

## *Call for Papers*

### **HOUSE/KEEPING: DOMESTIC ACCUMULATION, DECLUTTERING, AND THE STUFF OF KINSHIP IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Homes tend to be depicted as sites of consumption and display, but they are also the locus of a perpetual struggle against unwanted accumulation. Guests often judge the proliferation of clutter as an indication of the moral rectitude of the family, and yet the act of keeping material objects is an essential mode for the transmission of kin relationships and identity. In many societies, the house is analogically related to the body (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995), and the flow of domestic possessions in and out of the home can be associated with the purity, health, and wealth of its residents (Empson 2012). But little anthropological attention has been placed upon the conflicting forces of the need to store family valuables (and values) while simultaneously fighting against the encroachment of clutter and disorder, especially across cultures. And yet the increasing availability of cheap consumer goods means that surplus belongings are an increasingly common phenomenon across the globe.

Since its appearance as a psychological disorder on reality television in 2008, “hoarding” has become a household word in the US, and most people claim to have one in their extended family. Professional organizers and purveyors of minimalist aesthetics and ethics have also made regular headlines in recent years, further demonstrating a widespread concern with over how to contain and control the constant influx of material goods, as well as the difficulties in ridding themselves of unwanted things that tend to accumulate in various niches of the home. In 2013, “Hoarding Disorder” was entered for the first time as an official category of psychological disorder to the DSM-V (The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), the most important manual for psychological practice in the U.S. According to the DSM-V, hoarding disorder is estimated to affect 2.5 to 5% of the human population, and is believed to be a genetic trait that is distributed universally. Despite historical and anthropological indications that it is strongly correlated with capitalism (Hodder 2014, Smail 2014), the biomedical model continues to dominate intellectual discussion in reductionist ways (as described by Orr et al 2017).

Indeed, if we approach the problems from a social rather than psychological perspective (Herring 2014), it is possible that hoarding disorder and minimalism are indexes of the limits of the North Atlantic ethics of accumulation. These problems have now been documented

ethnographically (Daniels 2010, Gregson 2011, Gygi 2018, Kilroy-Marac 2016, Lepselter 2011, Newell 2014) in the United States, England, and Japan but little anthropological or historical documentation has been done on these issues outside those regions. Even in continental Europe, the problem of hoarding is not a public concern in the same way, and the word remains untranslatable in many languages. At the same time, other languages offer new perspectives, such as the Bruxellois concept of *brool*, a word that describes heterogeneous jumbles of old things but evokes the miasma of attachment and abjection that surrounds them (<https://dvo.hypotheses.org/3242>). But what happens in places where the non-human things are explicitly understood as animate beings?

The relationship between persons and possessions has been an important source of anthropological insight since Mauss' reflections on gift economies such as the *kula* and *potlatch*, but here we hope to turn that rich history of insight towards the social processes surrounding gathering, storing, purging, and recirculating objects with an attention to the influx and outflux of materiality in the home. Already in two of the most renowned ethnographic texts we find indications of the importance of storage in social relationships: the Azande granary and the Trobriand yam house. Indeed, Weiner (1992), a pioneer of storage studies, demonstrated that a reinterpretation of the yam house in terms of gender demonstrates that the yam house is always a public index of the state of relations between brothers-in-law, a relationship also mediated by the production and circulation of perishable women's wealth (bundles) by the woman that brings them together. Brought into dialogue with the global spread of commodities for household consumption, these kinds of interminglings between relatedness, possessions, and the spatial organization of the home can serve as inspiration for new interpretative approaches to kinship. The twin problems of storage and clutter seem present in most societies, and yet they are rarely given a space of prominence in ethnography. In this collection we hope to draw upon a wide range of ethnographic sources to make the hidden spaces of storage and their role in social relationships visible in new ways.

We invite submissions of abstracts of less than 300 words to [etasia@ulb.ac.be](mailto:etasia@ulb.ac.be) by January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021, considering the following sorts of questions: What is the relationship between storage and the labor of kinship? What kinds of possessions are sources of obligation? Which are experienced as social or animate beings? What social practices and spatial processes surround waste, excess, and the riddance of objects from the home? How might local ethnographic concepts like *hau* or *brool* inform the anthropological understanding of attachment to possessions, recycling, or the circulation of second-hand objects? When is accumulation a valued social practice, and when is it morally suspect? How is the space of storage constructed in relationship to the social space of the home, and how might this reflect on the local category of stored things? We invite authors to consider how practices such as storage, stockpiling, and purging of belongings can be approached anthropologically in order to provide both nuanced ethnographic depth and broader cross-cultural and historical perspective. Interdisciplinary perspectives are also welcome.

This project is envisioned as a workshop leading to a special issue or edited volume. We will invite a group selected from the abstract submissions to submit 6000-8000 word papers in May 2021. We will ask all participants to read and participate in the discussion of all papers, either in a two-day workshop at the ULB in Brussels, Belgium, or in some virtual substitution for this process in late May or early June. Due to ongoing Covid difficulties, we are not certain of our ability to meet in person. If face to face contact is possible, we will pay for travel and lodging for the event hosted at ULB. In the seemingly likely event that travel is impossible, we will engage with each other's papers with written notes and in virtual group discussion and commentary in order to produce collective knowledge and coherence between participants and if possible, seek later venues/dates for in person meetings.

## **Suggested Readings:**

- Bennett, Jane. 2012. "Powers of the Hoard: Further Notes on Material Agency" In *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. Washington, DC: Oliphant Books: p. 237-272.
- Carsten, Janet and Stephen Hugh-Jones. 1995. *About the House: Lévi-Strauss and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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- Daniels, Inge. 2010. *The Japanese House: Material Culture in The Modern Home*. Berg Publishers.
- Empson, Rebecca. 2012. "The Dangers of Excess: Accumulating and Dispersing Fortune in Mongolia," *Social Analysis* 56(1): 117-132
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- Gygi, Fabio R. 2018. "The Metamorphosis of Excess: 'Rubbish Houses' and the Imagined Trajectory of Things in Post-Bubble Japan" In *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*, Edited by Katarzyna J. Cwiertka And Ewa, Machotka. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. 129-151.
- Henare, Almiria, Martin Holbraad & Sari Westell, Eds. 2007. *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*. London. Routledge
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- Marcoux, Jean-Sebastien. 2001. "The 'Casser Maison' Ritual: Constructing the Self by Emptying the Home," In *Journal Of Material Culture* 6(2): 213-35.
- Mauss, Marcel. 1990 (1925). *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London: Routledge.
- Miller, Daniel, Ed. 2005. *Materiality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Newell, Sasha. 2014. "The Matter of the Unfetish: Hoarding and the Spirit of Possessions," In *HAU* 4(3): 185-213.
- . 2017. "Uncontained Accumulation: Hidden Heterotopias of Storage and Spillage," in *History and Anthropology* 29(1): 37-41.
- Orr, David M.R, Michael Preston-Shoot, and Suzy Braye. 2019. "Meaning in Hoarding: Perspectives of People Who Hoard on Clutter, Culture, and Agency," *Anthropology & Medicine* 26(3): 263-279.
- Peebles, Gustav. 2020. "Hoarding and Saving," » *Sociocultural Anthropology*. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.013.80
- Reno, Joshua. 2014. "Toward a New Theory of Waste: From 'Matter Out of Place' to Signs of Life," *Theory, Culture, And Society* 31(6): 3-27.
- Smail, Daniel Lorde. 2014. "Neurohistory in Action: Hoarding and the Human Past," In *Isis* 105(1): 110-122.
- Steketee, Gail, and Randy Frost. 2010. *Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things*. New York: Mariner Books.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 1988. *The Gender of the Gift*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weiner, Annette B. 1992. *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving*. Berkely: University of California Press.