

August 10, 2007

Dear Bill, Dan, Dave, Dawn, Nick, Roxane,
Sheila, and Tom,

Last semester I made a book, *The Apocalyptic Future Has a Past*, which examined a category of objects that fascinate me. Products of postindustrial disenchantment, these objects are made of mass-manufactured parts cobbled together into new wholes. Examples included the work of Imitation of Christ, Barnaby Barford, Sarah Sze, Richard Hamilton, Fluxus, Tim Hawkinson, DJ Shadow; also the Big Dig house, TV Carnage, the DIY craft movement, the outfits featured in the Wardrobe Re-mix Flickr user group, and the dystopian future of repurposed objects depicted in the *Mad Max* trilogy. My book's title derived from those movies. Before the apocalypse, things served their intended functions. After the bomb, everyone is a scavenger and a gatherer. A social structure like money is useless; what is valuable is only what you can build out of all the accumulated things of the past found around you.

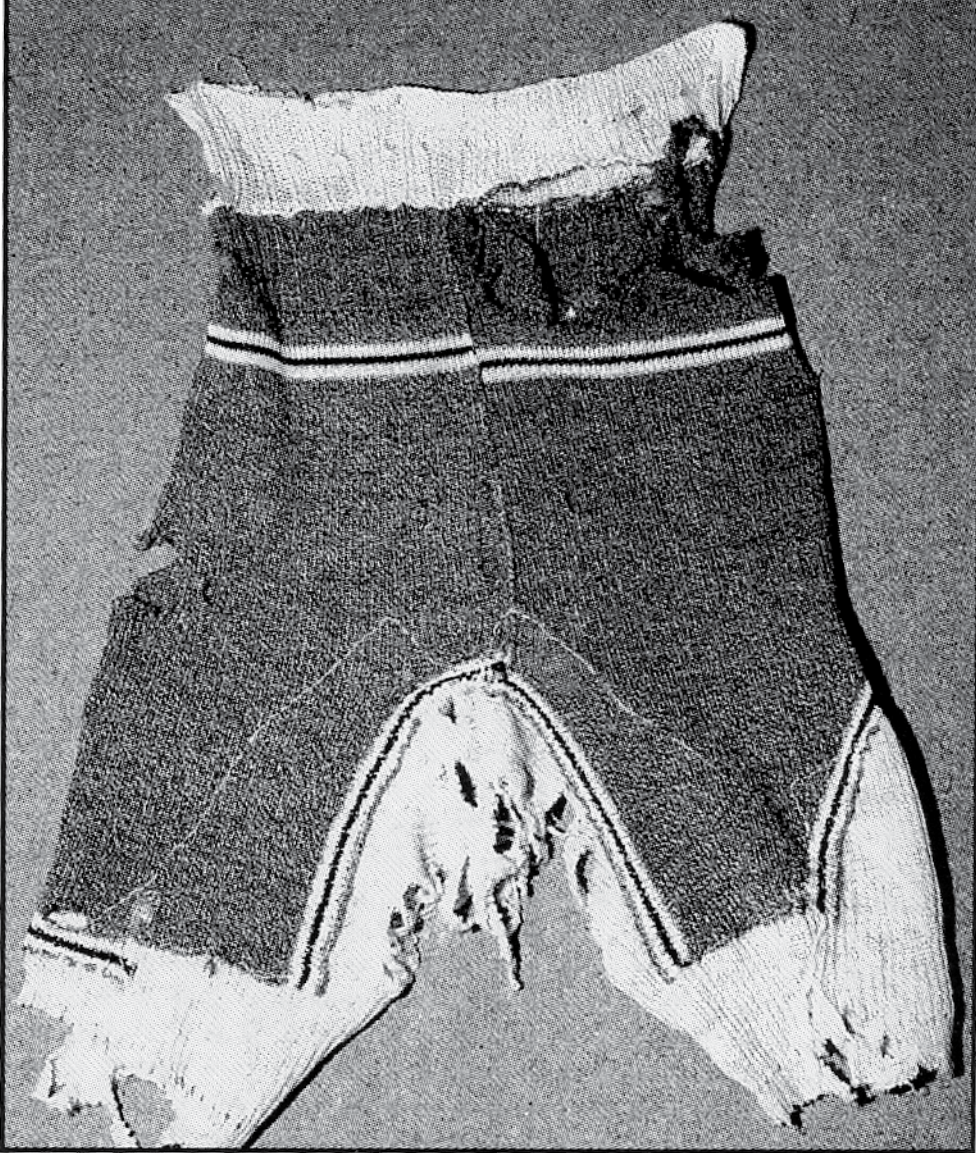
I find this idea engrossing because I am enthralled by the world of things. I've been a scavenger and a gatherer (at thrift stores, flea markets, estate sales) from an early age. But I am not fond of the formal qualities of many cobbled together objects. I'm not interested in the scrappiness of collage and pastiche and junk sculpture. Instead, I'm interested in how new, elegant, surprising forms can be made of already existing things. I'm interested in economy, because I also find the sheer volume of stuff nauseating. So I've been thinking about saving. Or rather, the various denotations of to save:

Save as to rescue. Save as to mend. Save as to preserve and protect. Save as to accumulate. Save as to make unnecessary. Save as to use without wasting: to economize. Save used to remove: save as "but" or "except".

Saving things from obscurity, extinction, excess, meaninglessness, or themselves. Saving scraps for future applications. Saving space. Saving to reuse. Saving as utilizing an economy of form; making do with what is at hand; saving as repurposing. Saving as inventive improvisation. Saving as Yankee ingenuity.

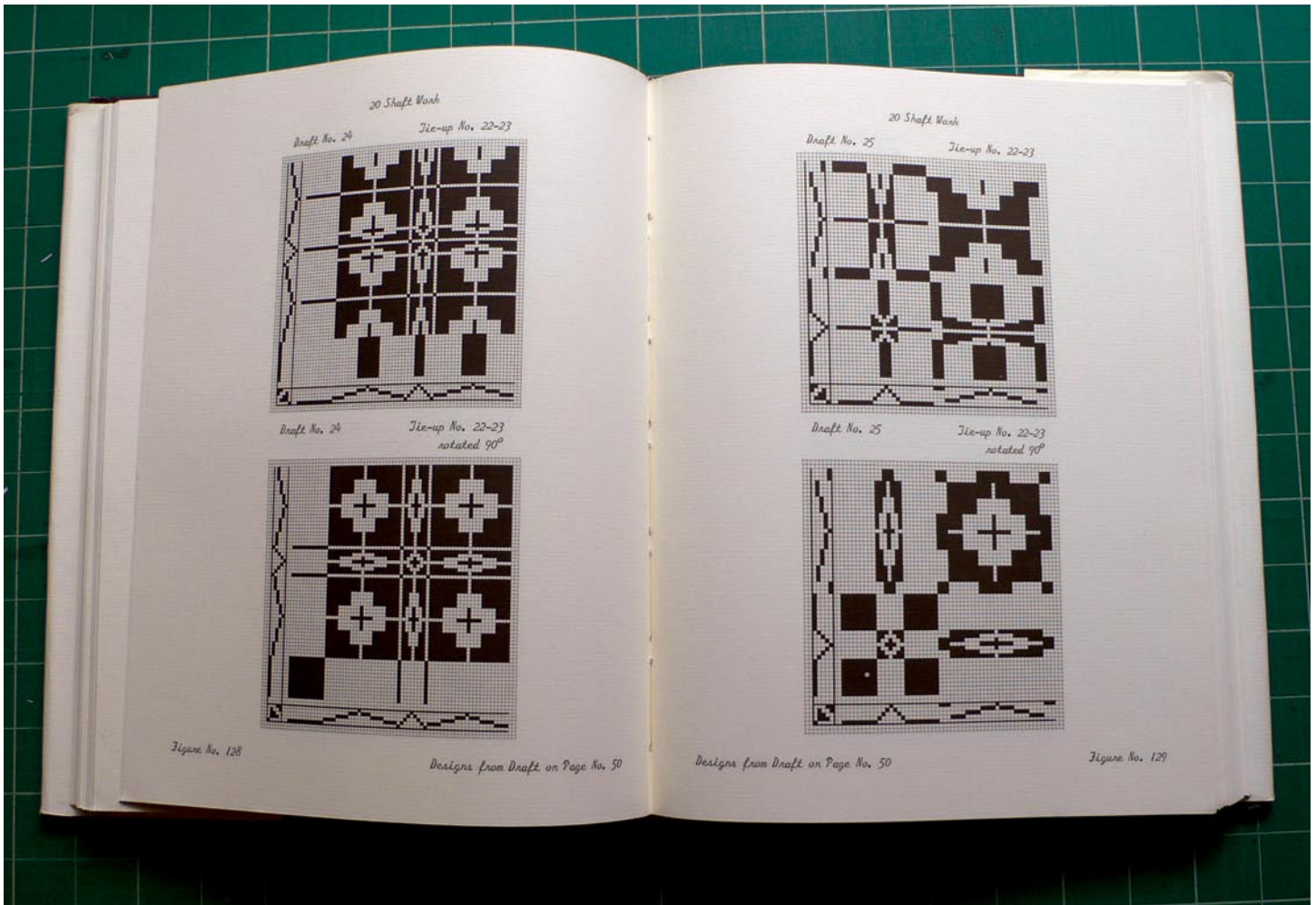
It is not accidental or entirely unfortunate that Save! has a ring of both missionary zeal and capitalist hawkishness. It has a sense of urgency because it is a call to action. We live in an age of excess. Save! offers a recourse of restraint and economy, a consideration of the future, and a way to prepare for it: by making the most of what we've already got.

All best,
Emily



Norwegian underwear | early 20th century

Winter underwear made from an old v-neck sweater. Saving as reusing a thing once its original life is spent. Note that the end use of repurposing need not be radically different in order to still be surprising.



Jacob Angstadt Designs Drawn From His Weavers Patron Book | 1976
Ruth N. Holryod & Ulrike L. Beck

Despite the fact that the "first computer" was the jacquard loom in 1849, looking at weaving pattern templates still provide an anachronistic thrill. *They just look so contemporary.* Plus so economical in form: these designs are nothing but positive and negative units on a matrix. Like the economy of the alphabet: there is only A-Z and the space: but that is all you need.

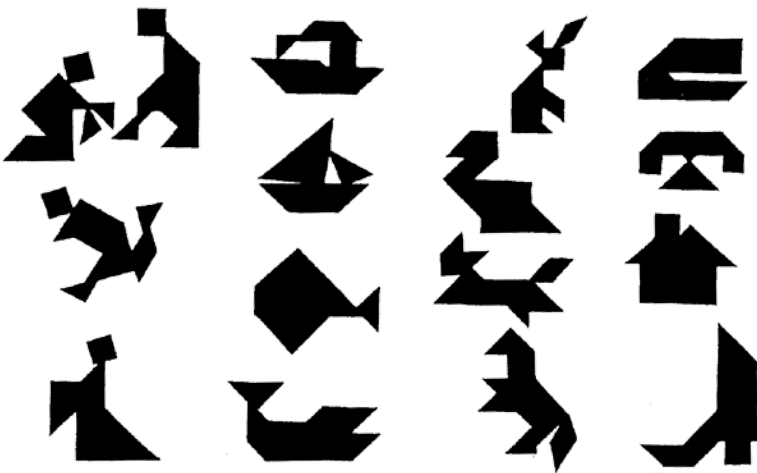


PEOPLE

FISH & BOATS

ANIMALS

HOUSEHOLD ITEMS



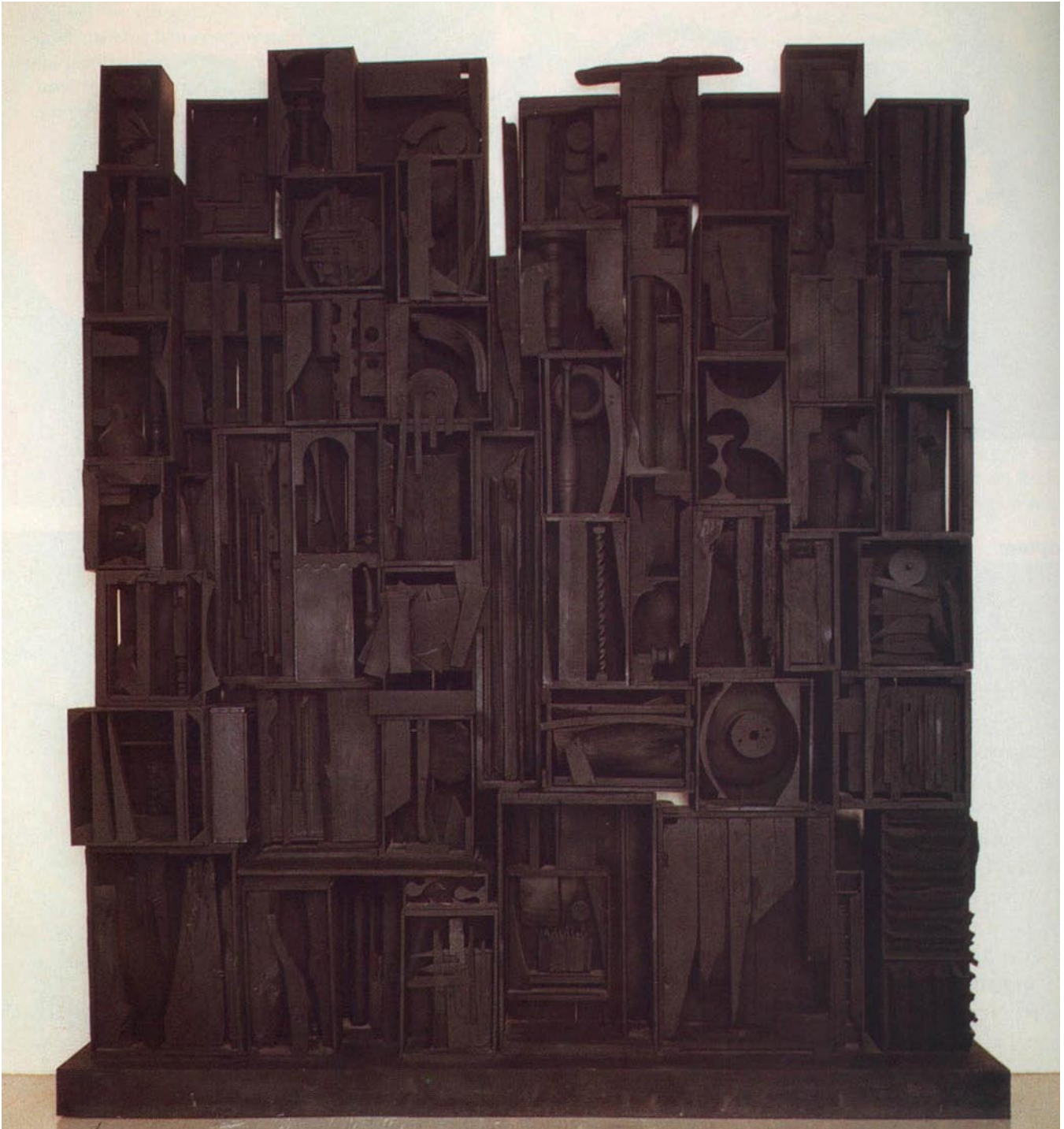
Tangram | originated 960-1279 AD

This ancient Chinese puzzle is an excellent lesson in economy of form and the potentially endless applications of a finite number of parts.



New England Digs | 2002
Mark Dion

The archaeological dig as saving objects from their surroundings. Artist Mark Dion digs in a specified location and then meticulously organizes his chaotic findings into an orderly and beautiful universe. Curiosity cabinet as structure for saving. (Other saving structures: libraries, history museums, ragpiles, homes [especially attics].)



Sky Cathedral | 1958
Louise Nevelson

Enormous sculptures made of common objects, each painted monochrome and arranged into majestic configurations. Most "art from junk!" retains its origin and appears unfortunately whimsical. Through rigorous arrangement, treatment of surface, and sheer scale, Nevelson not only saved objects to make the sculpture but also saved ordinary materials from their ordinariness.



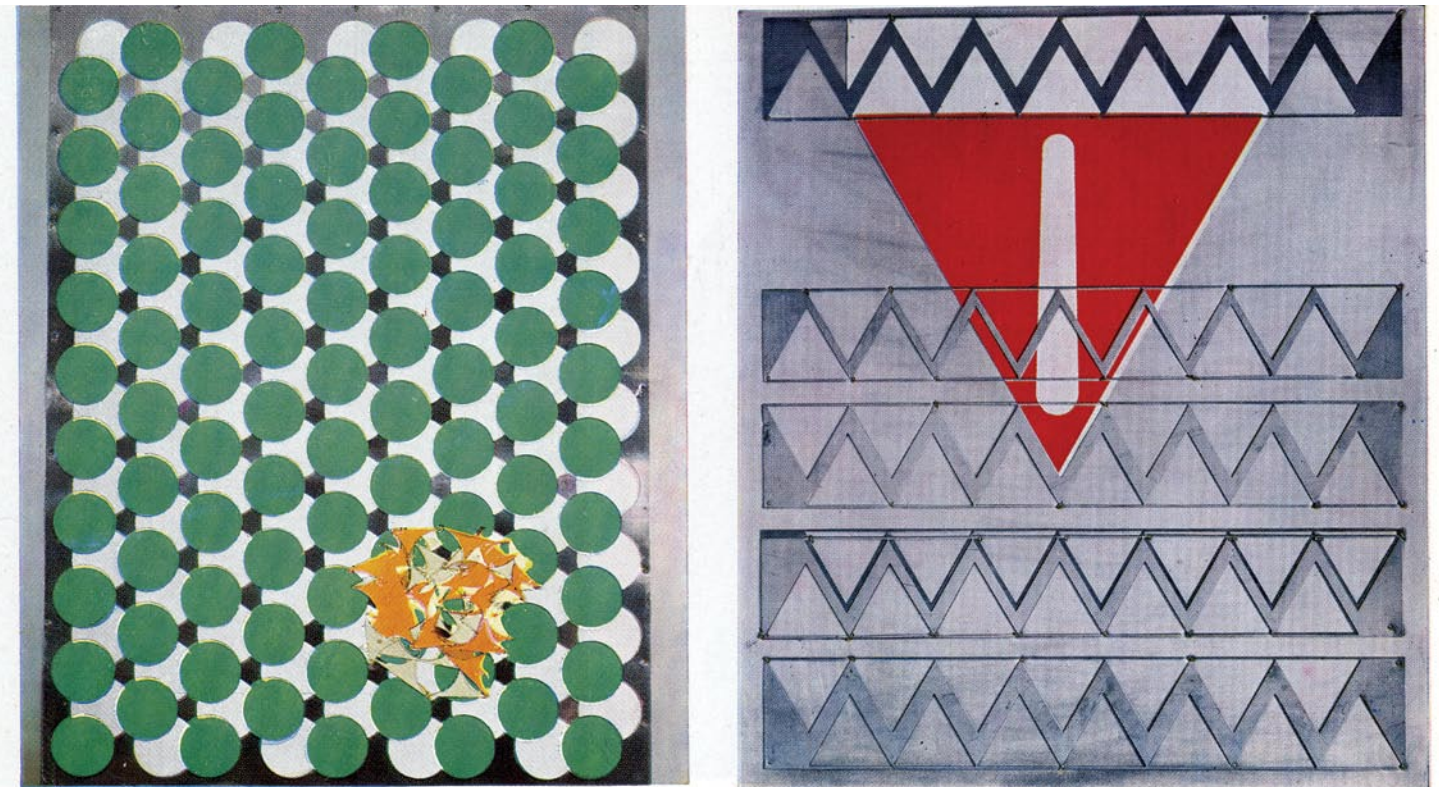
www.dirty-domains.com | 2001
Laura Carton

Artist Laura Carton downloads internet porn, photoshops out the actors, and meticulously reconstructs the tableaux. From her artist statement on www.nyfa.org: "Beyond the camouflage of naked flesh, what remains are carefully constructed and overproduced fictions—the mise-en-scènes of domestic space, suburban melodramas, utopian ideals, and fantasies." Saving as looking closer at something already out there and liberating the latent meaning concealed by the most obvious. Saving as editing: "save" as "except."



Hand shadow puppets | 19th century

Economy of form. Saving by not using anything other than the one thing you always have—your body—to make something new. But it is also specifically using what you already have in such a surprising and ingenious way. The end result is literally not the thing you made but its shadow. So! Elegant!



9 x 10 and Yellow; Red Triangle | 1965
Eugenio Carmi

While art director of the Italsider steel group, Carmi salvaged tin-plates from the rubbish heap and silkscreened on top of them. Graphis magazine wrote that "these compositions in a sense restore meaning to the waste products of human labour." The idea of the individual saving the waste from large industry is very appealing to me. But once again in these compositions there is an economy of form in addition to reuse of materials. On the left: let's only use circles! But oh, ok, you can cut up the circles and use them as scraps too.



letterpress studio snapshot | 2007

A picture of paper goods in my studio saved to print on: tickets, doilies, shooting range targets, flashcards, old letterhead, paper bags, shipping tags, radio ID cards, score cards. Also paper offcuts from cut down parent sheets: economy. Waste nothing. I am always looking for more found paper products to print on, and I store them for a future purpose not now anticipated. When the proper occasion arrives, I will be ready.

Of course, the process of letterpress printing from handset type, foundry ornaments, and pre-existing cuts is about saving also: using only what is already out there, but trying to do so in a fresh, contemporary way.



Bachelor Science | 1985
(author in Japanese)

Purchased in Tokyo in a used bookshop. I can't read it, but I can identify it as a tongue-in-cheek sex manual. I love all the formal evidence of its economy of means: found images, old and new, of varying quality, all printed exclusively in black and white. Its dynamic design keeps its imposed limitations from feeling meager. The only way to save is to save with style.



SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barber, Benjamin R. Consumed. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007. The subtitle is "how markets corrupt children, infantilize adults, and swallow citizens whole." Lots of potential Save! models, such as: the economy of old children's games (hopscotch, hide-and-seek, etc.) which relied on imagination and physical activity instead of consumer goods.

Benjamin, Walter. The Arcades Project. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. Enormous amount of content; complete economy of form. A social history made entirely of notes. A clumsy extract from the translator's forward summarizes why this book engrosses me: "the primal history of the nineteenth century... realized only through... the refuse and detritus of history, the half-concealed, variegated traces of the daily life of the collective... and with the aid of methods more akin.. to the methods of the nineteenth-century collector of antiquities and curiosities, or indeed to the methods of the nineteenth-century ragpicker, than to those of the modern historian."

Bloemink, Hodge, Lupton, & McQuaid. Design Life Now: National Design Triennial 2006. Cooper-Hewitt: New York, 2007. (exhibition visited July 23, 2007) First, interesting to see how many of the works included were also included in my Apocalyptic book. New things to note: the 21st century conflation of natural and artificial, craft and technology, regional and global, virtual and authentic. The craft atelier as design space: the return of one maker, making, such as the Ladd Brothers and Judy Geib, who not only make jewelry by hand but also make all the supporting materials—booklets, boxes, display platforms. Saving making from the division of labor in addition from the world of corporations. Cottage industry. Postindustrial handcraft.

Boingboing: a Directory of Wonderful Things. (<http://www.boingboing.com>) Blog as contemporary cabinet of curiosities. I visit it daily. Curiosity cabinets (an early repository of saving) developed when America was discovered by Europeans. Literally and suddenly, there was an entire New World to be understood, mastered, collected, conquered. The World Wide Web is our new New World: and hence the emergence of blogs such as this one which try to collect into one place an index of all interesting, wondrous, amazing things to be found. Not so different from the Whole Earth Catalog, maybe.

Carmichael, Bill. Incredible Collectors, Weird Antiques, and Odd Hobbies. Englewood: Prentice-Hall, 1971. A veritable record of strange sav-

ing practices written in an affable style. More about the whos and whats of saving than the whys.

Goldberger, Paul. "Salvage Artists", The New Yorker, March 19, 2007, 147-149. Architectural firm Single Speed Design was commissioned to design and build a house out of 300 tons of salvaged steel and concrete from the Big Dig, the notorious Boston highway project.

Liman, Ellen. The Spacemaker Book. New York: Viking Press, 1977. Making space by saving unused spots: under stairs, above beds, around and above doors, in hallways and in bathrooms.

Max, D. T. "Final Destination," The New Yorker, June 11 & 18, 2007, 54-72. About the UT Library Archives. How do special collections decide upon their curatorial policies? Who decides what is worth collecting? Insight into the working methods of authors, such as Delilo and Joyce. Also: how conservation styles change over time: "the 'invisible mend' has been replaced by techniques that allow the scholar to see the sutures."

Milinaire, Catherine, and Carol Troy. Cheap Chic. New York: Harmony Books, 1975. My fashion bible, which I periodically revisit: "Surrounded by mass manufacturing and mass marketing, we stuff our closets with masses of mistakes. We end up with far too many clothes, without stopping to consciously work out our own personal style and gather together the basic elements we need to get it going." Exactly my thoughts on saving.

Rush, Michael. "Art that gives meaning to bits of this and that," New York Times, October 27, 2002, AR 33, 38. Five years ago Thomas Hirschorn's piece for Documenta was "Bataille Monument", a "street display" of cultural detritus that invited the active participation of the area residents, mostly immigrants. Written of Hirschorn's youth: "His goal was to be a graphic designer, 'not for hire' he said, 'but my own kind of graphic designer.'"

Shaw, Dan. "When the everyday becomes art," New York Times, July 22, 2007, RE 4. Article about the apartment of Japanese textile curator Stephen Szczepanek includes a description of Meiji-period boro, "normal people's textiles", a "patched and mended" fabric of hemp, cotton, and ramie worn as sleeping kimonos. "The Japanese are inveterate recyclers. They understood the value of cloth... they were an indigenous people with a superrefined design sense. They would use anything to make fabric. But what they made was never meant to be seen."