversies around the global used clothing trade). Even while mounting these criticisms, though, most of the literature on the global used clothing trade focuses on sorting and consumption in receiving societies abroad (Hansen 2000, 2004 and 2005; Milgram 2005; Norris 2008; Abimbola 2012). There are few studies that focus on the work of textile recyclers in countries where "supply" is generated. Botticello's (2012 and 2013) ethnography inside a London-area sorting facility is a notable exception, but in her analysis the process of commodification starts when clothing is delivered to the sorting facility. Sorting is described as the moment when "the process of transforming…tons of waste items into commodities with new value commences" (Botticello 2012, p. 171).

It is true that sorting is a moment of commodification, but in this chapter I also describe another moment of commodification, one which precedes commodification by sorting. This earlier moment takes place in the collection process when used clothes are purchased by textile recyclers by the kilogram. Multiple actors cooperate and compete for the right to collect used clothing. Textile recyclers' ability to transform used clothing, via sorting, into valuable commodities that they sell onwards is constrained by the fact that they have actually paid for the material from which they will create new commodities.

In describing these two moments of commodification (at collection and sorting), I show how the materials collected set limits to value creation. Bringing these processes into focus provides nuance to the picture that has been painted by anthropologists and geographers studying the global trade of used clothing, which tends to characterize textile recyclers as capitalizing on "waste." A professional in the textile recycling industry described the work of companies collecting used clothing and other types of materials which can potentially be recovered as valuable as "working at the limits of waste." She meant it in the context of the legal obligation to report quantities of waste dealt with in accordance with European Union (EU) and domestic regulation. But her statement also accurately portrays the value production processes related to used clothing as it travels from points where it is discarded or donated through points of sorting and moved to other markets around the world. Used clothing can easily become waste if it does not pass through proper infrastructures of collection. In processes of sorting, too, where used clothing is "produced" as a new commodity, value production must be weighed against waste production. Whereas value production along the value chain of used clothing has been described as a process of consecutive moments of *value extraction* (Crang et al. 2013), I describe how for

textile recyclers, *value distribution* among the products they produce is an equally pressing concern.

As waste matters attract more scholarly interest, the focus has shifted from identifying the cultural patterns that define what is considered waste to identifying how waste is managed and what social realities are thereby produced. Ethnographers of waste and waste management are interested in "what specific capacities and affordances characterize waste materialities, their management, and their meaning"; "who manages wastes and what…they become together in specific entanglements of labor, power, and possibility"; and "how…specific wastes circulate, from who to whom, and with what significance for specific waste regimes as well as more general global and planetary processes?" (Reno 2015, p. 558). The nature of waste corresponds to the political economy in which it arises. Gille's concept of *waste regimes* (2007 and 2010) captures the changing modes of calculation and material management that shape the "production, circulation, and transformation of waste as a concrete material" (2010, p. 1056). Her work on waste in socialist Hungary identifies shifting waste regimes within which distinct modes of the production, representation, and politicization of waste were dominant (Gille 2007). Turning waste into value always requires an apparatus, what O'Brien (1999) has called a "wasting framework" and Gabrys (2013) has called a "waste infrastructure," that shapes the social, political, material, cultural, and economic qualities of waste. In this chapter I describe the emergence of the "circular economy" as a mode of governance of used textiles and how this affects the ways that used clothes are represented, collected, appropriated, and commodified.

I consider textile recycling in the UK and Poland together in this chapter. Though the histories of the industries in each country are divergent, as described in Chapter 3, Poland's textile industry has developed to a degree that it is possible to consider the dynamics of textile

recycling as an industry that spans national boundaries. Poland and the UK are both affected by EU-level waste management policies and quotas. Further, textile recycling actors in Poland stress that the industry has developed on a Western European model, by observing how the Dutch, Germans, or English textile recyclers operate. Despite cultural differences in demand and orientation to discards, then, the logic of value production is similar enough that the processes in both countries can be considered together. Collection remains divergent, due to the presence of charities as major collectors of used clothing in the UK, and I consider these processes separately in each country.

In the section below, I discuss the way that used clothing is collected, first describing the relevant policies and regulations, then discussing the various ways that used clothing is collected in the UK and Poland and the actors involved. I then turn to the question of production, first considering how sorters deal with the uncertainty of supply, then describing the wholesale product itself: the various grades that are produced when collected material is sorted.

5.1 Collection of used clothing

Used clothing has the potential to be a valuable commodity and multiple actors compete over the right to collect it, whether as a donation or for a price. In the previous chapter, I introduced two types of actors involved in the collection of used clothing—charities and textile recyclers. In this chapter, I also consider the role of governments and policy in mediating the ways that these actors collect used clothing. At collection, people are encouraged to discard their used clothing items in particular infrastructures, thus enacting used clothing as waste diverted from landfill and/or as a charitable donation.

5.1.1 Regulation as waste

In recent years, EU policymakers have shifted to a circular economy paradigm to govern waste. Within this paradigm, the linear economic model of "take-make-consume-throw away" is replaced by a circular model "in which products and the materials they contain are valued highly" (European Parliament 2014). This circular economy model builds on the earlier Waste Framework Directive (WFD) of 2008, which provided a regulatory definition of waste and established a waste hierarchy that prioritizes prevention, preparing for re-use, recycling, other recovery, and disposal, in that order (European Parliament 2008). Circular economy proposals focus on all stages of the product cycle, including design, production, consumption, and waste management (European Commission 2015).

From a regulatory standpoint, when something is discarded, it is waste. According to the definition in the WFD, "waste" is defined as "any substance or object which the holder discards or intends or is required to discard" (European Parliament 2008). This definition causes a great deal of confusion and in practice has led to a variety of interpretations as to how it should apply to used clothing (Norris 2012, p. 132). In the UK, clothing collected from charities is considered waste; in Northern Ireland, clothing collected in textile banks is additionally considered waste; and in Scotland, all the above categories of collection plus door-to-door collections are considered waste (TRA 2018).[11] In Poland, used clothing that is discarded by its owners, even if their intention is that it goes on to be used as clothing by someone else, is considered waste in regulatory terms. Ewa Metelska-Świat, president of the Polish Trade Union of Secondary Textile Resources (*Krajowa Izba Gospodarcza – Tesktylnych Surowców Wtórnych*, KIG-TSW),

[11] UK stakeholders from the textile recycling industry would have preferred to define waste in line with the intentions of the person who has discarded the items, as described in an official opinion to the European Commission: "…it is the UK's view that when used clothes are put in a collection bank with the intention that they should continue to be used for their originally intended purpose as clothes then they have not been discarded as waste within the terms of the definition" (Morley et al. 2009, p. 10).

explained to me that when used clothing is collected, it is waste, and through sorting processes, it transforms into "goods":

> According to EU laws, waste is anything that people get rid of, doesn't matter if it's clothing or furniture, whatever is not necessary, is thrown out, it is waste. So the things that are taken out of [clothing collection] banks, or that are collected in door to door, that is all waste. At the moment that it reaches a company and is sorted, through sorting—this is a legal regulation—through sorting and removal of those things from the whole collection that are suitable for use [without further processing], they acquire the status of goods. (Interview June 28, 2017)

In many cases, then, it is necessary to have a waste carrier's license in order to collect, carry, or store used clothing. The waste carrier's license is thus a minimum entry requirement to participate in the market for rag by collecting used clothing.

Recycling has become an increasingly important focus for local authorities in both the UK and Poland as waste management policies become more far-reaching. Pressure from European institutions and national governments to move towards lower levels of waste puts local authorities under the imperative to increase levels of recycling. At present textiles are a material stream with a large potential for improvement in terms of how much is recycled, and in fact changes will soon have to be made. In 2018, the Waste Framework Directive was amended to say that by 2025, textiles will be a fraction of waste that must be collected separately from general mixed waste (along with the other fractions of glass, metal, paper, and plastic) and that recycling targets will apply to textiles (European Parliament 2018).

In connection with waste regulations, research initiatives and public education campaigns have been launched in the UK.[12] The Waste and Resources Action Plan (WRAP) is a registered charity that has been working since 2000 to "promote sustainable waste management" (WRAP 2018). WRAP launched a textile-specific initiative called the Sustainable Clothing Action Plan

[12] No such initiative has been launched in Poland. It is likely, though, that public education campaigns and quantification of textile flows will become a priority when the separate collection of textiles is introduced.

(SCAP) in 2013 and the Love Your Clothes consumer campaign in 2014. Under the auspices of SCAP, WRAP funded a number of studies on the UK used textiles market as part of their series of reports on the current state of markets for recovered materials. These and other initiatives in other European countries have "increased transparency…[and] improved traceability of material flows throughout the life-cycle of clothing" (Norris 2015, p. 3).[13] Love Your Clothes is a "campaign…developed together with industry organizations to help change the way the UK consumers buy, use and dispose of their clothing…to reduce the environmental impact of clothing across the UK and influence a more circular approach to clothing globally" (WRAP 2017). Love Your Clothes provides information and resources for "buying smarter" ("No more flimsy fabric and skimpy stitching that falls apart the minute you get it home"), care and repair, refashioning and upcycling,[14] and what to do with unwanted clothes.

The effect of these initiatives has been to both produce knowledge about the state of the industry and provide textile recyclers with discursive resources that they can utilize to create legitimacy and an eco-friendly image. Textile recyclers in the UK often referred to the WRAP and SCAP initiatives in conversations with me, and some of them had even opened their warehouses to researchers and were themselves the subjects of the studies. Many of them stressed the ecological side of the business, saying that they provide a necessary service in both collecting and extending the life of clothing (an attitude that Hawley (2006) and Norris (2015) confirm).

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[13] Other initiatives include an Extended Producer Responsibility system in France; reports commissioned by the Nordic Prime Ministers on pathways of reuse and recycling; and a project by the Danish Fashion Institute to model relationships between clothing economy stakeholders in Denmark (Norris 2015, p. 3).

[14] Though there is no universally agreed-upon lexicon for the various value transformation processes that used clothing can undergo (such as upcycling, recycling, reuse, or rewear), in this context "upcycling" refers to processes of altering, repurposing, or creatively re-working clothing items. An example would be turning an old t-shirt into a girl's dress.

In both Poland and the UK, members of the textile recycling sector know that their industry would benefit from an alliance with the stronger members of the recycling industry—the powerful metals, paper, and plastic recycling sectors. In the lobbies and waiting rooms of large textile recycling warehouses I often found current issues of recycling industry magazines, like *Recycling International*, *Resource*, or *Materials Recycling World* ("The Recycling and Waste Management Resource since 1912"). TRA President Alan Wheeler told me that rather than focusing on relations with the charity sector, textile recyclers need to be communicating with WRAP and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA). At the same time, used clothing is so different from the other materials, Wheeler says, that the used textiles sector continues to "operate in a bubble" despite the presence of textile sector representatives at annual recycling industry conferences and other attempts to benefit from the political power that the other materials sectors have.

5.1.2. Collection of unwanted things

Used clothing items are not only collected by charities, as described in the previous chapter. In England, local authorities and textile recyclers are other important actors in the process of collecting used clothing from the public.[15] In Poland, private textile recyclers continue to be the primary actors in the collection of textiles, though some local authorities are beginning to propose their own collection systems. In the collection of used clothing, there is a constant risk that potentially valuable items and materials will become waste. The ways that used clothing is

[15] WRAP notes that it is difficult to arrive at reliable figures for amounts collected as "there is no consistent reporting requirement across these different routes [local authority collections, textile 'bring banks', civic amenity centre collections, donations to charity shops; retailer in-store collections, door-to-door charity bag collections and 'cash for clothes' donations] and there is a degree of overlap as textile collected can go through several operators along the way" (2016, p. 8). WRAP research indicates that in 2010, more than half the textiles collected in the UK were being exported, 32% destined for re-use in UK through charity shops, and 9% were recycled (2016, p. 10).

managed through various collection efforts can be understood as attempts to navigate the fine line between value and waste.

Local authorities in England: Collecting used clothing as waste while preserving potential value

The structure of government determines which bodies have obligations and responsibilities for waste in the UK. When local authorities are two-tiered, district councils are waste collection authorities (WCA), and county councils are waste disposal authorities (WDA). Unitary authorities are in charge of both aspects, collection and disposal. Local authorities are held accountable for recycling and landfill rates by the national government and are obligated to report waste diverted from landfill in weight. At the same time, they are not allowed to dispose of waste themselves so they must maintain contracts with waste management companies. It is the waste management companies that make decisions about which materials brought in by the local authorities are suitable for recycling. Local authorities are thus anxious to provide materials to the companies in such a way that the maximum amount will be diverted from landfill. From the perspective of the district council, the WCA, it is not relevant whether those textiles end up being reused (clothes are worn again or items like sheets are used again) or recycled (chopped up for wiper rags or shredded and burned for energy recovery).

As noted in Woolgar and Neyland (2013), the main concern of local authorities with respect to recycling is avoiding contamination of material. As with other material streams, contact of high-grade textiles for reuse or recycling with low-grade materials has the potential to turn everything into low-grade material, even into waste. A study commissioned by WRAP found that when textiles are put into the blue bin given to householders for curbside pickup, the percentage of textiles from these comingled collections suitable for reuse or recycling is zero

(Ripper and Morrish 2012, p. 3). In other words, textiles that are put into a household recycling bin are actually 100% waste. Textiles that moved through this household collection infrastructure were unsuitable for reuse or recycling because they were contaminated by food material, which may have come from other recyclables that were not completely washed by householders (Ripper and Morrish 2012, p. 15). The aim of local authorities is therefore to keep textiles *out* of the curbside collection bins, at least until a feasible scheme to collect textiles curbside without contamination is developed.

Local authorities are dependent upon the public to a large degree for the success of their efforts to divert tonnages of recyclable materials from landfill. This is a challenge that hinges on making the public care about segregating materials properly, according to a member of the recycling team: "Just making people put the *right* thing in the *right* bin is our biggest tackle, but to me and you it's probably the most easiest thing. Just trying to make that message easier for residents that don't fully understand or don't care. A lot of people simply don't care." The "right" versus "wrong" object is created via infrastructures of disposal. In the "wrong bin" (which includes the garbage or the curbside recycling bin, alongside other recyclable materials such as glass, paper, and metal) textiles are rendered not recyclable and end up in landfill, whereas in the "right bin" (the textile collection bank in a car park or a textile collection container at a Household Waste Recycling Centre, HWRC) they are tonnage diverted from landfill.

Multi-sided partnerships for collecting used clothes in England

From the perspective of waste collection authorities, the public must be taught that recycling is the right thing to do, and to properly dispose of textiles in such a way as to produce

the desired object: textiles which can be diverted from landfill and translated into recordable weight which can be reported. One way in which the public is made to care about the quality of textiles that they put into the recycling stream is through partnerships between local authorities and charities. The city allows a large national charity to put out extra collection banks on roads near student housing and inside halls of residence and colleges during the time that local university students are moving out before the summer. This type of initiative not only raises money for the charity (via sale of the material) but also allows the local council to claim extra tonnage that has been diverted from landfill. The same principle operates at council-sponsored events promoting recycling, where clothing swaps are organized and recycling bins are provided specifically for textiles. The city can not only claim the tonnage for their recycling quota but can use the tons collected at the particular events to justify the spending in order to continue to host such events.

Despite the fact that local authorities in Oxford do not currently provide a curbside pickup textile recycling service, they do provide residents with other infrastructure through which recyclable or reusable textile can be collected. The county council's HWRC has containers where residents are asked to specifically deposit textiles. There are also textile collection banks throughout the city which the city's Recycling Team lists on their website as "their" textile recycling banks. These textile collection banks sit alongside other receptacles which are specifically labeled as accepting other recyclable materials or items, such as paper, glass, metal, books, or shoes.

Along with the desired material for recycling, other, undesired material is also generated. From the city's perspective, the charities should pay for the textiles collected in order to offset the cost of the fly-tipping (littering) that the banks attract (Figure 5.1): "Bring banks are

annoying to have, they cause a lot of fly-tipping, they're expensive to maintain. When they are overfilled it attracts even more fly-tipping. Bring banks have all these negative aspects, so there has to be another incentive for the local authorities to have a bring bank somewhere in the city. Receiving an income for what they're getting inside that bank is one of those reasons" (Recycling Team member, Interview February 8, 2016).

The city, however, does not directly receive this material stream, only the income from the material stream. Despite being able to claim the banks as "theirs"—meaning that their contents can be counted as tonnage diverted from landfill—the city council does not actually service any of the banks. The banks are not, in a strict sense, the city's, although the city does control the right to set out collection banks and collect their contents. The city makes agreements with charities whose cause they would like to support. Each charity pays the council a "market price" for the right to put their name on banks and to be able to receive the textiles collected in the bank. This so-called market price varies based on the ability of the charity to pay relative to the desire of the council to support that particular charity. Used clothing is therefore not only useful to the city as waste diverted from landfill but as an income stream. As Bertus Servaas, owner of Poland's largest textile recycling warehouse, recently said, large cities with very wealthy districts "know very well what capital they have at their disposal. That's why they organize a kind of auction [for the right to put out used clothing collection containers]" (Zaczyński 2017).

Neither are the charities with their names on the banks the actual recipients of the textiles being collected. As described above, the placement of banks in public places is negotiated between a charity and local authorities. However, it is actually the textile recycling companies that are picking up the clothes and paying charities for them. It is the textile recycler that does

the servicing and logistics for the banks. Charities pass on textiles collected in collection banks with their logo on them to textile recyclers. Textile collection banks are portrayed as not belonging to the textile recycler but as belonging to their charity partner. Textile recyclers are effectively paying charities not only for the textile collected but also for the use of their name and logo on the collection bank. Textile recyclers pay charities for the material, which effectively offsets the charities' costs of paying the council for the right to have the bank. While charities are required to disclose how much of the profits from textile collection they receive and how much goes to the collecting recycler (under regulation of the Charities Act of 1992 which requires charities to enter into a Commercial Participation Agreement with businesses with whom they are involved in commercial ventures), this is not always clearly communicated. Charities are a necessary middleman between local authorities and textile recyclers. Local authorities get the added benefit of supporting charities of their choosing in addition to diverting textiles from landfill. For textile recyclers, this arrangement is beneficial, since people are likely to donate good-quality items in support of a favorite charity.[16]

In the same way that local authorities are dependent upon the public to produce an uncontaminated recycling bin, when textile recyclers collect textiles via collection banks, they are dependent upon the public to provide the "right" materials. The clothing collection banks that are widely used are constructed not just to keep the clothes in (avoiding theft) but to keep the elements out. In the UK, the rainy weather is often damaging to textile recyclers' raw material. Wet clothing is a contaminant, as wet garments are unsuitable for either reuse or recycling. Only some textile recyclers have dryers, and if they do, drying clothes is an added cost. Banks are

[16] This organization-oriented generation of supply is not limited to collection schemes centered around charities. A spokesperson for a large multinational textile collection company told me that she negotiates takeback schemes with brands rather than with the mall where the brand's stores are, since they are much more likely to work well when people associate them with particular brands.

clearly labeled with what is and is not accepted. This is one way that textile recyclers communicate with the public in order to procure a supply of raw material that will allow them to produce high-quality graded clothing. While textile recyclers will accept sheets and towels, they do not want duvets (comforters). These are bulky and because they take up a great deal of space and are not worth much, will lower the value of the contents of the bank. Textile recyclers spoke to me about the difficult balance between instructing the public to give them the items that they really want (items that are still in good condition, not ripped, torn, or soiled) and not having the public edit their donations too much. One textile recycler explained to me that if people start thinking that items are not good enough to put in the textile bank then he will end up with too little.

Another type of collection is known as door-to-door. Just as it sounds, this method consists of used clothing being collected at people's homes rather than counting on them to bring it to a charity shop or a collection bank. Textile recyclers partner with charities for this mode of collection as well. Plastic bags with the name of a charity on them are distributed on people's doorsteps, with instructions for when to leave unwanted clothes outside to be collected. Since this form of collection is not regulated as waste in the UK (with the exception of Scotland), there is less of a barrier to collecting used clothing in this way. Established textile recyclers complain that other collectors pose as "phony charities" in order to secure stock, putting misleading or untrue wording on the collection bags. Theft of bags left outside for collection was so common around 2011 that a hotline for reporting instances was set up and guidelines were prepared for the police on how to prosecute this specific type of thief (Norris 2012, p. 135; see also WRAP 2016).

A relatively new but marginal form of collection is the Cash for Clothes model, which emerged around 2013 as competition for other forms of collection, wherein people are offered a small compensation for their clothing, by weight. This model is not generally viewed by established textile recyclers as particularly effective. The price paid (generally around 50p a bag) is not high enough that people with valuable items would bother to dispose of it in this way. This model of collection can allow collectors to bypass cooperation with charities (Norris 2012, p. 134).

Cooperation and competition for value of charity rag in England

UK textile recyclers collect used clothing from charity shops. There is no industry-wide standard for textiles collected via this route (known as "charity rag"). Each textile recycler has their own set of guidelines for the charities they work with, specifying what they will and will not collect and/or pay for. In charity shops' sorting rooms there are often flyers displayed with instructions for what should or should not be included in the rag that will be sold to textile recyclers (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3).

Charities compete with textile recyclers over where value should be extracted from rag. Textile recyclers prefer to buy unsorted stock from charities, but charities often prefer to sort through all stock, even rotating it between shops to try and sell as much as possible, and simply pass on items that they have decided they cannot or do not want to sell themselves. TRA President Alan Wheeler explains that charities are

> getting more savvy with rotation and sorting. Do they not sort, not eke as much out of donations, and get a more guaranteed through-put at the back end? And not deal with problems of dealing with waste? You'll have a happy clothing collector. Or, do you extract as much value out at the shop front, knowing that quality coming out at the other end is lower? (Interview November 10, 2015)

As Wheeler notes, items that charities cannot sell are waste in the perspective of the charity. But that waste can have different values depending on how it was assembled and whether a great deal of "value" has been extracted from it. For charities, how this waste is disposed of enters into their calculations. While some charities are given special dispensation from local authorities and do not pay for the waste that they generate, many charities do pay for their waste. It costs less to recycle than to dispose of waste in the landfill. But if waste can generate an income, this is of course preferable, and is the logic behind working with textile recyclers (and recyclers of other kinds).

Though the relationship is often fraught and characterized by distrust, textile recyclers and charities cooperate with one another out of necessity. As described above, textile recyclers provide charities an income for what otherwise might be a liability. When I asked Wheeler about his relationship with the Charity Retail Association (CRA, the charity retail trade association), he says they

> have a good working relationship. You have to – it's an important part of the supply chain, even though local authorities are more interested now. If you ask the public what they do with their clothing, most people will say (even if it's not true) that they take it to a charity shop. Probably about 50% of clothing donated for reuse or recycling goes via a charity shop. So we have a good working relationship. (Interview November 10, 2015)

Wheeler says he gets invited to give market updates at the annual CRA conference. He says they need to know what to expect, to try and plan for the year ahead. He tells them, "I don't have a crystal ball. But they need to mitigate any risks."

In an attempt to standardize charity rag, the TRA has developed a prototype "charity shop grade specifications" document in which guidelines for assembling acceptable material for rag are laid out. These guidelines include instructions to keep items clean and dry and should specifically exclude a number of different types of items ("pillows, cushions, duvets, carpets,

balls and cones of wool, offcuts from manufacturing process and unfinished garments, hard toys, books and bric-a-brac, coat hangers, sharp objects and single odd shoes"). The guidelines also specify that the goods should not be pre-sorted and that no items should be removed for sale to other merchants before rag is sold to a textile collector. Wheeler explained that the idea of developing this grade was to "bring about harmonization" in what charities were passing along to textile recyclers.

The usefulness of such a grade, however, depends on the degree of competition currently existing among textile recyclers. When textile recycling companies proliferated in recent years, Wheeler explained, "charities said, if you're not prepared to accept what is coming out of our stores, we'll just go to the next person. Somebody is always willing to pay 5p more per kilogram, for lower quality." Textile recycling companies that he characterized as "fly-by-night" operations were able to out-compete more established textile recyclers in terms of price. But now that those smaller companies have been going out of business,[17] the more established recyclers can once again exert their influence on charities to produce a suitable standard of charity rag at a price that they ask.

Textile recyclers take advantage of the ambiguous nature of "rag" to compete with each other not only in terms of price but also in terms of reliability. When used clothing is not properly managed, it can quickly become waste. First, as described above, charities would otherwise need to dispose of unwanted collected items, which in many cases would mean incurring a cost. Second, uncollected rag quickly becomes waste – a nuisance, a waste of space (unproductive space) within the shop, or it can be damaged by rain (i.e., contaminated) if left outside. Local regulations might prohibit rag bags from standing and waiting to be collected after

[17] Alan Wheeler says this is because the upstarts lacked the experience of knowing how to sort successfully that comes from being in the business a long time, and the contacts that were necessary to sell sorted clothes to foreign markets. See the "distributed quality" section below.

a certain hour. Sandra, the manager at Hospice Charity, said that at one of her shop locations, all the bags must be carried outside by 8:30am but gone by 9am, because of regulations. Several members of the TRA have joined together to form a cooperation scheme that guarantees clients continuity of service. In the event that one of the members has financial trouble, the other members "cover the costs of servicing existing contractural obligations until new permanent arrangements are made" (Recyclatex 2018).

When qualification of the product or service the textile recycler is offering fails, extra-market mechanisms are also utilized. Textile recyclers' competition strategies are reportedly even more drastic than competing on price or reliability. Some try to actively manipulate the prices that charities pay them, or even sabotage each others' business or resort to threats. Sandra, the regional shops manager from Hospice Charity, explained to me how some textile recyclers tried to control the price of rag by first establishing relationships with charities by offering a high price per kilo, then drastically lowering the price once they have the charities' business:

> Rag dealers try to drive the price down. They come to you and offer you really good amount of money. Like for example Hospice Charity is currently getting 42p a kilo, so for instance they might offer 65p per kilo. They try to get as many charities as they can on board, then try to drive the price down. [Our dealer] tries to keep the price up, so the other companies don't like him. (Field notes, May 24, 2016)

Sandra emphasized to me that the rag trade is "nasty" and "like the mafia" and that she had heard that they set fire to each other's vans. The textile recycler that she works with has had death threats. Textile recyclers' operations are sometimes literally situated behind rolled barbed wire and outfitted with CCTV cameras, which she found "very off-putting." One of the reasons that she works with this particular textile collector is that he is particularly trustworthy and easy to work with, especially so since he had decades of experience as a charity retailer before moving over to textile recycling. Not only does this experience make him easy to work with, he is also

understanding if there is any problem with his workers. Sandra says that she has been "shouted at" by other recyclers when she stopped using their services after, for instance, an episode where she discovered that the drivers had been stealing things from one of her shops.

Poland: Collection for a net-export industry

In Chapter 3, I described the development of the used clothing industry in Poland. After the opening of the market, used clothing was primarily imported and sold in Poland, with minimal export. Selling the majority of what was imported was, as industry veterans describe, relatively easy. But the gap has shrunk between Poland and Western Europe, and today customers are more discerning. Poles are also buying more clothes, so there is more to give away. Today Poland actually exports more used clothing than it imports (see Figure 1.1).[18] Textile recyclers in Poland have looked to Western Europe to see what sorts of collection strategies are effective, and have implemented textile collection banks and door-to-door collections.

Ewa Metelska-Świat, President of KIG-TSW, reports that there are currently around 800,000 collection banks in Poland. With a population of 38 million, that is one collection bank for every 47.5 people. Door-to-door collections are also common. There is no available data, however, on how much of that domestically collected stock is actually sold in Poland. One

[18] If these figures are accurate, popular conceptions of Poland's material well-being have not quite caught up with reality. One journalist made his doubts especially clear when he summarized the state of the used clothing industry: "The business is not the most transparent and takes place in (rather large) part in the grey zone [informal, unreported trade]. GUS statistics should be treated with great care, because there are landmines. In 2014, export of used clothing from Poland supposedly amounted to 520 million złoty or 166.5 million dollars, which would mean that it was greater than import. That is somehow hard to believe, because despite a large dose of goodwill it is difficult to believe that our country, still coming into its own [*na dorobku*], would be a primary center of supply of second-hand clothes" (Cipiur 2016, translation mine).

textile recycler told me that all of it is exported to Africa, Pakistan, or Eastern European destinations like Ukraine (though unrest in the Ukraine has created problems for the market). Others claim that it is possible to sell some of the Polish stock domestically. Generally, though, textile recyclers report that Polish stock is of lower quality than imported stock—because Poles still wear things longer, because the clothes are not properly laundered before being donated, and because Poles still have the mentality that there are people who want their old things:

> People think [in Poland] if they put some old sweater out for collection someone is going to be happy to wear it, but those people no longer exist, and fortunately there isn't this kind of poverty in Poland that someone is waiting for a really old sweater and is going to wear it. So in order for the industry to function, things have to be in good shape. (Textile recycler, September 15, 2014)

Vive Textile Recycling has Poland's largest sorting warehouse, as well as a chain of retail shops. In May 2018 the company announced that they currently operate 34 shops and hope to increase the number to 40 by the end of the year (Dla Handlu 2018). With import numbers falling, it seems likely that some of this stock has been collected in Poland. If Poles are buying their own used clothes, then, it is not information that is readily shared.

The policies of local authorities towards collection banks are varied. Collection banks have always been privately owned. Some cities, like Krakow, have begun removing collection banks. Like in Oxford, local authorities find collection banks an annoyance that end up attracting a mess, which the city's waste management authorities end up servicing. In Krakow, the body responsible for waste management has formed a partnership with the Polish Red Cross to pick up used clothing and distribute it to needy individuals. Even this model, though, ends up in partnership with textile recyclers, as all items donated are not suitable for redistribution (if they are stained or otherwise damaged). Moreover, the space available for the distribution operation is

limited, so some items are simply moved onward to textile recyclers because there is no more available rack space or hangers to display them.

5.2 Production

Sociologists have unraveled the conventional economic wisdom that equilibrium in a market is reached when quantity of supply meets quantity of demand. Demand is not naturally existing but must be created by market actors (Bourdieu 2005; Rona-Tas and Guseva 2014). Supply must also be made into commensurable commodities, which is a social and material process that connects market actors around the globe (Çalişkan 2010). But the market for used clothing challenges even these sorts of explanations, as supply is relatively inelastic (Crang et al. 2013, p. 13). Bertus Servaas, President of Poland's Vive Group, explains it this way:

> The specificity of this industry is its inverted model. "Normally" demand generates supply. But not in our case. We get a pig in a poke [literally, "we get a cat in a sack" *dostaniemy kota w worku*] and we can't guarantee that we will send as many dresses, shorts, or coats of a given cut or color as are actually necessary and will sell, because we don't produce them. Of course, we have historical data, but we are dependent on that which trucks bring to us and what people are currently getting rid of. (Zaczyński 2017)

Sellers of used clothing have limited strategies for modifying the products that they offer based on demand, unlike other producers of consumer goods who can change the way their products are produced and/or marketed in order to "re-qualify" them in ways that will be appealing to consumers (Callon et al. 2002, p. 204). In this section I consider some of those strategies that used clothing sellers can employ, such as carefully choosing and monitoring suppliers and creating relationships with buyers. These are strategies that have been relatively well-discussed in the existing literature on the used clothing trade. I suggest, however, that these strategies—

which serve to build relationships of trust and reduce the uncertainty of transactions—are only part of the story.

By closely considering the way that collected used clothing is made into a commodity, it becomes apparent that the logic of waste is pervasive. In other words, the "value extraction" model or the metaphors of "panning for gold" (Crang et al. 2013) and "digging for diamonds" (Hawley 2006) proposed by other social scientists are only partially accurate. Of course, buyers and sellers of rag do speak about the existence of "pearls"—those items that are particularly valuable. But value production is not only a question of finding those pearls, extracting value, and connecting value regimes. It is also a matter of *distributing* value throughout newly-created products in such a way that as little of the material stream as possible becomes waste.

5.2.1 Supply

Sorting and grading of textiles can be done by the same firms who collect those textiles or by separate firms. In the UK, graders either collect clothing themselves or work with collectors. In Poland, all the textile recyclers I spoke to worked with collectors in Western Europe (the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, or Scandinavia were the most common sources), but as I described above, Polish firms are increasingly collecting textiles as well. In this section I describe how questions of supply are managed by those firms that do not collect their own textiles, then turn to questions of grading in the following section.

Production in the used clothing industry follows a different logic than production in industries for newly-produced goods. Wiktor, a Polish wholesaler in the business since the early 1990s who buys imported used clothing and sorts it, says that if he were selling televisions, he could simply order one thousand units of the same model and be sure that they would all be

uniform—it is a "product that is replicated." With used clothing it is different, and the materials from which a product will be made must be chosen differently. When we spoke, he had recently received an offer to import used clothes from the United States. He explained to me that this was too risky of an offer for him to accept from such a distance. He would really need to be able to check the quality of the clothing being offered himself, to see whether it meets his standards. There are no industry-wide standards of quality—they are "fluid." Even buying the highest grade, he would be setting himself up for a "blind date" in which he would be reliant on the subjective standards of another trader. Each trader can sort however they see fit, and name their grades however they see fit. "Anyone can…make a batch of stock and call it 'cream.' That's a name that is often used, but it actually doesn't mean anything because there are no norms. Someone can simply have a whim, someone can think that [for him] cream is such and such clothing, someone else is going to think it's worse, and the name remains the same."

Buyers of wholesale bulk used clothing use various strategies to deal with the risky nature of buying tons of heterogeneous clothing items at a time. Graders have to choose suppliers carefully in order to be sure that the "quality" of the shipments they receive is as high as possible. One strategy to ensure reliable quality is diversifying suppliers and the types of shipments purchased. Wiktor purchases clothing from several different suppliers and different countries. Certain types of shipments are rejected outright if he does not believe that the clothes are of the proper type and quality. Quality is monitored through auditing procedures to make sure that the yield of items appropriate for sale is high enough from each shipment. In Wiktor's sorting room, each cart into which clothing items are sorted is equipped with a scale. This helps him track the quality of each shipment:

> Everything is based on weighing, so the weight of every cart must be known. In every container I have to know how much there was of that best stock, how much

> "special" [the highest grade] there was, and so on and so on.
>
> *EG: And what do you do later with that data?*
>
> I analyze if it's worth continuing to buy from that supplier, or if the stock he sends me is poor, and if it's poor, I tell him thanks, it was great, but…simply you see what the percentage of good clothing is, and then later it's the simplest and easiest to judge. (Interview September 15, 2014)

The same logic guides the calculations of sorters and graders in the UK. Clothes which can be sold again as clothing—so-called "re-use grades"—are where the profit of the industry are made. Clothes that are unsuitable for resale—"recycling grade" items—are less profitable and sometimes are even sold at a loss for the recycler. Wheeler says that if collections are procuring 50% recycling grade textiles, "we can cope with that kind of balance" but that if textile recyclers "see that 60% is going for recycling, they know that's not good enough quality."

Graders can purchase shipments of clothes that were generated from door-to-door collections, from collections in neighborhoods or schools, or from collection banks set out by private firms. Ala, a Polish retailer who owned several stores over a period of about seven years, described to me the logic behind choosing one collection type over another. She and her husband bought stock for their stores from an importer. Shipments came loaded in the back of large trucks from the United Kingdom. Ala learned from experience to only buy bags of clothing that came from school collections. These types of collections more reliably contained good-quality items, meaning clothes that were not too worn-out to sell. She told me that she thought that people donated better items when the collection point was in a school; perhaps people were embarrassed to donate lesser-quality items when the items that one donates can be seen by others. Door to door is thought to be the highest-quality category of unsorted goods because it is the least anonymous way in which clothes are donated (as opposed to clothes left in collection bins in public places), and because it comes directly from primary customers, there is a guarantee that

the clothing has not already been sorted by other actors farther up the supply chain (for instance by textile recyclers in the items' country of origin). According to Wiktor, the quality of stock generated via Cash for Clothes models is quite "even" but there that "there are few of those 'hits' in it, those things which are really nice." It is unlikely that a potential donor would go through the trouble to make a tiny amount of money rather than simply donating to a charity or actually selling the items individually if they are valuable.

Where clothing is collected makes a difference. Though once the clothes reach retail points, Polish shoppers generally do not distinguish between countries of origin (as discussed in Chapter 7), Polish graders are much more attuned to these differences, because of trends in the level of wear of clothes that tends to come from different places (countries but regions as well, or even neighborhoods or modes of collection), as well as the general aesthetic of the clothing. Within the UK as well, regional differences are perceptible, as poorer areas in the North and poorer neighborhoods yield worse quality stock. For Polish importers, English used clothing is described as "better quality" because it tends to be colorful and fashionable, and because the English tend to get rid of clothing faster than other nations. German clothes are thought to be "quality" of a different sort—better materials, but duller colors. The German market is also more difficult to navigate, as there is a great deal of competition, and according to Wiktor it is more difficult to acquire nice stock:

> For sure English stock is more expensive, but at the same time better than German stock.
>
> *EG: Better, as in more fashionable?*
>
> Yes.
>
> *EG: In better shape?*
>
> In Germany the used clothing industry, because it's been operating for a long

> time, that market has become a bit saturated. Besides that, there are a lot of firms, there is a lot of competition between them, which also definitely had the effect that people who were giving away clothing saw that a lot of *rich* companies emerged who are involved in that industry, and people said, am I supposed to give something away for free for someone to get rich on it, that's a little off, right? And that all has an effect on the fact that those clothes are sort of average. There are good bags, but there are a lot of very average ones. (Interview September 15, 2014)

Polish clothing continues to have a bad reputation as being poor quality (more worn out, older and less fashionable) and frequently unwashed before being donated.

The generation of materials from which to produce a new product, described in the next section, is closely connected to patterns in the way that people discard clothing. People tend to get rid of their seasonal clothing at the end of a given season, which means that collectors will receive fall and winter clothing when the weather warms up in the spring, and clothing for warm weather when it is getting cold. As a consequence, the ability to store such items until they once again become seasonal is key. Textile recyclers with larger storage facilities have an advantage in that they are able to use space in this way. Przemek, whose family owns several shops in Krakow and an internet sales business, says that a friend of his who runs a smaller business is sometimes forced to simply get rid of things which are not seasonal because he does not have the space to store them.

While out-of season clothes are worth holding onto for larger textile recyclers, out-of-fashion items are more of a risk. Like out-of-season clothes, out-of-fashion clothes are generally discarded after their "season" is up. But the fashion cycle, unlike the cycle of the seasons, is unpredictable. Though the garments might be only temporarily undesirable, there is no guarantee that they will come back into fashion. Even if they do, there is no way to predict when that might happen. Wiktor provides the example of wide-legged trousers, saying that they were popular several years ago, but now they are making their way to him.

> What are we supposed to do, throw them out? Maybe in four years they'll come back into fashion. And maybe it's a shame to throw them out. But on the other hand to hold on to them, storing them, it's sort of, it's a serious problem. You have to have significantly more space and it doesn't really answer the question of *when* that fashion comes back, because earlier, wide trousers, I remember, they were, about fifteen years ago. They were, then they disappeared… keeping trousers for fifteen years is sort of senseless. (Interview September 15, 2014)

Textile recyclers are faced with the challenge of sorting the clothing that they acquire in such a way as to maximize profit, a calculation which also requires that they avoid creating waste to the greatest degree possible.

5.2.2 Grades

One UK textile recycler told me that it was important for me to understand that each recycler makes a slightly different product, depending on the way that clothing is sorted and graded. Once a wholesaler buys a shipment of collected clothes (in the UK, a grader can buy from a collector if he does not do collections himself; in Poland, a grader can buy from an importer or from a collector abroad, or increasingly from Polish domestic collectors), the clothes must be sorted into various categories that will best allow the clothes to move through the market, finding their way to interested buyers.

Producing quality grades

It is by being sorted and graded that used clothing is transformed into a valuable commodity once again (Botticello 2012). This time the commodity is one that will move into far-flung markets. Sorting and grading is done by companies of various sizes, but regardless of the size of the company, the general process is the same. At the start of the process, the first stage is the "rough sort" or "crude sort" (Hawley 2006). Sorters pull out the bulkiest items, such as

curtains and blankets, and items other than clothing, such as bric a brac (household items) or books. These items will be sorted themselves and sold onwards. At this stage damaged or soiled items are also pulled off the line.

A smaller operation might have a dozen or so women sorting through about one ton of clothing per day, with clothing being initially removed from a container in the plastic bags it was collected in and ripped open by the first sorter, and moved on to further sorting stations in carts. Larger companies, sorting hundreds of tons a day, need more technologically-advanced systems and hundreds of employees (see Figure 5.4). In these warehouses, when the collected material arrives at the grader's warehouse, it gets piled up and then dumped onto a conveyer belt by employees who rip each plastic bag open.[19] Rather than moving from station to station on carts, in these types of facilities, clothes travels down a conveyor belt as employees pluck off items for the grade they are creating. The most advanced facilities have highly-automated equipment, such as "smart" containers that can sense when they have been filled with sorted clothing.

The highest-quality grades are assembled at the top of the line. In UK sorting facilities, for instance, the highest-quality items that are destined for Eastern Europe are collected at the first stations. In Poland, the highest-quality grades are destined for domestic sale. This grade is the most expensive and the category that allows recyclers to make the most of their profits. This most desirable category makes up a tiny percentage of the total textile flow brought in, in both Poland and the UK. The recyclers that I spoke to said that cream represented between 2 and 5% of the textiles that they sort. This grade is often called "cream"—as in, that which rises to the top—and is a mix of types of items which are considered fashionable or look new. Cream contains, for instance, sweaters, t-shirts, jeans, shorts, and so on. These sorters are often women

[19] Male employees are generally involved in the parts of the process like these that involve heavy lifting, and sorters are nearly uniformly women.

whose home country is the destination market for the items, which gives them insight into what might be desirable for particular clientele (Botticello 2012). In one London-area textile recycling facility I visited, most of the employees (male and female) were in fact Polish, and Polish radio was playing over the loudspeakers.

Clothing that is not selected for cream is then progressively sorted into more finely-grained categories. These categories are highly specific, often sorted not only by the type of item but also by the material (such as "Ladies Cotton Skirt," "Ladies Denim Skirt," "Ladies Poly Skirt" and "Ladies Silk Skirt"). Each textile recycler has his own method of sorting, developed over time and together with clients. The number of grades varies. While some only have ten or twenty grades, others have hundreds (one sorter in Poland even reported having 700). Getting the grading right is key to the business. Each recycler has his own set of techniques to make sure that clients are satisfied. The importance of these processes to the value that a recycler is producing explains some of the resistance that textile recyclers had to telling me the specifics of the way they carry out their business. Some textile recyclers emphasize the fact that all their grades are "bespoke" – developed to meet the requirements of each particular customer (see Abimbola 2012 for a description of how this works in practice).

One way that recyclers attempt to control the quality of their grades is to make sure that they are made up of items that were sorted by at least two different workers. This is done to make up for the fact that one sorter could be having an off day or sorting improperly. If a client complains about a particular shipment, it is often possible to trace the shipment back to the worker or workers who assembled that particular grade. In some cases, quality is monitored by the buyers, who actually come to spend time in the sorting warehouses, checking the sorting to make sure the sorted product meets the specifications that his own buyers require. This is a form

of quality control that helps reduce information asymmetry and builds relations of trust across the great distances that the clothes will travel (Abimbola 2012). Cultivated relations between sorting companies and buyers, often developed over generations, are an important part of the way that the extreme uncertainty associated with such a heterogeneous and always-changing product is mitigated (Hawley 2006, p. 265; Botticello 2012, p. 187; Alan Wheeler, Interview November 10, 2015). Crucial knowledge of end markets is also cultivated through relationships between sellers and buyers (Crang et al. 2013, p. 19). Buying used clothing by the ton—a container contains 20 tons or more—is a risky investment, so strong relationships and the knowledge of how to sort properly are key to making good business decisions.

Sorted grades are destined for different end markets. In the UK, a tiny percentage is sold in the UK via online auctions or to individual traders who specialize in used or vintage clothing. Most collected used clothing is exported. The value of export has been steadily climbing since the mid-1990s, growing almost fivefold in the last two decades with a slight downturn in recent years (WRAP 2016; see Figure 5.5). High-quality cream items go to Eastern Europe (usually Poland or Hungary), and summer-weight items go to various African countries. In Poland, sorters sell the best-quality items to domestic retailers and stock their own shops. Lower-quality grades are exported to countries farther east and south, such as Ukraine, Africa, or Pakistan. The different directions that used clothing is sent in does not only reflect local tastes and requirements as far as style, fashion, or level of wear, but is also differentiated in terms of climactic needs and body sizes (Crang et al. 2013).

In all cases, sorting and grading is a labor-intensive process that relies on human judgments and sensory capabilities. In her ethnography of one London-area sorting facility, Botticello (2012) describes the value-production process whereby sorters turn unsorted, cast-off

clothing into sorted categories that can make used clothing useful and desirable. She observes that the system of categories that the workers are producing is not only a top-down framework imposed by management but is also dependent upon the workers' abilities to discern differences in garments and materials, to "recognize different values in the clothing and to place them in their appropriate categories" (Botticello 2012, p. 168). Workers did not wear gloves in order to be able to feel the material and make quick judgments based on sensory contact with the items as they moved past. Speed is essential, as workers' reflexes affect the amount of stock that can be sorted and the quantity of grades that can be accurately produced. As Wiktor said, "a good employee makes quick decisions. They can stand thinking and look at it for an hour, but then how much would that thing have to cost?" Hawley (2006) reports that newer employees are often given the "rough sorting" tasks near the beginning of the process, while more experienced sorters are given more finely-grained classificatory tasks.

Julia, a Polish costume designer in her early 30s, described to me what she observed when she worked in a sorting warehouse for a Warsaw-based sorting company with several shops. Julia had been hired in an attempt to create a specialized "vintage" shop, and her task was to identify and pull out items that might be suitable. The criteria that she used were completely different than the ones that other sorters used:

> You dig through a lot, see something out of the corner of your eye, you do it very quickly. When I did it, I'd grab things on the basis of the fabric, on the basis of the cut, on the basis that there was something weird about that item…or on the basis of what's in fashion, or coming into fashion, from an aesthetic perspective, from the perspective of art. But the ladies that worked there every day, for 10 years, it was simply their everyday work. They would just see if there were holes, they'd stretch things out, see if the legs were the same length, if things were ripped. They had a completely different way of looking at clothing. (Interview January 29, 2017)

These sorters looking for different sorts of things are sometimes in-house workers, like Julia, or the arrangement at one London-based company I visited whose vintage sorter had an entire room full of items set aside for potential buyers. Those looking for specific types of items can also be outside sorters who pay by the bag for things that they choose themselves from the line (Botticello 2013).

Buyers can bypass the system of grades imposed by wholesalers by purchasing unsorted goods. The first page of a price list from a Polish sorter lists "England door to door"—collected in the way indicated by the name and unsorted—as the most expensive grade. The high price of this grade reflects its potential to contain high-quality, high-status, unique or vintage items that can be sold for high prices or be of generally good quality. Choosing this category of used clothing is risky for buyers, since it is possible that there will be items in poor condition that, had they been sorted, would have been assigned a to grade that cost less per kilo, or would have been diverted from sale in Poland altogether, had it been sorted in England. It is still an attractive category of goods, however, since there is also a chance that the quality of some clothing items will be much higher than the price point indicates (8.99 złoty/kilo versus 40 złoty/kilo and up for high-quality "mix" and "cream" sorted goods). It is the buyers who takes on the risk in this transaction for unstandardized goods (whereas if the wholesaler processes the goods, he carries that risk that is passed from the firm responsible for collection).

Grading and waste

Recycling grades. Used clothing that can be reused as clothing is only one part of a larger ecology of use. When used clothing items are damaged or worn out to such a degree that a recycler cannot find willing buyers, used clothing can still be made valuable as a material. In

clothing form, materials are always "on the way to becoming something else" (Ingold 2011 in Ingold 2012, p. 435) as they become worn, damaged, or otherwise unsuitable for wearing. Metelska-Świat stressed that it is not possible to understand the industry by only looking at the sale of used clothes as *clothes*:

> …you can't look at used clothing only through shops. That is absolutely a narrowed view. You have to look at it holistically, so from the moment that people get rid of those clothes, and then there is a whole path, a whole history, a whole cycle, of what you can do with those clothes. (Interview June 28, 2017)

Even after all the grades of clothing are sorted, there are still some items that are too damaged to be resold as clothing and are treated as what is called "recycling grades."

Recycling grades are, as Wheeler put it, the "Achilles heel of the industry." Profit is made on reusable clothing, but as prices are falling for used clothes,[20] it is becoming more crucial to find markets for clothing as a material. Used clothing is considered post-consumer textiles as opposed to post-industrial textiles. Post-consumer textiles are characterized by heterogeneity: worn out, damaged, or soiled, in varying degrees, and made of a range of fiber compositions. Their heterogeneity makes them difficult to recycle. Post-industrial scraps produced, for instance, in the process of carpet production, which are uniform in terms of their material content and level of wear, can be more easily collected, processed, and turned into products such as wool felt (which can be used as carpet underlay, or as "grow felts" used as substrates in urban farming) as they are fairly consistent "inputs" for a production process.

The technology used to pull apart fabrics mechanically has not developed much in the last 40 or 50 years (Andy Hall, Interview June 2, 2016). *Shoddy* and *mungo* are the names of the processed fibers made from knitted textiles and woven textiles, respectively, and made into stuffing, insulation, automotive components, or blankets (Hawley 2006). Cotton clothing that is

[20] Falling prices of used clothes are connected to the falling prices of new clothes, as well as to dynamics of competition in the industry among textile collectors.

damaged but not soiled can become wiper rags for industrial use. Some graders produce their own rags, but others simply sell the material onward as a semi-finished product to others who will produce rags. At one of the UK's largest sorting and grading facilities, wipers are cut on site, making one last trip through a sensor that detects any harmful metal or hard bits left on the material before being bound up in 10 kilogram bales (see Figure 5.6). This machinery is ISO certified, meaning that this product is standardized in a way that clothing sorted for re-use is not. Clothing can also be shredded by specialized mills into pieces of 30 by 30 millimeters to make an alternative fuel with high calorific value. This material is currently being used by cement factories, but textile recycling actors have their eye on electrical power and heating plants as a potential buyer (Metelska-Świat, Interview June 28, 2017).

Despite what might be suggested by the name "textile recycling," making collected clothing items into new clothing items is the most under-developed area of recycling in the industry. When fibers are re-processed, they lose their length, so it is still not possible to make entirely new garments out of recycled fibers. Jennifer Gilbert, Chief Marketing Officer for I:CO, a "consumer facing brand" in the textile recycling industry, remarked on the difficulty of this sort of recycling, saying "we can go to the moon but we can't make a t-shirt into a t-shirt!" (Interview February 8, 2016). The technology to produce new clothing items out of reclaimed and recycled fibers is still under development. Some recycling methods have been developed for cotton, but currently it is still not possible to produce a new garment from entirely recycled fibers. H&M's line of denim made with recycled fibers, for instance, only uses 20% recycled fibers since it is not possible at present to make strong enough fibers for a higher recycled content (Gilbert, Interview February 8, 2016). Blended fabrics (for instance, cotton and polyester blends) are extremely difficult to recycle. Innovation initiatives have increased in recent years with the aim

of developing viable "fiber to fiber" or "cradle to cradle" (as opposed to the more linear "cradle to grave") recycling methods, with increasing focus on chemical (as opposed to mechanical) processes. At present there is a great deal of research and development in this area.[21]

Still, despite textile recyclers' best efforts to find markets for all components of the material stream, the innovation efforts of various industry actors, and an increased rhetoric of sustainability, a percentage of waste still remains, which can be up to about 10% or as little as 3-5%. This category of items actually costs textile recyclers money because they have to pay to take it to landfill (in the UK this is about £170 per ton).

Distributed quality. Sorting the mass of heterogeneous collected clothing into grades is a way of making it knowable, making sense out of it, ordering it so that potential buyers can be sure about the quality of what they are buying. These processes are well-documented by social scientists who have studied the way that used clothing is traded in global networks (Hansen 2000 and 2005; Abimbola 2012; Botticello 2012 and 2013; Brooks 2013; see Chapter 3). There are certain general trends, such as higher-quality "cream" going to Poland and other Eastern European countries from the UK, and lower-quality going to Africa or Pakistan. The "better" brands are, as Botticello has observed, "not Bond Street, but High Street" (2012, p. 176). In both UK and Polish sorting processes, there are opportunities to pull off "vintage" items and make them a separate category for individual vintage traders to buy at a higher price.

The used clothing trade has been characterized as a globally-distributed process of "downcycling" and "sequentially stripping out value" (Crang et al. 2013). There is a balance between "value extraction" processes and value distribution processes that allow a grader to

[21] Measures include those mentioned in footnote 3 above, as well as corporate efforts like those of H&M.

maximize profit and minimize loss on recycling grades or waste. Despite the value extraction metaphors inherent in the expressions "digging for diamonds" (Hawley 2006), "panning for gold" (Crang et al. 2013) or "searching for pearls," textile recyclers must pay attention to leaving quality *in all their products* in order to avoid being stuck with large quantities of materials that no one will buy, and that ultimately they will have to pay to get rid of. If a recycler takes out more of the highest quality items to make bigger and better high-quality grades, he automatically makes the other grades lower quality. One of the UK recyclers I spoke to said that each producer has to make a decision about whether to make all his grades slightly better or sell the best stuff at really high prices and "pass off the rest." All classifications used by wholesalers, including the class of unsorted goods, should be understood as part of a strategy for constructing a wholesale market object which "drags along" as much of the material stream as possible, allowing them to sell as much of their stock as possible. The processes of classification that I have described are meant to make as much of the collected material stream as knowable and desirable as possible.

Wiktor told me that the unique thing about the used clothing business is that those truly desirable items, the ones that are like "gold" for his clients, make up only 1.5-2% of the stock that he sorts through. He separates out these goods and calls it his "special" grade. The challenge for wholesalers like him is to sell as many of the clothes that pass through his sorting facility as possible, including the remaining 98 percent:

> one of the "problems" or specificities of used clothes, used clothing industry, is that it's not possible to produce what clients want. So if clients want "special," it's not possible to produce special, because a whole huge quote-unquote "tail" emerges, which drags along behind that special…It's not like in normal wholesale, where they sell, for example, some sort of dresses…and we call up the wholesaler and we bring in a thousand dresses like that. And we sell them because they sell great. But here, the nice things are always weighed down by the whole rest of it that also has to be dealt with [*trzeba zagospodarować*]. (Interview September 15, 2014)

He does not buy his own stock cheaply enough that he could simply decide not to sell a large percentage of it that he finds unsatisfactory (as, for instance, charities do):

> In this industry there is not, unfortunately, such a high margin that I could allow myself to throw out half the stock and sell—so I buy a ton of that unsorted stock and let's say I sell 50%, and the rest, ok, I can sell for 2 złoty or throw it out—throw it out is the wrong term for it, I don't use that term at all, but send it to be reprocessed [*oddać do przetworzenia*] into those kinds of half-finished products [like wiper rags]. In that case those clothes would have to be so expensive, that 50% that I would sell would have to be so expensive, that it would certainly come close to the price of new clothing. (Interview September 15, 2014)

He and other recyclers balance their better and poorer quality things by only selling the best quality items along with worse quality items. Wiktor described what he does as "dragging the heavy tail" of the bulk of the clothes behind the desirable ones that propel the process. He attaches this "heavy tail" of less-desirable items to the more desirable items by including them in a multitude of categories. Although he does separate out the best items to create a higher-valued "special" grade, he only sells this to people who will buy other grades as well. Wiktor describes it as a kind of "rationing" [*reglamentacja*], like under socialism, saying that he makes people wait in line for his "special" grade rather than simply selling it to the same people all the time:

> I prefer to sell it to people who buy other grades too. And not to someone who buys only special, opens a great boutique and is going to have nicer things than at Galeria Krakowska, but I really wouldn't benefit a lot from that, because I won't be in a position to produce, and I will be left with all the other grades here. (Interview September 15, 2014)

Another UK recycler, describing his grading system to me, emphasized the fact that when he is selling his product, the aim is to sell all of it, not only the best grades. He described his grades to me in an email: "the [grade] has an A, B, C or D next to it. A being the most popular D being please please please take it/if you don't buy that you won't get any grade A" (personal communication June 1, 2016).

The small percentage of desirable items that can be priced higher, buried in tons of other clothing, is a barrier to entry into the market for would-be competitors. When the media in the UK started reporting that used clothing was a lucrative business, many people became interested in getting into the business. But the numbers were deceptive: "They heard that it was worth £2,000 a ton. What they didn't know is, that you might have to go through 100 tons in order to get that £2,000/ton" (Wheeler, Interview November 10, 2015). For those recyclers with larger operations, tiny percentages of collected clothing add up into large sums. When asked by a journalist about the fact that "only" 1.5% of sorted clothing is brand-name, Poland-based recycler Servaas replied, "Only? That's six tons a day!" (Zaczyński 2017).

Grades are thus constructed in such a way as to move along such unwanted items. The wholesaler does not always give the buyer the opportunity to see what it is that he or she is buying, and the burden of uncertainty in the transaction falls on the buyer. Some wholesalers do allow buyers to "look inside" their purchased kilograms of clothing. In these cases, the ability to inspect goods before purchase is one of the selling points that a wholesaler will stress when explaining why his or her product is better than other wholesalers'. In one case that I observed, the added value of the most expensive grade was that buyers were allowed not only to inspect the individual items before making the purchase, but to reject up to 40% of the weight. In this case the logic is clear: buyers are not calculating value based on price per item, but are willing to pay more per item in order *not to acquire* unwanted items. In wholesale, the market object is contingently produced from a material stream of heterogeneous, uniformly unique things through sorting and classification.

Like wholesalers, retailers also deal with clothing of various levels of wear and desirability. Unless they buy clothing by the individual item, for higher prices, they are all forced

to cope with items that they might prefer not to have to deal with. Wiktor describes his attitude towards having to sell lower-quality goods in his shops along with the nicer, newer-looking items:

> I would prefer to have only shops with clothing sold by item, because they look nicer, you can make them [look] like shops with new clothing, and I like that, and that's the view I always had on this issue. That it should all look nice. But unfortunately the lower-quality clothing is left, that clothing, let's call it, to be sold by weight, and well you've got to do something with it. (Interview September 15, 2014)

Textile recyclers are fully aware that those pearls must remain in the sorted grades in order to preserve the attractiveness of shopping for used clothing. If shoppers believe that there is a chance of finding "pearls," they will return to search time and again. Although I was told by many people in Poland that it is possible to find treasures in used clothing shops because sorters "don't know what they have," this is not altogether true. It is true that certain "high street" brands are more generally known. But it would be theoretically possible for sorters to be alerted to the existence of higher-end or niche fashion brands. Textile recyclers often leave in those more attractive items on purpose, knowing that if they were to completely separate them out, their product would no longer be as attractive. Klara and Kamil told me that even if they find an item from a luxury retailer, like a Max Mara coat, it will go into their shop priced like the other coats. In Chapter 6 I describe the strategies that retailers use to "drag along" or "push through" all these goods that are at risk of being unwanted.

5.3 Conclusion

The production of value in the market for rag is to some extent characterized by extraction (Crang et al. 2013) but is better understood as a process of waste management. The goal of recyclers is not primarily to "dig for diamonds" (Hawley 2006), pan for gold, or search

for pearls, but to sort stock in such a way as to make as much of it move as possible in a way that is profitable to them. Concentrating on the value creation processes for the bulk of collected clothing expands our understanding beyond the valuation of expensive or luxury used goods like antiques (Bogdanova 2013), historic homes or collectors' items (Thompson 2017), or individual used clothing items that can garner thousands of dollars per item (Hawley 2006).

Textile recyclers tend to be distrusted by the public at large in light of the disconnect between charitable giving and the for-profit nature of the recycling industry. They are acutely aware of their reputation. A US-based textile recycler told me with frustration that he had recently given an interview to a journalist-activist who "had her own agenda" and had subsequently written a negative article about the industry for a major publication. In many cases I had the impression that my interviewees were primarily focused on presenting their work and their industry in the best light possible. But it is not so easy to know where to place blame. At one UK textile recycling facility, the representative who spoke to me acknowledged that it would be best if the industry did not need to exist—but that given current rates of clothing consumption, the textile recycling industry provides a necessary service. The story that textile recycling props up the exploitative fast fashion industry is undermined by the fact that textile recyclers themselves complain about the quality of fast fashion items, saying that the quality of used clothing is no longer what it used to be. They would actually prefer to process smaller quantities of higher-quality clothing, since that is where they can produce the most value anyway.

Textile recycling itself is not a new industry—in many cases the businesses have grown from family rag-picking businesses that have existed for a century or more. The education about how to buy, care for, and dispose of clothing items provided by Love Your Clothes—information

that is supported by textile recycling industry actors, who also complain about the level of wear and tear on clothing coming through their warehouses and sorting lines—is in many ways a modern version of domestic guides from a much earlier era (as detailed in Strasser 1999, for instance). For instance, Love Your Clothes produced a series of printable guides for identifying the quality of garments. The guide for women's shirts explains how to identify double-threaded lockstitching versus less durable chain stitching and includes tips for easy care methods ("It's a lot easier to iron a shirt when it's still damp, so try to make a habit of doing just that"). In many ways, despite developments in scale and the modernization of equipment and monitoring technologies, the textile recycling industry and the governance of a circular economy are taking up old questions.

Despite excitement around the revolutionary potential of new systems for exchanging used goods in a so-called circular economy, the trade of second-hand goods is in itself not a new phenomenon. And indeed, this sort of trade itself has been implicated in narratives of progress before, though in a different way, usually as part of a teleological narrative in which "second-hand transactions [are]…eclipsed by ever more efficient and modern commercial practices" (Stobart and Van Damme 2010, p. 5). Whereas in the Circular Economy model, exchange of secondhand items is cast as a sustainable solution to the problem of overproduction and strain on the planet's resources, the existence of a secondhand trade across history suggests that it might be possible to understand the phenomenon as an indication of "the inability…of the first-hand market (and by implication 'modern' systems of production and marketing) to meet growing demand for a wide range of durable goods" (Stobart and Van Damme 2010, p. 7). There is thus an irony in the fact that the secondhand trade is being reimagined as a modern and cutting-edge solution to contemporary problems, given that in the past the "whiggish" argument was that

secondhand consumption would someday be rendered unnecessary by the highly efficient power of modern systems of production (Stobart and Van Damme 2010, p. 11). In Chapter 7 I consider how used clothing does seem to act in Poland as a response to the failures of modern systems of production.

5.4 Figures

Figure 5.1. Textile collection bank with excess donations on the ground around it. A sign on the container on the right hand side of the image warns that fly-tippers are being watched.

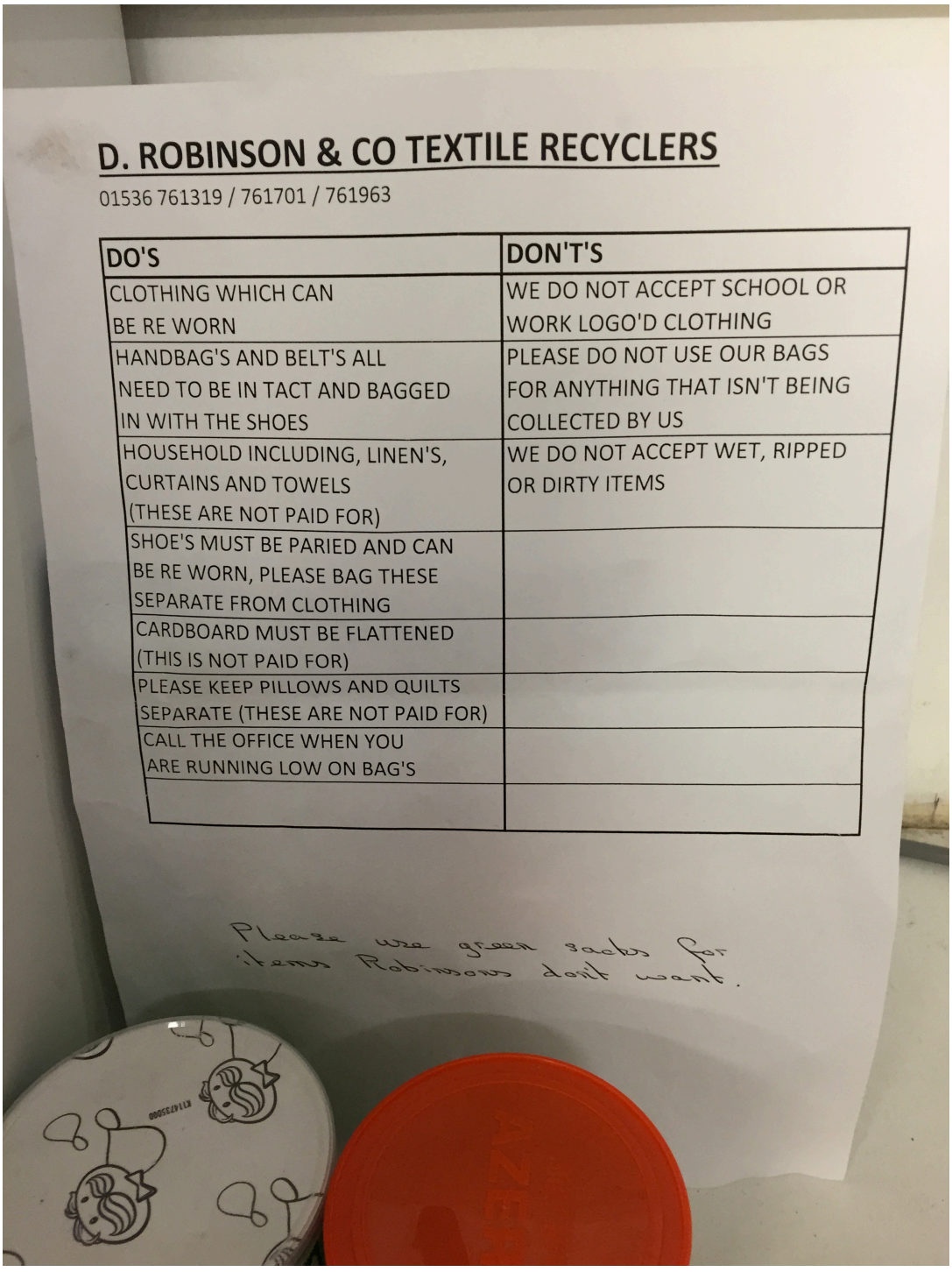

Figure 5.2. One textile recycler's charity rag specifications in an instructional chart, hanging in a charity shop sorting room.

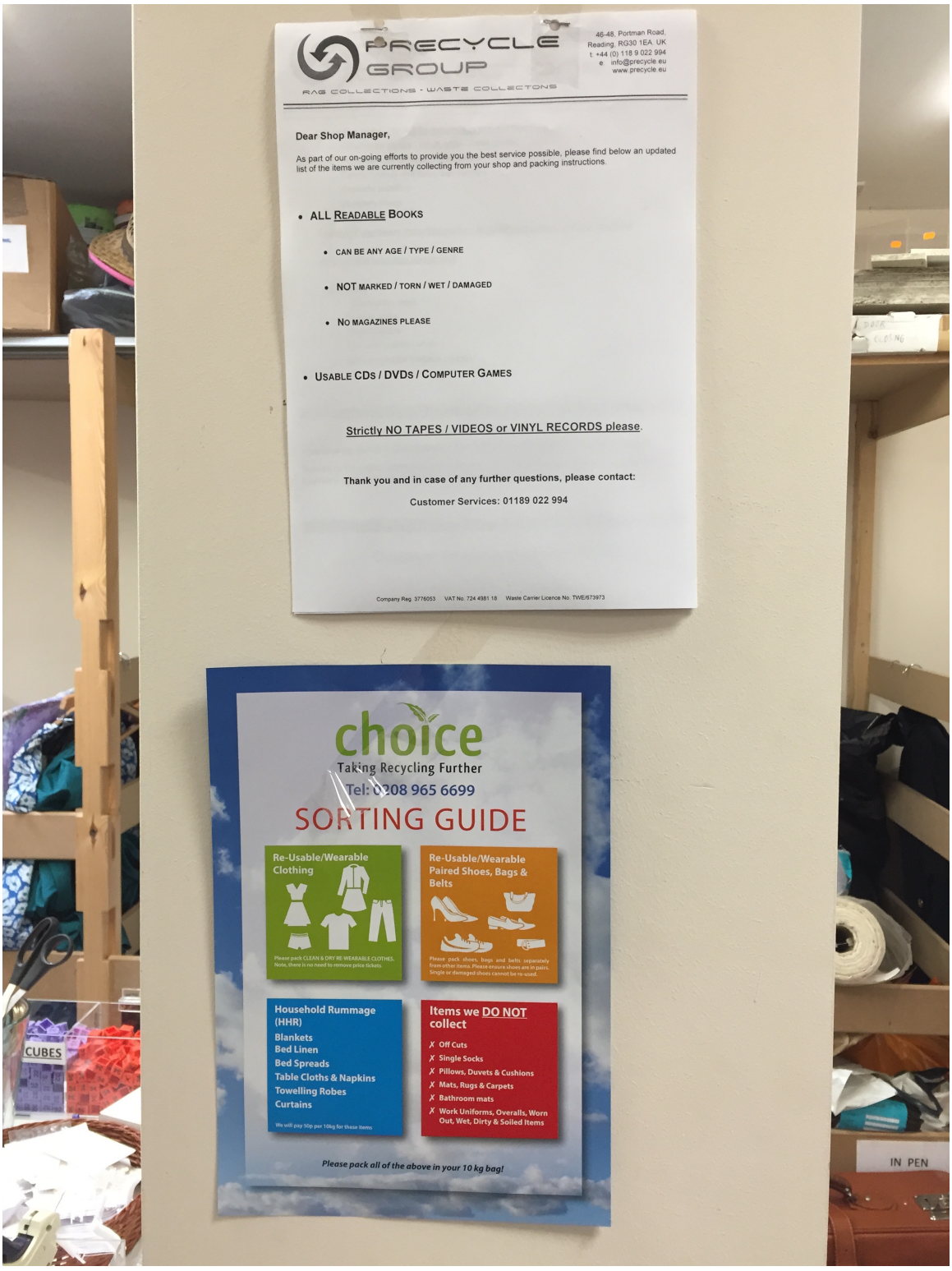

Figure 5.3. A more colorful depiction of what should and should not be sorted out as charity rag. Above are instructions from a book recycler.

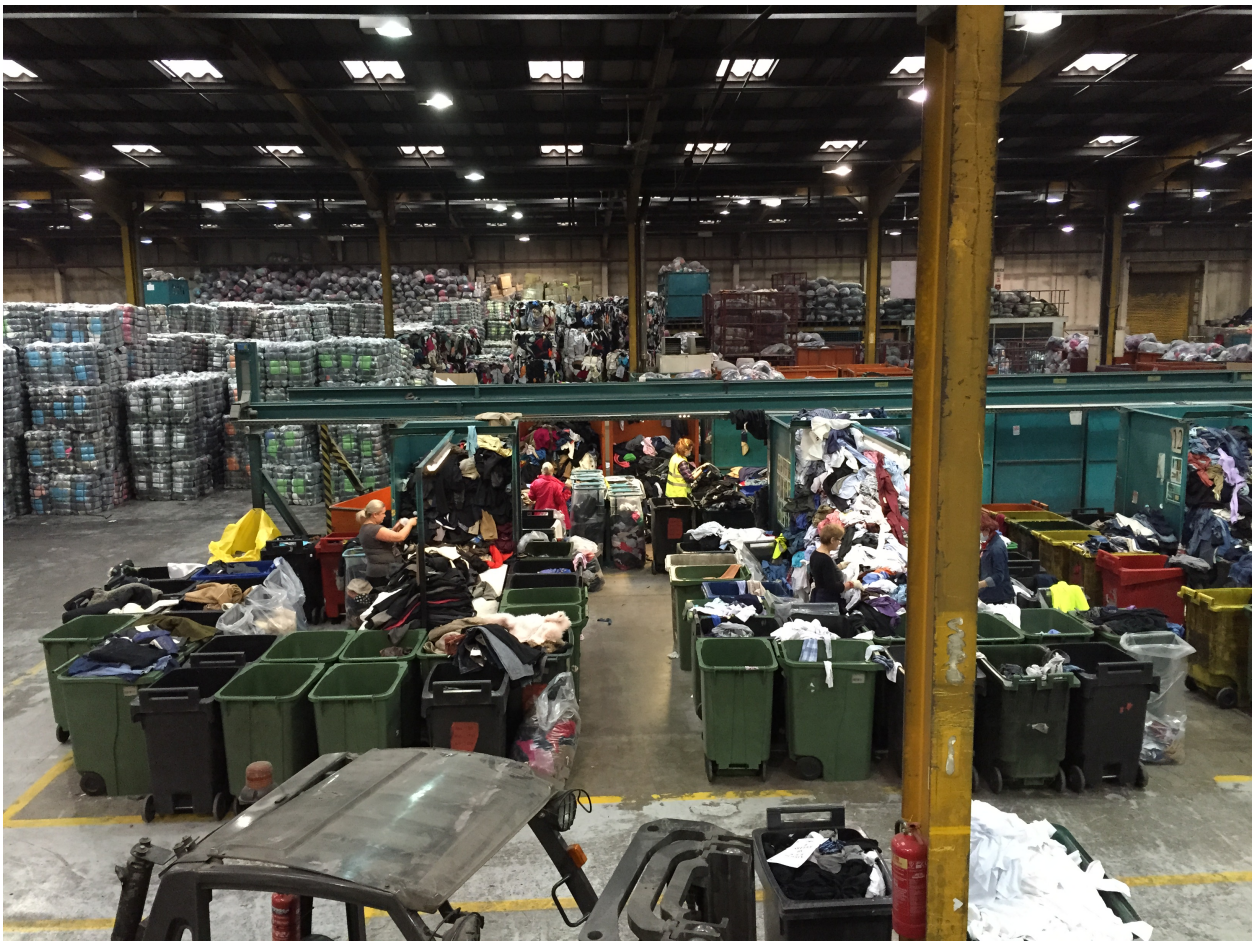

Figure 5.4. The interior of a large textile recycling warehouse. Women are sorting various types of garments into fine-grained categories (the woman on the left is sorting trousers; the women to the right is sorting men's long-sleeved shirts). The items for them to sort pile up behind them as conveyor belts deliver them to their stations. In the background are ready products: graded product that has been sorted and assembled into bales.

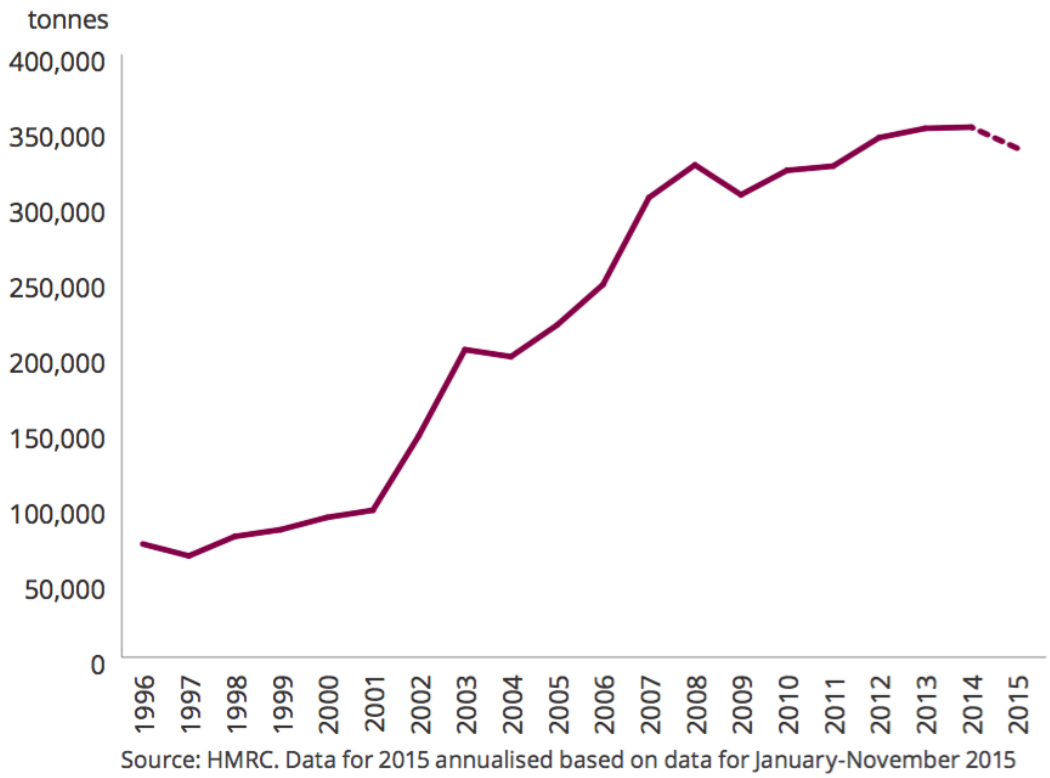

Figure 5.5. UK exports of used textiles (reproduced from WRAP 2016, p. 11).

Figure 5.6. Cotton clothing that has been turned into wiper rags.

CHAPTER 6

Retail of Used Clothing in Poland:

Production and qualification of retail objects

Used clothing is exchanged in a variety of retail spaces in Krakow, Poland. It is difficult to walk very far in this city without coming across a used clothing shop. Many of these are stores selling imported used clothing by the kilogram – what I call "bulk used clothing" stores. This type of shop is identifiable by its no-nonsense name: nearly all are called some variation of "Cheap Clothing." If there is a more specific name of the shop, it is usually a made-up word derived from the surname of the owner. These shops sell mostly men's, women's, and children's clothing, both by the kilo and priced individually, but they also sell textiles such as sheets, curtains, and tablecloths, as well as a small amount of books, children's toys, inexpensive jewelry, and assorted cosmetics. Another kind of used clothing shop, which tends to look more like a traditional boutique, is the consignment shop [*komis*]. These shops tend to sell exclusively women's clothing. A third kind of used clothing shop, much harder than the previous two kinds to come across in Krakow, is a vintage shop. These shops also tend to be arranged like boutiques and sell exclusively women's clothing, though there might be a small men's section.

The materialities of used clothing present possibilities for and limitations to qualification processes that retailers as well as customers must encounter and deal with. In this chapter I describe the work of qualification done by sellers and buyers in the market for used clothing. Drawing on the ideas developed in Chapter 1, I describe the devices and strategies used by retailers to produce *objects*—that are knowable and desirable to potential buyers—from heterogeneous *things*. Sellers position their goods and demonstrate their quality through

processes of sorting (including physical sorting processes, as well as symbolic sorting, accomplished through categorization processes like pricing) as well as through processes of narration. Buyers also participate in the processes of qualification as they encounter the goods and form attachments with them (McFall 2007, McFall et al. 2017). The qualification of goods is not only a problem of knowledge but is also a material problem, situated in concrete assemblages of goods, market devices, and actors in different types of retail settings. I describe different market segments and discuss the ways that used clothing is qualified in each of them.

6.1 Qualification of Used Clothing

How stability and order are achieved in a market for used clothing is a particularly vexing question. Scholars of the used clothing trade note that given the nature of used clothing as heterogeneous and unstandardized, uncertainty about quality is one of the central problems that needs to be overcome in order for exchange to take place. In the rag trade, for instance, sustained relations of trust and cooperation help build reliable "brands" that provide quality assurance in the face of information asymmetry about what, exactly, is being exchanged (Abimbola 2012). But in a retail setting, buyers not are entering into long-term contractual purchasing relationships with sellers. If a buyer does not like what she sees in a store, she simply does not buy it, and moves on. Long-term relationships of trust are less relevant in a retail context than specific, situated evaluations of the objects encountered. Any explanation of the creation of value in the retail of used clothing should include a discussion of the qualification strategies of buyers and sellers.

Economic sociologists have recognized that in order for a market to function, goods must be made stable and knowable. Uncertainty must be eliminated to such a degree that sellers can

reliably demonstrate the value of their goods (Kocak in Beckert 2009, p. 253). To do this, the seller must convey to potential buyers the quality of his or her goods. Quality is "the explicit and implicit, visible and invisible aspects of a good, service, or person being valued" (Beckert and Musselin 2013, p. 1). Quality is not intrinsic to a good but must be constructed; it is "the outcome of a collective process in which products become seen as possessing certain traits and occupying a specific position in relation to other products in the product space" (Beckert and Musselin 2013, p. 1; see also Callon et al. 2002). This process of qualification has also been referred to as "stabilization" (Slater 2002), "individualization" (Callon and Muniesa 2005), or "product differentiation" (White 1981). The consumer must be able to locate the product within a larger class of goods, but at the same time recognize the unique nature of that particular product: "Defining a good means positioning it in a space of goods, in a system of differentiated similarities, of distinct yet connected categories" (Callon et al. 2002, p. 198). Because in the retail of used clothing, heterogeneous, unique items are being exchanged, it would seem that the buyer should be in a continual state of "requalification": always needing to "hesitate…wonder what they should buy…puzzled [like the buyer in a grocery store] when faced with an impressive range of orange juices or when they notice a new product standing out among the others" (Callon et al. 2002, p. 206).

The "new new economic sociology"[22] is focused on the way that markets are organized as socio-material networks and perform economic realities into being (McFall 2009, Frankel 2015). As McFall describes, the strength of economic sociological approaches that focus on socio-technical market devices is that they offer a "pragmatic, material, and mundane" account

[22] As opposed to the "new economic sociology," which refers to the subdiscipline which arose in the mid-1980s and could be characterized by its attention to the social nature of economic phenomena, the embeddedness of economic phenomena in social life, and the inadequacy of the atomized, rational-actor account of economic phenomena provided by the discipline of economics.

of precisely *how* economic objects and/or persons are brought into being (2009, p. 268). McFall and coauthors insist on focusing not just on the devices of market attachment, but also the "arts," explaining that while the notion of "device" has a connotation of something that works, "'arts' better signals the uncertainty, guesswork, sentiment, luck, mystery and failure that is also inherent in attachment" (2017, p. 10). In the exchange of used clothing, the element of uncertainty and the art of conjuring attachment are particularly apparent, as buyers and sellers deal with materially heterogeneous items in often quite ad hoc and improvised ways. Even routinized procedures of classification and sorting are prone to unexpected failure.

In the exchange of used clothing, qualification is processual and ongoing, and as discussed in Chapter 5, it begins with earlier sorting processes which direct the flow of items into different spaces and to different clienteles. In this chapter I argue that qualification should be understood in relation to the pragmatic, materially specific processes through which used *things* are produced as knowable *objects* in the market for used clothing.

6.2 Production of Used Clothing as a Retail Object

Callon and coauthors (2002) argue that changes in production practices should be thought of as part of processes of qualification, just as much as re-branding a product. For instance, an orange juice producer might combat declining sales by using different oranges, producing a differently-tasting juice, or changing the packaging (Callon et al. 2002, p. 206). Changes in the production process, and changes in the "marketing" process through strategies such as branding, are therefore equally part of qualification processes. Understanding qualification of used clothing in retail settings, then, should deal with the question of how used clothing is produced and how that production process can be modified.

Unlike in their first round of life as commodities, used goods are not mass produced. Mass production processes allow for an easy conflation of things with objects. In a market for new clothing, millions of mass-produced t-shirts are *things* in their individual specificity, but are simultaneously a *market object* which can be easily manipulated on a larger scale. It is this object-ness that allows for the particular top-down social relations of advertising and marketing that characterize much of the apparel industry. Advertising campaigns can feature particular items, store layouts can be centrally planned, and when stock runs low, t-shirts can be replenished with other t-shirts that fill the same relational object-position. But in markets for used goods, it becomes more obvious that things and objects are analytically separate. In the market for used clothes, millions of t-shirts which have each been worn by a different owner in a different way acquire unique patterns of wear. The shirts are *things* and preserve their thing-ness until they are produced as *objects* which can be exchanged in market relations. Things—former commodities, which have undergone heterogeneous and varied processes of wear—must undergo production processes that turn them into value-able objects. Used things, then, cannot be "mass qualified," so to speak. When attempting to demonstrate the quality of their products, sellers must deal with the heterogeneity of individual items. In the same vein, buyers cannot take advantage of judgment devices (Karpik 2010) in the same way as with new items.

The clothing sold in bulk used clothing stores, consignment shops, and vintage shops travels along distinct value chains with different value production mechanisms. Why consider these different contexts together? First, the barriers between the types of shops are permeable. An uninitiated or relatively uninterested consumer might not make a distinction between different types of used clothing shops. I noticed on many occasions during my observations that customers would enter a vintage shop and ask if it was a consignment or a bulk used clothing

shop, or enter a consignment shop and ask if it was a bulk used clothing shop. The differences are most visible to actors directly connected to the market; knowing the details of the supply stream makes the distinction visible. Furthermore, it is not only the customers who find the divisions between the ways of selling used clothing indistinct: particular items can and do easily move between spaces. In one serendipitous episode of observation, I noted a quite unique silky scarf in a bulk used clothing shop one afternoon, and the next morning I saw the same one in a consignment shop. Even if it was not the exact same item (though I suspect that it was), the fact that an identical item can be sold in multiple ways speaks to the connectedness of these ways of selling used clothing. Second, and relatedly, I consider bulk, consignment, and vintage together in order to make my analytical argument that value is produced through the production of different market *objects* from heterogeneous material *things*, which are qualified in a variety of ways in different assemblages.

Retail shops need to turn clothing purchased in lots, by the kilogram or bale, into individual items that customers encounter and make judgments about. Shops owned by wholesalers depend on multiple locations to move stock and create novelty, and use pricing systems to demonstrate quality. The customer encounters a constantly shifting, always potentially new and interesting object. Independently-owned shops, in contrast, do not have the infrastructure to physically displace the goods, so they rely on merchandising and other more static, spatially-confined techniques. Despite the fact that wholesale-owned and independently-owned shops are dealing with the same *things*, their variable ability to create an attractive and knowable *market object* translates into the variable success of these types of used clothing businesses. Vintage and consignment shops are able to employ more symbolic mechanisms of valuation based on the individuation of individual items as market objects because they have a

different sourcing and production process than the bulk used clothing market. When valuation is understood to be contingent upon this transformation of things into objects, rather than done with respect to already-existing objects, it is possible to understand why quality can be reliably demonstrated in some cases but not others.

6.2.1 Wholesale-Owned Retail: Novelty and Change

After used clothing is sorted by wholesalers, it is sold to individual consumers in two ways: in retail shops owned by wholesalers, and in independently-owned shops. When used clothing is bought in a retail setting, one might think that the object of valuation is self-evidently the individual clothing items. As I show in this section and the following one, however, the market object for valuation is produced differently in wholesale-owned retail versus independently-owned retail. The wholesale object must be disaggregated into individual retail objects that consumers encounter. How do sellers in shops owned by wholesalers qualify their goods when the high level of heterogeneity of individual items precludes the possibility of building a coherent narrative for the shop, or even for individual items?

The solution is to utilize the volume of goods flowing through sorting warehouses to stock the shops with new goods on a regular basis. In shops owned by wholesalers, customers are presented with an ever-changing selection of goods that creates a sense of constant novelty. This novelty is not only based on the regular appearance of new *things* but of moving scales of valuation that create constantly changing price-quality configurations according to which customers can find and evaluate various market objects. In the case of retail owned by wholesalers, the object is created through sorting and classification, stock rotation systems, and pricing systems. In the next section I will describe the difficulties of independent used clothing

retailers that stem from this inability to rely on the infrastructure of multiple shop locations and warehousing (and the accompanying pricing systems).

The fact that wholesalers have multiple shop locations allows them to take advantage of multiple customer bases. A number of wholesalers told me that having multiple locations is crucial to having a successful business, since success depends on being able to sell as much of the material stream as you can. Przemek, whose family has owned several shops for years, told me that it is necessary to have "multiple fronts" to sell on. Klara described to me how each shop has a unique clientele that is interested in buying different things. Processes of qualification begin with these decisions made by wholesalers about where to direct certain types of items.

These shops' greatest advantage is their connection to wholesalers, which ensures that there is a steady stream of fresh goods. Where the individual items lack in desirability, or where wholesalers lack the ability to qualify their goods clearly to consumers via narratives, branding, or other marketing devices used in more organized market segments (Bogdanova 2013), wholesaler-owned shops make up for it in novelty, through constant rotation of stock and the shifting price systems that create a constantly moving reference point for value. In addition to being better able to sell different things in different locations, things from one shop that do not sell are often sent to another shop location for another chance. Moving goods from shop to shop keeps the general "product" appearing fresh and novel. These transfers of items from one shop to another happen according to regular schedules. When I asked, workers would often tell me that although it is worth coming on the morning of a delivery, because there is the biggest selection, it is also worth coming by at any time during the week because they put out more stock all throughout the week, so there is always the chance that something could be found.

Once the goods arrive at a particular shop location there are a variety of strategies employed in order to impose order and encourage shopping strategies that are tailored to the constantly shifting supply. These strategies comprise a kind of merchandising that, in the case of new apparel, is planned out at the corporate level, with display guides distributed to shops across a wide geographical area. Here, though, visual merchandising is done by workers in each individual shop based on what is available at the moment. Displays are created from thematically- or color-matched clothing. Kaja, a woman who used to work in a shop belonging to one of the biggest wholesalers in the country, told me that each day she and her coworkers would make a new display, which she interpreted as a way of creating order from chaos (see Figure 6.1). Clothes in these stores are not displayed in a completely heterogeneous jumble, even when displayed heaped in bins to be sold by the kilogram, but separated by type. Women's skirts and dresses may be in one pile, pants in another, men's sweaters in another, men's shirts in yet another. New clothing (that is, clothes that have been discarded and made part of this secondhand market but still have tags from their original sale) is often separated out and placed on a clearly-labeled rack.[23] Sorting is done either by sorters at the wholesaler's warehouse, or by shop workers, who spend most of their days hanging clothes in the appropriate location in the store. This type of order makes it easier for the customer to find what he or she is looking for, though it is still necessary to spend time combing through the racks or piles.

These stores have very few extra decorative elements. There may be some mannequins—usually half mannequins in the window of the shop and full mannequins inside—and the top perimeter of the room is often used as a display area, with seasonal outwear often hanging up

[23] A friend of a friend, who did not agree to speak with me because her contract prohibits disclosing information about her work, nevertheless conveyed to my friend that part of her job as manager in a wholesale-owned retail shop is to remove tags from clothing—from previous secondhand retail, such as charity shops in the UK. Whereas tags that show that the items are new are used as devices that add value, tags that betray traces of the item's secondhand biography are not.

near the ceiling (see Figure 6.2). There is functional signage indicating areas of the room ("men's shirts," "women's trousers," "children's clothing," and so on). Information about price is often hand-written or is displayed in a chart or in a display with changeable numbers that can display the particular day's price (see Figure 6.3). If there is music, usually it is a radio station playing pop music. Often there is simply silence.

Customers are encouraged to employ a mode of shopping that is appropriate to this display of novelty. I was told, and I heard other customers being told on multiple occasions, that it is "worth dedicating a lot of time" to searching through the racks. Shop attendants emphasized that one "can find something nice" [*coś fajnego się znajdzie*] but that it might not happen every time; it is necessary to come back regularly to see what is available. Encouraging this style of shopping serves to normalize and encourage a style of shopping that is time-consuming and is based around repeated and regular searches. The buyer has a very active role in this style of shopping, and must be willing to put in the work to seek out items that meet his or her implicit or explicit search criteria. In these shops, there can be no routinized attachment to particular types of goods with familiar qualities (Callon et al. 2002, p. 206). Instead, qualification is always a two-way encounter between shoppers and goods, a "process of ongoing, mutual adjustment which allows goods to become attached to consumers" (McFall 2009, p. 271).

The fundamental mechanism by which used clothing items are made into a knowable market object in retail shops owned by wholesalers is via different pricing systems. These systems often coexist alongside each other in one shop. In most shops, there are regularly-scheduled deliveries once or twice per week. The price fluctuates along with the delivery cycle. For clothes sold by the kilogram, the highest price is on the day of delivery, and slightly lower each day thereafter, until the day before a new delivery when items are priced at the incredibly

low price of 1 or 2 złoty. Other items, in the same shop, are priced individually rather than being given a price according to their weight. These are pieces that have been specially set apart by sorters at the wholesale stage to be put on a hanger and given an individual price. These items, also, drop in price throughout the week, by a given percentage that increases throughout the week. Thus while the prices are highest on the day of a new delivery, the potential "quality" of goods is also the highest on that day—because the best items have not yet been bought. Higher prices indicate the greatest chance of style, quality, and selection in the first few moments after the doors open on the morning of a delivery.

Cyclical pricing systems have the effect of making all kinds of goods attractive to customers. As prices fall, some items become more desirable. Whereas at the start of the pricing cycle, people may be more willing to pay more for what they consider to be "status goods"—fashionable brand-name items—by the end of the pricing cycle, evaluations are more oriented to "standard goods"—those judged on their material qualities or functionality (Aspers 2009). On several occasions I observed women waiting to make certain kinds of purchases until a later day in the pricing cycle. One middle-aged woman instructed another perusing the bins with her that "you don't buy this kind of thing now," referring to a pillowcase that her friend had picked up with interest. On another occasion, an elderly woman asked the shop attendant to confirm that the prices of the cotton undershirts that she had in her basket would be "even cheaper" later in the week, and decided against buying them that day. Evaluation of these items, using criteria of use value with relation to price, corresponds to the mechanisms of a standard market. People with low incomes, like pensioners, can take advantage of this point in the cycle to buy items for their "physical value," rather than paying more for perceived symbolic "positional" or "imaginative" value (Beckert 2016, p. 195).

When prices get low enough, clothing items can be bought for their material components rather than as garments to wear as such. On a day when all items cost 1 or 2 złoty, people come in looking for items with useable buttons, or for items made out of interesting material that can be repurposed. As Crewe and Gregson have observed at car boot sales in the UK, people do not always form attachments in relation to the "commodity we see" but instead to "a particular attribute of it which will be realized only when they return home and either renovate, alter, transform or display it" (1998, p. 48). The low prices at the end of the cycle make this mode of qualification possible, reinforcing the importance of understanding distinctions between the *objects* being valued and the physical *things* passing through retail spaces.

In shops that use this cyclical pricing system, items that have been individualized by pricing can be transferred to the by-kilo piles, which effectively demotes them in status, though not necessarily always in price. During my interview with Andżelika, a manager at one of the locations of another Krakow-based wholesale chain, she was busily marking down the price of jewelry and assorted cosmetic items on plastic stickers. She told me that she is constantly occupied with this type of work, and lowering prices is necessary to "push things forward" that have not yet sold. The shop she works in has bins of clothes that are priced by the kilogram, as well as items on hangers that are individually priced. Andżelika also told me that when individually-priced items from hangers have not sold after a few days or weeks, she takes them off the hangers and throws them onto the pile of clothes in the by-kilo bin.

Utilizing one pricing system or another is (as in other markets, like the market for contemporary art as described by Velthius (2003 and 2005)) itself a signifying act that is central to constructing the categories and knowledge conditions of the market. The pricing act clearly creates distinctions, but those distinctions can be interpreted in different ways. In a conversation

about shopping for used clothes with two girlfriends in their late 20s, one of them told us that she always avoids the by-kilo areas of shops, since she feels that it means that someone has decided that those things are worse quality and not worth as much. The other disagreed, saying that the by-kilo areas are where the best and most interesting items are to be found. A woman I spoke to outside of a shop with clothing sold exclusively by weight said that she prefers that type of pricing system, as it's "more honest – it's like everything is the same. Pricing [by item] isn't always right." On the other hand, a man shopping with his family while visiting Krakow from Gdańsk told me that he prefers clothing priced by item because it's "better quality. There is only garbage by weight [*są tylko odpady*]. It's hard to dig something up."

Another type of pricing mechanism deals with the problem of the indeterminacy of the market object in a different way. In some cases, all items or classes of items are given a uniform price. Either every item in the store costs a given amount, or different types of items will be given their own prices. For instance, Klara, a wholesaler whose family has been in the business for almost two decades, told me that in her shops she always prices all pants at 10 złoty. This is because, as she explained to me, the nature of pants makes it very difficult for her to determine what a given pair should cost. This is the most difficult item to sell, because the fit must be much more precise than, say, a skirt or a blouse. Not only must the pair of pants fit the customer, but the other material qualities of the item must also be pleasing (the material, the color, the presence or lack of signs of wear from its first owner(s)), and the pants must also be acceptable in terms of style. Klara told me that she prefers to set one price so that that the customer can decide for him- or herself which pair of pants is the best value. Another chain of stores applies the same rule that Klara uses, but applies one price to all items in the store. Each store has one price that applies to all items, but the price is different in each store (one may sell everything for 5 złoty, while

another may sell everything for 25 złoty).[24] Here, a winter coat costs the same as a cotton t-shirt. The same rule described above by Klara applies here: the customer decides which items are "worth the price." The wholesaler's pricing work in this case takes the form of sorting the items into price classes, according to which they can be distributed among different stores.

Knowing the pricing system gives people an opportunity to try and cheat it to their advantage. Hanka, a costume designer who travels all around Poland to shop for used clothing, says that she has seen tricks that people use, like cutting the buttons off a coat so that no one will want it, and then waiting to buy it when it goes on sale later in the cycle. She says that she has seen clothing hidden in various places: stuffed into a radiator, or into the sleeve of a snow suit. Employees also know how to cheat the system. Wiktor, a wholesaler, tells me that it is easy for dishonest employees to earn extra income by employing tricks like not entering an item into the cash register when it is sold. When the price of the item falls on the next day, the employee can then enter it, and pocket the difference in price.

While multiple pricing systems ensure that the non-uniform, heterogeneous goods on offer can be understood as different kinds of objects by different customers, sometimes the existence of multiple pricing systems makes the value of objects ambiguous in a way that threatens their potential value. Where existence of multiple possible pricing systems allows for flexibility in the way that customers evaluate the value of an item, it can also make a particular item a "bad deal." I observed a group of women methodically combing through a rack of women's t-shirts, commenting on the price. In this particular store all items are sold for 5 złoty. Holding up a cotton t-shirt, one woman remarked to her companions that if it were sold by

[24] The more expensive shops may be, although are not always necessarily, in locations that attract a more affluent clientele. In at least one case, a 5 złoty shop and a 25 złoty shop are located next door to each other. While some customers may be more willing or able to pay the higher price, those same customers might try to see what they can find for 5 złoty.

weight, the current price would be revealed to be actually expensive. “How much could this weigh?” she asked, then calculating a price based on a per-kilo price from another store. On the whole, however, the individualized market objects produced in retail shops connected to wholesalers are more value-able than those produced in independently-owned retail shops, which I describe below.

6.2.2 Independently-Owned Retail: Static Merchandising Techniques

I have shown in the section above how in shops owned by wholesalers, the infrastructure of warehousing and multiple shop locations with regular stock rotation, market tools (pricing systems), and the items themselves work together to produce a market object characterized by novelty which can be qualified flexibly in a number of ways. In this section, I discuss why independently-owned shops are unable to produce a desirable market object. Whereas the wholesaler-owned shops create a knowable and desirable market object by manipulating used clothing items through the classification systems that I have described above, independent shop owners struggle to do so. The organizational structure of this part of the market does not allow for the production of such an object, even if the *market object* here is also created from the same *things* as with shops connected to wholesalers. Independent shop owners do not have invested and frozen capital in the form of stock, warehouses, and transportation that would allow them to treat the used clothes that they buy as a bulk object. Shop owners cannot employ a shifting price system like the one described above to manipulate the market object as a status or standard good. The things that are sold in these independently-owned shops are ineffective market objects because the incongruity between the bulk nature of the market object at the point of wholesale

and the need to individualize the market object at the point of retail cannot be overcome by consistent introduction of novelty.

The inability of shop owners to make used clothing into a value-able market object results in less successful businesses and frequent closures or failures. During my fieldwork, two of the shops where I conducted interviews with shop owners went out of business. Both of them had only been open for about six months. Stores where I did not manage to get interviews also closed; new stores opened during and after the period of my research. This situation may be considered representative of the general situation of individually-owned bulk used clothing shops. In contrast, stores connected to wholesalers tend to operate for years.

Considering market failures like these alongside successful market transactions is at the heart of the approach to attachment developed by McFall and coauthors (2017). Citing Callon's work on attachment, they point out that "[u]nderstanding the puzzle of the market…means investigating the mixture of fragile and resilient attachments that underpin the success and failure of commercial transactions" (McFall et al. 2017, p. 16). Stability, or a lack thereof, in different market segments is an outcome to be explained. The capacity to reliably and consistently make the same types of *things* into more or less valuable *objects* is an emergent characteristic of the organization of things in markets—understood as assemblages which include market infrastructures, devices, the materials flowing through supply streams, etc.—in different configurations (McFall 2009, p. 273).

In bulk used clothing stores, market objects are produced through rotation of stock and with the use of pricing systems that allow a variety of people with varying tastes and needs to find an appropriate item. In independently-owned stores, where these techniques are not possible, shop owners try and devise ways to make the clothing appear accessible and appealing

through a kind of visual marketing. Dagmara explained to me that when she first opened her shop, she arranged clothes according to their color, but this turned out to be less successful than she had hoped because it seemed to give clients the impression that there was a smaller selection than there really was. Clients thought they had seen everything before they had really looked through the racks. Dagmara admits that the question of display is a tricky one: "Sometimes you have to finagle" [*czasem trzeba kombinować*][25] to get the clients to think there is a good selection of items. She now groups items according to type rather than color. Sometimes owners of these shops try to approximate the techniques of the wholesale-owned shops. Shop owners can try to make the clothing on their shelves attractive by having sales, taking markdowns, by setting out new things on a certain day of the week, or when possible by informally exchanging goods with a friend who owns a used clothing shop as well. Dagmara told me that for some time after she opened her shop, her weekly sales initially brought in clients, but that this strategy had become increasingly less effective.

Shopping for used clothing is markedly different from the process of shopping for new clothing items. Marketing, branding, and coherent narratives about the quality of clothing offered – all strategies used to convey information about items in firsthand retail settings – do not play a role in the "disorganized" market segment of secondhand retail (see Bogdanova 2013). Shoppers describe finding things by chance, often buying things that they were not searching for in particular. However, people are often uninterested in shopping in the mode required for this kind of used clothing. Bozena told me that clients do not want to expend the effort of going through the racks to search for an item that they might want. She complained that people come in looking for a shirt and expect her to find something for them – but they do not even know themselves

[25] *Kombinować* is a mode of action, well known to all Poles, that Wedel (1986, p. 94) has defined as to "scheme—to devise an ingenious, possibly devious situation" and Mazurek (2012, p. 303) has "loosely translated as 'finagling.'"

what they are looking for, and do not want to look themselves. She shrugged in exasperation: maybe "it hurts their arms" to flip through the hangers. It is difficult for her to help customers find something they want under such circumstances. When possible, she advises her customers, pulling items from the rack for them, and suggesting alterations that might be made to the garment to make it fit ideally.

It is a problem that the inventory of the shop does not turn over on a regular basis. Shop owners buy the clothes that line the racks of their shops from wholesalers, buying new batches when they have sold enough to make room for more. Making a good decision is crucial for them, because having a store full of things that will not sell is lethal for the business. Stagnation is apparent in the shops themselves. Whereas in used clothing stores owned by wholesalers, there is constant motion as customers come in and out, and shop clerks hang, sort, and rearrange clothes, independently-owned used clothing stores are characterized by stillness. During my interviews with women who owned these types of stores, I heard about long stretches of time with nothing to do, of boredom, and of lack of movement in the store. Thus, it is difficult for independently-owned clothing stores to attract potential customers. The recognizable tropes of wholesale-owned clothing stores are not present (the bins of clothing, the frequent deliveries, the prices predictably falling throughout the week), yet there is not a level of organization on par with that of a boutique with new clothing.

These independently-owned shops are in competition with wholesale-owned shops. Customers tend to compare independently-owned shops to stores owned by wholesalers, as it is not always apparent or relevant to the customer what the ownership structure of various stores is. Dagmara, whom I first interviewed when her store had been open for only three months, told me that some clients come in looking for clothing sold by weight in bins, and when they see that she

has clothing arranged on hangers and individually priced, they turn around and leave. She is not sure why this is so, as she is careful to offer "affordable prices" based on her observations of what prices are in other stores in the neighborhood. Though she and others are careful to offer competitive prices, they cannot compete with the prices on the final days of the week in the pricing cycle in shops owned by wholesalers. Wholesalers can sell clothes in their stores at the same prices that they sell to business owners. Bozena told me about the store down the street, a shop owned by a wholesaler that has been in the bulk used clothing business since the early 1990s. There, they sell clothing for as low as 1 or 2 złoty per item, and Bozena is incredulous that they are able to sell at such prices. She doesn't know where they get those things to be able to sell for such low prices, she told me. She showed me a rack of men's pants that she had marked as priced at 5 złoty – so they would sell, she told me. Despite pricing things at what she considers to be very low prices, she told me that people are still sometimes disappointed or annoyed to find that her prices aren't as low as they would like.

The difficulty these shops have competing with wholesale-owned shops cannot be explained by price alone. It is not that independently-owned used clothing shops necessarily have higher prices than in shops owned by wholesalers (though this is sometimes the case). It cannot be explained by a reference to the quality of individual items, either. The items in independently-owned shops are not necessarily less fashionable or in worse material condition than those sold in shops owned by wholesalers. The relevant explanation is that when equally-attractive, equally-priced individual used clothing items are sold in independently-owned clothing shops, the chances of a customer finding them are lower. This is because independently-owned used clothing shops seem to be offering a lower-quality market object than do wholesale-owned used clothing shops. Retail shopping for used clothing items is an idiosyncratic process based on

search and chance, so the ability to attract customers into one's store based on the market object one seems to be selling is crucial. As a used clothing shop owner interviewed by a journalist said, the battle between used clothing stores is over getting clients interested in appealing and good quality stock (Uliczny 2009). Independent shop owners cannot produce an object whose value can be reliably demonstrated because they are unable to employ the techniques that wholesalers use (cyclical pricing systems, passing goods between stores, regular "disposal" or rejection systems) to resolve the conflict between the heterogeneity inherent in the bulk market object and the need to make the individual items that the customers see as knowable and desirable.

Independent shop owners generally buy used clothes in bulk from wholesalers. The relative lack of dynamic capacity in their qualification strategies means that they incur a great deal of loss when purchasing stock in this way. Both Dagmara and Bozena report that when they buy unsorted bales, they have to throw out up to 60% of the items. Unlike wholesalers that I spoke to, who uniformly sold items that were unsuitable for sale as clothing to fabric recyclers, thus cutting their losses, Dagmara says that when she has to get rid of things, she simply puts them in the ubiquitous clothes-recycling bins that stand on the street, or gives them to a friend who says she has someone who could use the things. In this segment of the bulk used clothing market, those with less power to sort items are at a clear disadvantage relative to those who hold the power to sort: to accept, reject, and classify clothing items which will become goods for sale.

6.2.3 "Added Value" Retail: Curated "used clothes," consignment, and vintage

There are some independent used clothing shop owners who attempt to create a more curated collection of items and craft a brand image for their shop that reflects the type of items

that they sell. As Gosia, a devoted bulk used clothing shopper, explained to me, in a bulk used clothing shop there is no "added value"—you are simply buying a piece of clothing. In a shop with new clothing at the mall, or at one of the shops described below, in contrast, the shopper is not just buying the item but the image, narrative, or values associated with that item. In more-organized market segments for used things, narratives and branding are important market devices that convey information to buyers about the qualities of goods being sold (Bogdanova 2013). The ability to utilize such marketing techniques is contingent upon an underlying level of standardization of the goods offered, achieved through production/sorting processes that take place in other locations and prior to the moment of narrative-based valuation.

People involved in the bulk used clothing trade most often say that they saw a business opportunity: Dagmara's friend owned a used clothing store and she thought that she could open one too; Bozena observed how many used clothing stores there were and thought that since there are so many, it must be a good business. People who own more curated shops, on the other hand, often speak of their work in terms of love and personal connection. Those who own shops of this type speak about them in terms of their personal tastes and lifestyle. The stock in these shops is often in many cases an extension of the owners' personal collections (see also Gregson and Crewe 2003, p. 63). Vintage shop owners report that they had amassed such an extensive collection that it seemed natural at some point to open a shop. Statements like "I identify with what I do" or "the shop is my child" are common among owners of these types of shops. This sort of personal identification with the work and the goods is part of the process of qualification of goods in terms of narratives and branding.

Curated "Used Clothing"

Independent shop owners who want to create a brand image do not buy used clothing

items by the kilogram. They buy instead from wholesale-owned shops where prices are low enough that they can buy individual items, or travel to used clothing retail shops in small towns and rural areas in order to find appropriate pieces that can be sold at a mark-up. This buying strategy is time-intensive and more expensive than buying by the kilogram from a wholesaler.[26] It is also a potentially risky strategy. Like other goods that straddle multiple categories, they are less potentially valuable market objects (Zuckerman 1999), both because sellers are less able to convey clearly what it is that they are selling and because buyers are less equipped to evaluate goods that fall outside of clearly defined categories (Hsu et al. 2009). These stores resemble bulk used clothing stores, and are often located in the same areas as those other types of shops. Aniela, a co-owner of a shop of this type, described the difficulties of her strategy to me when she acknowledged that selling only things that she likes or would wear herself sometimes seems to be a disadvantage for her business when older women come in, in the process of visiting all the used clothing shops on the street, and cannot find anything for themselves. Despite her concerns, however, their strategy has paid off considerably for herself and the other co-owner, as they have been able to open three additional shop locations in Krakow with the same style of clothing over the course of four years.

Aniela, and others like her who choose a similar strategy, produce used clothing objects in a different way than Bożena and Dagmara. Her selection and sorting processes are different, as are the qualification strategies that she can subsequently use. Like owners of consignment and vintage shops, which are described in the sections below, she selects individual pieces that are coherent with the brand that she wants to develop and are aimed at a particular clientele (see Botticello (2013) for a description of several re-sellers working in similar ways in the UK).

[26] It also depends on the sellers' expert knowledge of fashion and is often a business venture that has grown out of a personal love for used clothing. This topic will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 8.

Because she employs a consistent strategy based on pre-emptive sorting at the point of supply, Aniela is able to sell clothing items with a coherent aesthetic, effectively producing a brand for her shop. Whereas Dagmara and Bożena's shops resemble the no-frills shops owned by wholesalers, Aniela's shops are spaces which are carefully arranged to convey an attractive and fashionable aesthetic: dressing room curtains with a trendy palm print, leafy green houseplants of the sort that can be bought at IKEA and which are Instagram- and Facebook-friendly, fresh flowers, framed graphic prints on the walls. She plays music from her own playlists. She runs a Facebook page and Instagram profiles for her shop, regularly posting styled outfits using fresh stock, often featuring visible brand names. She favors a colorful aesthetic, bordering on a knowing kitsch: Pokemon sweatshits, t-shirts with prominent Coca-Cola or MTV logos, bright Hawaiian prints, colorful track suit jackets. Compared to the way that qualification happens in shops owned by wholesalers, or in independently-owned shops where stock is bought in bulk lots from wholesalers, more information is conveyed about what these goods are, what sort of clientele might be interested. Aniela is positioning her products as fashion: as status goods (Aspers 2009 and 2010).

Consignment Shops

The consignment market is much smaller than the bulk used clothing market. Consignment stores are generally oriented towards women's clothes, shoes, and accessories, and provide women a way to get rid of unwanted items. Clothes are not collected on a donation basis; in a consignment model, the first owner remains the owner of the item until it is sold, at which point an agreed-upon sum of money is paid out to the first owner. If the item is not sold, the item goes back to the first owner, or in some cases, is donated to charity. Prices in this market are

higher than in the bulk used clothing market, yet not as high as prices in stores in the shopping mall. Price here is a technological artifact of the system whereby it is set; namely, the negotiation that is part of the relationship between consigners and shop owners and employees.

Each consignment store has its own target clientele and a corresponding style of clothes on offer. Already, the difference between the consignment mode and the bulk used clothes mode of selling used clothes is apparent. A consignment shop can have a "brand" in the sense that customers can expect a more or less coherent style and quality level (in terms of materials used, degree of wear and tear, etc.). This coherence is due to the fact that in the consignment model, it is the shop owner or employee that decides whether or not to accept an item from a client. Further, if an item does not sell after a period of time, or if customers do not seem to be interested in it, the shop owner returns the item to its owner. Items in the shop make up a highly-edited collection. Customers in consignment stores are in a sense co-producers of the goods available for sale, because collective disinterest in an item means that it will be removed from the shop.

Consignment operates as a status market in most cases: Jolanta, the owner of a consignment shop, told me that her business model depends on the fact that her customers are shopping for their wants and not their needs. It would be impossible for her to provide specific items to customers; people come to her store in search of something that they like but not for something in particular – a pink top in a particular style, for instance. But if customers come in and are open to finding *something* that they like, regardless of what that thing is, they will find something to buy in Jolanta's shop.

Items in consignment shops are always individually priced, based on the consignment payout sum that the primary owner has negotiated with the shop owner. This pricing system is

only one aspect of the phenomenon of greater individualization of items in the consignment market. Whereas in the bulk used clothing market, items are often one among many, in the consignment market, individualization (Callon and Muniesa 2005, p. 1233) is of utmost importance. Owners and employees speak to customers about the materials, the patterns, the style, and even the specific history of certain items. The mediated personal connection between primary owner and secondary owner means that consigned items are far more knowable than those sold in bulk. Knowability is, of course, a criterion of a docile object: one whose materiality and meaning has been tamed sufficiently to occupy a stable position within a social world (Domínguez Rubio 2014, p. 624).

It is difficult, however, to tame all of the used clothing sold in consignment shops. Despite the level of control that owners and employees have over the production of supply, they are still reliant upon consigning clients to bring clothes for sale. No matter what the preferences or vision of the owners and staff of the consignment shop, concessions and compromises must be made. Sometimes owners or employees must accept items that they do not necessarily want. Jolanta told me that sometimes she accepts items "out of politeness" or because a regular customer of hers has brought it. Kasia, a longtime employee of a consignment shop specializing in high-status, unique clothes and accessories, described to me how the quality of items offered has declined over time. The women that were bringing in their designer clothes for consignment simply cleaned out their wardrobes, she told me, and the level of quality of things for sale has since dropped.

Vintage Shops

As with independently-owned clothing shops with an explicit branding strategy, clothing ends up in vintage clothing stores after being individually selected by the shop owner. While it might be tempting to explain the relatively high prices of vintage clothing, especially as compared to the highly visible bulk used clothing market segment, as a factor of their greater status as compared to other goods, at least some of the cost of vintage goods is accounted for by the nature of the supply chains through which they travel. Vintage sellers say that not much Polish vintage clothing actually exists.[27] Clothing in vintage stores in Krakow is sourced from outside of Poland or from shops selling imported used clothing in small towns around the region or the country. Marta is a woman in her late 30s whose shop is stocked with things bought in the United States, at thrift shops, estate sales, and from vintage wholesalers. Ewa, who is a woman in her 20s who runs a shop together with her mother, told me that she bought many of her things at charity shops and flea markets in Sweden, where she had spent time during her studies.

Similarly to consigned used goods, vintage used goods are highly individualized. As a consumer in other markets, the shop owner buying items to sell as vintage is able to benefit from sorting processes done in other markets, and to do more sorting herself. If she buys something, she accepts the item, and then classifies it according to narratives. The market object is an individualized item, produced with the aid of narratives. Much of the work of selling them is connected to the historical narratives in which shop owners and employees situate the items. These narratives are usually quite general; an item might be described as a "dress from the 60s"

[27] Explanations offered to me for this were that the quality of items produced since WWII was generally poor, and higher-quality items were extremely rare. What good-quality items did exist were generally used as long as possible and are thus less suitable for resale as vintage than pieces which got less wear from their owners. According to Hanka, a costume designer who travels around Poland and shops nearly every day in used clothing stores, Polish "fashion" from the socialist period is starting to show up. Her theory is that these items belonged to Polish emigrants to the UK or Germany who have recently died and whose children have not recognized the brand/designer names, so have simply given the clothes away.

(see Figure 6.4) or a client might be shown a reference book with a two-page spread describing poodle skirts and sock hops to help her contextualize a voluminous skirt with a felt poodle.

Along with this narrative individualization, vintage goods are also materially treated in an individual fashion. Items are cleaned, repaired, and altered as needed. Marta described to me how when she finds items she wants to buy for her shop, she envisions alternative uses for them. For instance, a skirt in a very large size can become a dress, or a dress with a stained top might have its top half lopped off to become a skirt. While I was in her shop, a woman came in dressed head to toe in a vintage look. She and Marta had a spirited discussion about the ways in which she had altered the jacket she was wearing and whether or not Marta should remove the face-covering lace from a jaunty 1940s hat on display behind the cash register. These alterations and conscious manipulations result in a coherent set of goods within any given shop.

Because the demand for vintage is not strongly developed in Poland, and they cannot rely simply on walk-in business in their shops, Marta and Ewa rely on an Internet presence to stimulate sales. Both have Facebook pages for their businesses, and Marta maintains an online shop. Marta is frank about the amount of work that she must invest in the online shop: she hires a model and photographer, styles looks, and must update the online inventory when something sells in her physical shop. The unique nature of vintage goods, while it allows for a narrative individualization, also means that sales methods that reach a much larger audience, and work well for mass-produced items, require a great deal of work to maintain, as each unique item requires a great deal of work to list.

One final way in which vintage goods are highly individualized is the way in which their heterogeneity is treated. In all used clothing markets, items are singular "snowflakes" that a customer cannot simply choose in another size or color. In the vintage market, this uniqueness is

turned into an explicit asset. Marta says that sometimes customers will ask her if she has a particular item in another size or color, but she says with satisfaction: there isn't another one! The vintage clothing market relies on a balance between rarity and availability of the goods. While vintage clothing is meant to distinguish the wearer, if vintage items are too rare, there simply cannot be a market for vintage. According to Marta, the market for vintage clothes is, unfortunately, headed in that direction. The economic crisis since 2008 has meant that women in Western countries rid themselves of less than they used to. The golden age for vintage was, Marta says, the 1980s, an age of excess when women bought and got rid of things with the tags still on them. Damiano, a vintage enthusiast from Italy living in Krakow, told me that vintage is like gold—and soon, it will run out.

This very material reality of the exhaustibility of "vintage" clothing means that shops selling exclusively vintage items are rarer than those with some combination of vintage and modern items. Both Marta's and Ewa's shops were defined as vintage shops, but actually sold a combination of contemporary and older pieces. The one "true" vintage shop had some scattered items that were more contemporary, which works against the narrative built around the clothes. During my observations in Marta's shop, I inspected a rack of belts while two young women next to me considered some purses. One of them held up a bag, saying that she liked it, and the other whispered pointedly in her ear, barely loud enough for me to hear: "It's contemporary." The first woman dropped the bag, and nodding, agreed: "I thought so." The two left the shop.

6.3 Conclusion

In the market for used clothing, order and stability are pragmatic material achievements. Qualification processes are processual, iterative, and highly contingent on shifting material

possibilities. Considering qualification means looking at a variety of production practices and strategies through which market objects are produced. Heterogeneous things are configured and reconfigured, with the help of infrastructures, market devices like pricing systems, and narrative devices to produce objects which can be evaluated and so that processes of attachment can take place.

In this chapter I have distinguished between used clothing sold in "bulk" from global supply chains from that sold in more curated shops like consignment or vintage shops from other supply chains. Doing so, with an eye to how qualification of goods happens in each of these settings, helps us see contingency and difference, while bringing into starker relief those patterns (relations) which are constant. Beckert (2009) has proposed that the question of social order should be at the center of a sociological approach to understanding markets. How is uncertainty overcome and how are the disparate, often conflicting motives and interests of participants to the market transactions reconciled? I have approached the question of order in this chapter as a material problem as well as a problem of knowledge.

In doing so, I have drawn on an assemblage approach, focusing on how heterogeneous material things are organized. The question of social order is also at the center of a critique often leveled at the assemblage approach. One such typical approach is elaborated by Elder-Vass, who finds that "central to this ontology [of assemblage developed by Latour] is a denial of natural stabilities and repeatedly instantiated types" (2014, p. 6). Elder-Vass goes on to cite Harman, who writes: "For Latour an actant [and thus an assemblage] is always an *event*, and events are always completely specific: 'everything happens only once, and at one place'" (Harman 2009 and internal quote from Latour 1993 in Elder-Vass 2014, p. 6).

It is, however, possible to read Latour as stressing *both* the specificity of assemblages as events *and* the emergent patterning of social life that arises when the components of assemblages are brought together in consistent ways. Thinking in terms of assemblages does not mean denying that the social world is patterned, surrendering to radical contingency (Elder-Vass 2014). It *does* mean describing in sufficient detail the way that the world is patterned. In the case of understanding valuation, it means not reducing qualification to marketing, and insisting on a material, relational account of how the stuff of the world is socio-materially organized. Shifting attention in studies of valuation from the moment of exchange—with a supposedly finished object being exchanged—to processes of production shows that Latour's insistence on the contingency of assemblages is not an approach that dissolves the patterns and structures of social life into a sea of difference. On the contrary, putting assemblages at the forefront of analysis shows how patterns are able to emerge from the heterogeneity of social (material and symbolic) life. Focusing explanation on the level of things and objects produces an account of emergent patterns, like how valuation of goods in markets works. This is the type of account of social order that does not inadvertently bracket out material realities or take a historical contingency (the possibility and ubiquity of standardized mass production) as a constant. Thinking in terms of assemblages and focusing on the way that heterogeneous things are turned into knowable objects brings the question of production into focus.

In this chapter I have focused on the object side of the co-production of subjects and objects through processes of attachment: the qualification of goods. I now turn in Chapter 7 to the question of the production of subjects.

6.4 Figures

Figure 6.1: The day's display

Figure 6.2: Window display with half mannequins

Figure 6.3: Display showing the current day's price. This photo was taken on the fourth day of the sale cycle, so the price is 28 złoty per kilogram.

Figure 6.4: A price tag indicating the era of a vintage dress

CHAPTER 7

Retail of Used Clothing in Poland:

Value and attachment

Why do Polish consumers want to buy imported used clothing? After the transition to a free market, it seemed to many to be self-evident that Polish consumers would gravitate towards Western goods. In fact, textile recyclers often spoke about their industry in these terms. It was a "starved" market: one that was ready to accept anything different, better, and especially produced in the West. Tropes of greyness, poor quality, and shortage have often served as heuristics for understanding socialist consumer realities prior to the transition (Fehervary 2009 and 2013). Western goods, moreover, were symbolically charged as alternatives—challenges—to the "unified dress" and "imposed models" that were imposed by a centralized ideology regarding fashion as well as centralized planning and production (Pelka 2007, p. 10, translation mine).

But what has happened to the perceived quality of used Western clothing now that new clothes from Western brands are widely available within the country? Poland's free market history is still only a few decades old, and socialist times, when access to goods was much more restricted, are still a reference point for anyone who spent even a few years of their childhood under that regime (those born in the mid-1980s or earlier). Many people spoke to me about their memories of those times, and their memories of the transition. Shopping malls appeared first in big cities, then spread throughout the country. Today, shopping malls and hypermarkets bring the products of globalized supply chains and Western brands to Polish shoppers. It would seem that

consumer choice has never been greater. It is in this context that we must understand Polish consumer preferences for used clothes.

By a variety of measures, interest in used clothing in Poland is still growing. In 2010, the Public Opinion Research Center (*Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej*, CBOS) included the option for the first time for respondents to a survey about consumption practices to indicate that they shop for clothing, undergarments, and shoes in shops selling used items (CBOS 2011a). Although only 4% of respondents from a random, representative sample indicated that they buy these items used, the inclusion of the question on the survey (the fifth of its kind since 1997) indicates the growing importance of the used clothing industry. In 2010 when the survey was conducted, both import and export had been following a rising trend in Poland since the turn of the millennium (see Figure 1.1). It is also possible that the number is grossly under-reported. A spate of journalists reported in 2016 that ten million adult Poles—nearly one third of the population—wear clothing from secondhand shops.[28] On the high end, a survey in 2010 found that 42% of Poles wear clothing from secondhand shops (Newsweek 2010). The best data available indicate that there are likely around 15,000 used clothing shops in Poland.[29] Used clothing is a fixture in the social landscape. Its popularity is evidenced by the number of ways that people refer to it. In addition to the generic "used clothing" [*odzież używana*], it is also referred to as "cheap clothing" [*tania odzież*], as "rags" [*ciuchy*, *szmaty*, *lumpy* and the corresponding names for the shops: *ciucholand*, *szmateks*, *lumpeks*], or the ironic and rhyming *tani Armani* [cheap Armani].

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[28] Journalists reported that this number came from the Polish Central Statistical Bureau (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny*: GUS), but when I inquired about the report that these figures came from, a GUS employee was unable to track it down for me (saying "this is the first I've heard of it" and "I don't think it exists"). None of the journalists that I contacted responded to my inquiries.

[29] These data come from GUS. The smallest category of retail that is recorded is "retail sale of second-hand goods in specialized stores" (CEIDG 2007). The number for 2018—15,626—includes all used bookstores, antique shops, and other types of stores with used goods.

In this chapter I describe how Polish consumers encounter and understand imported used clothing.[30] I have three aims in this chapter. Firstly, I provide an overview of the market for imported used clothing in Krakow and its dynamics, with some consideration of the specificity of Krakow as compared to the rest of Poland. I identify different types of shoppers and situate imported used clothes in relation to other circuits of retail, including further rounds of resale. Secondly, I consider the various conceptions of quality that customers find meaningful. In particular, consumers make distinctions between used clothes and new clothes, and between used clothes and vintage clothes. Thirdly, I consider the role of the material qualities of used clothing in the meanings that consumers understand them to have. Processes of sensing and deftly exploiting not only symbolic distinctions but also material distinctions between heterogeneous items are at the center of judgments of the value of used clothing. I employ a pragmatic approach, focusing on what people say about what is important to them and how they go about securing clothing with these qualities. I draw out these themes by focusing on the three criteria that were most often cited to me as reasons used clothing is desirable: price, quality, and selection. At the end of the chapter I discuss the mode of shopping through which used clothes are encountered.

7.1 Understanding preferences

In this chapter, I will examine Polish consumers' preferences for used clothing through the pragmatic lens of *attachment*. The attachment approach has been developed as an alternative

[30] While used clothing is considered desirable to a great many people, there are of course others who are uninterested in shopping for used clothes. People refer to the unpleasant smell of used clothing stores, saying that they do not like the experience of shopping there. People say that they can never find anything in used clothing shops, though many people can refer to a sister or friend who can. Relatedly, some people complain that it takes too long to find anything in used clothing stores, and would rather just go to the mall where the experience is made easy. I focus on those who do buy used clothing rather than those who do not.

to what have been called "critical" approaches. It has become something of an orthodoxy in the social sciences to explain away perceived differences in the material quality of objects. These sorts of explanations are characterized by what has been called the "hermeneutic of suspicion" (Felski 2015; see also Ricoeur 1969 and Boltanski 1990 in Silber 2009). Whereas our respondents might refer to the quality of an item of clothing, we sociologists know that judgments of quality are "really" learned in particular social positions. Though our respondents say one thing, they are "really" motivated by something else; though people claim to attend to certain aspects of the world, what "actually" informs their actions is an underlying structure unknown to them. Especially when it comes to judgments of aesthetic value, sociological accounts tend to be of the "de-mystifying" variety. Latour writes about the critical attitude with which matters of aesthetics have been treated in sociology: "Every sculpture, painting, *haute cuisine* dish, techno rave, and novel has been explained to nothingness by the social factors 'hidden behind' them" (2005, p. 236). Critical approaches seek to explain by "invoking some larger frame…some final explanation or cause: social, cultural, psychoanalytical, historical, or linguistic" (Felski 2015, p. 189). In the subfields of economic and cultural sociology, these approaches focus on the social underpinnings of preferences or judgments.

7.1.1. Critical sociology

Economic sociology

Economic sociology has focused the ways that consumer desires are created and the social nature of preferences. The question of how consumer preferences are constituted is one of the central problems in the sociology of markets (Beckert 2009). Consumer needs, desires, and

preferences for goods are not innate, natural, or already-existing, but are created in markets and other social and historical processes (Slater 1997; Bourdieu 2005; Rona-Tas and Guseva 2014). Economic sociologists have tended to focus on the symbolic aspects of consumer goods to explain why someone would prefer one over another. One form this has taken is theories of the "positional value" of goods (Beckert 2016, p. 195). In this category are classical analyses of consumption, like Veblen (1915) and Simmel (1957), who theorized consumption of particular goods as a way of signaling social status. Common to these approaches is the observation that there is nothing inherently valuable in the goods that are consumed; value is instead a reflection or demonstration of the social "value" of the person consuming the goods. When it comes to aesthetic goods in particular, like clothing, preferences arise in relation to status orders rather than objective qualities of the goods themselves (Aspers 2009 and 2010; Beckert and Aspers 2011). To say that goods have positional value does not only mean that they reflect a particular social order, but can also mean that consumption patterns actually serve to legitimate it and reproduce it (Bourdieu 1984).

Another dimension of the symbolic value of goods is their "imaginative value" (Beckert 2016, p. 195). Imaginative value is related to positional value but refers in particular to the meanings that consumers understand goods to have. These meanings can refer to visions the consumer has of him or herself but can also refer to transcendental values, or evoke connections to other places and times. Branded garment retailers—those shops that we encounter in the shopping mall or on the main shopping streets in cities—construct identities that not only allow consumers to differentiate them from other brands in the market, but also allow consumers to identify with them and their goods, to feel "this is for me" (Aspers 2010, p. 76). The value of antique furniture is demonstrated in part through narratives of provenance which demonstrate

quality by referring to evocative historical times, persons, and events, beyond reference to craftsmanship or any other intrinsic values of the objects (Bogdanova 2013).[31]

To focus on imaginative value goes farther than simply referring to social status and is connected to the specific images and understandings that goods are tied to. But these approaches stop short of acknowledging any potential basis of these sorts of narratives in really-existing differences. Beckert describes imaginative value in terms of the "imaginaries" that goods are connected to; the "make-believe" agreements among consumers about the meaning of a brand or product; the "fiction" of the promised value of an object; and the consumer "dreams" which are manufactured by the advertising industry and which propel consumer desire (2016, pp. 188-214). Of course, imaginaries do have "real consequences because dominant discourses affect the distribution of resources and can thus prevent or marginalize alternative futures" (Beckert 2016, p. 185). In other words, real futures are created, but that creation happens nevertheless on the basis of social fiction. These approaches, thus, while acknowledging the real-world consequences of consumer beliefs, dismiss the possibility that these beliefs and meanings are rooted in a more solid ground than social conventions.[32]

Cultural sociology

In cultural sociology, the concept of taste is one way of theorizing the relationships of people to the world of things. Since Bourdieu (1984) disenchanted the aesthetic gaze, showing

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[31] In Chapter 6 I described the organizational and material "substratum" (Domínguez Rubio and Silva 2013) that is necessary for deploying such qualification devices.

[32] I should qualify here that of course I am not interpreting Beckert and Aspers as anti-realists or accusing them of not believing that differences in the material qualities of things exist. Aspers (2009), for instance, writes about standard markets where differences in price correspond to the material qualities of the goods. It is just a curious feature of his thought that when it comes to aesthetic goods, he is ready to dismiss material differences between products as insignificant. An alternative approach would be to acknowledge that material differences do exist alongside socially-constructed interpretations of those differences, and that both are significant (see below for a discussion of how Fehervary (2009) does this).

how tastes are learned and embodied in ways that map on to particular positions in social space, this has been the predominant way in which preferences for things have been understood. Other scholars have followed suit, mapping Bourdieu's concepts onto other societies (Holt 2000; DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; Grief 2010). The taste for music (Bryson 1996), food (Ferguson 1988), and other cultural goods is explainable according to a social logic and can be seen as arising from social relationships. The thing itself, it is argued, does not matter. Lowbrow preferences can even be combined with highbrow ones in a cultural "omnivorous" disposition that signifies high cultural capital (Peterson and Kern 1996; Johnson and Baumann 2007). An article of clothing, for instance, could equally serve as a marker of high- or low-class status depending on the way is it is consumed and worn, and the signification of a particular good can change over time.[33]

Differences in taste can be at least partially explained by the social groups which serve as reference points, orienting individuals to aesthetics that serve as markers of social position. The idea that personal taste is influenced by meanings held in particular social groups has long been accepted in sociology (Blumer 1969; Lieberson and Bell 2002; Godart and Mears 2009; Mears 2011). In other words, what is experienced as personal taste is actually "collective taste" (Blumer 1969). Godart and Mears (2009) describe how in the fashion modeling industry, the personal tastes of cultural producers are entangled with status considerations and serve as mechanisms of exclusion. In all of these accounts, preferences are understood as an expression and perpetuation of social distinctions.

7.1.2. Sociology of attachment

[33] This point is the basis of Thompson's (1991) *Rubbish Theory*; namely, that the ability to socially consecrate something as valuable and no longer rubbish is a function of one's social status.

An alternative orientation to understanding taste and preferences is what has been called the "sociology of attachment." Attachment is a notion that spans economic and cultural sociology.[34] This literature offers a more pragmatic view that focuses on the ways that people come to feel affinities to objects. In Chapter 6 I focused in detail on the nature of attachment developed in economic sociology specifically, looking at the tools, devices, and "arts" (McFall et al. 2017) deployed by used clothing retailers. In cultural sociology, considering attachment means offering explanations that take actors' experiences seriously; providing a pragmatic account of the encounter between people and things that they form judgments about; and returning focus to the objects being sensed, evaluated, and valued (or not). As Benzecry (2011) observes about understanding what drives opera fanatics, it is not always possible to explain attachment in terms of status considerations. By reducing our understanding of the mechanisms, motivations, and underlying structures of aesthetic choices to status, we risk missing a great deal of rich detail about the ways that people form attachments to things. The aim is not to explain away the attachment that people make with goods as "really" about something else, but to explain the attachment itself. Most significantly, reducing aesthetic choices to an epiphenomenon of social position does not get us any closer to understanding the significance of those choices to the people who are making them.

The ability to discern differences is honed through prolonged contact and in concrete situations: "Tastes are not given or determined, and their objects are not either; one has to make them appear together, through repeated experiments, progressively adjusted" (Hennion 2007, p. 101). Hennion cautions that this approach to understanding taste does not take the naïve

[34] Antoine Hennion, for instance, has been associated with the "new new economic sociology" and is a colleague of Michel Callon at the CSI (Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation, which has been closely connected to the birth and development of ANT), but has equally been a source of inspiration for scholars like DeNora (2003) and Benzecry (2011).

approach that differences are "already there" in the objects (2007, p. 101). On first glance, this stance is the same one that critical sociology takes; namely, that differences between things are socially agreed-upon. But they are slightly different, in that Hennion's approach leaves open a possibility that the things themselves could assert themselves in the processes of tasting. In this sense Hennion's approach to objects is similar to Latour's, who argues that nylon and silk are not simply "transporting faithfully some social meaning" (2004, p. 40). Nylon and silk material are not just empty vessels, floating signifiers onto which any given social meaning can be ascribed. Latour is willing to short-circuit sociological common sense and propose that silk and nylon fabrics should be understood instead as mediators: "*without* the many indefinite material nuances between the feel, the touch, the color, the sparkling of silk and nylon, *this* social difference might not exist at all" (Latour 2004, p. 40). Our theories should be able to account for people's experiences of beauty, quality, and aesthetics—or lack thereof. These experiences are formative (and not simply epiphenomenal, as in critical accounts) of social worlds.

In her analysis of the meaning of state-produced goods in communist Hungary, Fehervary draws on a Peircean material semiotics to "counter the notion of goods as arbitrary signs" (Fehervary 2009, p. 444) and to argue that it was precisely the shoddiness of state-planned products and the experience of shortages that allowed them to carry the meanings that they did. Their qualities were perceived in certain ways and came to be proof, for socialist subjects, of the incompetence and lack of care that their state was willing or able to provide for them. Western commodities' power was drawn in large part from their ability to index "life out there" through their material properties like color, packaging, design, or craftsmanship (Fehervary 2009, p. 453). Differences were there, and sensed, and came to be meaningful in a semiotic relationship that was indexical rather than symbolic. In this analysis, preferences—and the meanings

associated with goods that underlie those preferences—arise in social relationships, surely, but the distinctions between consumer goods are not *fictions* in a meaningful sense. The focus returns to the object in this sense, then, as material qualities of objects are again part of the story.

7.2 Dimensions of attachment

7.2.1. Price

Used clothing is often a cheaper option than what is available in the shopping malls. As described in Chapter 6, the price of used clothing items is dynamic, allowing for the items to be evaluated in a variety of different, interrelated ways. In this section I am not considering the symbolic meanings of prices (as in Velthius 2003 and 2005). Instead, I treat price as a factor that makes different meanings, uses, and forms of sociability possible. Keane writes that understanding objects—clothing in particular—requires paying attention to their causal capacities: "clothing makes possible or inhibits new practices, habits, and intentions; it invites new projects" (2005, p. 193). Objects, and used clothing in particular, are made part of different social worlds and relations and can play a variety of roles.

Financial limitations

Although used clothing stores do not function principally as a place where poor people shop, used clothing can be an economical choice for the poor or the elderly on small pensions, especially when maximum discounts are applied to the items. Even while limiting the amount that they spend, for instance by choosing not to spend more than 20 złoty on an item, or to even look around in an area of a store where the items are higher priced, people can still find

something that they consider fashionable. Prices vary from city to city. In Warsaw the highest prices can be around 80 złoty per kilogram, whereas in Krakow the highest prices are closer to 45 złoty per kilogram. In Krakow, the lowest prices at the end of the cycle are one or two złoty per item. Hanka, who visits used clothing stores all over Poland for her work as a costume designer, mentions that there is one chain of stores in Łódź that is "really for poor people." In those shops, the price reaches a low of 2 złoty per kilo.

The relatively low price of clothing means that shopping for used clothes can still function as an important form of sociality and relational work (Zelizer 2005, p. 337). A 71-year-old woman that I spoke to outside a store where she had just finished browsing told me that she used to buy new clothing more often, but now she does so more rarely because she is retired. Every Saturday she goes with her niece to one of the city's largest shops, which she likes for its prices. She tells me that it is enormous, and that it has three differently-priced areas, though she says she generally stays out of the area where items are priced at 25 złoty and higher. Many people are not only shopping for themselves: women shop for children, their husbands, or other family members; younger, unmarried women might shop for a significant other, family members, or friends. In their ethnography of used clothing stores in a small town in north-eastern Poland, Piotr Cichocki and Katarzyka Ciołek observe that although many women do not consider themselves part of the global fashion world, they still take care and pleasure in dressing themselves in used clothing shops: it is a financial "necessity that became a choice" (Boćkowska 2015a).

When used clothes are purchased out of necessity, there is likely to be more of a stigma attached. The cultural meaning of used clothes is still uneven within Poland: people in small towns are more likely to be ashamed to shop in used clothing stores because they worry about

what their neighbors might think, whereas in cities people are increasingly outwardly proud of their cheap purchases. One woman who owned several shops told me that one located in a small town actually does well because its entrance is located in a courtyard and customers can enter and exit without being as exposed to public view as they would be if the entrance were on the street.

Consumption savvy

At the same time, used clothing has achieved a level of mainstream appeal that resulted in the airing of a TV program in 2017 called "Queens of Secondhand" (*Królowe second-handów*), hosted by a popular fashion blogger. Contestants (usually, though not only women) were invited to create a look for a given type of event (such as a family party, a date, or a job interview) in one of the branches of a chain of used clothing stores. The winner is the contestant who achieves the greatest discrepancy between what she (or he) "actually" paid for the items, and what members of the public judged to be the price of the outfits. It is a skill to be able to spot an "expensive-looking" item, and to furthermore mobilize one's knowledge of fashion in order to put together an outfit that would pass as having cost a lot of money.[35]

Many of the people that I spoke to in the course of my research said that they shopped in both used clothing stores and the shopping mall, often mentioning H&M as another place they shop.[36] Customers frequently remarked to each other or spoke excitedly to shopkeepers about the

[35] Of course, what is judged to be expensive looking is highly subjective. Because the "jury" on this program was comprised from people selected on the street, the contestants' ideas of what looked attractive and expensive did not always line up with the ideas of those judging them. In one episode, an artistic woman in her early 20s put together a minimalist look that was judged to be less expensive than the busier look that her competitor assembled.

[36] H&M is a fast fashion retailer with 4,801 stores worldwide as of May 2018 (H&M 2018). It sells clothing at a variety of price points. An internet portal did a study to find which shopping mall brands

purchases they were making, observing that they had seen a similar item in the shopping mall. This similar item (or sometimes even the *same* branded item), currently in fashion, and already desired by the customer, was even more desirable thanks to its much lower price at the used clothing store. When an item is comparable to what might otherwise be purchased new, the lower price for the used item is the significant factor. A 40 year old mother of one who has an office job with a European foundation held up her bags of purchases for me to see as we stood outside the shop she had just left. "I buy jeans most often, good brands, you can get for pennies [*grosze*] what you'd have to pay 200 złoty for at the shopping mall." When I asked whether she has any rules when it comes to what she'll pay for something, she said: "It should be cheaper than at the mall. I paid 35 złoty for two pairs of jeans, so about 15 or 20 złoty per pair." The fact that she would rather buy jeans for a lower price is not necessarily an indication that she cannot afford to buy them new, as she says that she shops more often at the shopping mall than in used clothing stores, and that her wardrobe is so large that she doesn't have space to store it all.

Resale

The low prices in bulk used clothing stores mean that there are ample opportunities for further resale in secondary markets. Two major distinct secondary markets have formed, taking advantage of the heterogeneous nature of the clothing in these types of shops.

Handlary. One of these groups is highly visible, as they are the ones who stand in line outside shops on the morning that there is a new delivery. They are known as *handlary*: female dealers (the word has a negative connotation, something like hucksters, mongers, or peddlers).

sold the most and least expensive outfits. H&M was both the seventh cheapest (an outfit could cost as little as 598.80 złoty) as well as the most expensive (as much as 4,363.40 złoty) (Rost-Laskowska 2013).

These women (occasionally there are men, too, but they are always in the minority) know the delivery schedules of the wholesale-owned shops, and starting about 15 minutes before opening, a line starts forming. Sometimes the line is not very shapely at first, but each person knows where she stands in relation to others. Many of them know each other, and chat amiably as they wait. By the time the store opens there are often a few dozen people waiting. A few minutes before the store opens, the atmosphere changes and a more well-defined line forms, and presses closer to the door. The chatter continues until the door is thrown open from the inside and the crowd presses inside as quickly as possible, each person grabbing a plastic shopping basket from the stack by the door. In the first minutes there is a flurry of activity, as everyone competes for space next to the bins full of piles of clothes and in front of clothing racks. The piles of by-weight clothing are combed quickly, individual items picked up and flung away, hands reaching to the bottom of the bins and heaving the piles around to expose new surface area.

During this initial flurry, women fill their baskets with whatever catches their eye. When they have finished searching the store, they take the time to go through their purchases, holding up sweaters to see the size, style, and whether there are any holes or snags, consulting with each other about the size, quality, and value of each item. They sometimes pass items around between themselves. Things that they decide that they do not want after all get flung back onto the piles of clothes.

My field notes from some of my first visits to a store opening give a sense of the intensity of the experience:

> I arrived at a few minutes to 10 and there was a line about 3 or 4 meters long waiting…Once the doors open everyone threw themselves onto the piles. One guy ducked under the railing to get inside faster. Women were grabbing things to put in the basket to examine later. Three middle-aged women in particular seemed to be skilled and had obviously done this before. There was a general air of frenzy. (Field notes, November 4, 2013)

> 9:30 [am, after a 9am opening]. Out. It was so hot and crowded in there I had to take my coat off. Some of the same women were there from yesterday. A lot of them seemed to know each other. One tall, attractive young woman…had a stack of clothes, mostly children's, that reached as high as the top of the bins. In general the atmosphere was competitive, rushed, pushy. I was not more than 30 seconds behind the first woman in the shop and by the time I entered people had absolutely full baskets. (Field notes, November 5, 2013)

Handlary are often referred to as "the ones who sell their things on the Jewish square" [*na Żydówce* or *na placu Żydowskim*]—on the market square in Kazimierz, the formerly Jewish neighborhood, where there is a big market of secondhand clothing, shoes, and accessories on Sunday mornings.[37] Some of them also have their own shops, or re-sell items on Allegro, the Polish equivalent of eBay. Many of them buy women's clothing, but others, like the woman I wrote about in my field note above, specialize in children's clothing.

Handlary are looking for recognized names of contemporary brands. These brands are "not Bond Street, but High Street—Florence & Fred, Next, Warehouse, New Look, Atmosphere, Miss Selfridge's, Tu, H&M, Papaya, Per Una, French Connection, Jasper Conran" (Botticello 2012, p. 176). They are also careful to make sure that the clothes they buy look new, that they do not have obvious signs of wear, like fabric that is stretched, faded, or pilled. Clothing should not look "worn out."

Handlary are widely recognized as a kind of bothersome natural phenomenon that no one can do anything about. Shop managers rolled their eyes as they described to me how handlary never fail to show up, and how they push and elbow each other as they compete for the best items. On occasion I heard customers grumble that there were no good items left because the handlary had taken them all.

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[37] There did not seem to be any particular meaning associated with the fact that the market was on the "Jewish square." Though Jewish life is slowly but steadily returning to the neighborhood and to the Polish consciousness (Zubrzycki 2016), much of the neighborhood's "Jewishness" remains tied to tourism and festivals.

Vintage. The second main group of re-sellers could be classified as those looking for vintage pieces. These people do not wait in line for deliveries or compete with handlary. Because there is no set time that this group of people comes, they do not necessarily recognize each other like handlary do. Whereas handlary are looking for items that look modern, things that might be sold in the shopping mall, vintage shoppers are looking for items that are different, with fabric that does not look like what is being sold currently, or different styles. In Krakow, people told me that the stores are "still good," as opposed to Warsaw where it is difficult to find the type of unique vintage items that they are looking for. Hanka, a costume designer based in Krakow who travels all around the country to shop for used clothing, says that she is not sure why Warsaw is "tragic" and "weak" when it comes to used clothing, but she surmises that it might be because there are more set designers, costume designers, and stylists in Warsaw, and also that people in Warsaw want to dress differently than in smaller cities, like Krakow.

There are several potential re-sale possibilities for vintage clothing. One is to sell the clothing to Western European countries, like Germany. Julia is a woman in her early 30s who currently works as a costume designer in Amsterdam and used to have an arrangement with a vintage store in Berlin. She would bring them items that she had selected in Polish used clothing shops (sticking to her rule of never paying more than 5 złoty per item!) and sell them in Berlin for 3 or 4 euros. This was a good deal for those vintage dealers, she explained, because the clothes were pre-selected. Whatever the women did not want to buy from her, or what did not sell, Julia would pick up from them when she visited Berlin once a month and sell them herself at a flea market in Amsterdam.

Online platforms are also popular ways to re-sell vintage clothing. In particular, platforms which are widely used internationally are a way to connect customers in Western Europe or the US with items that are not "understood" in Poland. I spent a couple of days with Damiano, an Italian living in Krakow who is an enthusiast of vintage clothes, shoes, and accessories. I accompanied him on his "walk": the trip that he makes every few days between several of his favorite shops. He tells me about the treasures that he has found, and the profits that he has made thanks to his ability to identify fabrics, cuts, and special pieces. On the day that I first met him, he had purchased a Burberry coat in the shop he had just visited, which he planned to sell on eBay. In the last of several stores that we visited that day, he found an English tweed riding blazer, for which he paid less than two złoty. When we met up again a few days later, he told me a woman in Italy had already bought it on eBay for 40 euros.

7.2.2 Quality

Because of the symbolic potential of clothing, and the fact that the fashion industry relies heavily on the power of status and imagination to continually elicit consumer desires (see for example Aspers 2010 and Beckert 2016), material qualities are not generally regarded as significant in sociological explanations of preferences. Aspers is particularly clear about this: "order [in the market for fashion] is not primarily built around the material dimension of a commodity (say, a piece of fabric), but around its symbolic value…'quality'—measured, for example, in terms of the strength and colorfastness of clothes—does not determine the value of the product" (2010, p. 46). This may be true for mass-produced and mass-marketed new clothes, but judgments of material quality are at the center of valuation processes for used clothes. It is not my intent to argue that certain items of clothing have "inherent" value or that one type of

material is objectively better than another. But I do think it is important to take people's statements about the importance of material quality seriously, rather than trying to explain away their preferences solely in terms of underlying status orders. Expressions of frustration with the material qualities of new clothing, including cheap imported Chinese clothes, but also more expensive brand-name clothing available at the shopping mall, are indications of the reality people understand themselves to be living in.

Uncertain quality of new items

The idea that used clothing is actually *more* valuable than what is available new in stores is something that I heard from customers, store clerks, and wholesalers alike. Because a given item has already been used (worn and washed), one can be assured of the quality of individual items. Kamil and Klara, owners of a wholesale company with a chain of shops, described the way that customers came to view used clothing as a more reliable option to the imported "Chinese stuff" that is comparably inexpensive:

> Kamil: People simply realized that when they bought a new pair of pants for 30 złoty [from a Chinese market], but they were only good for a one-time use -
>
> Klara: Until the first wash! [laughs]
>
> Kamil: They got washed once, and either they fall apart, or the color changed, or they stunk of dyes
>
> Klara: They dyed all the other things [in the wash]…

Used clothing items are therefore, as Klara and Kamil described to me, not only cheaper than the least expensive new items on the market – the so-called "Chinese stuff" (*chińszczyzna*) – but are of more reliable quality.

But used clothing is also compared to new clothes from the shopping mall. Buying clothes is a risky endeavor in that the quality of the individual items—in the sense of their durability—is not entirely predictable. People often complained that the things available in the mall are practically disposable, designed to be worn once or twice and thrown out. While some people did say that they considered brand an indicator of quality, many noted that brand and quality do not always go hand in hand. The fact that used clothing has already been worn and washed is a measure of quality control, indicating the quality of the fabric and tailoring, like the strength of the seams. Buying used clothing, even the same brands that are sold at the shopping mall, provides an additional degree of assurance that the items will not "fall apart in the wash," pill up, or lose their shape and color after a few wears. The first round of wear of used garments serves as a kind of judgment device (Karpik 2010) that reduces uncertainty about the quality of items.

Investment of care and individualization

"Quality" does not necessarily mean that an item must be free of defects when it is purchased. Although the general material durability of the garments' fabric and construction are important, as described above, an item is not necessarily disqualified if it has holes or stains. Purchasing a used clothing item implies a certain degree of additional labor that must be invested in the form of care and energy (Botticello 2013). Divestment rituals like washing and ironing purchased items symbolically remove traces of prior ownership (McCracken 1986) but also can also physically remove evidence of previous wear and of the path that the used item has traveled, often including periods of storage before being gotten rid of by the previous owner (Hetherington 2004) or periods of storage in warehouses, which can result in a musty smell. When an item is

damaged, whether it is deemed to still be worth buying or not depends on the skills of the potential buyer. These skills include recognizing stains that can be washed out versus those which are likely to be permanent; the ability to sew up small holes or to repair loose hems or seams; or the ability to perform larger alterations like changing the size or fit of a garment.

Shopping for used clothing requires the deployment of shoppers' individual stocks of knowledge in order to minimize risk and capture value (Gregson et al. 2002). But the knowledge necessary to make alterations or repairs can also be sought out in the stores, from shop workers or other customers. This type of information includes particular products and techniques to use. Faded black garments can be freshened up in one's washing machine using German dyes that can be bought at the dry cleaner's. Dark stains that look suspiciously like blood can be bleached out of a white cotton dress. This particular dress in question was one I was considering buying. When I asked the middle-aged woman shopping next to me whether she thought it was salvageable, she instructed me on a course of action to take: to wash it first by hand, rubbing the stain, then in the wash with a powder designed for white clothes, then I could try to bleach it, but to test a small spot down near the hem first.

Inexpensive tailoring services are widely available in Poland, and if someone does not have the skills to fix or alter something themselves, they can calculate the cost of tailoring into the cost of the garment. I observed a shop owner advising two girls looking for party dresses for that same evening that they should visit the tailor down the street for alterations, which could even be done while they waited since they were in a hurry. My own tailor told me that she has a lot of clients who bring her things that they have found in used clothing shops. Some of her regular customers even call her from a shop, or text her photos of themselves wearing an item they have found, asking if particular types of alterations are possible and "worth it." Ania, a

young woman in her 20s, runs a "vintage" shop with her mother. In the courtyard next to the shop there is a tailor, where clients can take an item of clothing to ask about what alterations can be done, and also to find out the added price of alterations before they decide whether they want to buy the item. A coat bought for 15 or 25 złoty becomes a much worse deal if extensive alterations would cost an additional 80 złoty. On the other hand, paying for alterations can be worth the price if the garment that results is something that is perfectly fitted, and in any case could not be bought anywhere in Polish shops.

Of course, not only used clothing needs alterations. I have observed women conferring with each other in fast-fashion shops like Mango, for instance, about whether it would be worth it or not to take in a blouse. According to my tailor, what is available in shopping malls usually "needs alteration" [*do poprawy*], just as individual used clothing items do. She says that in her estimation, tailoring services have become increasingly popular over the course of her thirty year career. She ascribes the change not only to the fact that there are ever-greater amounts used clothing available and in need of alterations, but also to the fact that mass fashion options "from shopping malls" are made for an "average height, average build, average size" and more often than not require sleeves or hemlines to be shortened, or the width taken in so that the garments actually fit. She remarks that the expansion of the apparel market has been characterized by an increase in "shops offering 'middle shelf' [as opposed to 'top shelf'] clothing, where it's all so-so—and requiring alterations." When it comes to clothing from stores like H&M, items like pants need shortening, and blazers and jackets need their sleeves taken in. These are alterations that she does "in bulk," she tells me with a laugh—and for both men and women.

Others calculate that given the low price of used clothing, and the quantity of items available for purchase, it is not worth buying garments that would require further alteration.

Gosia has decided that she will no longer buy things that need alterations. She knows well enough by now, she says, that if she buys something to be a project, it will just lie there—she is too busy with her business and taking care of her two small children. When she buys something it must be already perfectly suited to her—and Gosia has learned that these items are abundant.

Quality and origin

Prior to the opening of Poland's market to the West, clothes imported from Western Europe or the US were regarded as higher quality and more attractive than those produced domestically (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the history of used clothes in Poland). Is used clothing still popular because it is "from" Western Europe? On the one hand, when I asked people about this, I consistently heard that the origin of the clothes is not important. Whether a store was selling used clothing collected in England, Germany, the Netherlands, or anywhere else was simply not a factor that anyone that I asked said that they found relevant. Moreover, not much contemporary apparel is manufactured in Europe, so the "European" origin of the clothes has more to do with the primary market of consumption rather than the place of production. Customers did not generally make distinctions between places of origin for the clothes (though this is a factor that wholesalers are much more attuned to; see Chapter 5). It is true that much of the contemporary clothing coming from Western European countries is from brands that do not exist in Poland, and might hold more cache than brands that are available in Poland.

Even when the brands are the same, though, there is reason to believe that their primary market functions as an indicator of quality. There is a pervasive belief that the same products, manufactured for Western European markets, are often of better quality. This issue came up in the European Commission (EC) in September of 2017, when EC President Jean-Claude Juncker

denounced food manufacturers' practices of selling products with lower concentrations of primary ingredients, with cheap substitutes for those ingredients, in East European markets. East European leaders talked about this phenomenon at that meeting as "food apartheid" (Tamma 2017). In April of 2018, the EC announced that it would prohibit so-called "dual quality food" and prevent Eastern Europeans from being treated as "second-class citizens" (EURACTIV 2018). In Poland, the most commonly discussed product category affected by practices of this kind are cleaning products—laundry detergents, dish soaps, furniture polish, and so on. Compared to German cleaning products (called "German chemicals" [*chemia niemiecka*]), Polish products are significantly weaker and watered-down. The legend goes that producers of those products justify the difference by referring to consumer habits: the Polish housewife is accustomed to using more product, so the product for the Polish market is made weaker to accommodate these habits. German cleaning products are often sold alongside used clothing, at the Sunday morning market in Krakow, or in used clothing stores (see Figure 7.1).

People often told me that they were looking for something "*oryginalny*" in used clothing shops. According to a survey conducted in 2010, 60% of Poles who shop in used clothing stores say that the most important criteria is that the items are *oryginalny* (Newsweek 2010). The adjective *oryginalny* has a variety of meanings: it can mean interesting or unique, but it can also mean genuine or legal—as opposed to counterfeit or fake. For a long time I assumed that people meant *oryginalny* in the previous sense, since they also often spoke about hoping to find something unique [*unikalny*] or different [*inny*] (more on this below). But I came to realize that people also meant *oryginalny* in the latter sense. Fakes [*podróbki*] are a constant presence on the Polish market. In a survey conducted in 2011, 30% said that they have bought fakes ("products illegally labeled as belonging to another company and usually resembling the genuine things"),

although only 10% of the surveyed population reported buying fakes sometimes or often, and the remaining 20% say they do so rarely. 65% of people who say they have bought "fakes" say that the faked items were clothes or shoes (in the second place at 24% were cosmetics and perfumes) (CBOS 2011b).

Buying clothes from a foreign source, produced for a Western European market, is a way of ensuring that the items are not counterfeits or of "Eastern European" quality. It is a way of managing distrust of retailers—large or small. For instance, the owner of a small used clothing shop told me that some of the women who trade in used clothes (*handlary*) will buy items just for the label of a desired brand—like Zara—in order to sew it into other items of clothing.[38] The items with the desired label can be damaged and thus purchased very inexpensively. A no-name garment, or one from a less prestigious company, can thus be passed off as a more desirable item of clothing and sold for more money. The same woman also reported to me that a friend of hers works for Zara sewing labels onto t-shirts (*przyszywała metki do koszulek*). When I pressed her for more details, she said that Zara has a warehouse where shipments of t-shirts are delivered, and then her friend sews labels onto them. It is of course no secret that brands like Zara outsource labor to factories that are not strictly "theirs," so in a sense it is not surprising that at some point brand labels would have to be sewn onto garments. But it is also important that anecdotes like these are expressions of distrust of retailers and producers, and of a constant nagging suspicion that the Polish consumer is being treated to worse—"second-class"—goods.

Cultural studies scholar Magda Szcześniak describes a newspaper article that appeared in *Gazeta Wyborcza* in 1992, around the time that the first McDonald's opened in Warsaw. The journalist was skeptical about the quality of the food sold at McDonald's in Warsaw, not because

[38] Botticello (2013) describes a similar move by a trader in the UK, who says that she tries not to buy cheaply-produced new clothing, such as from Primark, but if she does she simply cuts the tag out.

he had objections to McDonald's in general, but because the Warsaw location was one of several that had recently opened in Eastern Bloc countries—including a Moscow location in 1990:

> What they are serving us at Sezam [the name of the building where the McDonald's was located] is rather of Muscovite standard…The selection of dishes is staggeringly modest – only hamburgers, cheeseburgers, and Big Macs. Where are the fish sticks? Where are the breaded pieces of chicken? Where are the salads and soups? Where, finally, are the amazing warm apple pies? Truthfully, it's much better to go to Quick on Marszałkowska [a fast-food restaurant that opened down the street a few years earlier] – from there it's much closer to America and to Europe. (Bikont in Szcześniak 2016, p. 55, translation mine).

The clothing available in used clothing stores—collected from consumers in Western Europe and minimally sorted before being made available to Polish consumers—are products whose quality can be trusted, because they were not produced with a Polish consumer in mind.

Vintage quality

A taste for vintage has been interpreted as corresponding to a particular position in social space. Bourdieu identified a tendency for people from the dominant class who were born into that class to shop for furniture at antique stores, as opposed to, for instance, rising members of the dominant class with high levels of educational capital, who more often shopped at flea markets (1984, p. 78). Gregson and coauthors identified a "knowing mode" of consumption of retro 1970s clothing in vintage shops that allowed people to deploy their cultural capital to perform distinction (2001, p. 18). Poles interested in vintage clothing talked about their favorite haute couture producers or fashion/lifestyle magazines (like *Vogue* or *Kinfolk*). Many of them are involved in the art or fashion worlds in some sense (costume designers, art school graduates). In the Polish context, a taste for vintage was often connected to a critique of mass production and

Polish consumers' awareness of their position vis-à-vis the economically and culturally dominant West.

People who are interested in "vintage" clothing distinguish the types of items they are interested in from the bulk of what is available. When I initially approached vintage shop owner Ewa about including her in my project, she said immediately that she "wants to separate herself" from the phenomenon of used clothing, and that vintage is something completely different. At one time, she said, used clothing shops were full of vintage clothing but now it is mostly contemporary clothing. To Ewa, the vintage clothing she sells is an alternative to the cheap clothing produced these days. Not only is the quality of clothing produced today much lower than it used to be, but the prices are much lower too. Items are meant to be disposable, not fit for a second use. What fills used clothing shops these days, according to Ewa, is cheaply produced contemporary clothing that she has no interest in.

People who are interested in vintage clothing stress the fact that the items sometimes have signs of wear, which might make the average person see it as a worn-out "rag." Gosia, for instance, buys used clothing so frequently that she has to clean out her closet every two months so she doesn't "get buried" by the volume of clothes that she owns. Since she does not have friends who share her style, she puts the items in a charity collection container. But she emphasizes that she is not convinced that those clothes will be worn again: "I doubt that anyone will wear it. You know, we see the value, because it's our style or whatever, but people, you know, if they don't have money, you know what I mean, certain people would see it as a rag and wouldn't want something like that." Gosia recognizes her class position and her ability to valorize what might be worthless or perceived negatively from another position in social space. At the same time, I heard repeatedly from people like Gosia that it is actually contemporary

clothing that are "rags." In contrast, vintage clothing was produced to last, to be worn for years and years, even to be passed on to others.

The distinctions in taste between vintage-seekers and those with more mass-market tastes were often explained to me by people with vintage tastes in terms of Poland's particular history. Ewa says that in her view, the fact that Polish people do not understand or appreciate vintage items is a result of the fact that people are still trying to get their fill of "shoddy" [*tandeta*], cheap and plentiful goods after being closed off for many years. She has a lot of customers who are tourists from the US or from Western Europe who better understand the concept of vintage, and the prices that are attached. Poles, on the other hand, do not understand the logic of paying more for something that is used. Ewa says that people would rather have something styled to look old than something that is actually old.

These observations were confirmed when I struck up a conversation with the owner of a boutique in Warsaw, located in one of the most upscale shopping areas of the city. I had wandered into the shop because the layout of her shop, and the fact that there were individual exemplars of everything rather than multiples, made me think that I had found a consignment or vintage shop. When I asked, however, if her goods were used, she was clear: if it's used things you want, you won't find them here. As it turned out, though, it was not because she personally did not find used things or vintage things valuable, but because she believed that Poles do not understand them. Picking up a large leather duffel-style purse made from distressed and perforated black leather, she told me that people think that when something looks old like this, it should be cheaper. In Paris, she said, people would buy this bag and be happy with it, as it's from a boutique [*butikowa*], and it's unique. Poles want things to look new. In the hour that we talked, she waxed rhapsodic about the beauty of the various vintage things she has seen in Paris,

in Vancouver, or in a small town in Italy on the Austrian border. Polish people simply do not appreciate these things—yet. She told me that I can write about it in my dissertation: maybe in 20 years Poles will want the same things as the rest of Europe!

In the meantime, people with vintage tastes say that most people want to "look normal" or "look the same" as everyone else. Dressing too outlandishly in a small town, or even in many of Poland's smaller cities, is invitation to be laughed at and gossiped about. The draw of vintage is that it is different, even "weird" or "strange." As opposed to the things that one could buy in a store, vintage things "have soul." Of course, certain vintage items become popular when they are in fashion in the first-hand or mass market as well, and people are on the lookout for original or authentic versions. Ewa says that although she considers vintage as separate from fashion, trends in fashion do make some vintage items more popular for a time, like bomber jackets in 2014. On the other hand, Hanka says that she believes that she senses what is going to come into fashion in two or three years' time, based on what she sees in used clothing stores.

7.2.3 Selection

The theme of choice appeared again and again as I spoke to people about why they were interested in buying used clothes. Anthropologists who study used clothing around the world have described how used clothing is often spoken about in terms of desires rather than needs and that it serves as a way for consumers to creatively express their identities (Hansen 2000 and 2004; Milgram 2005). It is also common for people to say that they enjoy wearing imported used clothes because they are different, not what everyone else is wearing, or not usual (Hansen 2005, p. 114). Poland is no exception. When people spoke about used clothing as "something different," the comparison was usually to the goods available in the shopping mall. Given

Poland's transition over the past decades and the growth of the retail industry, I was struck by the paradox of the fact that people often complained to me about the lack of choice in the shopping mall as one of the main reasons that they buy used clothing instead.

Lack of choice in shopping malls

Over and over, I heard that there is actually no choice in shopping malls. One afternoon I spoke to slightly overweight 60-year-old woman who had just bought a used skirt that she planned to alter herself. She said that people like her cannot buy things in shops with new clothes: "stout people will not find the sizes that they need." Even people who are not overweight can find themselves facing a lack of choice when the styles that happen to suit their body type are not in fashion this season. Ania, who co-owns a vintage shop together with her mother, described her recent experience trying to find something for herself at the mall:

> For instance yesterday I was at the mall, and I absolutely wanted to buy myself a skirt. I went in thinking 'I have to leave with a skirt.' And simply, there is completely no choice. There are a ton of shops, a lot of goods, the shops are huge, but for instance when it comes to skirts, there are either A-lines or these ones that are totally bandage-style tubes. There is nothing else! That's also why it's nice to create choice for our clients. So that they can find, in addition to what is in the normal chain shops [*w zwykłych sieciówkach*], what's fashionable now, they can find things here that are not necessarily trendy at the moment, but that they feel good in, that they look good in, that fit their figures.

28-year-old Gosia echoed this sentiment, saying that every store at the mall has the same things. Even though she prefers more unusual and vintage items, sometimes she feels the need to buy something new, but says she usually ends up at H&M after having combed the shopping mall, only to find nothing interesting and no selection. Gosia buys her children's clothing from used clothing stores only, saying that what is available at the mall for children is always decorated with "strange prints…strange colors, horrible." First-year university student Kasia described how

when she began wearing corsets two years ago,[39] she realized that she would need to wear clothes that are cut differently than the contemporary clothing available at the mall. At used clothing stores she is able to find clothes that fit her body, as they are cut in the style of her favored 1950s silhouette.

"Something different"

Perhaps the main explanation proffered for why used clothing is an attractive options is that it is "something different" [*coś innego*]. Krakow wholesaler Wiktor explained that the search for the original is precisely what makes used clothing so desirable. Years ago, before used clothing stores were a well-known fixture in the fabric of the city, a journalist saw lines outside of one of his shops, and wrote about it in amazement:

> [the journalist wondered] what kind of shop is it, that the time of lines has ended, and a line has formed here in front of this shop? That was really strange. [laughs] But that is exactly the specificity of this industry. This industry is a little bit like the search for gold, so, for gold or for pearls, right, you can find something really nice for yourself, something original, and thanks to that it functions.

The appeal of used clothing is that you can wear something that has not been sold in mass quantities (at least currently), and is perhaps even completely unique.

Ten or fifteen years ago, the market for new clothing in Poland was certainly smaller and more limited. The limited shopping options made it likely that someone else might be wearing the same clothes. Hanka, a 42-year-old costume designer, told me that before the shopping malls appeared, there were two Diesel stores in the Krakow city center, which were the only places someone like her could buy fashionable new clothing. But when she showed up at a gay club in a Diesel t-shirt that she had recently paid a lot of money for, one of the only other women in the

[39] So-called "*gorseciarki*" [corset girls] are a primarily online community of Polish corset enthusiasts who share information with one another about how to safely wear corsets and ideas for how to style them. There are even a handful of Polish corset producers who sell their wares on Etsy.

place was wearing the same shirt. At that moment, she thought to herself, "oh no, never again," and began to shop exclusively in used clothing shops.

Even today, when Krakow has multiple shopping malls, and even a Zara on the main market square, people are still in search of "something different," something not from a chain store [*sieciówka*]. Chain stores contain mass-marketed goods that are available in multiple locations, often in shopping malls. There is a connotation of low- to mid-market appeal for these stores, since even though technically Giorgio Armani or Hugo Boss have multiple shop locations with mass-marketed goods, they would not be considered a chain store. The five brands that belong to Poland's largest retail group have, considered together, over 900 locations in Poland; H&M has more than 170 (Winnicki 2018). These chain stores are increasingly dominating the retail landscape. The number of H&M stores, for instance, has tripled in Poland since 2009, increasing from 65 locations in 2009 to 175 in 2017 (Statista 2018). Gosia used to shop for used clothing in her hometown when she was in high school in the 90s, because there were no chain stores and it was impossible to "follow trends." But now that she lives in Krakow and has access to chain shops, instead of the "horrible small shops" of the small town of her youth, she still shops in used clothing stores.

It is tempting to explain preferences for used clothes, particular types of used items, or the desire to have "something different" in terms of social distinction, in terms of staking out one's position in social space through consumption practices that signal one's superior taste. While taste and social distinction do shape preferences and patterns (as described above in the description of the taste for vintage clothes), it is important to remember that these tastes and patterns are formed at a particular historical moment and in relation to particular material conditions. Clothing is being produced at greater rates than ever before. It may no longer be the

case that poor quality and homogeneity of consumption options are a result of state planning and production under conditions of shortage (Kornai 1992), but the globalization of production and brands has resulted in a paradoxical sense of a lack of choice rooted in homogenization, even as shops and shopping centers multiply. While the socialist subjects in Fehervary's (2009) analysis knew that they blamed the state for the shoddiness, homogeneity, and drabness of goods available to them, tracing blame in this globalized capitalist world is a more stymieing task.

7.3 Material co-production of taste

Taste and preferences are developed in ongoing processes (Hennion 2007; McFall et al. 2017). In this section I describe the ways that people act out their tastes in their encounters with used clothing. Entwistle describes how taste in the fashion industry is not simply agreed upon by human actors in social networks, but actually acts as "a dynamic force, a hybrid, forged out of on-going, sensual relationships and encounters with product markets" (2009, p. 159). She describes how retail buyers' personal tastes were actually formed by the products that they came in contact with (a buyer of high-end jeans, for instance, began to move "up-market" in her personal consumption patterns as a result of her professional buying responsibilities; a woman who worked as a buyer in the Middle East for several years found herself wearing lots of gold, though she never had before) (Entwistle 2009, p. 159). Quite plainly casting the product as an actor, she writes: "While in the product/buyer encounter the flow would appear one-directional—inanimate object/good chosen by buyer—it is the product's sensual qualities that partly determine the outcome of selection" (2009, p. 158). Preferences cannot be fully understood if theorized as arising solely from social relationships between human actors in a market or social network. It is necessary to consider the role of the things in processes of taste

formation and attachment, including the ways in which they are encountered, and the ways that the things are actors in processes of learning. It is also important that people are encountering literally tons of heterogenous items when they shop for used clothing.

7.3.1 Mode of shopping

In their study of UK charity shops, Gregson and coauthors (2002) identify distinct modes of shopping that pertain to necessity or choice. They find that people who shop in charity shops as a matter of necessity treat shopping as a routinized, regular activity, regarding it as hard work; those who do it as a matter of choice shop sporadically, taking a break or a "time out" from their daily routine. Further, those shopping for used items out of necessity deploy practical knowledge in search of items which will be durable, a good value, and will convey respectability, while those shopping by choice are deploying logics of "differentiation" in their search for unusual (compared to what is widely available) fabrics, styles, or brands. This distinction does not seem to play out in the same way in Polish imported used clothing shops. Firstly, it is not always the case that used clothing is the least expensive option (as compared to, for instance, new items in the "Chinese shops"), especially in the first days of the pricing cycle. Secondly, many people who shop for used clothing as a matter of choice do so in a routinized, repetitive way. Thirdly, as I outlined extensively in the section above, even those who are shopping out of choice are focused on the durability of the garments. The practice of shopping for used clothing is most often characterized as repetitive and addictive.

Repetitive

There are of course people who rarely shop for used clothing, or those who are completely uninterested in even going in the shops. But when people do shop there, they often do so on a regular basis. A 71-year-old retired tailor told me that she visits used clothing stores at least once a week. Every Saturday she visits a large shop with her niece, which has such a large selection that she estimates that "it's necessary to dedicate at least three hours to see" what is there. Other than that regular visit, she sometimes stops in impulsively, like she had on the day we spoke. "I walk past [this shop] almost every day, but I went in by chance today because it's 30% off." Repetitive searches are often incorporated into one's day, by stopping in on the way to or from work while walking past, or while killing time at the tram or bus stop. This mode of shopping is well suited for chance purchases, the type of thing that "might come in handy," like an extra pair of guest slippers. Gosia summarizes the benefit of repetitive shopping: "I go to the one near the tram stop where I am every day on my way home from work. In every [shop] there is nothing and everything. I mean if you're lucky you'll find something. And if you go as often as I do, you'll definitely find something."

Those who shop in used clothing stores in order to resell clothing are among the most dedicated to repetitive shopping (see below). Damiano, the vintage enthusiast from Italy, says that the only way to be successful is to be consistent: "You have to have the capacity to search, you won't find the best things easily, you have to look where no one else looks." For him this means several hours, several times a week, walking through his favorite shops in different neighborhoods. Given the nature of the search, and the randomness of selection, this mode of shopping is not for everyone. The manager at a popular shop told me that she does not have time to shop for her family in used clothing shops, and would rather go to the shopping mall, where she can "take her time" while still finding what she needs.

Addictive

Recent work on attachment of goods to subjects in markets has raised the topic of why it is that certain brands or products become the object of an intense attachment, in the manner of addiction (McFall et al. 2017, Callon 2017; see also Hennion and Gomart 1999 and Benzecry 2011, p. 130). In the case of shopping for used clothing, it is not necessarily specific products that are the object of addiction, but the potential inherent in the randomness of what one might find. Women described themselves as "addicted to used clothing shops," "addicted to rummaging," or as "addicted to buying dresses"—flowered dresses, in this particular case. A woman in her late 20s described shopping for used clothes as addictive, relating to me how she had not visited the shops in a while, but after finding a couple of things one Thursday, immediately decided that she would go again on Friday to see what she could find for the sale price of two złoty.

The addiction to shopping for used clothing does not necessarily always have to end in a purchase. Going to the shops every day might mean that a purchase is made once a week. For some, the unpredictability of what might be found is part of the appeal. A commentor on an online newspaper article about secondhand clothing shops from 2015 put it this way: "I like to go in for fun and see what they have on the hangers, it gives me a little adrenaline rush – you never know what's on the next one…and in a chain store you know it'll be 10 pairs of the same pants, 10 blouses etc. SH [secondhand] relaxes me, sometimes it's a kind of game: what beautiful thing will I find today?" Hanka says that she doesn't have the need to actually buy anything, but that she simply enjoys the act of searching, and looking at the clothes. But, she notes, some women ask specifically for opaque bags so that their husbands will not see that they have bought yet

another item. While I was conducting an interview with Aniela, a woman bought a blouse and put it straight into her own bag, saying that she didn't want her "old man" to see it. As another woman said, "if something costs three złoty, it's hard *not* to buy it!" According to my tailor, some of her clients are "addicted" and bring in "whole bags, week after week" for her to alter—and even end up buying themselves additional cabinets to store their quickly growing wardrobes.

7.3.2 A feel for quality

Extended experience with used clothing helps those who deal with it develop an embodied sense of quality (see Botticello 2012 on sorters and Entwistle 2009, p. 78-9 on buyers). Buyers develop a familiarity with the clothes that allows them to make quick judgments about quality, often needing only a touch of the hand to distinguish one material from another (Hawley 2006, p. 268; Botticello 2012). In particular, those who shop regularly with the intent of re-selling items develop an "eye" for quality and desirability that helps them sense whether particular items are worth throwing into their baskets or not, or even whether entire shipments are likely to yield "good" items. On occasion, a few minutes into the search through a new delivery, women would remark to each other that they could already tell that it was of poor quality. "There is not going to be anything here. I already know visually." This statement was made by a *handlara* but is equally relevant for characterizing embodied knowledge of the quality of vintage clothing. Ewa, the owner of a vintage shop, described a similar phenomenon to me when she said that when she is visiting warehouses with vintage clothing, she can move really fast because she already knows what she is looking for. Like Julia, who worked in a warehouse weeding out potentially "vintage" items, over time contact with clothing allows these women to

work quickly as they develop a "feel" for the distinctions between items that are meaningful in their own classification schemes.

Contact with the clothing items is an important part of the process of both sensing and learning about quality. As we walked through shop after shop, vintage enthusiast Damiano repeatedly drew my attention to the details of particular items: the way a vamp on a shoe was constructed, the way that real leather wrinkles in a recognizable whiskered pattern, the knit pattern of a sweater that dated it to a particular era. He told me that he is able to do what he does because he has studied design, and has learned about distinctions between different fabrics, materials, textiles. In order to recognize them he has to not only take stock of them visually but touch them, sometimes smell them (in the case of leather) in order to determine whether an item meets the criteria he is looking for. Damiano and Julia both described how Internet searches—only after finding something they liked and purchased—confirmed their hunches and extended their knowledge about the qualities and value of the particular item. A silky heeled slipper that Damiano was intrigued by turned out to be made by a favorite brand of Marilyn Monroe. A shirt from an unknown brand, picked up because Julia "saw the fabric," proved to be made by an "amazing Norwegian brand, super pricey, exclusive."

When I asked if the brand was an important factor in choosing items to buy, people would often say that they only look at the tag once they have picked the item up. The brand is only a confirmation, then, of their personal preferences and choice. Patrycja told me that she recently bought a pair of jeans without trying them on, only to realize once she got home that they were from Zara. With a laugh, she said that she was "pleasantly surprised" and that she got them for only three złoty! When I asked a mother and daughter in the midst of a shopping

excursion if it was important to them that things are fashionable, they both said no, that it was more their taste that guided them.

The way that people interact with used clothes suggests that the encounter provides them a chance to experiment and sense their own taste. Katarzyna Ciołek observes that in the small town where she studied used clothing stores, the fact that the clothes were relatively inexpensive meant that women could "allow themselves to experiment" in a way that they could not necessarily do if they had paid more (in Boćkowska 2015a). The women that I spoke to in Krakow said similar things: "In these shops, for these prices, you can allow yourself to not think about it [whether to make a purchase or not]." Patrycja recently bought a sweater and jeans without trying them on, because it was hot and she didn't feel like trying them on. If they didn't fit, she said, it was only a loss of three złoty. Kasia described used clothing stores as a source of relatively inexpensive clothing that allowed her to experiment as she discovered a new style that made her feel attractive. Once she realized that her figure was best suited to 1950s silhouettes, she was able to find clothing that she "suspected she might look good in" without spending too much during her process of discovery. To paraphrase Hennion, used clothing shops can "equip people's taste" (2007, p. 110), give it material to grow and change with.

For those who are doing the most obviously creative projects with used clothing, it is clear how the (literal) tons of used clothing encountered in the shops serves as a source of inspiration. Gosia describes how the idea for her growing clothing business came into being: she came upon a piece of material and decided to make something out of it. It was a "beautiful curtain," she says, "one hundred percent cotton, thick material, faded, so I knew it wouldn't get destroyed." She made one blouse out of it, then bought another curtain and made five more which she sold to her friends, then started a business selling clothing made out of materials found

in used clothing shops. But at a certain point the font of potential dried up—there are no longer as many nice curtains and sheets of the kind that Gosia originally bought—and her business grew to the point that she no longer had the time to source individual, unique, used pieces of material. She still uses curtains to make her clothing line, but she buys new curtains from the US. It is important that people are not only encountering individual things, but an entire mass of heterogenous things. Hanka, the costume designer, says that other people have the Internet as a source of creative inspiration; she has used clothing shops.

7.4 Conclusion

In order to understand why Polish consumers want to buy imported used clothes, it is necessary to consider the experiences of shopping, sensing, and evaluating goods. In this chapter I have considered explanations of consumer preferences that stress the symbolic values of consumer goods and how social mechanisms shape taste. These sorts of explanations do not fully capture the way that people encounter used clothing and the types of evaluations that they make. Explanations of consumer preferences in terms of status cannot account for the mutual, co-productive nature of shopping, evaluation, and value judgment processes. If a garment is to function as a "material peg" upon which meaning rests (Aspers 2009 and 2010), the peg must be relatively reliable. The processes of seeking out, evaluating, and actively intervening to produce material quality can be understood as a process of stabilizing the material part of the sign. If used clothes have a meaning in Poland, the signifier—the clothing item itself—is not insignificant, as Polish shoppers attune themselves to minute details of wear. Used clothing shoppers become experts at recognizing clothes that they consider to be good quality.

What should we make of the pervasive complaints about quality that seem to motivate a preference for used clothes? Do Polish consumers simply value durability because they have a "taste of necessity" (Bourdieu 1984, p. 177)? Perhaps the complaints of Polish consumers can be interpreted as the fact that they are still comparatively low in levels of economic and cultural capital despite decades of catching up after the transition, and therefore tend to place value on material qualities like the strength of seams, resistance of fabric to stretching, wearing out, and so forth? This sort of explanation would assume that development towards full participation in the structures of the world economy (including the ways that the fruits of the economy are understood culturally) occurs along one trajectory. There is no reason to assume a priori that Polish consumers, as they gain capital and status, will behave in the same way as their Western counterparts. In fact, Smith and co-authors (2015) have found that increases in income in Poland and the neighboring Czech Republic do not correspond to the same changes in consumption patterns that would be expected when compared to the West. Instead of relying more on market-based consumption as incomes increase, Poles and Czechs continue to engage in high rates of food self-provisioning, i.e., the "production and sharing of food without economic benefit" (Smith et al. 2015, p. 223). These practices are not conceived of by their practitioners explicitly in terms of sustainability or ecological goals. And it is not simply that Poles and Czechs have failed to "catch up" to Western lifestyles: "…while many of their new life experiences of, for example, leisure, travel, work and shopping, are part and parcel of an identity that 'fits' with what social scientists and marketing analysts anticipated, the dogged commitment of a significant minority to FSP [food self-provisioning] qualifies western assumptions about the course of development" (Smith et al. 2015, p. 231). We should therefore be cautious about interpreting complaints about the quality of clothing available in shopping malls in terms of a

Western development model, or in terms of the way that Western consumers with high levels of capital tend to behave.

Further, we should ask to what extent the theory formulated by Western academics reflects particularly Western realities and convictions about the role of materiality in taste and consumer preferences. Consider this characterization of the tastes of individuals with high cultural capital [HCCs]:

> HCCs are acculturated in a social milieu in which they seldom encounter material difficulties and in which their education emphasizes abstracted discussion of ideas and pleasures removed from the material world. For HCCs, the material value of cultural objects is taken for granted: instead taste becomes a realm of self-expression, a means of constructing subjectivity. The tastes of HCCs express this distance from necessity, a distanced, formal gaze and a playful attitude that often takes the material value of cultural objects for granted. (Holt 2000, p. 224)

How much of economic sociological theory of the value of goods is shaped by function of the fact that the consumers generally studied by economic sociologists are relatively affluent Western subjects? Bourdieu's theory was meant to correspond to a particular place and time and was meant to be always translated in order to analyze other contexts. Bourdieu cautioned against a "realistic or substantialist reading of analyses which aim to be structural or, better, relational" (1991, p. 629). I argue, on the contrary, that the belief that material quality can be excluded from value judgments is a product of a particular social location in the development of global capitalism and mass production. In Polish social space we are dealing with another "particular case of the possible" (Bourdieu 1991) where in value judgments there must also be room for distrust of producers and suspicions about being left out, still, from global capitalist systems of production and distribution.

In this chapter it has been my intent to bring used clothing into focus—as consumers encounter it, understand it, calculate with it, and interact with it. It is not surprising that people

with money, or with greater social capital, or who are part of artistic or fashion worlds would be attracted to "unique" and unusual clothing, which sometimes might have signs of wear. What is interesting is that these processes are taking place in the context of ongoing transition, not just from a poorer society to a richer one, but from one which was cut off from the West to one that participates in a global economy, and where there is a pervasive feeling that Poland is regarded as a second-class country by powerful Western corporations. These distinctions are also being made in the context of growing globalization of production and fast fashion, with durability generally not a quality that mass-market manufacturers are aiming for. If we are willing to accept, as Fehervary (2009) has written, that socialist subjects rightly observed the poor quality of state-produced goods, and interpreted it as the incompetence of the state, we need to take Polish critiques of consumer goods similarly seriously.

7.5 Figures

Figure 7.1. Window display at a wholesaler-owned clothing store. At the bottom right is a sign advertising "genuine German cleaning products…German quality at the best price!"

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

> Even if we speak of construction, if we insist on instruments and devices, if we describe assemblages and elaborate on performativity…we still run a high risk of emphasizing the collective action of human beings, while letting things observe us from their passivity. It is not only a matter of *building* things, then, but of having them exist more. (Hennion 2017, p. 72)

In this dissertation I have tried to bring *things* into an economic sociological analysis of the valuation and exchange of used clothing. In doing so, I have tried to show that things' presence is a force in what is done to them and with them. The global trade of used clothing is the outcome of encounters between people and things, and the transformation of those *things* into *objects* that can be understood in particular ways, managed in particular ways, and occupy particular positions in social space. Centering my explanation on the encounter of people and things is not intended to revive a deterministic or naïve materialism. Indeed, the objects I have described in this dissertation are so multifarious because the outcomes of encounters between people and things are always contingent and creative. But the outcomes are also not unlimited or unconstrained. Modes of governance and management also set parameters for what types of objects are constructed. Historical and social factors (so-called "structural" factors) set limits and constraints for how things can be understood. Things also set limits to what can be done with them, and require that they be dealt with in particular ways.

The intervention into economic sociology that I have proposed is to connect economic sociological approaches which have rightly identified the need to look at markets as assemblages—considering the socio-material reality of market devices, infrastructures, and so on—with approaches that focus on *things* and *materials,* drawn from cultural sociology,

anthropology, geography, and poststructural approaches like actor-network theory. For economic sociology, this means considering the socio-material processes whereby things are made into exchangeable objects. As Hennion (2017) writes in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, despite increasing attention to various pragmatic and material aspects of economic life, goods have tended to be overshadowed by a focus on human actors. Throughout the exchange and circulation of used clothing, considering the materiality of what is actually being exchanged is crucial to understanding both why exchange is carried out in particular ways and what sorts of social relations are forged and maintained. In the remaining pages of this dissertation I will draw together the strands of the argument I have been making and explain why taking the *socio-material reality of goods* seriously can lead us to a richer picture of the social, political, and organizational realities of exchange.

In the next sections I will explain how materiality matters in the exchange of used clothing, both for the stabilization and transmission of value and for the organization of social relations. I first provide a general discussion about the role of "the material" in the circulation, valuation, and exchange of used clothing in the UK and Poland. I then discuss the specific theoretical contributions arising from the materially-focused approach that I have used throughout the dissertation. Showing how value and meaning are concretely constructed socio-materially in and around the goods exchanged provides an important perspective to economic sociological understandings of value in markets.

8.1 Overview of the role of the material in the exchange of used clothing

In Chapter 4, I described how in UK charity shops used clothing was processed in assemblages that enacted competing logics of exchange. Objects in the production-oriented

model—commodities intended be exchanged and produce profit for the charity—were produced in assemblages that objectified things as part of daily production quotas, circulated stock between shop locations, and generated waste. Objects in the item-oriented model, on the other hand, were understood by volunteers as inherently connected to their donors' intent that they be sold in the shop. Volunteers consequently worked to wash, launder, and mend goods where necessary, even extending the assemblage to their own homes as storage or laundering facilities, in order to fulfill the obligation to the donors inherent in the gift-like exchange relationship. The ongoing question of how used clothing should be exchanged continues to play out in practical engagements with things and their symbolic production as commodities or gifts.

The processes whereby donated items are transformed into objects of exchange is open to these sorts of conflicts—it remains a *matter of concern*—because the processes cannot be routinized to the extent that exchange is routinized in cases where decisions about stock are made at higher levels of management and employees are required to simply sell the commodities. Stock is generated from donations and is materially heterogeneous: a variety of different sorts of things are collected, with different levels of soil and evidence of prior use. As a result, charities have to collect a great deal more than they ultimately end up wanting to or being able to sell. This, in turn, puts employees (paid managers) or volunteers in the position to make decisions about what to sell and about what sorts of social relations those sales entail that might otherwise be made elsewhere (at a higher level of management or ownership). While larger charities with national or regional networks have implemented logistical and organizational solutions that seek to manage this heterogeneity effectively and produce the highest profits possible from heterogeneous goods through central warehousing, distribution of the proper stock at the proper time to the proper location (holiday items can be held until the right time of year,

for instance; or items that are thought to be more valuable can be sent to a location in a more affluent location so that they can fetch a higher price), at the level of individual shops the heterogeneity of incoming items nevertheless leaves space open for these conflicts about the proper way to handle donated items.

In addition to these competing assemblages which form as ways of organizing the exchange of materially heterogeneous goods in the shops themselves, the social relations of exchange constituting these flows take the particular forms that they do because of the material heterogeneity of used clothing. Because charity shops collect so much more that they are able or intending to sell themselves, as mentioned above, it is very important that charities have a method of disposing of (from their perspective) or moving along the items that they are not going to sell. A successful charity shop business cannot, like a shop selling newly-produced goods could, simply seek to reduce the amount of unsold stock by more accurately estimating what and how much customers would like to buy and ordering such stock. Instead, they form an exchange relationship with textile recyclers. Forming relationships with textile recyclers is a way of upholding the terms of the "gift relationship" connected to donations and not simply turning what they cannot sell in their own shops into landfill waste. It also allows them to follow an economic rationale of getting the most possible profit from donations by selling them onwards to other types of traders. As I described in Chapter 5, ensuring reliability—i.e., finding a partner in exchange who will be consistent about collecting "charity rag" or other types of goods rejected by charity shop sorters and not let them pile up and become waste which gets in the way of the functioning of the shop—is very important in these relationships, to the extent that textile recyclers can use continuity of service as a way of qualifying the service that they are offering as superior to that of a competitor.

In Chapter 5, used clothing becomes a waste object governed by EU policies, especially recent Circular Economy measures that seek to divert waste from landfill. Used clothing is commodified at two different moments in the "market for rag": when it is purchased from charities or local authorities, and when it is sold onwards as a sorted and graded product. At each of these moments, the value of used clothing as a commodity is produced at the "limits of waste." At the first moment, infrastructures of collection are designed to prevent the contamination of textiles with water, food, or other substances from the municipal waste stream or the environment. At the second moment, used clothing is sorted into grades through processes of *value distribution* that ensure that the greatest volume of material stream is turned into a "reuse grade" commodity.

Textile recyclers would prefer to acquire higher-quality "rag" from which they could produce higher-quality, higher-priced grades to sell along to their buyers. To this end, they do provide instructions (to their charity shop partners or to potential donors) about what they are willing to accept, and the Textile Recycling Association has attempted to exert pressure on charities to accept a standard for how charity rag should be produced. But the heterogeneity of used clothing donations as well as the frequent turnover of volunteer staff in charity shops, which makes it difficult to "train" or teach volunteer sorters to produce rag according to their specifications, precludes a greater stabilization and standardization of used clothing flows between charities and textile recyclers. Thus textile recyclers are perpetually in a position of, like the employees and managers doing sorting in charity shops, managing a heterogeneous material flow. It is not possible to "produce" only desirable used clothing, and along with the desirable items come a much greater flow of items that must be processed and dealt with despite being able to fetch much lower prices. In order to produce the highest-value, most profitable grades,

textile recyclers must also accept huge volumes of material from their charity partners and from other collection methods, like collection banks, and door-to-door and school collections. Being able to turn used clothing into a commodity that can fetch the "market price" is thus a matter of having the capacity (i.e., having the infrastructure, personnel, and capital) to acquire and sort through huge amounts of things.

Like in UK charity shops, in the wholesale context it is not only that the material heterogeneity of used clothing requires buyers and sellers to organize exchange in a particular way, but the particular social relations that make up exchange are also directly related to the fact that used clothing is so materially heterogeneous. They way that heterogeneity is managed in the commodification of rag via its sorting into graded "products" is at once a matter of economic calculation (the grades must be profitable) and a matter of managing the moral dimensions of exchange and preserving relationships between buyers and sellers. Because it would not make economic sense to sell only the "best" items in high-priced grades, textile recyclers sort clothes into grades. These products are themselves internally heterogeneous, despite having some level of standardization relative to the heterogeneous collected material. These products serve as a way of "moving things along"—acquiring potentially less desirable items is part and parcel of acquiring more desirable items. This is true not only of the products being sold (the grades are themselves a way of passing along more of the material stream) but also of the way that the products are sold. Textile recyclers speak of being reluctant to sell customers only their best grades, and will sometimes require that a purchase of desirable grades be accompanied by a purchase of the lower grades as well. The way that grades are produced and exchanged is not only a matter of moving along the bulk of the material stream; it is also a matter of what textile recyclers described as "fairness" and the distribution of value. Individual items recognized as

being more valuable are often purposefully left in the sorted grades to make them attractive to buyers at various points further along the value chain rather than extracted and isolated to fetch a higher price for the textile recycler.

Because transactions involving used clothing are simultaneously a significant investment for buyers (several tons might be purchased at once) and a significant risk (until a volume of clothes is sorted, it is unclear what exactly has been sold within the weighed quantity), relations of trust play a key role. Textile recyclers must trust their exchange partners, like charities, to provide them with high-quality rag from which all the desirable items have not already been removed. As Wiktor explained to me, establishing a new relationship with a potential supplier would require him to travel personally to inspect the goods, since there is no industry-wide standard to which he could make reference to when making decisions about the quality of goods. Subsequent standardization of that exchange relationship would then rely on Wiktor's trust of the seller to maintain a particular level of quality. Those who buy from textile recyclers must trust the textile recyclers to provide them with a quality product, since it is often not possible to inspect grades before making a purchase. Sometimes these issues are negotiated by the presence of a representative for the buying company who personally inspects the grades as they are being assembled to make sure that they correspond to the expectations of the buyer and the customers in the distant markets where the clothes are to be sold.

In Chapter 6, I described the retail of used clothing in Krakow. The "used clothing market" consists of differently-configured assemblages that produce used clothing as market objects with different qualities. Overcoming uncertainty to demonstrate product quality is difficult, if not impossible, to overcome in the sale of used clothing. Retailers whose shops are owned by wholesalers and therefore have a steady supply of goods deal with this problem by

producing used clothing as a constantly-novel good. Circulating stock and cyclical pricing systems allow used things to be understood variously as standard goods and status goods (Aspers 2009). The cyclical pricing systems, various pricing mechanisms, rotation of stock, and constant production of novelty in bulk used clothing shops are necessary as ways of dealing with heterogeneity. Even the way that used clothing is often displayed—piled in bins rather than hung—invites a type of shopper and mode of shopping that can deal with heterogeneity. Independent retailers struggle to turn used things into a desirable good because they do not have access to the same assemblage of stock rotation. Some independent retailers solve the problem of value production by choosing different supply methods—selecting items individually rather than buying them by the kilogram—and qualifying the goods with branding and narrative devices. Relations of trust are necessary with employees as there are many ways—of course!—for employees to use the dynamic pricing systems to their advantage or to take advantage of the hard-to-monitor nature of the stock and simply take items for themselves. The way that exchange is organized in this retail landscape is thus directly connected to the material nature of used clothing.

In Chapter 7, retail assemblages were less visible, but used clothing itself came into focus. Polish consumers' preferences for used clothing are difficult to understand if we assume that the material qualities of consumer goods are irrelevant to sociological analysis, as do critical approaches. Used clothing is ubiquitous in Krakow and is an alternative to the homogeneous products of global supply chains that are offered in shopping malls. Shoppers become experts about sensing quality, developing their taste through encounters with used clothes that are often surprising, exciting, or addictive. When it comes to consumption, more standard explanations about taste and habitus do go far to explain the structures of preferences and taste; in other

words, who is interested in particular types of goods, and why. In this dissertation, I have been interested not only in consumer preferences but also in the way that exchange relationships are constructed. Even so, it is possible to see a bit of room for the emergence of novel preferences that emerge through almost chance encounters between people and piles of things.

8.2 Theoretical implications of understanding exchange as thoroughly socio-material

The world of used clothing exchange is thus organized and maintained in a way that is inseparable from the materiality of what is being exchanged. In each of the contexts of exchange I have described above, people are involved in the project of conveying value and meaning in a relatively stable material form. What looking at used clothing has shown is the various ways that the agency to stabilize form and convey value and meaning is distributed among actors (human and non-human actors spread across time and space). In the sections below I outline some of the implications of this research for a sociological understanding of valuation and exchange. I consider how the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological approaches I have chosen to use in this dissertation provide insights into understanding the way exchange is structured *around* and *by* the goods that are being exchanged.

There are some questions that have long been of interest to sociologists (such as why certain *types of things* are considered valuable to certain people) that can be answered without recourse to the type of approach I propose here. If I were to have done a study of the retail markets of used clothing (for instance focusing on the Polish market for used clothing, or comparing the Polish and UK markets for used clothing), I might have just focused on the social and historical factors which shape people's understanding of and interpretation of "used clothing." I would certainly have found patterns in people's taste for and desire for used clothing

that correspond to different positions in social space (i.e., the habitus). This part of the story of used clothing is certainly important and should be made part of this work in the future. But in this dissertation I have focused on slightly different problems. First, by focusing on the *goods* in the retail contexts in the UK and Poland, I have tried to show how "used clothing" comes to be understood as valuable in dynamic socio-material processes. This thus complicates the notion of a class of goods that can be understood in a particular way and introduces the necessity to see how understandings of goods are produced in specific encounters (which of course are in part structured by existing social and historical patternings). Second, by considering the entire value chain and not just the retail contexts, where the goods appear to be a *fait accompli* (Ingold 2012, p. 435), I am able to consider valuation in relation to production processes. In all the spaces of exchange that I have considered here, used clothing organizes people into different relations of exchange as much as people are involved in the work of organizing, managing, and transforming used clothing into valuable objects of exchange.

8.2.1 Assemblage and the nature of economic life

Sociologists have shown that markets are socially embedded and socio-technically embedded. To say that economic life is socially embedded means that the value of goods and the way that goods are exchanged does not happen according to a law-like economistic logic but is inherently connected to and arises from social patterns and cultural forms. The socio-technical nature of markets has been shown by performativity scholars, who have highlighted the crucial role of infrastructures and ideas about economics or "the economy" which also play a role in structuring exchange and valuation. It has been my aim to extend these insights a step further (as

Hennion (2007) suggests) by using assemblage to encompass not only the human actors and the non-human market infrastructures and devices, but also what is being exchanged.

Using the concept of assemblage is in itself not an original innovation on my part. Assemblage has been used in a variety of disciplines in recent years to conceptualize a wide range of different entities and phenomena (such as cities (Sassen 2006 and 2014; Farías 2010; MacFarlane 2011a and 2011b), states (Ong 2005), or the organization of a startup media firm (Girard and Stark 2005)). Assemblage has also already been used to conceptualize the workings of markets (see for instance Berndt and Boeckler 2010 or Çalişkan 2010). Some approaches within economic sociology, further, share a sensibility with the assemblage approach without calling it by that name (for instance, the classic "strawberry market" story of a nearly perfect real-life instantiation of an abstract economic form (Garcia-Parpet 2007)). My use of assemblage in this dissertation should therefore be understood as a way of, firstly, allying myself with other scholars who are asking similar sorts of questions to the ones that have occupied me in this work (i.e., the *hows* rather than the *whys* (Law 2009, p. 148) of used clothing exchange; secondly, focusing on process (Yu 2013); thirdly, considering forms which are historically new or new to the literature; and fourthly, thinking of agency as sociomaterially distributed (MacFarlane 2011a and 2011b).

Assemblage approaches have been a target of criticism for appearing to completely reject, neglect, or ignore the concept of structure (see Brenner et al. 2011, p. 233). For instance, it has been argued that the analytic of assemblage is insufficiently attentive to context since similar-looking assemblages may be "positioned in quite different ways within any number of broader historical geographies of power" and that materiality only acquires its value and meaning in the particular "political-economic structures and institutions in which they

[materials] are embedded" (Brenner et al. 2011, p. 234). But whereas the assemblage approach is often presented as opposed to "structural" approaches, it should be understood as complementary rather than replacing or rejecting it (see MacFarlane 2011a and 2011b).

One way assemblages have been described is as "social-spatial formations" (Anderson and MacFarlane 2011, p. 124). Understood in this way, there is no reason that an assemblage approach could not be brought to bear on questions of how structural patterns that have long interested sociologists (like, for instance, one's position in social space) are enacted, maintained, and shift over time. Structure is, after all, a process which is constantly being elaborated. Structures are *processes* which have been stabilized into *patterns* that are relatively long-lasting and relatively predictable/knowable. DeLanda (2006) has argued that assemblages (structures) exist on different time scales. Some assemblages exist in geological time. Other assemblages, like some of the ones I have described in the chapters above, are fleeting (the way that the pricing cycle makes different sorts of objects out of used clothing). Still other structures/assemblages, like "class" (people in similar positions in social space), exist in a middle temporal and spatial realm. The language of assemblage does not in itself imply contingency and instability. The relations constructed through the exchange of used clothing are relatively stable structures/assemblages that turn the radical contingency of heterogeneous used clothing items into markets and value chains that can work relatively well and in a relatively stable manner. The lens of things and objects has been my approach to dealing with the problem of contingency versus continuity, or in other words, heterogeneity and disorder versus order. I turn to these questions in the next section.

8.2.2 Objects and things: materiality and the stabilization of value

The essence of the exchange of used clothing is the transformation of cast-offs—heterogeneous items discarded by their previous owners—into forms that can once again transmit value and meaning. This value and meaning can be, for instance, that of a commodity in a shop or that of a gift between two people connected by a charitable organization. As Domínguez Rubio (2016) has argued, the maintenance and transmission of value and meaning is contingent upon the stabilization of the material form of a *thing* into the relational social position of an *object*. The material form of a thing (whether that be a Trobriand ceremonial prow-board, a speed bump, or the Mona Lisa) needs to be maintained, repaired, and ceaselessly *managed* in order to keep it efficacious in the social function or role that it fills as an object. Further, the social relations around used clothing also arise in relation to the specific materialities of used clothing as an object of exchange. Domínguez Rubio (2014) has also shown how the organization of conservational work and ownership structures in museums are organized around particular types of material forms, which require the formation of different types of expertise and classification systems. The same dynamics are true for objects of exchange, be they commodities or gifts. The achievement of structure, stabilization, and repetition (Deleuze 1994) can be seen through the lens of objects.

Historically, clothing has occupied different sorts of object-positions to hold and transmit value and meaning. In Chapter 3, I discussed the history of textiles and clothing as stores of value. In the early modern period, textiles could hold value for a span of several generations. When the social function of a piece of clothing is simply to cover the body and keep it warm, maintaining stable material form is of utmost importance. As I wrote in Chapter 3, Marx (1993, p. 197) wrote disparagingly of the practice common in the wool industry in the mid-19th century to construct garments from reclaimed wool. Reclaimed and reprocessed wool produced less

expensive garments, but the shorter fibers in the reprocessed wool wore out faster. Garments made from reclaimed wool did not hold their value—they fell out of their object-positions—more quickly than garments made from more expensive new wool. When the social function of a piece of clothing is to convey meaning and a sense of an individual's value and place in society, it is no less important that the thing be subsumed to its object position. With the fashion cycle increasing in speed, and fashion "seasons" increasing in number, things are produced to remain in their object-positions as fashionable clothing items for only a short time.

8.2.3 Markets as object-producing assemblages

What attention to materiality has gotten us is a fine-grained view of how the production of used clothing as an object of exchange actually happens and how different valuation processes are connected to differently-produced objects. The story of used clothing is a story of how stability is produced, even where disorder and contingency would seem to preclude the production of order. What used clothing helps us see is the different articulations of production processes and how these come to bear on valuation. A kind of typology emerges based on how objects are produced. In their overview of economic sociological work on valuation in markets, Aspers and Beckert ask if we might find a "general theory applied to all market exchanges" and if "valuation processes differ systematically in different types of markets and, if so, how" (2011, p. 31). They make a distinction between three types of markets that economic sociologists have tended to study: financial markets, markets for aesthetic goods, and markets where ethical issues figure prominently (Aspers and Beckert 2011, p. 30). This is not a formal typology, but they are suggesting that each of these types of markets is characterized by a certain similarity of valuation mechanisms. I suggest not focusing on divisions based on the types of goods exchanged in

markets (since as I have shown, goods of the same "type" can be produced in quite different ways, like vintage and bulk used clothing, charity shop goods and Polish bulk used clothing, retail and wholesale) but instead on making distinctions based on how goods (i.e., relational objects) are produced.

Production should be understood as any labor processes that stabilize material form and value in objects of exchange. Production can happen in assemblages with different spatial distributions, like in individual charity shops, in networks of charity shops, in textile recycling warehouses, and in different types of retail. Sometimes the object produced is a class of goods; other times the object is an individuated singularity.

Across the ecology of used clothing exchange, from the production of raw materials to make new clothing, through the marketing and sale of new clothing, the collection of cast-offs, and the production of commodities (such as bulk used clothing or vintage clothing), used clothing is a social object that is produced in a variety of ways. Through the lens of used clothing, it is possible to identify a variety of production processes. Types of valuation processes—the ways that actors organize themselves and material objects in order to convey value and meaning—correspond to these various modes of production. These are also often steps in a value chain, building on earlier-produced forms. Looking at production (what goods are actually produced for exchange, where it is done, and who does it) when considering valuation makes clear who is in control of the process, i.e., the political economy of that form of exchange.

Production through growth/cultivation

This type of production involves the production of goods through human manipulation of natural resources. Examples of the type of good produced by this type of production are cotton (Çalişkan 2010), strawberries (Garcia-Parpet 2007), or eggs (Aspers 2009). These products are naturally heterogeneous (no strawberry is exactly like another) but are standardized through sorting processes. Their quality is then evaluated in relation to a scale. This type of good falls under the category of what Aspers (2009) has called "standard goods." In the ecology of used clothing, the cotton grown for the production of the original new garment is produced in this way. Çalişkan (2010) extends his analysis of the global cotton market "backwards" from the exchange of cotton as a standardized commodity to the growing of cotton. Crucially, farmers do have some degree of control over production, and can attempt to change the way they grow cotton in accordance with the "rules of the game" and the frameworks imposed by the way cotton is traded. Similarly, producers of strawberries can change their production methods to produce "better" strawberries that look more like the ones their competitors are selling (Garcia-Parpet 2007). As opposed to cotton or strawberries, where material homogenization was the result of a political process of aligning interests of producers in order to strengthen the position of their product with respect to other strawberries being grown and sold in France, the supply of used clothing simply cannot be homogenized.

Mass production

Mass production is the production of series of identical goods. Jeans, t-shirts, cars, or screws are all examples of mass-produced goods. Mass-produced goods can be both status and standard goods. Aspers (2009) has argued that different sorts of knowledge are necessary to evaluate the value of status goods and standard goods. Knowledge of the value of status goods is

derived in relation to social status of the parties who trade in the goods; knowledge of the value of standard goods is derived in relation to an objective scale that situates the good's material qualities in relation to those of other goods of the same type. But qualification processes for both standard and status goods that are mass-produced can be done in a top-down fashion. In other words, exchange is structured (i.e., socio-material order is created) by a particular pattern and organization of the socio-technical agencies that qualify and move things through markets and along value chains. Even some of the "singularities" that Karpik (2010) has identified as goods without one objective measure of quality (like music or books) should be understood in light of the fact that they are mass-produced. Despite the fact that the content of a book cannot be evaluated through any objective standard, books are materially produced in industrial processes. Marketing a book, then, involves stressing its symbolic qualities in relation to the symbolic qualities of other books, since each exemplar of a book (the physical object produced) is identical to the others. Mechanical (mass) reproduction (Benjamin 1936) of cultural objects can be industrial or digital. YouTube videos or mp3s of songs purchased in the Apple Store are identical exemplars of a single, standardized product. Mass production is what makes the "material peg" phenomenon (Aspers 2009 and 2010) possible. When goods are mass-produced and thus standardized at the moment of production, the symbolic dimension of value becomes more important in differentiating goods.

Analyses of global value chains and global production networks are focused on understanding how the power to manage different parts of this sort of mass-production processes is distributed. Decisions about the buying, selling, and marketing of new clothing, produced in bulk in factories to correspond to particular material parameters, can be made in a centralized or top-down manner. In the exchange of used clothing, since the goods that actors encounter at each

moment are never materially standardized, the "mass production" of used clothing in value chains that move millions of metric tons of material involves a more diffused set of actors making buying, selling, and marketing decisions.

Production of non-standard singularities

The next type of production is one that is based not on material production but on the selection of individual items. Valuation processes with this type of production are centered around individuating and narrating the value of individual goods. Examples of goods produced in this way are antique furniture (Bogdanova 2013), art (Velthius 2005), or any number of craft or art objects that are not industrially produced with identical exemplars. Vintage clothing is also an example of a good produced in this way. This type of production is capable of producing high-value, "spectacular" goods. First a sorting process is done (whether this is a physical sorting process, as with used clothing, or a sorting based on the selection of only particular items from an array of available items) and then qualification of the objects is carried out through the construction of narratives that testify to the value of individual objects. This type of production should be understood as only possible as the result of wider flows and processes with wider spatial and temporal dimensions that are purposefully excluded from the space of calculation in order to produce the value of the chosen goods.

Scavenging or (re)claiming

In this type of production, goods are produced through scavenging, claiming, or reclaiming. Goods produced in this way often are, like those produced through growth or cultivation, not materially identical. Processes of valuation are contingent upon their

standardization through processes of refining or sorting. Examples of goods produced in this way are oil, mushrooms, diamonds, and used clothing. Tsing (2013 and 2015) describes how mushrooms, not planted or cultivated by anyone, are collected from public land and then sorted in multiple stages on their way to becoming a global commodity. Struggles over valuation involve, like with other goods, attempts to make the "type" of good appear valuable to potential consumers, but unlike with other goods, cannot involve actually physically *cultivating* the goods in a different way, i.e., changing the nature of supply. With this type of production, actors can attempt to create value through innovations in sorting processes or innovations in how and from where the goods are sourced. In the used clothing industry, the classical economic paradigm of demand generating supply in a market is inverted. Sellers can try and shape supply in a variety of ways, but ultimately supply is relatively inelastic (Crang et al. 2013, p. 13) and sellers are engaged in the work of finding demand and buyers for that supply.

Issues of ownership are often salient in these sorts of markets. In the case of the mushrooms, Tsing has argued (2013) that so many rounds of sorting take place precisely in order to alienate them from their pickers and the non-market relationship that characterizes their "production." The production of other found goods like oil and diamonds is also characterized by conflicts (and even war) over their ownership and who should derive value from their exchange. In the exchange of used clothing, the issue of rightful ownership is also central in debates over what kind of value should be produced and who should derive the profits or benefits from its exchange. For instance, controversies around used clothing swirl around the issues of whether used clothing should be a gift to people in need or whether it should be turned into a commodity to produce profit for a charity or a private textile recycling firm.

Goods produced in this way can subsequently be sorted or further processed. The value of a diamond depends not only on the cultural value placed by particular social groups on this particular type of material produced by the earth, but on the labor done by actors distributed throughout the networks which extract diamonds from the earth, refine them, and sort them according to a variety of culturally-agreed-upon characteristics, including size, cut, and the existence of various kinds of inclusions which may be visible to the naked eye or with the aid of a jeweler's loupe. By the time a diamond gets to a jewelry shop, it has been re-produced a number of times, and the merchant is able to tell individualizing stories about the value of a particular, selected diamond. Oil extracted from the ground goes on to become all sorts of products whose value is determined largely through top-down buying, selling, and marketing decisions described in the section above on mass production. Similarly, when used clothing or collected e-waste are transformed into standardized, mass-produced products like wiper rags or smelted metal, these products can then be subject to valuation processes corresponding to that of mass production.

Production of "fictitious commodities"?

The production processes that I have referred to above have largely made reference to material goods. But what about valuation processes in reference to non-material "goods" like human labor or financial derivatives? I suggest that these be thought of as "fictitious commodities" following Polanyi's (1944) formulation. He identified land, labor, and money as social things that were not *de facto* produced to be exchanged as other commodities are but which were brought under the control of the market. Markets for fictitious commodities, like labor markets and financial markets, have not been the subject of this dissertation. I suggest,

however, that it could be fruitful to think in terms of the framework I have proposed here and consider the valuation of "fictitious commodities" in relation to their production. This is, in fact, the approach taken by scholars who have shown that people often produce themselves as commodities in various labor markets (for instance fashion models (Mears 2011) or Hooters waitresses (Newton-Francis and Young 2015). Studies of financial markets have often explained value production by stressing the importance of market devices and infrastructures through which the particular immaterial "products" are created (Pinch and Swedberg 2008).

8.2.4 Assemblage as post-critical politics

The post-critical approach of assemblages, which seeks to show how things, entities, and processes *come to be* rather than to debunk[40] or unveil hidden structural forces, helps to fine-tune the political conclusions that can be drawn from our work regarding the causality and agency responsible for undesirable social outcomes (of, for instance, inequality, domination, exploitation, or ecological destruction). For instance, by looking at precisely how textile recyclers turn discards into valuable commodities, it becomes clear that it is not so evident that the critical attitude towards them as responsible for the undesirable outcomes of the trade found in much existing scholarship on the used clothing trade is justified. With the used clothing industry, it is easy for scholars to point fingers within the industry to textile recyclers as those who are benefiting and perhaps (it is suspected) even encouraging excessive consumption so that they will have material to process and profit from. But my research has shown that textile

[40] See for instance MacFarlane (2011a, p. 213): "Rather than a form of critique that would seek to debunk—that is, dissociate from and subtract from 'matters of fact'—assemblage emerges as a form that would seek to be more closely associated with its objects by tracing and multiplying the relations with those objects."

recyclers are also unhappy with sheer *volume* without what they (and their clients, and their clients' clients) would consider *quality*.

The *quality* that textile recyclers are interested in is not only related to what is considered attractive in particular cultural, historical, and/or political contexts, but is also connected to the material capacities (or affordances) of those garments and materials to be stabilized in cultural or social worlds. If a shirt has worn out by the time its user has donated it, despite the fact that it might still be trendy and thus desirable to another group of consumers in a downstream market, it is harder to make it serve that function. In other words, garments that are worn out are *things* that are difficult to subsume to a fashionable *object* position. Of course people in destitute circumstances are often willing to wear things that others might consider too worn out, and in some cases people may only be interested in the functionality of a piece of clothing rather than its social value. These are different object positions. The materiality of the things does make a difference for the ways they can be taken up into subsequent social worlds as objects in relation to subjects.

This approach to criticism and politics is connected to a broader trend that has emerged starkly in recent years: the growing polarization of politics and the erosion of trust in experts. In this climate, it is necessary to understand the role of scholarship in societal debates, considering the possibility that it could even contributing to increasing polarization. As a political strategy, traditional critique is polarizing and does nothing to break down ossified categories and entrenched conflicts. If we, for instance, wish to critique capitalism or capitalists, how are we going to reach people who identify with those things? This argument has been made by Latour and recounted by Puig dela Bellacasa (2011) in relation to one example of a pernicious behavior: the driving of SUVs. By demonizing SUV drivers rather than engaging with what makes driving

SUVs appealing to them, we risk alienating those we oppose and pulling the rug out from under our political goals. The assemblage approach helps us identify the projects that actors are engaged in and the constraints they face and to potentially build new alliances rather than further entrenching divisions.

8.3 Future research

Because the used clothing trade in its current form, processing billions of clothing items and moving millions of metric tons of used clothing items around the world, is a novelty in historical terms, an assemblage approach has been a fruitful way to approach analysis. However, moving forward, it will be important to historicize these processes that I have described. How has this particular this type of charity developed, and how did environmental issues become a powerful motivation for exchanging used clothing? Why used clothing is such a widespread phenomenon in Poland? How do changing geopolitical hierarchies play a role in where and how used clothing is exchanged?

It will also be important to connect the workings of the value chain that I have identified to a larger universe of economic processes, not all of which are organized as markets which turn cast-offs into commodities. The "value chain" I have examined in detail is only one part of a larger ecosystem of used things. Some of this ecosystem is organized in markets and through the commodification of used items. Charities and textile recyclers compete with online marketplaces like eBay for people's unwanted items. On the more formal end of the spectrum, consignment and resale businesses are ever-fiercer competitors for unwanted clothing, especially designer-label pieces. ThredUp, a US-based online consignment company, reported in 2018 that so-called "resale disruptors"—those that "focus on higher-quality, gently-used, brand-name products and

present a more curated product assortment"—is growing at a rate nine times faster than "traditional resale" (ThredUp 2018). Companies like The Real Real, a luxury consignment business, are drawing some of those "pearls" away from the global trade.

Non-market exchange is an equally important part of this ecosystem. It is notoriously hard to track the flows and magnitudes of this kind of exchange, precisely because it is informal. In Oxford, some neighborhood community centers hold weekly swap events. Clothes are one of the most popular types of items at these events. In Poland, some used clothing is collected by the Caritas charity, by churches, or by individual charitable organizations (whose retail operations are not professionally organized as they are in the UK). Informal swap events are becoming increasingly popular, as are garage-sale type events where people sell their own unwanted items. The unsold, unswapped, and unwanted items left over after these events are often passed along to charities or textile collection banks. Informal, online communities organize the circulation of various types of used items, from furniture abandoned next to dumpsters to children's clothing that is no longer necessary.

The central focus of this dissertation has been the commodification of cast-off used clothing along a value chain between the UK and Poland. But alongside commodities, gifts and waste have appeared as equally important. In charity shops, gift exchange competes with commodification. In the UK and Poland, used clothing has been increasingly drawn into waste management assemblages. The exchange of used clothing as commodities in Poland, though divorced from the gift relationship within which the goods were originally donated, is also characterized by trust relations that are usually not be thought to be part of the impersonal, alienated market.

Given that gift exchange and market exchange are so intimately intertwined, perhaps it would be more fruitful to theorize the relation of production to valuation in exchange in general rather than markets more narrowly in the way I have done above. I would also question the extent to which we should be interested in finding a general sociological theory for markets as Aspers and Beckert (2011) have suggested, or whether we should rather be interested in the broader phenomenon of exchange. Zelizer has formulated the concept of circuits of commerce to describe social relations that comprise networks of human actors as well as "distinctive cultural materials, particular forms of economic transactions and media, as well as crucial relational work involved in the constant negotiation and maintenance of relations" (2011, p. 307) is an attempt to move away from a focus on markets. Her focus has been smaller-scale networks within which processes of objectification are not characterized by mass production. Healy's study of the exchange of human blood and organs, however, does focus on the exchange of a certain kind of highly personal good on a mass level. Healy's analysis, however, does not dwell on the differences between different "products" made from human plasma. He mentions only in passing that there are now "many kinds of blood products and they have longer shelf lives" than there used to be (Healy 2006, p. 127). An analysis of contentious exchange with multiple logics should be attentive to the specific ways in which objects of exchange are produced.

Though the structure of the dissertation has preserved the form of a value chain, with a beginning ("entrance" into the used clothing trade) and an end (purchase by Polish consumers), there is nothing fundamentally "first" about the place where I began or "last" about the place I ended up. As Lepawsky and Mather conclude about studying global e-waste flows, it is only ever possible to be "[i]n the middle of it all" (2011, p. 246). My analysis began "in the middle of things, *in medias res*" (Latour 2005, p. 27): used clothing entering charity shops as donations. It

also ends abruptly, though the things go on with their various object-lives in people's closets, as treasured garments, in markets farther afield (Africa, the Middle East, Pakistan), in landfills emitting greenhouse gasses, in factories being burned as alternative fuel, or in charitable collection banks to again cycle through the processes I have described in this dissertation.

In the course of this dissertation I have attempted to do justice to the massive organizational feat that is the transformation of rags to riches. The global trade of used clothing is the sum total of the production of a multitude of objects that make millions of metric tons of discarded clothing items mobile. The flow of used clothing is not likely to slow any time soon. New objects are on the horizon: development of textile recycling technologies and capacities is at the top of policy agendas in Europe. As these come to fruition, the assemblages that produce objects in economies of used clothing exchange will be negotiated anew.

APPENDIX
Survey Questionnaire[41]

How often do you shop for used clothes? (In a given week, month, or year?)
How often do you shop for new clothes?
Where do you most often buy clothes?
Do you have a favorite used clothing shop? (If yes): Why do you think that shop/those shops are better than others?
Do you also shop in consignment shops? Vintage shops?

Did you buy something today? (If yes) What did you buy?
(If no) What was your last purchase in a used clothing shop?
Were you searching for something in particular today?

Do you mainly buy for yourself or for others as well?

Are there things that you would not buy used?
How do you prepare used things for your own use? (Washing, dry cleaning, etc.?)

What do you look for when buying used clothes?
Do you look at the brand when you buy used clothes?
Is the origin of the clothes important to you? (e.g. England, Germany, Holland)
Is it important to you that the thing you buy is in fashion now?

Would you buy something that was not in ideal condition? For instance stained or with a hole?
Would you buy something that had to be altered in some way? To fit, or mended?

Do you have any rules when it comes to price? What is the most you've paid for a used item? The least?

When did you start shopping for used clothes? (Have you always done so or was there a moment when you started shopping there?)

How often do you get rid of clothes? What do you do with the things that you no longer want to wear?

Are you wearing something now that you bought used?

Demographic questions:
How old are you (more or less)?
What do you do?
Do you have children? Are you married?
How many people are in your household?

[41] Translated from Polish version used in the field

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