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*Flea-ing Clutter: Consuming, Containing
and Casting Out in a Dublin Flea-Market*

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*'You take an object from your pocket
and put it down in front of you and you start.
You begin to tell a story...And then I ask myself which story shall I tell?
What is tellable and what is untellable? What do I pick up and where do I
put it down?*

*Where shall I put this jar? Above you in the attic where your most treasured
and most problematic objects are consigned? Below you in a vitrine sunk into
the ground, so that it is chanced upon? It matters because where you find
things in the world, how near you are to it, if you can touch it or not, is as
much part of the language of objects as their colour, their use'.*

-Edmund de Waal-



Abstract.

This research investigates the circulatory networks second-hand goods flow along as they move unilaterally between spaces that connect the home to broader social and cultural spaces and practices. Representing over four years of ethnographic investigation, I focus on the *Dublin Flea Market*, charting its founding in 2008 through its later loss due to the redevelopment of *Newmarket Square* in 2018.

In *Newmarket*, I trace the lived experiences of traders who operate within and around the markets, identifying how the flea market acts as an important node in the circulation of material objects as they travel between the trader's stalls, homes, bins, and other channels of acquisition and divestment. I follow these circuits of flea market objects, questioning how changing cultural conceptions about second-hand, consumer ethics and re-use have influenced consumer trends displayed at such sites. How do the traders of second-hand items construct narratives of value around these material objects?

Finally, I question how practices of procuring and divesting material goods at second-hand markets impact domestic practices of home-making, decluttering and discarding. To understand this, I build on existing ethnographies of second-hand and alternative markets and contemporary debates in consumption studies, which emphasise the importance of the quotidian, everyday, oft-deemed superficial material belongings and practices of home-making. Whilst much of this scholarship has focused on how we make ourselves and construct our identities via consumption, I focus on how the continual acts of divestment, decluttering and curation that traders engage in personally and professionally can be considered a means of value-making for the material objects and the traders themselves.

Ultimately, I argue that the flea market functions as a fluid and contested space that facilitates the circularity of second-hand material goods and makes apparent the contradictions accompanying such object biographies within competing ideologies of clutter, waste, minimalism, home-making and consumption.

Acknowledgements.

A lot of life happened during my PhD, and this document represents the culmination of hard work, joy, adventure, achievements and accomplishments, personal growth, tears and tantrums, self-doubt and heartache. I agonised over whether to have this page be gushing, poetic and full of profound reflections on ten years of work and relationships. However, I decided it is probably best to express those sentiments in person and keep this (relatively!) concise. Whilst I have given all that I could to this project, it would be disingenuous to claim full credit for its completion and it is to the following people that I give wholehearted thanks;

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Chapter One: Introduction.

Over the din of the bustling flea market, I moved steadily through the crowd, passing various stalls laden with clothing, jewellery, ornaments and random trinkets, following the sound of two women arguing that had caught my attention. Stepping around other shoppers, I moved closer to the women, now excitedly gesticulating and directing their voices both at each other and at the vendor, an older man with wiry grey hair and square glasses standing with his arms crossed and wearing a bemused expression, shrugging as he sipped tea from a thermos flask. The two women, appearing in their early 60s, were well-dressed and unaware of the scene they were causing as their voices carried across the cavernous hall. Passing a book back and forth, they interrupted each other, pitch rising as they fought to be heard. Gesticulating at the trader and the other books on display, one wildly waved the book around, causing the passers-by to duck and dodge her flailing arms. Sheer curiosity drove me ever closer. I carefully positioned myself to the left of them, picking up some other books from the same stall, paying careful attention to appear deeply engrossed in perusing them and oblivious to the scene unfolding beside me.

I was now able to see that the item in question was a very old recipe book, battered, worn, and showing the effects of time through its stained and yellowing pages, some of which were threatening to slip entirely from the book as the women continued to leaf through it and excitedly grab it back and forth from each other, waving it in the air as if to punctuate their points. The vendor, at this point, had ceased to engage with them, sitting back and taking a long sip from his flask, seemingly resigned to allow the conversation to continue without him. Making eye contact, he winked and checked to ensure he was out of eyeshot before rolling his eyes, shrugging and smiling at me, bemusedly signalling a sense of understanding that I was listening in on the two women's spirited discussion. As I took my time prolonging the time I could try and covertly eavesdrop, I flicked back and forth through the same book several times, trying to appear inconspicuous, but I was hanging on their every word.

Edging slightly closer, I looked at the book's cover and discerned that it was a very well-worn and vintage home economics and lifestyle book by a *Mrs. Beeton*. The front cover was torn and faded, and the book had been used a lot. The book continued to be moved back and forth between the two women, never saying still for long as they continued arguing and

snatching it from each other's grasp. The first of the two, who I will refer to as Sally here, was insisting that the recipe book, albeit a curiosity item of some value owing to its age and the desirability of such an early work by its author, was ultimately 'quite disgusting'. She was trying to convince her companion, Nora, that the book's value was lessened owing to its damaged condition. With a contemptuous expression, she continued to comment on the poor 'state' it was in, pointing out the 'stains, pages missing, scribbles and marks' throughout. It was, 'at best', she uttered pithily, 'a set of outdated recipes, most of them are missing details so it is both ugly and cannot do its basic job... you cannot follow a recipe that isn't fully there'.

Sally went on to further berate her friend and attempted to draw the vendor, still sipping from his flask, back into the conversation, yet he continued to passively ignore her ranting. Sally looked around and continued her tirade. We made eye contact, and I smiled wryly, awkwardly unsure that I wanted to be pulled into the conversation. Sally then slammed the book back onto the table, causing the piled stack of books beneath to shift and wobble. She went on a mini tirade about how the asking price of €100 on the book's price tag was 'ridiculous', accusing the trader of being 'delusional if you think someone would give you one hundred quid for something that is so decrepit'. The vendor calmly looked up, shrugged his shoulders and said, 'The price is the price. No one is asking you or forcing you to buy it if you don't want it. That's not how this works. Sally was unsatisfied by this response and continued asking, 'But who do you think will give you one hundred for someone else's dirty, old, filthy book that they did not even want anymore?'. Nora stepped away from her friend and picked up the book, subtly moving the book to the further side of the table away from Sally. Placing her hands in front of her as if to push Sally back, Nora rolled her eyes, sighed heavily and went on to chastise Sally for her inability to see the 'beauty' and 'all that history' in the soiled pages. Nora told the vendor that she wished to purchase the book and, if possible, she would appreciate a small discount. She said, 'I don't really enjoy that haggling business, but if I can be cheeky and ask if you are willing to knock anything off?'. Nora, (in a move I felt did demonstrate her lack of proficiency in haggling, i.e., do not let the vendor know how much you actually want the thing as they will be reticent to lower the price when they know you will probably pay asking or close-to-asking price) started to chatter excitedly about how thrilled she was, knowing that she had 'just found a treasure' and continuing, how she 'loved it when her flea market hunts were super successful'.

Nora reached for the book and again turned back to Sally; speaking more calmly now, she began to leaf through it, almost devoutly cradling it. Nora lingered on the pages with the 'flaws' Sally had pointed to, remarking that she 'loved all the little marks and personalisations' in the book. She continued to thumb through the pages gently with her right hand whilst cradling the book securely in her left. She told of how she 'adore[d] the smell of old books', and the 'joy' that finding this book and presumably using or reading through it in future would bring her. Pointing to the annotations and adaptations to the recipes that were present every couple of pages, the flour stains and traces of old tea or coffee cups imprinted on the pages, she spoke of her sense that 'this book had nurtured a family' and that Margaret, (the/a previous owner as evident from the faded, flowing cursive inscription inked inside the front cover), had used this book as her 'bible', like a manual for 'cooking and baking with her family' just as Nora had experienced with both 'my mother and my children and soon, the grandbabies'.

The fragile and fading pages of handwritten recipes for a Christmas pudding and a shopping list that were folded into neat squares and tucked between pages on the verge of falling from the hand-stitched binding were, in Nora's words, 'precious gifts', little extra enduring ephemera that just added to her sense of Margaret and how central the recipe book had been to her every day, banal domestic life. These stains, markings and cursive notes thus had formed a patina that Nora found remarkably captivating and even magical. It struck me as curious how she spoke of Margaret as if she knew her and seemed to instantly form a connection to this woman's life, her lingering traces made tangible in the annotations and stains of the recipe book.

Nora signalled to the trader that she was ready to purchase the book regardless of Sally's insistence that she was 'a fool to pay so much money, but obviously, you have got money to burn these days'. Unconvinced by Nora's enamour with the book, she turned to the vendor and sarkily remarked that he ought to give her friend a discount because 'even if you've hoodwinked her into buying that tatt, it is still in a terrible state'. Perhaps embarrassed by Sally's proclamation, Nora assured the trader that she would pay him the price he was asking for if he thought it was 'a fair and honest price'. Pulling out a small red purse, she handed over two €50 notes, taking a moment to wrap the book up in a small scarf she had pulled from her handbag before nestling it back into her bag. The vendor waited until Sally had started to walk away, muttering to herself about the 'ridiculousness of that' and how she 'needed a coffee after witnessing a robbery', before calling Nora back and discreetly handing her back a €20 note,

remarking that he was glad to 'see it go to someone who will mind it' before laughing and saying that the money was to 'make sure and do not let that other one, [Sally], come back'.

Realising I had also lingered the entire time, fascinated by the exchange between the women, I started to walk away. The trader laughed and remarked that 'you get all kinds of crazy at the flea market', and he hoped I had 'enjoyed the show'. We both laughed and chatted briefly about the difference in the women's approach to the book. I noted that 'I did not realise people would get so heated about something they did not even want', and he advised that

'people tend to have a lot of opinions about what you sell. People value different things, and some want shiny, perfect things, but these are old books, and this is a flea market. Things are *meant to be* used and second-hand. They have character and life and a past. Those bent and creased pages, ripped covers and broken spines are their past, and some people value that, and others just see, what did she say.... decrepit ugly... nonsense. Some people see the magic in taking a thing that has been someone else's, and others just want new, shiny and perfect. A book is a book, and you can read it whether someone else marked it or not'.

-Dave, a *Professional* trader of books.

The Recipe Book Battle- Some Further Context.

In the scene described above, I am wandering around one instance of the *Dublin Flea Market's* monthly market held in *Newmarket Square* in the *Liberties* area of *Dublin City*. The market is lively and loud, has drawn a large crowd of visitors and has no less than 65 various stalls and traders selling a menagerie of various second-hand, craft, vintage and artisanal goods. Today's market in January 2014 has benefitted from being a bright and dry (though still with a bite in the cold air) day that has drawn many out of their homes, across the city and to the markets seeking entertainment, community and the lure of a potential bargain. Located inside a large hall within the *Dublin Food Co-Op's* premises, the market is in full flow with people browsing, shopping, chatting and eating at the small café at the back of the hall. Tightly packed with people and stalls, moving through the crowd is slow at best, and the pace repeatedly slows as the throngs of people stop to inspect the items on display at the various stalls, positioned in an outer and inner ring formation, leading visitors to loop around the hall in a spiral pattern. It is noisy, with the many voices calling back and forth, melding into the loud music being broadcast

across the hall over an extensive speaker system and creating a soundscape that is dynamic, cacophonous and echoes and reverberates, making conversation difficult unless one speaks loudly. Across the stalls on display today, there are items and objects of every shape, size, purpose and colour, with clothing, jewellery, bric-a-brac, old rusting tools, vinyl records, toys and household furnishings heaped precariously into piles atop tables.

Sensorially, the flea market is also vibrant and somewhat overwhelming as the aromas from various food stalls merge and mingle with the scents from stalls with handmade candles, creams, lotions and potions competing in the enclosed space. Although not my first visit to the field, I have yet to attend many markets here and, as such, am overwhelmed by the scale of the seemingly chaotic scene in front of me. Nothing stays still very long in the flea market- people and things are constantly moving, interacting and disappearing. As such, the random encounter that I had witnessed as Sally and Nora's reactions to the recipe book unfolded beside me seemed laden with importance and crucial to capture in as much detail as I could immediately jot down into my notebook or phone or even sear into my brain for later recalling. This effort to be present for and 'catch' these moments of encounter would become an essential aspect of my research efforts in the field.

Ethnographic Serendipity and 'Magic Moments' in Field Work.

Walking away, I was struck by his words and the tiff I had witnessed. Replaying the women's discussion of how the book was simultaneously repulsive and a treasure, I was thinking about how the patina the book has accumulated was so divisive. So many things circulate through the flea market, and it is so subjective how the presence of past ownership (such as that of the recipe book's modifications) either accrued or depreciated the value given to an item. Value, worth, price, and meaning are contested, contradictory and even conflict-inducing. The flea market things had previous lives; most of the traders dealt in second-hand goods, so the things there moved in and out of people's lives through the traders who mediated the entire process. Just as the things moved, so did their perceived value(s) and worths, depending on the people that serendipitously encountered them amongst the piles of goods each market day. This interaction happened in the first few months of my research; however, it was often replicated, albeit over different flea things with different traders, vendors and outcomes. This was a felicitous experience that set me on a path of tracing the circulations of material things between

the flea market and the domestic, examining the value and practices of meaning-making traders iteratively utilised along the way, recounting to me the stories of so many objects as we walked the market floor, touring their homes- attics, garages, basements and all, along the journey.

This vignette above is important as it touches on many themes that would emerge consistently from the years, I spent doing ethnographic research in the flea market. The recipe book interaction detailed above happened on one of my very first research trips to the flea market. At the time, I had yet to 'officially' start my ethnographic research and was merely scouting a range of potential field sites for a couple of projects I was still contemplating. I was also overwhelmed by the chaos of the flea market. I was contemplating ruling it out of the list of potential research sites owing to the complexity and challenge of trying to navigate the market. Despite this initial discomfort, the 'fight' I had listened in on would become one of the richest, layered and defining moments of my entire research process; one which, for a long time, I had overlooked, deeming it to be too obvious, too early an insight, too superficial, and therefore, not something to write about in much detail. How wrong could I have been? The truth is that in the exact moment that I had witnessed this seemingly mundane exchange, which could be chalked down to simply a difference in opinion or taste, I had encountered something far more meaningful. This was a fortuitous exchange to have witnessed so early in my fieldwork at the markets and one that, as noted earlier, I would come to see played out innumerable times more over the years to follow.

After many similar instances in my fieldwork and some that I had partaken in as a customer over the years in the market, I understood that such disagreements were not just a matter of personal taste. Rather, they represented contested practices of meaning-making and subjective values. The extent to which individuals were willing and wanting to (or not) viscerally engage with flea things in various conditions was altered by the lingering traces of past owners, made visible, tangible and material through the objects' signs of use-wear, that conveyed their 'pre-loved' status as second-hand consumer goods. At the flea market, discussions of monetary worth collided with more symbolic and sentimental notions of value. For different people, the same object could be a nostalgic recollection, facilitating a return to the past, i.e., the rediscovery of a long-forgotten childhood toy, but also aspirational and future-oriented, i.e., wanting to furnish one's home in the mid-century modern style they lusted after, or to update one's wardrobe only to include beloved vintage attire and unique flea-market finds, etc., Everything in the market felt in flux- the items that were brought there each month, the

revolving door of traders, the visitors that would come seeking a bargain or treasure, and the values given to the entangling of these people, things and practices.

In other words, I would see the importance of exploring how open or closed off my participants were to the possibility of encountering traces of an object's past lives, previous owners and affective materiality in a spontaneous and serendipitous flea-market encounter. Over the considerable time I came to spend in the field, somatically experiencing the flea markets, I saw similar interactions play out repeatedly; the objects in question differed each time, yet the crux of the encounter remained reasonably consistent. That is not to say that aspects of taste, practicality or necessity never entered or informed such customer decisions; they frequently were cited as important considerations. That said, I often found that many of the conversations I either witnessed or partook in, as one individual was in the process of selling to another, referenced the extent to which a second-hand object explicitly appeared second-hand and whether this created a repulsing or an attracting material characteristic or quality for the potential buyer.

Even a few months later, whilst still in the early trajectory of the research I would go on to conduct, I had yet to fully realise the importance of the recipe-book conversation, resisting the wealth of insight it had provided on the basis that I needed to spend more time in the market before the critical insights would emerge. My research efforts had, to date, been focused more on the underpinning motivations for both traders and customers to choose to shop at a flea market at all and less on examining the commodification of inalienability, patina and traces of the past closely. And, more significantly, how those objects came to be at and pass through the market, circulating in value as much as location. How could the same object simultaneously hold all the corresponding values for people to perceive it as unwanted, a commodity to generate profit, a desirable treasure, old rubbish, historical curios, clutter, and a prized personal possession? However, gradually, and drummed home by such repeated encounters, I began to understand the importance of what I had experienced early on in the research, and it went on to become one of the main themes I would later focus on. This contrast in varying responses to the material qualities of second-hand flea things stuck with me throughout the research process. In fact, throughout my research process, I found referencing this story to become a fruitful and generative anecdote, one whose sharing would almost magically seem to invite people to share their own stories about similar experiences with me, regardless of whether it was in speaking to participants in the field or chatting more informally about my work to friends and family. I

had happenstance stumbled upon a topic that people genuinely enjoyed talking about, and it was also this spirit of enthusiastic sharing and tale-telling amongst my participants that would later provide the stories that inform this thesis.

More than a Flea-Thing, or Why This Matters?

The purpose of recounting this specific flea market encounter here is to provide a sense of the hustle and bustle of the flea market and to show how examining one chance encounter (of the potentially- thousands that happen each month at the market) with an object can open up broader conversations about processual practices of value, worth and meaning-making. Of particular interest to this dissertation is exploring how and why the visible patina of an object's previous use can either repulse or attract potential new owners. In other words, what can the circulation of flea market goods reveal about how we experience and value our domestic material worlds? Moreover, specifically within the context of second-hand consumption in contemporary Ireland, how do the market traders understand, shape, and manage both their inventories for sale and their domestic material belongings? What factors lead to and sustain the flows, channels, and moments of rupture/ failure in these flows of second-hand goods?

Over time, I became a frequent shopper and a card-carrying member of the *Co-Op*, regularly attending meetings, markets and events held there throughout the week. Additionally, I got to know more of the traders, organisers and visitors to the flea market and was gradually building my network of 'flea folk'. In this way, the flea market served as my leading field site and as a base camp from which I could follow some flea things. I was invited to accompany some of the traders into their homes, gaining an insight into their lives beyond market Sundays. This opened up a more comprehensive network of second-hand consumption channels. I was brought to scrapyards, homes, sheds, antique dealers, other markets, online retail sites, shops and businesses, a literal dumpster, and workshops and talks/ seminars on decluttering, mending clothes, zero-waste lifestyles, organic and vegan cooking, minimalism, etc., as well as partaking in various online groups, activist groups and planning committee public briefings and meetings. For several years, membership of the *Co-Op* increased dramatically, and visitors to the flea market grew to approximately 5,000 people each month. All seemed well. Little did I realise how precarious a position the *Dublin Flea Market* would soon come to find itself in (as will be revealed shortly).

My Contributions:

Material Culture Literature- Puzzles, Problems & Paradoxes.

Whilst much has been written about how objects become enlivened in the material culture literature within anthropology, this thesis aims to build on existing scholarly discussions about the importance of material objects, specifically second-hand things, and the many forms of social work that they can perform and influence. However, many of these have been ethnographically embedded within the home or the market. I aim to connect these seemingly disparate places, i.e., the commercial and public market, with the private, domestic context of the home by following the circulations of flea market goods between these spaces (Gregson & Crewe, 2003). Such flows of second-hand goods are not unidirectional; instead, objects are continuously moving back and forth between these spaces, mediated by the traders. Over time, I started to see the slippages between these two spaces, not just as a consequence of objects that were once located in both spaces over time; instead, I will argue that the flea market is, in fact, present in and constructed in the home, through the traders' domestic practices, i.e., how they manage, organise and categorise between flea things and home things. Examining the processes and strategies traders must undertake to either integrate or separate their flea goods from their household goods thus becomes a way to illuminate how practices of trading occur not only within the market space but inform the traders' domestic reality also.

I make use of Foucault's (1967) conceptual model of the heterotopia to investigate this quality of Otherness that the flea market manages to juxtapose and reconcile into one place seemingly non-compatible practices and values, e.g., commercial and social, real and symbolic, old and new, etc. Paying attention to these paradoxical sites of tensions and accommodations through ordinary and quotidian practices of trading, tidying, storing, cleaning and decluttering thus connects these two spaces using a circulatory framework. It will show how the market is present, constructed and challenged in everyday domestic practices for the traders. This research thus follows the flows of second-hand things, not merely to record their movements but rather in order to examine the feelings they invoke and inspire for flea market attendees. Discourses of attraction, shame, desire and repulsion were imbued with the objects. I situate these varying sentiments through the practices, material goods and people that come together at the flea market.

Within the flea market, people tended to speak of it as a singular, bounded and fixed thing, constantly referring to 'the market' and discussing it as an abstract thing. Many participants invoked narratives of 'the market' as a counter-space, one that stood outside of the greedy, consumerist, throwaway society they felt had been formed by contemporary capitalism. Here, a paradox emerges. Those involved in the flea market often elevated its social and community role and downplayed the intrinsically commercial and capitalistic nature of the space. However, the market is not separate from capitalism and is reliant on the influx of goods rendered disposable for first-hand consumption streams in order to function.

Additionally, at the market, everyday acts of provisioning were deemed morally superior, i.e., people venerated and aspired to shop local, buy second-hand, reduce consumption, eliminate single-use plastic, etc. However, this opting into a more green and conscious-consumption model was not comprehensive, and traders often impulse-purchased, built-up clutter, wasted food and shopped at *Amazon* for convenience. Drawing out the moments where participants' beliefs and values do not necessarily tally with their actions (Miller, 2012) also provides insight into the complexities in everyday acts of provisioning and shopping. This dissertation critiques reductionist and overly-simplistic accounts of the flea market as a binary space whereby the markets are positioned as either a site of successful anti-capitalistic resistance or one that fails in its imperative to challenge mainstream capitalism. Instead, this thesis draws out the paradoxes, tensions and contradictions between a flea-market community where participant and devotees' narratives are saturated with stories of the flea market as an important space that exists outside of capitalism and that venerates second-hand and ethical consumption. The irony that exists for my participants is that their lived reality often suggests otherwise. For many, if not most, of the individuals in this research, their consumption choices and practices at the flea market represent only a small proportion of their consumer lifestyle and are often overshadowed by the very forms of consumption they seek to critique and as such, may represent a tokenistic effort at best. These themes of sentiment and emotion (cf. Wulff 2007, Miller 2008) and the discrepancy between the aspirations and actual practices of second-hand consumers will be explored in detail in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Discussions around value- what objects are valuable, what qualities are valuable, values at the flea market, what types of homes are valuable, and is clutter a blessing or a burden? etc. pervaded my research. Confronting subjective and shifting notions of value in terms of the types of goods that are valuable for the traders, and specifically, instances where disparate evaluations of value(s) become a site of conflict, reveals insights about the reasons that objects are perceived as having meaning within a second-hand and alternative consumption context. This often entailed trying to reconcile flea market goods being fluid in meaning due to their respective monetary or sentimental value being differently perceived by each person who engaged with them. Furthermore, these values are not only personal but are shaped by sociocultural discourses about normative consumption, homes and ethical consumers. I will demonstrate that even a single flea market thing with a single owner can have multiple values dependent on the time and space it occupies and the emotional entanglements that form between the object and its owner. Following the circulations of flea goods between the market and the domestic sphere of the home, therefore, illuminate ongoing and contested processes of value translations and offers insight into how these entanglements speak to broader societal contexts and trends.

Irish Anthropology.

Whilst a significant scholarship on flea markets exists and will be engaged with throughout this dissertation (cf. Gregson & Crewe, Minter, Appelgren & Bohlin, etc.), more needs to be written about Irish flea markets in the Irish anthropological literature. My dissertation represents one such contribution to remedy this blind spot. Much of the anthropological tradition based in and written about Ireland has dealt with depictions of a traditional, frozen-in-time, rural Ireland, zoned in on smaller villages and towns (cf. Arensberg and Kimball, 1937; Scheper-Hughes, 1979). My research was based in Dublin City and its surrounding neighbourhoods and, therefore, is an urban and metropolitan site.

That is not to say that my field was exempt from tensions between notions of the past and future. Many traders and flea market attendees held contradictory understandings of their market involvement. The growing popularity of second-hand consumption and the flea market was envisioned at once a return to an idealised and nostalgic past where people had less and were happier for it, and practices of repair, reuse, etc., were expected but also understood to

symbolise a radically new mode of consumption, one that rebelled against the very nature of capitalism and that offered new possibilities for an aspirational future. Many such binaries could be found at the flea market the more you came to know it. There were tensions between types of traders dealing in different types of goods; second-hand goods were at once repulsive and alluring, distinctions between the local community and the wider city, and one central theme that often occurred was the role that the flea market played in regards to the excesses of domestic accumulation and clutter. Some argued that the market was an end destination for clutter that transformed goods back into desirable commodities; others saw the market as one big temptation that encouraged excessive materiality. All of these clashes and tensions will be unravelled in the following chapters and speak to how the localised context of one flea market and the vendors that traded within it encountered and navigated broader societal shifts related to tradition and modernity, the local and global context, and personal and collective consumption choices. All of these collided in the final years I spent in the market as the market and the immediate geographical area experienced significant social change during my fieldwork, as alluded to earlier.

Fiona Murphy (2017) conducted ethnographic research in Ireland's second-hand economies, focusing on flea markets and second-hand baby goods markets. Murphy examined how the post-2008 recession economic crisis and period of austerity changed Irish consumers' shopping habits. Writing on the relationship between austerity and sustainable consumption patterns, she demonstrates how reduced spending and consumption patterns may serve the interests of sustainability politics. She notes the inconsistencies in how consumer interventions are shaped in the aftermath of the financial crash: 'On the one hand, we have notions of blame and responsibility where ordinary citizens are pilloried as 'wasteful' and 'greedy'; and, on the other, we have the idea that it is the ordinary citizen who, through frugal living, can propel us from crisis to recovery' (2017:160). Murphy argues that there has been a proliferation in second-hand markets, but this has also been accompanied by an increase in discount retailers such as *Penneys*, *Dealz*, etc., that do not share the values associated with the flea market that of thrift and sustainability, etc. Murphy (2017) explains that shopping at the flea market is motivated by a range of concerns; not everyone chooses to shop there out of economic necessity; some face financial constraints and need to shop in consumption spaces where prices are negotiable, others hope that frugal lifestyles will help them access a more 'spiritually fulfilled life' (this normative drive to reduce belongings to achieve enlightenment will be

examined through the lens of the growth of minimalist homes as the aesthetic ideal in a later chapter) and others, favour a mixture of second-hand and first-cycle commodities, especially in a context where vintage and retro goods become trendy, cool and desirable. Referencing Miller's (1998) writing on thrift, she confirms that 'thrift can also mean simply buying more for less. It is not necessarily about second-hand shopping nor is it conducive per se to sustainable living' (Miller, 1998:25 in Murphy, 2017:160).

Murphy's research period would have overlapped with mine, and my research findings further support this argument. Although my research focuses mainly on the traders, they did speak of differing factors in what motivated them to both trade and make purchases at the market. These included financial, moral, personal and pop culture factors. Murphy's writing on flea markets in Ireland is useful and generative. However, my work is the only long-term ethnographic research bringing anthropological sensitivity to the Dublin flea markets. This becomes all the more valuable, urgent and relevant owing to the market's later struggles with precarity that eventually saw the market officially disbanded on its tenth anniversary. Next, let us consider the impact of anthropological research in a context that has been destroyed and no longer exists.

A Chronology of the Dublin Flea Market.

Before we jump forward to the market's ending in 2018, let me start at the beginning and provide an overview of the timeline of the *Dublin Flea*. A comprehensive account of the flea market will be given in *Chapter Two*; however, here, I wish to flag to the reader some of the critical dates that are of the most significance for the market and the legacy it left as I set the scene for the dissertation that follows. The *Dublin Flea Market* was founded in 2008 and was hosted in the *Dublin Food Co-Op's* premises in *Newmarket Square*, in the *Liberties* area, southwest of *Dublin's* inner city. Starting with only a handful of traders and attendees, the market boomed and grew consistently over the ten years that followed, reaching over 100 stalls and approximately 5,000 visitors on the last Sunday of each month. However, in the background, the *Co-Op's* lease had expired, and it was becoming increasingly challenging to negotiate temporary extensions and renewals as developers and City planners became more

interested in the rapidly gentrifying area. In July 2017, there was a sudden rush of activity in the Co-Op and market scene and across their social media sites when word spread that three planning submissions had been made to *Dublin City Council (DCC)* by a developer, *Newmarket Partnership PM Ltd.*, for significant development and construction in and around *Newmarket Square*. In early July, a *Facebook* page entitled *Save Newmarket Square* was set up to boost and amplify the rallying call to protest against the development plans. The page moderators utilised evocative, emotive and anthropomorphising language as they implored people to save the square against the tirade of the greedy, capitalist developers with no regard for the community but only for profit. One status uploaded on July 20 pleaded with the page's followers to understand that

‘Our beloved square, the long-time home to Dublin Food Coop, Dublin Flea Market, Fusion Sundays Market, and Pure Vintage, is under threat by greedy developers. Three new planning applications released this month reveal a chilling scheme to push out these community-driven social enterprises in favour of for-profit businesses and big developments. The Coop is being kicked out at the end of the year, with no place to go, after her landlord doubled her rent and reduced her space. Join us on the square for a rally and information session Thursday, July 27th from 6-7pm. Learn the full history of how these millionaires have hoarded their vacant land for the past ten years, the ways in which we can stop these plans from pushing ahead, and how we can create a community-led development plan that provide a people-powered alternative to this anti-social behaviour by a few greedy individuals lining their pockets’.

-Post on the '*Save Newmarket Square*' *Facebook* page.

Over the month, the page attracted a significant number of followers, with the membership of the page swelling beyond 1,000 users. However, the page had controversy. A few days later, it shut down the event page for the upcoming rally, citing 'security precautions'- this was presumed to be due to the indicative numbers of members logging in to confirm their attendance at the upcoming rally, passing over 500 individuals. The following day, at least three other groups were set up by the founders of the original page in order to circumvent and bypass the restrictions being imposed on their page by the Facebook moderators.

A second source of conflict arose between the official response of the *Co-Op* (DFCO) and the organisers of the *Save Newmarket Square (SNS)* *Facebook* page. The initial public postings of the SNS page were critiqued and heavily rebuked by the online moderators of the *Co-Op* due to their implicit implication that they were representing the views of and acting on

behalf of the *Co-Op*. In response, the *Co-Op* posted a message across their website and social media pages on July 21st declaring that,

‘PLEASE SHARE: the Facebook event calling for a rally against the redevelopment plans in *Newmarket* might lead co-op members and supporters to think that we are part of this organisation. This is not the case. The *Dublin Food Co-Op, Newmarket* has not been contacted by the *Save Newmarket Square Rally* and is not involved as a society in its organisation, and their statements don't accurately reflect our current situation’.

Instead, they urged that their upcoming OGM on August 16th was a more suitable medium through which the response and ongoing strategies of the co-op concerning the proposed developments could be debated democratically and cooperatively by all members.

What emerged from this discussion was a tense understanding that there were various and conflicting political agendas at play. The *Co-Op* maintained that *Facebook* was not an appropriate medium to discuss the developments and that until their OGM (to be hosted on August 16th) provided an opportunity for member discussion, they could not speak to the will of the collective body of their members. In response, the SNS *Facebook* page appeared to retaliate by posting the original post made by *DFCO*, side by side with their response, to 'clarify the situation'. This new post, dated July 21st, was a fierce indictment of that official response and instead stated that '...The rally is being organised by *Co-Op* members, just not ones who are collaborating with the landlord to drain the *Co-Op*'s savings’.



Dublin Food Co-op, Newmarket

Like This Page · 2 hrs · Edited ·

PLEASE SHARE: the Facebook event calling for a rally against the redevelopment plans in Newmarket might lead co-op members and supporters to think that we are part of this organisation.

This is not the case.

The Dublin Food Co-op, Newmarket has not been contacted by the Save Newmarket Square Rally and is not involved as a society in its organisation and their statements don't accurately reflect our current situation.

If you shared this event thinking it was from us, please share this to rectify. Many thanks. Fusion Sundays The Dublin Flea Market Purevintage Fair



Save Newmarket To clarify, when those who posted this message say "Dublin Food Co-op, Newmarket", they are actually speaking for the "Friends of Creedon", a small group of staff, board, and producer members, most of whom have a personal financial interest in the Coop and control of the Facebook page without the consensus of the full membership.

Unfortunately, greed is not reserved for the developers in this case... and it brings bad vibes to otherwise lovely events and institutions.

This rally is being organised by Coop members, just not ones who are collaborating with the landlord to drain the Coop's savings. The organisers have made numerous attempts to address this situation in pro-active and positive ways, but have been rebuffed by this small group of members.

We expect this message to be censored and removed, so it will also be shared on the event page so everyone is aware of this undemocratic situation.

We love everyone involved in the Coop and markets and look forward to finding common ground in this struggle to save our beloved community space.

Whilst I followed and got involved in the various campaigns to 'save the square', this topic will not be expanded here. To be clear, I include some details of this conflict to demonstrate that this rupture to the *Co-Op* and market's futures was not responded to with a collective sense of solidarity; instead, the external threat widened the existing chasms in beliefs, values and visions, simmering tensions erupted rupturing the sense of community within the space and initiated a process of splintering that eventually saw the market and the *Co-Op* take separate paths to very different outcomes, i.e., the *Co-Op* relocated and, at the time of writing, is thriving. In contrast, the flea market disbanded and was lost for good. Various 'flea folk' were involved in both the *Co-Op* and the SNS rally, and one interviewee remarked to me that 'when we lost that sense of being in it together, that is when it all went to hell'.

It All Comes Tumbling Down- A Fallen Wall as Foreshadowing.

Let us return to the flea market, which had become part of the social fabric of the surrounding area. However, throughout my research, many cracks, both metaphorically and literally (in the

case of a collapsed inner wall that happened in the *Co-Op* as a consequence of nearby building work causing structural damage in December 2017 and later, the tearing up of the foundations), had begun to appear which threatened the future of the upcoming Christmas markets. Initially, the *Dublin Flea Market* organisers moved quickly and efficiently, deflecting the impacts of these mini-crises and managed to secure alternative venues, additional funding, and public support, and in the true spirit of a ‘Christmas miracle’, the market was saved. However, the problem that ultimately led to the market’s demise, comprising a final reckoning that they could not return from, was when, post-wall-collapse on December 5th, 2017, it became clear that the *Co-Op*’s attempts to get approval to commence the necessary repair work to render the building safe had stalled. This was a shock and a significant source of stress. However, as the annual December markets were located elsewhere, this was not an immediate concern as the assumption was that the wall would be repaired quickly. The *Flea* could return to its home base at the end of January as planned. This did not come to pass. Instead, it later emerged that the landlord was, for all purposes, waiting out the *Co-Op* after the end of their imminent lease expiration. This made sense for the developer- why bother spending money on repairing a wall that would soon be demolished along with the entire building? Nevertheless, it was this decision that effectively rendered the *Dublin Flea Market* ‘temporarily’ homeless.

Indeed, the wall issue was prolonged and hampered by a breakdown in negotiations between the landlord and the *Co-Op* management, who had been seeking to extend their lease amidst the threat of the building being sold for redevelopment. This saga played out throughout 2018 and beyond when demolition works began in *Newmarket Square* in 2019, and the *Co-Op* secured new premises and moved to a different part of the city. Unfortunately, the flea markets’ fate was not as fortunate. Despite being able to temporarily hold some smaller pop-up style markets within the confines of *Newmarket* at a venue a few doors down, the *Dublin Flea*

Market's attempts to secure a new and permanent home were ultimately unsuccessful. The final market on May 27th of 2018 was the market's 'last hurrah' in *Newmarket Square*, where its regular tradition of monthly markets had become a mainstay for the previous ten years. The *Dublin Flea* campaigned heavily during this time. They organised a public petition, met with and implored local political representatives to intervene, embarked on an intensive search for a new premise, launched the *Love Your Markets* and *Save Your Markets* campaigns, increased the scale of the annual Christmas markets held in the *Point Venue* in Dublin's *Docklands* area, and managed to procure a temporary venue elsewhere in *The Liberties* to hold three small Summer Pop-Up markets.

This surge in activity was short-lived, and further tragedy struck the market when the news broke across social media in July 2018 that, for the first time since 2008, there would be no Christmas market as the venue, *The Point Village*, had pulled out of the agreement to host. The fight to save the market looked increasingly doomed to failure. Resignation to the loss of the market happened eventually when, on December 3rd of 2021, the founders of the *Dublin Flea Market* released a statement on *Facebook* to their 30,000+ followers entitled '*Flea Closure*'. Whereas up to this point, the market was on hiatus, fighting to find a new home, this announcement signalled the end. Accompanied by a glossy photo of the founders, the post went on to detail that despite their best efforts, they had come to the difficult and emotional decision that '[we] are not in a position to operate the *Dublin Flea Market* anymore. Therefore, the *Dublin Flea Market* will officially cease operation at the end of 2021'. The statement went on to detail the various challenges that the market had contended with recently in trying to procure a new and permanent home, such as the *Covid-19* pandemic, rising rents, loss of cultural spaces in the city as the development of more hotels was being greenlit, etc., that ultimately contributed to their decision 'to exodus the constricting confines of the city walls'. The post

reminisced about what the market had managed to achieve and the meaning it held for so many people.

Given that the literal foundations and buildings that the market was hosted in have now been demolished and re-made into something new entirely, the lasting legacy of the market will be the website, which will be archived in order to function as a repository of the market, the people, place and things that temporarily existed and passed through there. Signing off on an emotional and somewhat defeated-sounding note, they wrote that 'Words cannot really describe the loss we feel. Thank you all for being there with us. It was a beautiful thing. The reaction to the posting was fast, with multiple 'likes', 'shares', comments and reactions pouring in in the immediate aftermath, which I witnessed personally in perhaps the final virtual ethnographic witnessing that this project could partake of. The following comments included an outpouring of grief, nostalgia, anger, well-wishes and gratitude for the founders in their future endeavours. Similar responses to concurrent postings on other social media platforms, such as *Instagram* and *Twitter*, were met with a similar response.

Displacement & Demolitions- When your field site is knocked to its foundations.

It was only in the latter stages of this research project that it became apparent that I was capturing perhaps the only ethnographic account of the *Dublin Flea Market* before it would disappear from the city, along with much of the architecture that had housed it and the many thousands of items that passed through its domain in the years of small beginnings, through soaring peaks and later precarious crashes to total disassembly. The same metaphorical phoenix that rose from the ashes of the *Celtic Tiger* was now burnt out. The tragic irony struck me; the same sociological conditions that had contributed to the market's success eventually contributed to its destruction. The flea market operated as a liminal or 'in-between' place. This

second-hand heterotopia spontaneously and surreptitiously connected a menagerie of people, things and practices that converged and diverged and connected a host of other locations, homes, consumer practices and beliefs along with cultural phenomena such as the collective obsession with clutter, disposal and waste. This will be the true lasting legacy of the market, the multiple meanings, values, practices and connections that were shaped and shared through the consumption of second-hand things.

Additionally, the ramifications of the precarity and subsequent loss of the flea markets stretch beyond the immediate confines of *Newmarket Square*. Within the national scale, the loss of the markets was widely condemned as yet another instance of the ongoing loss of cultural and creative spaces in a city that was increasingly coming to be characterised by an influx of fast-tracked developments of transient development spaces, mainly in the form of hotels, luxury student accommodation and office buildings. In an even broader context, the period of rapid structural change to the flea markets and *Dublin* cityscape also has ramifications for the cultural practices and understandings around the themes discussed elsewhere in this thesis, namely the emergence of the decluttering industry, the growing concerns over the impact of consumer culture and fast fashion on the environment with aesthetic minimalism venerated as the solution to excessive consumption. Finally, the ever-growing challenges and problem of trying to deal with and manage the waste and discards we, as a species, in the time of the Anthropocene (or, may I suggest, Clutter-cene) continue to produce at an ever-accelerated rate.

Circulation & Clutter through an Anthropological Lens.

Concerns with, and questions about, conspicuous consumption, the accumulation of goods to confer status, what socio-cultural factors create/constitute value and worth, the circulation of

material objects for economic and ceremonial purposes and broader existential questions about the creation of meaning and the (albeit varied) lived human experience are all present in even the earliest anthropological and ethnographic scholarship. Indeed, attention has been directed to the various configurations in which people and their possessions and the exchange, gifting and stockpiling of those resources since the beginnings of the discipline. Some of the most famous, canonical, and enduring of which are all woven into this dissertation as I draw on threads of work on gifting, exchange and inalienability, to name but a few. Revisiting, for example, Malinowski's (1922) and Mauss's (1925) respective writings on the gathering and public displaying of *Trobriand* islanders' yams as a form of conspicuous accumulation and the circulations and ceremonial exchange of *Kula* valuables to convey status with that of the meaning of the gift and how material exchange, (or in the case of *Potlatch*, the ceremonial destruction of objects) co-creates social connections, can be connected to a number of the materially-mediated social practices of my participants.

For example, acquiring and accumulating valuable objects that will be desirable at the flea market entails possessing sufficient financial resources to be able to purchase 'worthy' goods, but also the cultural capital to be able to identify such goods and the social networks to be able to access them. Traders' stalls can be read as socially desirable accumulations, and it is the circulation and exchange that occurs at the trader stalls that builds both the spaces and practices of the flea market as an abstract entity, as well as the relationships that are formed within it. Just as was the case for the circulation of *Kula* valuables and their symbolic lore, the practices of trading in second-hand goods in contemporary *Dublin* flea markets are also more complex and layered than may first appear. The circulation of *Kula* valuables and the circulation of second-hand flea-market goods are both subjected to processes of meaning-making, symbolic as well as monetary exchange, and various other social functions that can

illuminate the normative, performative and provocative dimensions of alternative contemporary consumption. Such circulations of goods and the broader practices that accompany them at the flea market, e.g., conflict over value(s), practices of domestic ordering, etc., become tangled with other socio-cultural concerns, i.e., the climate crisis, consumer excess, unjust labour inequalities, etc., and become associated with societal problems or interventions, i.e., minimalism being touted as the ‘cure’ to the ‘clutter crisis’. For example, as will be discussed in this dissertation, for many of the people who participated in my research, the flea market was conceived of as a morally superior alternative to, and even solution to, the excesses of consumption and conventional shopping that had spiked during the height of the *Celtic Tiger*, and dramatically ruptured during the global economic recession of 2008. This resulted in a seemingly restorative and, perhaps of most significance, culturally/collectively - sanctioned practice of atoning for and managing (ideally through reduction via decluttering interventions, which I argue could be likened to that of the *Potlatch*’s display of no-longer-needed or wanted excess) one’s previous material accumulations, to show how discourses of second-hand consumption and the divestment of material objects are laden with practices of surveillance, moral imperatives and collective values, especially in the context of the current ecological crisis.

The common theoretical threads that weave together those yams, *Kula* valuables and *Potlatch* distributions with contemporary flea-market items, second-hand goods, clutter objects and decluttered and discarded goods is the shared concern with exchange, keeping and cultural values. Put simply, when can we understand the accumulation of (certain) material things as valuable and indicative of celebration, versus when does it represent something unjust, dangerous or morally problematic/suspect?

Situating my work in the Anthropological Literature.

As my primary field site's symbolic and literal foundations became more precarious and increasingly chaotic, I was struck by how this contested space, with its contested market practices and values over the contested second-hand goods that passed through it, seemed to continually generate more puzzles, paradoxes, tensions and necessitated questioning how and why the patterns of material culture consumption practices that occurred within it were at one so locally mediated yet also responded to broader sociological conditions of transition and change. This research is underpinned by a material culture lens- one that aims to pay close attention to an oft-overlooked, even deemed trivial, uninteresting or unimportant area of human activity, i.e., trading at a flea market and how this shows up and is negotiated in the traders' homes, etc., in order to gain insight into the processual practices of home- and meaning-making that also guided and influenced traders' experiences in the flea market. Later in this chapter, I will outline some of the most important methodological and ethical considerations I drew on when commencing my research. However, firstly, in order to trace my scholarly approach that informed how I went about conducting this research, unpacking the themes and tensions that I observed is required. Here, I turn to the scholarship on material culture, flea markets and second-hand consumption and follow a brief synopsis of some of the most important and influential ideas (those that explained, challenged and provoked my own) that helped me to contextualise and situate this work in the genealogy of anthropological scholarship follows.

This literature focuses on developing a conceptual and theoretical framework that speaks to the importance of flea markets from an anthropological perspective, paying close attention to the types of practices and processes of meaning-making that they enable or limit and the impacts that this has on the individuals who operate within them, or at their margins.

A brief discussion of the significance of flea markets and their transient material contents will be flagged here, and later chapters will explore the connections between consumption and disposal practices and flea market goods through various contexts such as the home, the bin and beyond. Using a material culture lens, I aim to focus on the affective quality of material things to elicit meaning from the mundane.

The trajectory I follow here is to draw on classical anthropology topics such as Malinowski's (1922) work on *Kula* circulations and Mauss' (1925) work on the gift to demonstrate the significance of everyday material practices. I am interested in how the movement of second-hand market goods connects the flea market to a wider network of second-hand consumption practices. Referring to the literature on the social lives of objects, (cf. Kopytoff & Appadurai (1986), etc., I align myself more closely with the approach developed by Joyce & Gillespie (2015) as the analytical framework of 'object itineraries', i.e., that emerges most useful to focus on the multiple sites of movement flea goods pass through and the accompanying transformations of associated values and meanings over time. Noting that the flea market is not homogenous, fixed or stable, I then draw upon literature on the production of value (cf. Graeber 2001; Miller 2008; Norris 2012A + 2012B, as well as more recent work on consumption and the production of meaning, memory, identity and such through shopping (cf. Daniel Miller's body of work contributes significantly to this).

As my research aims to connect two seemingly separate spaces, i.e., the public, commercial market, and the private domestic setting, I draw on bodies of literature- that on the market and the domestic context. Using the flea market traders as a channel through which to follow the circulations of second-hand goods, I draw on the literature of domesticity and home

(cf. Pink 2004; Daniels 2010; Garvey 2018 and Hurdley 2013, etc., and that pertaining to second-hand practices and specifically, analysing flea markets from an anthropological lens (cf. Appelgren & Bohlin 2015; Gregson & Crewe 2007; Herrmann 1997, etc). Here, I also borrow Foucault's (1967) concept of heterotopia as a suitable conceptual framework through which to understand and unpack the flea market. This model, I argue helps explain how the flea market can juxtapose and reconcile so many contested and conflicting agendas that occur within it.

Drawing on more contemporary anthropological and sociological scholarship on clutter and the emergence of a professional decluttering industry (cf. Newell 2023; Woodward 2015, Tasia 2023; Ouellette 2022, and Cwerner & Metcalfe 2003) I apply concepts such as magical thinking to the connection that occurs when decluttering interventions are presented as both a household chore but also a route to self-improvement and personal fulfilment. Understanding the home as a site of circulation that should enable the flows of material goods, people, practices and values that occur within it, I also consider what happens when these processes fail, i.e., when this circulation is ruptured and items accumulate, disrupting both the aesthetic appearance of the home and question if such ruptures are the moments when clutter is created. I also use this framework of flow and stoppage to explore how contemporary home aesthetics have become morally laden with an ideology of minimalism shaping popular discourses of what a 'good home' ought to look like, i.e., one that is free from excessive material accumulation (meaning clutter).

The final body of literature that I will consult is the recent attention given to processes of waste, divestment and ridding. Drawing on the work of several theorists (cf. Nagle 2013;

Minter 2019; Reno 2015; Thill 2015; Norris 2012B, etc., that aim to problematise the absence of attention paid to the circular nature of cycles of production, consumption and disposal, I will again aim to demonstrate how values such as rubbish, junk, clutter, etc., are also transient and in flux. Further complicating processes of divestment is the inalienable (cf. Weiner, 1992) quality certain items may possess. This can range from clothing and household goods, but can also occur when managing the material remnants of death (cf. Prendergast, Hockey & Kellaher, 2006). Inspired by Hetherington's (2004) argument that disposal is rarely final and forms a kind of 'spectral horror' I will problematise strategies of domestic divestment post decluttering interventions. Traders tended to utilise two different strategies to manage excess goods; storage and circulating objects out of the home and back to the second-hand economy or to the bin. I will draw on the work of Newell (2023), Woodward (2015) Cwerner & Metcalfe (2003) to unpack the use of storage practices within the home, and draw on discard studies approaches to follow the flows of objects out of the domestic setting and back to the flea market. Ultimately, I chart the flea market's rise and fall over ten years in order to explore how it operates as a contested and transformative space and as a paradoxical conduit for both disposal and accumulation.

Dublin and Second-Hand Consumption Spaces:

Here, I briefly note that whilst the scope of this thesis focuses primarily on the second-hand spaces situated in Newmarket Square and the more immediate surrounding areas, this does not mean that other similar spaces do not exist across the rest of *Dublin* city. In fact, over the duration of this research, I visited many other second-hand, alternative, vintage retail spaces and stores and attended, both for the thesis and for leisure, a host of other flea, antiques, and

craft markets. Unfortunately, many of these other markets clashed with the *Newmarket* varieties and thus could not be included in any meaningful manner. Similarly, I also attended various car boot sales, charity shops, second-hand books, and vinyl records stores, informal swap meets, as well as online-mediated freecycle, exchange and swap groups. Other quarters across the city that informed the argument of this work thus range from *Smithfield*, *Templebar*, *Blackrock*, *George's Street*, *Howth* and *Dun Laoghaire*, to name but a few. That said, during the duration of my fieldwork, the country was undergoing a period of economic recovery only to repeat cycles of boom and bust, gentrification and redevelopment and these impacted on the traders in a variety of manners. Next, I step back from the specific context of the flea market to give the reader a sense of the broader sociological conditions the market was situated in and that would have impacted the flea market and the people, objects and practices that pass through it.

National and Global Influences- changing times and trends.

Now that we have contextualised the geographical dimension of this research to set the scene for the home and surroundings of the markets, the chapter shifts to briefly present and consider some of the national and global influences that both directly shaped and likely influenced the founding of the markets and contributed in varying degrees to their boom in popularity and successful growth across ten years of drastically changing economic and societal/cultural transformations.

Economic Context:

The Celtic Tiger Era and Conspicuous Consumption in Ireland.

During the mid-1990s until the late 2000s, Ireland underwent a period of rapid and intensive economic growth, referred to as the ‘Celtic Tiger’, or ‘The Boom’. Factors such as an increase in foreign direct investment resulted in Ireland rapidly transforming from one of Western Europe’s poorest to the wealthiest countries. The impacts of this economic growth had a significant impact on the social and cultural landscape of the country and would further the wealth divide between the high- and low-income groups. Whilst disposable income and consumer spending were at an all-time high for both the middle and upper classes, others, such as the working or impoverished classes were not fortunate to feel much of an effect by the economic upswing. This disparity meant that the new wealth experienced by the country was distributed unevenly between its citizens/populace, (cf. David McWilliams 2006; Fahey et al. 2007).

During this time, mainstream media, e.g., *The Irish Times*, etc., ran numerous articles on individual consumption choices and how the impact of the Celtic Tiger had altered these. Popular news sites also published articles that at once both celebrated such outlandish consumption as ‘the good ol days of the Tiger’, but then also reflected on that period of consumerism in Ireland as being frivolous, superficial, and heavily centred on the insatiable acquisition of more and more luxury consumer goods in a display of conspicuous consumer wealth. This ran the gamut from new homes with extensive renovations, foreign trips, wardrobes full of designer goods and expensive leisure and dining activities. These articles captured the complexity of the Celtic Tiger and its unequal impact on the people. Some loved the Celtic Tiger period yearning for its return, whereas others hated it and critiqued it as excessive consumerism. This varied experience of the period of boom and recession was complex.

Fiona Murphy (2017) wrote of this period of ‘austerity’ noting that it had impacted the proliferation of second-hand consumption spaces and the types of people who showed up in them. Murphy notes that motivations for engaging in second-hand consumption were varied; for some, it was financially driven, either to access cheaper goods or it was about making money, whereas for others ‘sustainability and being green was increasingly a fashionable orientation’ (2017:167). Consumption practices here then are shaped by a collective or social memory at a moment of significant social change and transformation. Modernity and tradition overlap and bring versions of the past and the future into the present. Wulff (2007), writing on dance in Ireland also observes themes of displacement, nostalgia and longing in her research. Whether these are imagined or a ‘romantic memory of a lost Ireland’, they form a key metaphor for a rapidly changing society (208:12). In both the world of Irish dance and the flea markets, contested notions of value and visions for the country converge and are constantly negotiated and transformed, i.e., tradition versus modernity, local versus global, and commerce versus artistry; and, conscious consumption, in my own. Murphy concludes that Irish consumption spaces did experience some degree of change and that sustainability narratives had become central to the ‘larger narrative around recovery from economic recession in Ireland’ (2017:162). This suggests that within the second-hand consumption sphere, sustainability is subjective, and can be performatively enacted depending on one’s overall consumption orientations, aims and practices.

However, this new expression of wealth amongst the middle classes was not without its critics. One such instance of this critique posits that increased consumer spending was in fact causing a plethora of social ills and the flip side to the material excess being the eradication of the country’s community spirit accompanied by rising levels of health crises such as drug and alcohol abuse and rising suicide rates. In the contentiously titled ‘*Growth: The Celtic*

Cancer, why the global economy damages our health and society' Dr. Elizabeth Cullen's (2004) opening article claims that Ireland's rapid economic growth is in fact decimating the fabric of Irish society. She states that, 'We have mistaken standards of living with quality of life, and there is no doubt the quality of life in Ireland has deteriorated... People now equate quality of life with wealth - which is a major mistake'. This argument was met with a mixture of agreement and scepticism, however, in the economic crash to follow, more people began to express similar sentiments.

The Global Crash of 2008- The Death of a Tiger.

The economic boom period began to show signs of imminent collapse and by 2008, was abruptly followed by a severe economic downturn, fuelled primarily by a property bubble that was unsustainable, and had long-lasting repercussions across Irish society and its inhabitants. What followed was a crash into a deep recession characterised by high unemployment, the virtual shuddering to a halt of the construction industry, homeowners being plunged into negative equity and cuts to both social services and spending, as well as in the welfare system and consumer spending.

Anger and indignation at the Government's alleged long-term 'head in the sand' mentality regarding an inevitable property bubble burst, was expressed by many critics amongst whom, David McWilliams, a prominent economist and journalist who had been warning of the likelihood that Ireland's circumstances were primed for the creation of a housing bubble that would result in a massive crash. These warnings were often dismissed as being alarmist on the country's national broadcaster *RTE* and in the print media by various critics, where

McWilliams was personally criticised for talking down the economy and damaging consumer sentiment. Not dissuaded by the attacks in the press, McWilliams effectively doubled down and expanded his theory. Drawing the ire of many, on an appearance on RTE's *Prime Time* in 2003, he declared that the country's housing industry and current boom it was experiencing was a "confidence trick" by "an unholy alliance of bankers, landowners and a pliant political class" which would collapse resulting "in a generation in negative equity". Concluding on the collapse, McWilliams noted in a blogpost entitled '*Change? Yes we can and must*' published on his website on January 5th, 2009 that, 'The case is clear: an economically challenged government, perniciously influenced by the interests of the housing lobby, blew it. The entire Irish episode will be studied internationally in years to come as an example of how not to do things'.

Contributing to the immediate detrimental aftermath of the property crash was Ireland's economy now being heavily indebted due to both the wider impacts of the 2008 Great Recession (amongst other factors described as an American banking and subprime mortgage crises) and the European debt crisis, and subsequent Recession and a dramatic surge in domestic unemployment levels. In an attempt to offset the impacts of these crises, the reduction in consumer spending and prevent further collapse, what followed suit was a fiscal response that entailed enormous bailouts for the banking sector, despite its having been marred by a number of findings of massive financial fraud and further allegations (in 2005 *The New York Times* had run a story in which they described Ireland as the "Wild West of European finance"), and there were constantly stories of investigations of political corruption- colloquially referred to as 'brown envelopes' and 'golden circles' to mean politicians taking bribes in exchange for favours granted to developers, investors and to journalists for positive spins in coverage. Catering to the whims of the rich and powerful, Ireland had experienced

several major banking scandals for the routine overcharging of their customers, yet, bailing out the banks would become one of the main governmental priorities in the response to the recession. This bail out cost just under €42 billion and numerous articles would be published over the following years noting the enduring debt ‘hanging over the head of each citizen’ as the debts were slowly paid off.

A year after the official commencement of the Crash in 2008, as the Government struggled to establish a solution for the upturned economic and social state, it became apparent that any previous hopes for a ‘soft landing’ where the economy would gradually slow down and avoiding plunging into recession were firmly eradicated. It was accepted that a depression was now inevitable. An editorial in *The Irish Times* in January of 2009, entitled ‘No Time for Whingers’ declared: "We have gone from the Celtic Tiger to an era of financial fear with the suddenness of a Titanic -style shipwreck, thrown from comfort, even luxury, into a cold sea of uncertainty." Further commentators, analysts and journalists bemoaned the collective sentiment that Ireland had effectively squandered its years of high income during the boom on superfluous consumerism, rather than more effectively investing in transport infrastructure, social housing, education, public services, and telecommunications networks.

This exact duration of this period of recession and subsequent recovery is debated amongst different sectors however, it is widely accepted that in the fifteen years since 2008, the country was subjected to lasting negative consequences, with the initial period of 2008-2013 best summarised as five years of bust, and the following period between 2013-2018 surmised as five years of recovery, with 2018 to 2023 representing ongoing recovery and growth, whilst also struggling with pressures arising from both local and international trends,

such as insufficient housing, the climate crisis, disruption to global supply chains, and the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. However, just as the benefits of the Celtic Tiger were experienced differently depending on one's economic and social class, so too were the paths out of the Crash towards Recovery.

Lingering Impacts of the Boom to Bust Experience.

Austerity for All:

What followed was a dramatic reversal of the country's economic growth through the implementation of a national policy of austerity cuts and measures that would persist well beyond the recovery initially projected. The most drastic of these cuts would come in the form of an early budget delivered in 2009.

Debt:

Public sentiment since the Recession has commonly referred to tropes of government corruption and incompetent policies. From late 2010, the Irish Government began talks on a multibillion-dollar economic assistance package with experts from the *International Monetary Fund (IMF)* and the *European Union*. A serious cause of concern at the time, was the large increase in unemployment forecasted to occur and the need to borrow in order to support the recovery and escape additional economic downfall. Ireland would go on to request €67.5 billion from the *International Monetary Fund* and members of the euro zone. Taking the money meant accepting austerity and sealed the fate of the country for several years to follow. In the aftermath of the deal, government expenditure in public services was sharply cut, consumer spending dropped and emigration increased dramatically.

Ghost Estates:

The lingering impacts of the boom to bust cycle and subsequent periods of austerity measures had a tangible and sustained impact on the country, its landscape and its populace. In the years post- Crash, there was a surge in the number of unoccupied housing estates which would come to be known as ‘ghost estates’. These estates which had been built in droves during the period of economic growth during the Celtic Tiger resulted in a surplus of housing and, teamed with the abrupt interruption to consumers’ spending ability as a result of the Crash, resulted in large numbers of estates across the country that were abandoned, uncompleted or unoccupied. Oftentimes, even the homes within the estates that had been practically completed were left in various states of disrepair and dereliction.

Consumption and Spending:

During and post-recession, household consumption and consumer spending decreased rapidly and dramatically. There was not just a decrease in spending, but the very composition of that spending also was radically altered. Spending on non-essential consumer goods lowered as consumers were more cautious about spending their personal finances. Saving, thrift and ‘scrimping’ became the new normal in the aftermath of the Crash and signified a shift from conspicuous consumption to what could be termed ‘careful’ consumption. Any previous social prestige to be had from displaying wealth and one’s spending power was now repurposed into a veneration of being ‘bargain savvy’ and seeking out sales and discounts. Households under economic strain were even more likely to continue to cut their discretionary spending in the face of ongoing household and economic pressure. In order to lessen the risk of becoming even more vulnerable, households needed to mitigate a host of contributing factors such as reductions in, or total loss of income, as well as high levels of debt, expenditure exceeding income and/or impending homelessness.

One enduring cultural ‘scar’ of the 2008 recession and aftermath is a shared narrative and sentiment about the spending habits that were at their peak during the Celtic Tiger. In fact, since the Crash there has been an almost nostalgic-if- somewhat judgemental genre of reporting about the spending habits the country had borne witness to. Opinion pieces, articles and long-form essays are published semi-frequently marking the various anniversaries of the ‘collective trauma’ (as one article published in *The Journal* in 2019 commented) flattening and generalise the myriad experiences of the time and speaking to a seemingly nationally agreed upon belief that we had all ‘lost our minds’ in the pursuit of consuming evermore. As noted above, the gap between the haves and the have-nots remained during the Celtic Tiger and whilst for some, squandering millions was the defining characteristic, for many, this was just a period of being more financially comfortable (this conclusion is drawn from discussions with traders about that period of time and reviewing mainstream media coverage of the Tiger and Crash within Ireland).

Consumer Sentiments and Changing Predilections Context:

Emphasising the consumption choices people had made, these retrospectives most often come in the form of playful listicles, with provocative titles such as ‘*My most outrageous Celtic Tiger purchase*’ detailing the flamboyant, excessive and shocking trips, purchases and spending that people have either come to regret or still felt was justified during the economic growth period (as per *Reddit* forums, *Evoke Magazine*, etc.). Emerging from these publications are narratives and discourses that speak to a collective sense of memory and commonly include references to ‘being caught up’ in spending, ‘losing the run of oneself’, and a communal display of “consumer notions” or fanciful whims outside of common sense. One example of such a listicle comes from *The Independent* in December 2013- entitled ‘*14 things you won’t believe Irish*

people did during the Celtic Tiger'. The article goes on to detail ostentatious displays of wealth including 'popping over' to New York at Christmas to shop, chartering helicopters for First Holy Communion entrances, quaffing champagne at the hairdressers, lavish 18th /21st birthday parties with private entertainment, cars as gifts and massive guestlists. The article also discusses the consumer trend for less than savvy financial decisions such as procuring 100% mortgages, maxing credit cards or taking out large loans and overdrafts on minimum wages that would prove immensely difficult to repay. Within the luxury retail industries, examples such as gyms with chandeliers, the arrival and success of a *Vera Wang* bridal offering in *Brown Thomas* with prices starting at €25,000 per gown were also pointed to as further evidence of the country's excesses. These ostentatious and lavish consumption practices become more relics of the past with more people later turning to the second-hand economy.

The opinion pieces that often accompanied these reflective accounts of Celtic Tiger spending also vary between regret at one's choices to pleasant and yearning memories of having had disposable income. For some, recalling the spending from the time is less important than the melancholic remembrance of a time when they were not being burdened by negative equity or when they had access to an affordable rental market. It was these states of being, more so than any individual item purchased that were the joys most keenly remembered. Even in more contemporary times, these retrospectives remain popular and serve as a prompt for reflection on one's own experiences of the Tiger. For example, an Irish podcast entitled '*The Unpopular Opinion*' asked listeners in 2019 and 2021 to respond to episodes about consumerism and the Celtic Tiger with their own biggest wasteful purchases having shared their own examples. Another lingering discussion of the Celtic Tiger excesses comes in the form of a *Twitter* account with just under 17K followers, named *BustToBoom* that both highlights and shares some of the most Celtic Tiger-esque things that people have spent their

hard-earned cash money on and also vows to ‘keep an eye on boom time behaviours’ that may be creeping back into the cultural parlance. Recent examples include the high cost of craft sausages, people queueing for artisanal bread, to the creeping increases in housing prices despite the inability to do viewings during Covid-19.

Domestic Context:

Shrinking Spaces-Smaller Homes and Insufficient Supply.

In recent years, within Ireland and the UK, there have been numerous reports and research conducted into the shrinking of spaces of domesticity. Simply put, our houses are getting smaller with the average size of homes having less floor space since the 1970s. An article published in *The Guardian* in 2018 stated that in the UK context, ‘The average house has lost 20% of its space since the 1970s as austerity warps planning processes and greed rules the market’. In a similar vein, an article in *The Sunday Times* the following year entitled ‘*Why are new homes getting smaller?*’ referred to data from *the Central Statistics Office* noting that according to its new dwelling-size index, new homes were found to be at their smallest size since 2011. The article elaborated on the significance of this reduction explaining that there was an inverse relationship between the sizes of homes and new builds with a continued decline in the average size of the home. They also cited statistics stating that ‘The estimated average size of all homes stands at 142.8 sq m, compared with 187.6 sq m in 2011, and the index is 26% lower than its highest level in 2012’.

In Ireland, the pattern of diminishing home size has also been trending downwards. Whilst there are numerous instances of articles discussing the sociological implications of

smaller homes, a lot of them tend to focus more on the changing trends in family size and shifting dwelling preferences as being evidence for the need to invest in smaller homes as part of the country's efforts to emerge from an ongoing housing crisis. An article published in *The Business Post* on March 6, 2016 entitled '*Department of Environment fast tracked new apartment sizes despite opposition*' spoke to the contentious decision of the department to lower the previous minimum standards of 55 square metres for a one-bedroom apartment to 'as small as 45 square metres'. Documents released under a *Freedom of Information Act* request show how *Dublin City Council* defended the lowered apartment standards stating that they are 'appropriate to the particular circumstances and needs of the city as a capital city'.

As the number of consumer goods increased, domestic spaces got smaller and this resulted in a storage problem- or lack thereof problem. An article in *The Irish Times* published on September 7th 2018 critiques both the current offerings on the market as containing 'too many small, poorly configured, undesirable, apartment homes. We have failed as a city to "crack" the design challenges of building spacious, light-filled, apartment homes with high ceilings, dual aspects and ample storage'. Politics clashed with public sentiments about the idea of home and what it ought to be. Widespread opposition to the Government strategy of developing more co-living spaces as the best solution for the housing crisis by the Irish government (For example, articles published in *The Irish Times* entitled '*Co-living apartments could become 'glorified tenement living' says Taoiseach*' (2020), '*Single rooms the size of average car parking spaces*' (2020), '*Why can't we build apartments like the rest of Europe?*' (2020), and '*Co-Living the modern much dearer alternative to outlawed bedsit*' (2019) all critiqued the Government's performance, priorities and approaches to the housing crisis following the economic crash.

Codifying Storage in Home Design.

In 2015 and again in 2018, (and with the most recent amendments focusing on proposed co-living residences published in December of 2020) the Irish Government's *Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government* published guidelines (*Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments*) for local authorities stressing the need for further investment in smaller dwelling options and containing minimum design standards for new apartments. Focusing initially on the 2015 report, it becomes apparent that the Department acknowledges that there needs to be a shift towards apartments becoming an increasingly common form of housing option, especially in more urban areas. Summarising the contents of the reports and the amendments between them, the report states that the most important design regulations to focus on include standardised minimum specifications 'with regard to design quality safeguards such as internal space standards for 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom apartments, floor to ceiling height, internal storage and amenity space'.

Internal Storage was also reviewed and the report states that 'As part of required minimum apartment floor areas, provision should be made for general storage and utility' with minimum requirements for such storage areas included in an appendix. The report notes that such storage areas should be fit for purpose, be additional to spaces such as 'kitchen presses and bedroom furniture, but may be partly provided in these rooms', and that they are 'intended to accommodate household utility functions such as clothes washing and the storage of bulky personal or household items'. In addition to storage spaces within the individual residence, the report also states that there should be further secure, well-maintained communal spaces to 'provide storage for bulky items outside individual units (i.e. at ground or basement level). Secure, ground-floor storage space allocated to individual apartments and located close to the

entrance to the apartment block or building is particularly useful and planning authorities should encourage the provision of such space in addition to minimum apartment storage requirements’.

‘Not Enough Rooms for One’s Own’- No Space for Storage or Stability/Security.

The massive shortcoming in the availability of smaller size dwellings coupled with exorbitantly high rents for subpar accommodations meant that for many non-homeowners being limited to renting a home both storage space and longer-term security were lacking and a source of significant stress. The participants in this dissertation tended to fall into two accommodation-based categories- those middle-aged and above owned their own homes and those who identified as young adults up to mid-40 were most commonly rental tenants. Subsequent chapters will provide a closer examination of the domestic conditions of individual participants in this research, however, here I just wish to flag that the most common complaints I heard from those individuals pertained to the lack of storage space and how this directly impacted their consumption choices at the flea market (e.g. being limited to smaller sized purchases, an inability to purchase heavier and durable furniture items when their rental status was in flux, or choosing to sell off more cumbersome pieces that were not compatible with their current accommodations, etc.) alongside the overall stress and strain such uncertainty had on not only their domestic circumstances but also in how it bled into other aspects of their lives.

Commodifying Space- The Emergence of the External Storage Industry.

So, if the problem is an excess of consumer stuff, with not enough room/(s) to accommodate it, the solution appears to come in the form of an external storage industry (cf. Lofgren 2012).

Capitalism now sells us the goods, the means to contain them and the space to store them all, thus enabling us to continue to acquire more. It seems highly probable that it was partially thanks to the economic boom experienced in Ireland prior to the Recession of 2008 that we witness the emergence of an external storage industry in the mid-1990s. Prior to this, as best as I can find, the concept of procuring and paying for self-storage was relatively unheard of outside of the parameters of one's attics, garages and so on. The industry rents, on both short- and long-term basis, storage space to tenants, both individuals and/or businesses. Storage units tend to be offered in different sizes, and with different amenities such as climate control, with controlled access for security. Most often companies also sell insurance as part of the conditions of use.

Global Storage.

Much of the academic scholarship on the use of external storage spaces tend to be based within the US context. Here, I briefly note some important contributing factors and statistics. Appearing to have originated in the US around the 1950s, industry experts deem the '4 D's' (death, divorce, downsizing and dislocation) as the most common rationale for their appeal to customers. To the present day, the US is also deemed to have the biggest storage industry with an abundance of over 50,000 self-storage units estimated to exist (statistics from *SpareFoot*, a US-based company that tracks the self-storage industry in 2018 suggests this is likely to continue to rise annually). In order to convey the scale of the industry in the US, the *NY Times* magazine ran a feature declaring that, 'the United States now has 2.3 billion square feet of self-storage space... with more than seven square feet for every man, woman and child, it's now "physically possible that every American could stand — all at the same time — under the total canopy of self-storage roofing' ('The Self-Storage Self' by Jon Mooallem on September 2, 2009). They state that industry statistics claim that 1 in every 10 households rents a storage

unit and a *Bloomberg* article from 2017 claimed that the industry made \$32.7 billion in 2016 (by Adam Minter, August 28, 2017.cf. Arnold et al (2012).

Ireland's Storage Industry.

So how does the industry compare in Ireland? Statistics from the *Federation of European Self Storage Associations* (FEDESSA) in 2015 state that there are 25 established storage facilities, most of whom are and registered with *the Irish Self-Storage Association* (ISA). The rentable storage space stood at approximately 80,000 square metres with 69% occupancy meaning that Ireland had 0.017 sqm of self-storage per person, in contrast to the US's 0.7 sqm per person. The most recent FEDESSA's *European Self-Storage Survey* was published in 2020 and states that there are 'now 4,831 facilities across Europe, providing nearly 10.5 million square metres of self-storage space'. The report shows that the 'big six' (UK, France, Spain, Netherlands, Germany, and Norway) have '78% of the total market share of facilities in Europe and hold 84% of the total floor space'. The report indicates that the industry is still growing across Europe at a steady rate and they estimate that there are now '4,831 facilities providing nearly 10.5 million sq. m of self-storage space'. The report provides a breakdown of facilities per capital city, however, Ireland is not included in this section of the report.

That said, it is interesting to note some of the other statistics provided for 2020- Ireland's average rent per square metre is slightly above the European average, the average occupancy remained approximately 15% above the European average, domestic clients account for more of the rental income than business units, and, interestingly, Ireland has one of the largest average facility size across the 17 counties surveyed, with a broad range of facility sizes and 'a huge difference between the smaller operators and large mature facilities'. Later

in the report, there are itemised breakdowns per country and Ireland is listed with the following statistics: In 2020 the ‘population is 4,887,992, estimated number of facilities is 42, current lettable area in square metres is 106,000, floor space per capita in square metres is 0.022, and the facilities per million population is 8.6’. The report also notes that all the figures represent a year on year (YoY) increase from the previous year, thus supporting the claims from industry insiders that there is still significant scope for the self-storage industry to expand in Ireland in the coming years.

Solutions for your Stuff- The Supporting Industries.

Supplementing the external storage industry as a means to contain, conserve and curate one’s excess belongings are a host of other associated industries, services, gurus, and experts. Here, I wish to briefly flag the existence of such services that constitute part of the sale of solutions to consumers by the very industries that enable and in fact, encourage consumers to acquire, more, consume more and retain more goods. If the goods sold are the problem, then these big retailers also seek to sell the ‘solution’. In perhaps the biggest paradox of the relationship between clutter (seen as problematic and an excess of material things) and storage (seen as the solution and means to corral such clutter items), the very means of solving the crisis of having bought too much, is to buy more material items that take up more space in the home in order to control, contain and order the initial excess of goods. Storage space is now commodified and possesses its own entire industry whereby we are sold more and more options for storage, in the form of tubs, bins, boxes, custom furniture, files and folders, to name but a few.

These associated industries are widespread and normalised within both specialist and more general shopping spaces. For example, popular discount retailers such as *The Range*, *Mr.*

Price, and various other *Euro-shops* (discount retailers with many items costing only a few euro- originally were called pound shops when Ireland was still using pounds as the national currency) all offer massive stocks of storage solutions for every room in the home, ranging from functional to decorative and everything in between. Even supermarket chains such as *Tesco*, *Dunnes Stores* and *SuperValu* carry storage solutions as part of their core product lines, with an increased emphasis on those goods at specific times such as ‘back to school’ in September, and after Christmas, just in time for Spring Cleaning (and of course- organising, storing and containing!). Other popular discount retailers such as *Aldi* and *Lidl* often advertise limited availability of various storage goods that are sporadically stocked and sold throughout the year, with the limited availability and ‘exclusivity’ this causes, a major factor in attracting customers.

More specialist companies also exist, and it is fair to speculate that perhaps the most dominant of them all is the first *Ikea* store that opened in *Ballymun, Dublin* in 2009. Statistics from *Ikea*’s European website in 2018 states that in the 2017 financial year, *Ikea* generated 38.8 billion euros in sales, had 2.5 billion virtual visits to their websites and had 957 million in-store visits. Further examination of the impact of ‘storage solutions’ approach will be discussed in *Chapter’s Six and Seven*, in conjunction with the impact of the ‘*Marie Kondo effect*’ and the surge in popularity of decluttering experts.

Finally, another recent development in the storage solutions industry in Ireland was the opening of a solely focused on storage store in *Dundrum Shopping Centre*. ‘*The Organised Store*’ offers an endless array of various solutions that customers can mix and match to customise to their needs and that of their homes. With solutions offered for every room and problem, *The Organised Store*’s product lines promise to help homeowners denounce clutter and curate a dream home. Their website promotes the Swedish designed and built ‘*Elfa*’ system

which is a set of customisable shelving that offers both functionality and classic and enduring Swedish minimalist designs. Much like the infamous *Ikea* catalogue, a photo gallery entitled ‘Inspiration’ offers an aesthetically pleasing variety of staged rooms all perfectly curated and akin to those featured in the pages of interior design magazines to convey a sense of order, design and beauty all via the careful selection and use of the products they carry. The images are selling not just the material goods themselves but also the promise of a more refined and ordered existence to accompany them.

An important caveat: Limitations, Hoarding and Collecting:

Before proceeding further with this chapter, I wish to inform the reader of one crucial caveat. The case studies and subsequent discussions of clutter and household management discussed in this dissertation are all ethnographically situated in homes that are reflective of their owners’ middle-class privilege and that are predominantly effectively functioning homes. Much of the psychological, medical and existing literature on clutter, along with the body of mainstream media that popularised discussions of clutter for the general public, focuses on the more dramatic and shocking instances of homes that have become overrun with clutter. Such examples are pathologised as the tangible and material manifestation of those suffering from/with hoarding tendencies, which are understood not just as an index of poor household management, but that the dis-order evident in the home is conclusively interpreted as being indicative of a mental health disorder, or deficit. Referring to both the scholarly literature and more mainstream resources that tend to the topic of clutter, I have found it challenging to unentangle the prominence of the biomedical model (i.e., whereby the presence of clutter correlates with the presence of a mental health disorder) that sees the inner disorder reflected via the exterior chaos, from much of the narratives around clutter management.

Sensationalist popular media shows such as *Hoarders* are presented to the viewing public, allowing them to judge and identify themselves and their own homes in opposition to the messy, overflowing and often dangerous homes depicted on our TV screens. Here, those to whom the various hoards belong are shown as unreasonable and undisciplined and are to be pitied. Deemed a problem of self-control, greed, and lack of discipline, such hoarders are subjected to decluttering interventions that are immensely emotionally difficult as the root cause of the hoard is superficially deemed to be merely a problem of accumulation. Yet, for those with Hoarding Disorder (HD), it is the actual removal and loss of the things that are seen and felt as problematic, not the presence of them/ a hoard in the first place. This is especially emotionally resonant and distressing for those for whom the slippage of self (me) and it (the hoard) means that 'separation from the things is experienced as the fragmented loss of self when identity and safety are mutually constructed between the individual with HD and their hoard' (Kilroy-Marac, 2016:443). The logic underlying these sensationalist hoarding interventions and organisation shows is to pathologise the (in)actions of those that have built the hoard with the before/after of a deep cleaning and decluttering intervention, with the desired result being that once the hoarder is restored to a blank slate, in a cleared-out home, they can choose to 'do better' and not return to their slovenly, irrational ways.

Many of these interventions are shown to fail, partially owing to the lack of further and ongoing support beyond demolishing the hoard given to the individual in question. What further complicates this is the simultaneous airing of TV shows that urge viewers not to be overly hasty in ridding themselves of older items lest they potentially lose out on a financial jackpot, as seen in shows such as *The Antiques Roadshow*. Here, the popular media instruction to the populace is contested- objects should be evaluated, cast out and discarded, and held onto

and collected. The circulation of, especially second-hand goods, thus becomes imbued with moral values and conflicting messages for the consumer/owner to navigate.

In essence, within the *Zeitgeist* of the clutter crisis, hoarding and hoarders have emerged as a form of 'Cultural Bogeyman'. Representative of the excesses of consumer culture, such individuals are chastised as representative of the worst of capitalism- the vampiristic desire to consume more and more, never satiated, coupled with the unwillingness to let go of or release those things. Hoarding, in mainstream media, is often presented as just a matter of 'too much' stuff and accounts of the excesses of hoarding are utilised as a cultural short script to 'other' and problematise people who are not adhering to the rules of mainstream society. Take, for instance, the media coverage that covered the infamous case of the deaths of the *Collyer Brothers* succumbing to their own (perhaps inevitable) hoarding dating back to 1947, alongside the enduring popularity of shows such as the US-based docuseries/ reality television show *Hoarders* that first aired in 2009 and went on to have over 150 episodes and 2.5million viewers.

The voyeuristic, almost akin to the 'tragedy-pornography' appeal of hoarding-related content, also endures in documentary film representations. One example is the 1975 documentary *Grey Gardens*, which depicts two women living together in increasing squalor and desperation. This documentary has a cult following; however, it is also criticised as being possibly exploitative of the two women who demonstrated some signs of mental illness, yet others praise its empathetic approach to the two women. It is interesting, briefly, to note that this pathologisation of clutter as a form of entertainment emerged on reality TV circa 2008, and tentative connections could be drawn between this sudden and dramatic rejection of consumer culture and the rejection of the accumulation of material things that had been so

widespread during a global economy boom (colloquially referred to in Ireland as the Celtic Tiger).

That this new form of reality TV emerged just as the global economic recession had hit, when consumers were having to quickly adapt to a period of austerity, in contrast to the preceding period of wealth and excessive acquisition enjoyed by many, may suggest that part of the popularity of such shows were due to the broader sociological conditions of the moment. I briefly foreshadow here that this argument of mapping cultural narratives to influence consumer behaviour through popular media can also be considered for the popularity of *Netflix's 2019 Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* docuseries that saw an upturn in viewers during the later lockdown periods of the Covid-19 global pandemic.

Increasingly, social science research has pushed back against such simplistic reductions of hoarding as merely a symptom of mental disorder, showing it to be far more complex and multilayered. It is essential to consider what/who determines normative versus pathological consumption. And what social functions do such entanglements of the material with the moral work to sustain? When our relationships to our material belongings are so subjective and nuanced, how can we determine what is clutter over what is a biographical object? An overflow and excess of contemporary material possessions also need to be situated within the broader socio-cultural context rather than be pathologised at the level of the home only. The symbolic associations with the site of a home have rendered the home a form of mirror for the physical body and broader planet. The flows of objects in and out of the home (and also the moments and locations of ruptures of these flows) are associated with the health and well-being of its inhabitants. This approach suggests that it is possible to interpret the physical, mental and

emotional health of those in residence by examining the state of the items that co-reside within the domestic realm.

Challenging such biomedical-only accounts, more recent anthropological and sociological scholarship (cf. Newell 2023; Tasia 2023; Woodward 2015; Kilroy-Marac 2022, and Cwerner & Metcalfe 2003) has offered alternative socio-cultural frameworks for examining hoarding behaviours at both the individual intervention as well as a contemporary cultural phenomenon. One of the most prominent approaches posits that hoarders are individuals sensitive to the latent potential in material things that the majority may overlook. This tendency to afford or imbue things with agency complexes living with things, but mainly, getting rid of things. Other contemporary materiality approaches posit that clutter can be understood as a previously overlooked form of kinship whereby people are in relation with the things in their hoard and the emotional resonances such accumulations can possess.

To conclude this section, I wish to make clear the following: although I only had very minimal contact with any individual who could, using the definition provided by the *DSM-V*, be diagnosed as meeting the criteria of an individual with Hoarding Disorder, I do wish to push back against the predominance of the biomedical model. I argue that hoarding, when linked to the influence of values and messaging of contemporary consumer culture and correlated with capitalistic systems and the global spread of cheap commodities, cannot be written off as simply a problem of ‘too much in and not enough out’ as is often prescribed in popular discussions of hoarding. Instead, contemporary scholarly conversations about subject-object entanglements and how the normative management of the materiality of our domestic contexts have become synonymous with judgements about morality and individualised consumer

interventions demonstrate how consumer culture movements, trends and interventions show broader cultural values intrinsically connected to the current sociological condition. In Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, I discuss clutter, divestment, aesthetic homes and minimalist ideologies. Whilst hoarding, clutter and critiques of consumer culture occurred in my research, these, as noted earlier, are discussed with the understanding that none of the traders were dealing with an actual Hoarding Disorder diagnosis. As such, further anthropological research into this area to capture the lived experiences of those individuals is needed.

Methodological Philosophy & Considerations:

Prior Assumptions versus Reality- Reflexive Research.

Upon my initial and somewhat superficial engagement with the flea market community at the beginning of this research, the flea markets I visited appeared to be typical, similar in scope and presumably indiscernible from each other due to the random assortment of people and things that manifested to coalesce one big aggregate of things and beings on any given Sunday in *Newmarket Square*. I had incorrectly anticipated that the markets and, eventually, my research trips to them would attain some degree of saturation where similar markets would draw in similar visitors to repetitive stalls. I could write of 'cookie-cutter' markets, which could be totalised into one account where I could identify an archetype market that accurately represented all the other markets with almost-perfect display consistency across the types and categories of goods available. I had naively assumed that most traders would have similar experiences, customers would have similar motivations, and the organisers would face similar structural challenges. However, this anticipated totalising and fictitious flea market never materialised. This would become one of the significant departures from some assumptions and

biases that had unintentionally accompanied me to the field and were swiftly exiled as more insight emerged from the ethnographic process.

Multi-Sited Ethnography.

Owing to the richness of ethnographic insights to be had by situating and deeply embedding my research within *Newmarket Square* and focusing on both the *Dublin Food Co-Op* and the markets hosted there, I was able to fundamentally align my project's methodological approach with the aims of a multi-sited ethnographic project as described by George Marcus (1995). Marcus argues that the value, richness and 'magic' of such anthropological research comes from following the '...chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography' (1995:105). In the context of my research, this means following the chains, connections, and interactions between the flows of people and material objects into and beyond the flea market. This also entails paying close attention to the narratives, biographies, stories, conflicts, and negotiations that such things and people both create and are subjected to. Following the multi-sited approach to this research, it thus appears likely that had my research been grounded in a different market space or a singular flea market where I would encounter different people and different objects at random, I find it probable that I would have likely captured similar connections, patterns and practices that make up and configure the spaces of second-hand consumption and the spheres of circulation that encapsulate this space, as well as instances I did not witness, notice or have happen in my research spaces. This approach was shaped by themes of circulation, rupture and clutter, and I found myself arriving in many different field sites in trying to follow those second-hand flows and practices. Thus, in weaving or stitching together the patchwork of people, places and things encountered in the research,

this ethnography serves as a microcosm and mirrors the reality of a social and material world in which all bodies, both human and material, are constantly in flux, forming fleeting and hybrid configurations of chance encounters, entanglements and engagements.

Access and Permissions.

As part of my research process, I sought out participants by speaking to and contacting the market organisers, introducing myself and my work to every trader over many markets and handing out flyers and letters of interest to customers and visitors to the market. These requests for permission to base my research within their markets were mainly met with a very positive response on the condition that I did not impede those working at the markets or engage in any activity that could harm the reputation of the flea market. Additionally, I spoke with several *Co-Op* members, including one of the founders and the current *Chairperson of the Steering Committee*, for permission to conduct research at their various events and with members.

The Challenges of a Dynamic Site.

During my fieldwork, I came to be familiar with around 80 people that I encountered each month at the various markets. It did take some time to form any mutual recognition, partially owing to the fragmented nature of my field site where, as well as regulars, there were a lot of faces that would drop in and out of the markets and whom I would have some limited interaction with. Therefore, I would say that I went on to develop close and meaningful relationships with a much lower number of these individuals, and it is the insights and stories derived from those close participants that contribute most notably to both the richness and arguments of this thesis deriving from the case studies contained within.

What My Research Entailed.

I would attend an average of three to four flea markets each month, where I would participate in and observe the setting up and dismantling of the flea markets, as well as being present for the six or so hours in which the markets were open for business. To supplement this, I spent long hours in the *Co-Op* for special events, other markets, members-only meetings, and weekly farmers' markets and to observe the everyday acts of food provisioning and communal activities that were frequently held there. I spent hours walking around and learning about the local geography and communities. I branched further afield, visiting other locations of second-hand retailing in Dublin City and around the country.

Additionally, as I became more enmeshed in the flea community and had gotten to know more of those involved in it, I conducted interviews with roughly 40 participants- some of which were one-offs, with others representing the first in a series of longitudinal interviews that would follow as my research progressed. Towards the latter end of my time in the field, I also began conducting ethnographic visits to the homes, workplaces, and craft studios of the participants with whom I had fostered close relationships. Where possible, this occurred more than once. This relationship-building work was enabled and supported through other more informal modes of socialising and interactions- such as meeting at coffee shops, connecting over texts or sharing social media content. For a handful of traders that I came to know, I would go on to accompany them on trips where they would source stock to sell at later markets. However, this was infrequent and less common an interaction than my meeting them on market days and helping with setting up or closing up shop, as well as making multiple coffee runs throughout the day. Whilst other individuals that I met through the markets contributed to this thesis in more informal ways, such as non-recorded and very informal interactions or through one-off encounters and conversations at the markets, the majority of ethnographic insights

discussed in this thesis were a result of over 300 hours spent on site and the relationships that were formed through and beyond the market.

Ethnography at the Flea Market.

Throughout the fieldwork process, my participation was mainly public-facing. Sundays became ritualised as 'market day', and each week, I would journey into Dublin city to attend, speak to traders and browse the stalls. One of my initial ambitious goals of conducting hyper-comprehensive research was quickly challenged when I realised the impossible Sisyphean task I had burdened myself with. I realised that I could not manage even close to a full engagement with every individual organiser, market, customer or, indeed, material thing present. This was the first, but not the last, expectation that needed significant reworking and recalibration.

My participation in the field, as discussed above, was best characterised by taking on as many roles as possible. I both participated, observed and held a range of statuses between those two points. I was, at times, a helper- this ranged from advising and offering support to organisers of various markets to helping individual traders whom I had become close with. This entailed anything from accompanying them on a stall, helping to price or transport, setting up and packing merchandise, going on coffee and tea runs on a busy day, etc. I was also a buyer, both from those who partook in my research but mostly with 'stranger' vendors due to the sheer number of traders, both regular and sporadic, in the markets over the years I was present. Purchases with the traders I had come to know always felt fraught in navigating the line between purchasing, gifting, donating and essentially 'trying to pay to compensate for their time'. On occasion, traders gifted me with items, such as a beautiful antique glass vase, a Lego figurine of a bee-lady (to symbolise my "*bee-ing* a busy bee" as one of my traders, Barry, jokingly remarked, pun entirely intended), chocolates and more minor gestures such as a

coffee, etc., leading me to internally panic about how to reciprocate about shifting understandings of our becoming friends, and how to manage those blurred boundaries.

Wulff's (2022) '*Gifts, Unwanted and Ungiven*' (also deriving from research she had conducted in Dublin), in which she spoke of how 'The occurrence of unwanted and ungiven gifts that recur through the narrative are thorny reminders of the fragility of friendship in the field' (2022:402) may have been published after my research had concluded. However, I found it helpful in thinking through some of my fieldwork encounters that had been complicated precisely through those same moments where gifts or ambiguous expressions of friendship, both given and received, fell flat, if not fail entirely. One other aspect of Wulff's paper has also stuck with me and become more temporally present as I write this dissertation and try to make the chaos into orderly paragraphs and arguments and structures. Already, a nostalgia-tinged-around-the-edges soft sadness clings to my recalling fieldwork memories and people. Just as Wulff writes, 'But for how long will we keep that up? How long can a friendship forged in the field last when the research project is completed? How many promises are made in the field for later, promises that are not kept, including giving certain gifts?' (2022:407). As the flea market was fought for and eventually lost, many of the people I had come to know had reached out, checking and wanting to ensure that I had heard about the latest developments. Assured promises, reminiscent of those naïve but childish utterances, confidently exclaimed at the end of childhood summer camps to always be friends and write letters and 'keep in touch' were promised yet inevitably eventually dissipated and were forgotten. So, too, did many of the connections made in the field, presumably hastened by the dissolution of the flea market.

Additionally, I briefly and intermittently experienced life as a trader, hiring my stall and selling a mixture of items I had wanted to expel from my own life, some craft items and

some trinkets I had picked up in preparation for having a stall spot out of a sense of panic that I would not attract any customers. Therefore, how I participated in the flea market scene- as a trader, buyer, attendee, helper, etc., shaped my experiences and understanding of the various roles and dimensions of participation involved in the markets. The effort to immerse myself in the flea market community and spaces was a critical component in my developing an understanding of the markets beyond just visiting for a couple of hours now and again. Anthropological research's strength has long been its insistence on trying to live as closely to the lives of the people we study. With my project, the multifaceted nature of my participation was crucial for attaining a theoretical and somatic understanding of the reality of the work. For instance, the experience of being cold, wet and miserable huddled under an insufficient tarp roof on a cold day, where the customers are scarce, and you have barely made your stall fee for the day, never mind any profit, is not as knowable had I just walked past into the warmth and briefly commiserated with them on the weather. Experiencing the thrill of a profitable sale or, over time, sharpening my ability to haggle and negotiate with customers became a source of personal pride and cultural capital that those around me commended me on in my site. As Tim Ingold (2017) has argued, the most effective way of learning is by doing, and whilst my market skills as both a customer and trader were leaving a lot to be desired initially, I came to see how they had become fine-tuned, more sophisticated and complex by the end of my time in the field. This effort to understand the market from various perspectives gave a nuanced sense of what it means to do, buy, or sell in a flea market.

Interviews with Key Participants.

My interviews thus became an important space and practice whereby I could instigate discussions with willing participants based on conversations we had previously had more casually and ensure that I was acquiring explicit approval to include those details in my work.

This was an important aspect of my methodological practice as I was also able to ensure that I had accurately understood and represented my participants whilst also allowing them the ability to respond to, clarify or retract specific points, thus ensuring that they felt involved in, and protected by my approach to their words. This meant that my participants felt that they could tell me details to add more context to some of their experiences and choices, to provide history to some of their falling outs or feuds or grievances within the market, etc., but also that they could trust me not to include any details that may prove problematic or damaging for them. Those silences and the absent presences of those whispers and tales have added meaning and deepened my understanding of my dissertation but will remain as invisible spectres on the pages of this work. Some details have been entirely omitted, whilst others, with permissions, are interspersed in the form of composite individuals, conflicts or stories that are untraceable back to their point of origin or, most importantly, to the person who told me of them. Those moments of almost transgressive vulnerability validated and strengthened the relationships I had formed with my closest participants and were not one-way exchanges. I became privy to deeply personal stories about financial issues, grievances with other community members, selling tricks and tactics, supplier connections, etc., and these confessionals seemed almost cathartic to some of my interviewees.

These absences are primarily instigated and determined by my participants' request; however, there are others that I have chosen to exclude because they did not fit into any of the contexts or scope of this project. Before making those authorial decisions, I reflected carefully on the relationship that those specific utterances had for my more expansive understanding of the flea market community. For the most part, I could not justify including certain details as the minute specifics of those disputes, fights, or trading secrets discussed did not necessarily provide any more of a valuable lens or insight through which to make sense of my broader field

or, more significant thematic concerns beyond being a venting moment for a frustrated individual or constituting somewhat salacious gossip.

Home Visits.

Interviews I conducted in the homes of my participants tended to begin with conversations about the shopping and provisioning they had done at the flea market and how this informed their consumption and disposal choices concerning clutter management. Often, these seemingly mundane and routine topics would render visible highly emotive undercurrents as stories were told about hopes, dreams, fears and treasured items. At my hosts' discretion, interviews were most often located at the kitchen table, over tea and biscuits; however, many of these home visits involved the regular domestic flows of the household, such as kids arriving home from school or preparing dinner.

This was also true of how homes were 'staged' for my benefit. Some of my participants' homes resembled the interiors of perfect show-homes with not an item out of place, whilst others were in various degrees of tidiness. What is interesting to note is that irrespective of the appearance of the home, with only a single exception, every participant apologised for the 'state' that their homes were in. Such breaks in the flow of conversation often prompted stories about visible household items, such as appliances and furniture. It never ceased to amuse me how many of the home visits would be passed off as a true reflection of the home's interior as they 'had no time to clean before I arrived'; despite this, I often pretended not to notice a Hoover being discretely pushed out of sight, kitchen counters devoid of any clutter or domestic debris, with the familiar scents of furniture polish, antibacterial cleaner or bleach lingering in the air.

Most of my visits also included a tour of the home, with commentary provided by my host on the origins of particular objects, anecdotes attached to them, and frustrations over clutter and inadequate storage. Traders frequently self-admonished and apologised for their cluttered or messy homes- even though this was not perceptible to me. It was atypical when participants toured me around every nook and cranny of their homes, such as their bedrooms, basements and attics and into the adjoining spaces, such as sheds and garages, enthusiastically showing me where clutter had built up. Most tours, however, were far more curated, and clutter was concealed out of sight, not for me to see. One participant later 'admitted' to me that she had panic-cleaned, tidied and organised in advance of my visit and then went on to 'artificially stage some clutter' for my visit, such as placing dishes in the sink, flinging some clothing on the sofa and spreading some paperwork and snacks across the coffee table in the living room that we had sat at. My participants always initiated these trips around the home; however, tours of less visible items, such as the interiors of cabinets and their contents, were often far less forthcoming. I include these here to draw attention to how participants felt exposed, vulnerable and unsettled with having a stranger enter their home in order to discuss and witness their homes, clutter and all, be it natural, hidden or bizarrely staged, no matter how much I tried to emphasise a lack of intent to judge.

Confronting/ Encountering Clutter: A Methodology.

Here, I wish to include one final note on the methodological experience of conducting ethnographic research in the traders' homes. Returning to the everyday lived experiences of the traders and the management of their surrounding material worlds, discussions of clutter and their opinions towards it were instigated/offered in our interviews and home visits frequently- if not independently by the traders, I would often find myself curious about their relationship

to it. Methodologically, my research process sought to follow their processes and practices of ordering and re-ordering domestic spaces and how their sale stock/inventory would intermingle with the contents of their homes. Through all the connotated sites examined in this research process (flea markets, additional sites of second-hand consumption, domestic spaces, etc.), my research approach focused on the individual and cultural forces that influenced everyday materiality. This topic garnered interest, with strong opinions expressed in the field and during ethnographic interviews and home visits by the traders. Paying attention to both the things and other peoples' things that the traders lived with, encountered and navigated daily was one means through which I could see how material goods circulated and where and why certain practices of care, selection and connection emerged between the individual and their belongings. This research approach used a material culture lens to question the traders' relationship with materiality and the intertwining of the material, sensorial, performative and moral in the home. This involved examining how the traders curated their material belongings through processes of ordering and containment, i.e., by integrating or separating the flea things from the home things whilst allowing for slippage between these categories. The traders often individually sought to create and curate atmospheres with minimalist or maximalist sensibilities in their homes, with and through their selective and intentional use of material objects, especially those purchased at the flea market as statement pieces for their homes. This dissertation explores materiality via the circulation of flea market goods and domestic belongings as they move in and out of categories of desired, unwanted and resented; phases of movement, rest, and rediscovery are indicative of material excess, absence and abundance through practices such as acquisition, storage, and purging.

The Virtual Dimension.

My field site became connected with and often slipped into my personal experiences in the field, most notably through the internet in the form of various social media and resource channels. This meant that my own social media feeds became characterised by various groups, communities and subscriptions recommended to me by various participants, thus widening the umbrella of participation beyond the geographical confines of my specific field site. This came in the form of constant pings and notifications- in joining or being sent links from different *Facebook* communities or interest groups, *Instagram* hashtags, *Twitter* feeds and accounts, as well as signing up for blogs either produced by or followed by my participants, as well as some more specialist online sources that informed their own lifestyle goals and interests. Having shared my phone number with a few traders, I also would then receive random messages from when they had taken it upon themselves to share my number with other traders to help me establish more connections but which often resulted in confusing messages from unknown numbers, one such example being, 'is this the flea girl?'

Additionally, the work of most of my participants continued after the in-person aspect of selling on market day. The internet was a vital resource that most, if not all, of the people I spoke to regularly utilised. Market organisers used the power of social media to spread the word about the market to a broader audience. Vendors often advertised their presence and gave sneak previews of stock they would have at upcoming markets, as well as following online auctions, researching objects for sale and running their virtual shopfronts. Similarly, witnessing the volume of hashtags linked to the *Dublin Flea*, in particular, on *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram* and other platforms, part of the customer experience of attending the market entails documenting one's visit. Engaging with, managing, acknowledging and responding to these shared communications, ranging from highly visible and public to more intimate shared spaces,

thus became another aspect through which I was able to build rapport with my participants and which enriched the depth of understanding and engagement I had with the topics of this thesis.

Addressing the Impact of Class in this Research:

The ethnographic vignettes presented in this thesis draw on the stories, anecdotes and lived experiences of my research participants. It is essential to reflect on how their various positionalities, experiences and various forms of privilege and social capital impact and shape the theoretical arguments presented within this work. I should comment upon the class dimension that underscores this research. At all stages of the project, I aimed to be as inclusive as possible and to attract a diversity of voices to participate. Regardless of this endeavour, most of the people who agreed to partake in this research identify as middle-class, white, Irish, and cis-gendered individuals. This feels appropriate for the reality of my field as the voices contained and presented within did form the majority of those involved in the markets, i.e., white, Irish, middle-class Dubliners. I am cognizant that there is a singular lack of diversity in my participants, but this reflects my experiences in the markets, and the scope of this project is not overly focused on drawing definitive connections between the convergence of class position and participation in second-hand consumption practices. Therefore, in reflecting upon the reality of my fieldwork experience, this paints an accurate picture of my field site, which could never be fully representative by the nature of my positionality, the nature of ethnographic research and the chaos of my primary site.

Finally, other contributing factors to the homogeneity of class position in my research may include the type of market selected and my positionality as the researcher. Firstly, this may be due to the methods I used to find participants, opting to base my leading field site in a 'fancier' flea market that most shopped in as a form of leisure or identity politics instead of

economic necessity. Additionally, my recruitment process consisted of contacting market organisers, vendors and customers and asking for their recommendations for other potential participants. This snowballing effect led to similarities in class composition. Secondly, I briefly acknowledge how my positionality could have impacted the participants who opted into this research. As a white, educated, native Irish person etc., my own identity and appearance, both professionally and personally speaking, may have affected who felt comfortable engaging both with me and in partaking in scholarly research, etc. I acknowledge the limitations of my research, noting that the factors discussed above will have shaped my findings. Nevertheless, this research identifies some exciting tensions, puzzles and ethnographic insights that help to expand and contribute to the existing body of existing anthropological literature.

Ethics and consent:

Ethical Conventions in Anthropological Research.

Careful consideration was given to the ethical dimensions of this research, and ethical approval was granted both from *Maynooth University's Ethics Committee* and through the *Irish Research Council's* scholarship process. This approval was granted before I formally started my research. I also endeavoured to follow the 2012 ethical guidelines espoused by the *American Anthropological Association (AAA)*, which remind researchers of the primacy of conducting ethically sound work and following professional principles such as doing no harm, being open and honest regarding your work, obtaining informed consent and necessary permissions, protect and preserve data, make work accessible, and finally, evaluate all conflicts of interest to ensure the development and maintenance of respectful and ethical professional relationships.

Ongoing Consent.

Informed consent (as an ongoing conversation versus simply ticking a box on a consent form at the beginning of the project) is considered one of the cornerstones of ethical anthropological research and was continuously sought throughout my fieldwork and through the analysis phase. Anthropology often invokes a sense of learning 'with' rather than 'about', and therefore, my research findings represent a collaborative project between myself and my participants. Participants were consulted throughout the preliminary analysis process, enabling them to provide a critical commentary on my work to ensure that their contributions were presented accurately and that their voices represented a significant element within my thesis.

Empowering Participant Decision-Making.

Using pseudonyms, composite case studies and anonymising any identifying features of one's research participants is a standard anthropological convention. However, it is imperative to note that there is a power aspect to the decision to render an individual unidentifiable or to write about and present them using their names and stories. Some of my participants agreed to be involved in this research only on condition of anonymity. They had reservations about divulging certain data types, e.g., their financial income, where they sourced stock to sell, or their grievances with the market organisers or other traders. A handful of participants declared that they did not mind if they were given code names or if they were referred to simply using their given first name. A small minority of my research participants did not want to be anonymised and explicitly requested that they be referred to by name and that any other relevant data, e.g., their business name, their concerns, etc., be included and related directly to them. The most adamant of these was one of the traders I met early in the course of this research, Barry, who wanted to have his own, and his business name, '*Muggins & Co.*' noted and to have any of the excerpts from our long interview ascribed to him. Barry felt that he wanted to own his words and that by virtue of 'existing' on paper in academic research, he had gained a degree of clout and validation from his inclusion.

Secrecy and Suspicions.

As noted above, my informants were very actively involved in negotiating the terms of their participation and the conditions they required. Initially, I was often met with a lot of secrecy and stonewalling, and it took time to build a sufficient rapport that they felt comfortable opening up to me and divulging certain types of information. I was frequently told stories with the explicit agreement that I would not include them in the research. I was asked (well, demanded is more apt as their participation was contingent on my doing so) to sign an NDA before two separate interviews. Finally, some of my participants insisted that I provide proof of my intentions and assure them that I was a PhD student conducting genuine research.

Rumours, Conspiracy and 'Hidden agendas'.

This desire to validate my identity and agenda came to a head when a rumour began circulating amongst traders about me a few weeks after I had started to recruit participants. Suddenly, traders were unwilling to speak with me, and it took me some time to get to the root of the problem. To this day, I still do not know who the rumour originated with. However, the story went that I was not a PhD student but rather an 'undercover revenue and tax agent' looking to try and expose any traders who were not tax compliant. The problem with correcting such a rumour circulating amongst strangers is that the more I plead my innocence, the guiltier and more 'tax inspector-y' my potential participants saw me. Eventually, I convinced a couple of traders of my actual purpose and innocent intentions, and over time, my key participants would go on to 'vouch' for me, and I was viewed and met with less suspicion, at least outrightly.

A Note on the Structure of This Dissertation:

As the chapters progress, the scope of my research will both zoom in and widen out to examine second-hand goods at the specific level of my flea market field site, through to ongoing

processes of clutter and storage in the context of my participants' homes and finally, will examine how shifting conceptualisations of what constitutes a 'waste' item will inform and underscore these earlier practices of second-hand retail and domestic curation charting some of the routes of divestment and channels of circulation now-decluttered objects make when they are no longer wanted in the home. This discussion will be supplemented by referencing the flea market literature already identified in the Introduction. The anthropological significance of the flea market as a critical site of second-hand consumption practices will be outlined by incorporating some select classical theories on *The Gift* and *Potlatch* via reference to Marcel Mauss' work, in dialogue with Bronislaw Malinowski's renowned work on *Kula Exchange in the Trobriand Islands*, right up to more contemporary work on clutter, waste and discard.

The thematic chapters will follow from this introductory chapter. Chapter Two builds on discussions of flea markets from the anthropological literature and provides the reader with an understanding of the sociological conditions that enabled the flea market to flourish. An overview of the market setting- *Newmarket Square*- is given with specific reference to the local geographical and historical context. This is followed by an in-depth account of being in the flea market, where the author invites the reader to join them as she provides a sensorial and ethnographic account of perusing the market. This is supplemented with a comprehensive discussion of the *Dublin Flea Market* that charts its founding, logistical processes and history.

Chapter Three asks several complex theoretical questions- what is a flea market anthropologically? This chapter then goes on to employ Michel Foucault's (1984) concept of heterotopia as a conceptual framework to make sense of and attempt to reconcile some of the

tensions, contradictory beliefs and practices within the spaces and practices of the flea market each month. Unpacking the six conventions of heterotopic space, I relate these to the flea market, drawing on ethnographic examples to demonstrate how this conceptual framework can be generative for understanding the flea market.

Chapter Four then grapples with questions of value, meaning and worth. Questions here include what is/creates value? What types of flea things have value? And specifically, how are clashes and ruptures over contested notions of value resolved in the flea market? Different examples of trader conflicts are detailed further to problematise the market as a homogenous or stable thing. Then, the chapter presents an overview of the constituent parts that converge to assemble the market each month; firstly, a typology of traders based on the frequency of trading is provided, i.e. *One-Offer/Rupture* traders, *Hobbyists & Side-Hustlers* traders and *Professionals*, and secondly, I distinguish between object categories, e.g., second-hand, new and artisanal items.

Chapter Five sees us relocate ethnographically as we move from the flea market and follow the flows of traders and flea market things into the domestic context. This chapter focuses on ongoing practices of home-making in a context where traders have to employ strategies of integration or separation in order to manage their sale inventory within their domestic surroundings. Contrasting case studies will demonstrate how the flea market is enacted, shaped and becomes present in the traders' homes as they navigate everyday processes of tidying, storing, cleaning and displaying goods that continually seem to slip between the categories of Flea and home thing. This chapter continues the focus on circulations, and both

follow the flows of flea things into trader's homes from the flea market, but also how they circulate, accumulate and come to a halt within the home.

Chapter Six focuses on moments of stoppage and consists of an ethnographic exploration of ongoing and morally-laden processes of home-making, noticing when things cease to circulate and asking if this is how and when clutter is produced. Clutter discourses saturated my time in the field and presented an interesting series of questions: Does the flea market create or reduce clutter? What even is clutter, and what does it make possible? Paradoxically, narratives about decluttering and minimalism pervaded my research site, which causes us to ask why are ideological discourses of minimalism so present in such a maximalist-oriented space, i.e., the flea market. Apposite for a chapter on accumulation, this chapter contains considerable quotes and stories from my participants, as clutter was ubiquitous for them. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, clutter is contextual and subjective.

Chapter Seven's aims are twofold; firstly, the theme of Divestment and Circulation is explored once more, before secondly, concluding thoughts and a brief synopsis of the dissertation's central argument and themes are outlined for the reader. Picking up from the moment of domestic decluttering, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, this section uses contemporary literature on waste and disposal to problematise the notion of getting rid of clutter by 'throwing out' when no 'away' exists and at most, we are only ever 'throwing elsewhere'. This section discusses two of the most commonly deployed routes of divestment for my participants. Storage solutions and a logic of concealment are used to manage clutter but keep it within the boundaries of the home. In contrast, routes of divestment entail rerouting an object from the home. This involves an object being cast back into the network of second-

hand goods as it is moved to a new owner or home, temporarily or permanently. This approach utilises a logic of ridding, and examples of the discard routes will be provided, such as the bin, charity shop, and other second-hand retail spaces- in-person and virtual, etc. The most interesting for this dissertation is an example where an object was brought from the flea market to the home but was eventually sent back to the market. Here, we can question if this is how the flea market self-replicates and sustains itself and whether it genuinely salvages cast-out goods from a liminal state of clutter or merely prolongs their inevitable disposal.

Key Argument:

Finally, I close this dissertation with a brief overview of the main themes, arguments, concepts and closing remarks on the *Dublin Flea Market*. This dissertation focuses on the flows of material objects between the flea market, the domestic setting and the bin. Such practices of second-hand consumption, clutter management and possession divestment combine to illuminate how pre-loved objects are subjected to ongoing and contested processes of (re)-enchantment, appropriation and meaning-making. The final chapter presents my conclusion, arguing that the flea market demonstrates processes of consumption and disposal as a continuum- an ongoing set of circulations, stoppages and ruptures that traders must navigate in order to materially manage their lives and the slippages that occur between the market and the domestic. I have explored these interconnections between the commercial spaces of the flea markets and the domestic setting by following the movement of objects between the two domains and through ongoing processes of clutter management, divestment and discarding. The fusing of these different consumption practices and spaces, the flows and ruptures of second-hand objects and the contested notions of value and meaning that underlie them represent an attempt to chart the intersections of these material processes within an Irish flea

market. When combined, the flea markets, domestic settings, and sites of disposal culminate into an ongoing consumer culture and set of shopping practices that are shaped by competing, overlapping and ever-changing notions of worth, meaning and value afforded to second-hand consumer goods, depending on the people, places and interactions they come into contact with. Throughout, I have sought to prioritise the stories and words of my participants to enliven the discussions and to chart the connections, circulations and entanglements of people and pre-loved flea things.

Chapter Two: The Context and the Origins of The *Dublin Flea Market*.

“Flea market[s] are so joyful because of the collection of rich, delightful sensations they offer. The abundance aesthetic is defined by a layering of color, texture, and pattern, and you don’t need a lot of stuff to achieve it.”

-Ingrid Fetell Lee.

The Challenge of the Dublin Flea-Market.

Throughout this project, I came to joke that my thesis could only endeavour to be a partial account of the flea market. Due to the intrinsic nature of my field site(s), the people, goods and practices were constantly in flux, shifting, changing, and moving along a network of second-hand channels. Market day was never replicated entirely; new traders, customers, material goods, and interactions were witnessed every Sunday. I found it helpful to consider the flea market and *Newmarket Square* as an important, significant, but singular locus in an ecosystem of alternative consumption practices whose tendrils spread through the city and beyond, both into various other consumption sites encompassing brick and mortar and into various digitally mediated spheres, e.g., social media groups, Freecycle pages, online selling platforms, etc. Instead, allowing for those limitations and logistical challenges of being but one single researcher, I playfully referred to my research and thesis findings as ‘locally sourced, small batch artisanal data’, echoing the categorisations I had come to be familiar with during my time in the flea-markets.

Introduction.

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the reader in the specific context of this research- the *Dublin Flea-Market*, based in *Newmarket Square*, in the *Liberties* area of Dublin City. The previous introductory chapter noted some contributing factors that would set the scene for the emergence of and popularity of the *Dublin- Flea*, e.g., national trends such as the *2008 Global Financial Crash*, decreasing home sizes and the growth of the external storage industry, clutter-discourses, etc., here, we now zone in on, and examine the local socio-cultural and geographical context of the markets. These combined contributed to the *Dublin- Flea’s* successful growth until it was officially disbanded in 2021 by the founders in a social-media statement.

Ethnographic research focussed on the Dublin flea market on *Newmarket Square* in the *Liberties* area of Dublin's inner-city. Also located on *Newmarket Square*, The *Dublin Food Co-Op* venue was home to and became synonymous with the *Dublin Flea Market*, alongside a selection of other smaller second-hand markets it hosted. The *Dublin Food Co-Op* was essential for the *Dublin-Flea*, providing them with a stable 'home' for most of the market's lifespan. The emergence of *Newmarket Square* as a hub for alternative consumption practices and second-hand markets across the wider cityscape of *Dublin* conveys how the historical and contemporary sociological context of *Newmarket Square* and the *Liberties* setting impacted the location, growth and flourishing of both the *Dublin Food Co-Operative* (host to the *Dublin Flea-Market*) and the flea-markets themselves.

In the following, I will outline the journey of the *Co-Op's* (2007) relocation from *Dublin's* inner city to *Newmarket Square*, charting the impact that both the *Co-Op* and the *Dublin Flea Market* would have in transforming this area of the city, the *Liberties*, into a hub for alternative consumption practices and provisioning. These moves turned *Newmarket Square* neighbourhood into a hub for second-hand consumption practices and innovation, drawing visitors from across the city and beyond.

The second aim of this chapter is to focus on the *Dublin Flea Market* in some detail, starting with an ethnographic journey through a day in the life of *the Dublin Flea Market*, from preparations and set up on market day, the chaotic circulations of people and things throughout the day, and finally, to the dismantling of the market as it is packed away until the following month. This section will also provide a comprehensive account of the market, familiarising the reader with all dimensions of the market, e.g., its founding, organisational structure and practices, and the types of traders, objects and consumption practices present and commonplace there.

The Liberties Area- then and now.

My main field site was primarily situated within the *Liberties* area of *Dublin City*. Whilst my research necessitated following the circulations of second-hand goods and the people and practices that kept them flowing and transforming, the *Liberties* area represents one significant hub for such circulations.

Historically, the *Liberties* is one of the oldest historic areas of *Dublin* city. Originally, it formed part of the county's medieval walled city in the twelfth century. Lingering signs of this long history have survived, such as at *Cornmarket* and in *St Audoen's Park*, close by to *Newmarket Square*, where some of the crumbled old city walls, marking the boundaries of the city, remain visible to the current day. The traditional trades that had become synonymous with this part of the city included, most notably, the establishment of the largest brewery in the world at *St. James's Gate* by the *Guinness* family in 1759. Other renowned and continuing distillers such as *Powers*, *Jameson*, *Millar and Roe* were also located here, creating a Victorian cityscape characterised by endless chimney stacks, mills, malhouses and bustling streets.

Due to numerous controversial redevelopment projects that were poorly- received by the local community, the face of this historic part of the inner cityscape has undergone other profound transformations in recent years. Since 2015, the pace of redevelopment in the *Blackpitts* and *Newmarket* areas of *The Liberties* has been particularly intensive, with significant amounts of demolition works, eradicating long-standing buildings and replacing them with primarily hotels, luxury student accommodations, and apartments often used as *Air BnB* venues. This intensive combination of public governmental reinvestment and improvement programmes and a significant amount of private sector investment has dramatically transformed the area and has its fair share of vocal advocates and critics of the accelerated works.

The area has a reputation for being economically disadvantaged. Many locals and members of the *Dublin-Flea's* market community and the *Co-Op* expressed to me how they are frustrated and angered that *The Liberties* was, for so long, a neglected quarter of the city and have condemned how, in their view, once it began to improve thanks mainly owing to the efforts of small businesses such as the *Co-Op*, flea markets and other similar entities, *Dublin City Council* saw an opportunity to make a profit. Throughout my research, I heard many tales recounted by the locals about how the 'Corpo' (*Dublin City Corporation*) was 'neglecting the people' and 'lining the pockets of the rich'. This 'profiteering' as explained in such discourse, was deemed to have been enabled by selling off assets to private developers who then kicked off a rapid and exponential process of gentrification where local residents, businesses and groups such as the *Co-Op* and flea markets became priced out of their own homes and community. Many local respondents whom I spoke to about this transformation indicated that '*The Liberties*', figuratively imbuing the area with a sense of agency, now seemed to care less

about its 'own' and the shared sense of local community rapport that had been fostered over time was eroding rapidly. One resident, John, a long-serving member of the *Co-Op* and attendee of the flea markets, commiserated that 'it' was, now, 'instead, an asset to generate profit' predominantly through promoting and catering to the needs of a mostly- transient populace in the form of international students, tourists and office workers.

However, despite the industrial wealth and prestige afforded by virtue of those contemporary Government and private investment interventions into the surroundings associated with the community, The *Liberties* had also been historically subjected to poor development policies, meaning that there were several 'eyesores' in the region. The surplus of particularly dire and impoverished housing conditions viewed as slums resulted in that part of the city becoming associated with stereotypes about poverty, crime, and deprivation. Locals often spoke to me of the area in a contradictory mix of pride (e.g., invoking the 'salt of the earth' people and how residents historically looked out for each other, etc.) punctuated with disparaging remarks (e.g., how the area had a bad reputation, was neglected by those in power and had real anti-social problems with graffiti, vandalism, violence, etc., all increasing) and a nostalgic recalling, or harkening back to the better, 'older days' (e.g., "when you knew your neighbours and we all looked out for each other...real community and the people cared"). The resulting social stigma attributed to the area would persist for a very long time and prove, even to this day, difficult to eradicate and break free from entirely.

Newmarket Square- Home to the *Dublin Food Co-Op* & the *Dublin-Flea*.

Newmarket Square, a main thoroughfare in the *Liberties* neighbourhood, thus functioned as my leading field site owing to its status as the home of both the *Dublin Food Co-Op* and the *Dublin Flea-Market*, as well as the other smaller flea markets (The *Brocante* market, the *Pure Vintage* market, and *Fusion Sundays*, markets, respectively) included in this research. The *Co-Op* relocated here in 1991, and the *Dublin Flea* was founded in 2008 and eventually disbanded in 2021. *Newmarket* was the home for both organisations for a significant proportion, or the entirety of their existence, respectively, and both organisations were well-enmeshed in the local community upon commencing my research. The Square was expansive, lined with trees in front of the various storefronts and predominantly made up of older industrial red-brick buildings with facades that bore witness to the long history of the buildings and their degradation, decay and dereliction over the years.

Traditionally a mercantile area in the early 1600s, the Square had functioned as a busy marketplace attracting residents from across the city, owing to its status as a local community hub for generations of tradespeople and crafts. Over time, the Square and surrounding areas could be conceived as a miniature or self-contained industrial suburb of *Dublin*. Other traditional trades that came to be associated with this area, in fact still to this day, include brewing, distilling, tanning, and weaving, and the Square became a famous locale for the trade of agricultural produce. Many of my research participants would allude to this long history of informal trading to convey how important the markets were to continuing and preserving the area's historical legacy in terms of commerce and retaining the character and charm of the locale.

From Humble Beginnings to the Height of Success- Founding the *Dublin Flea-Market* and its connections to the *Dublin Co-op*:

The Emergence of the Flea Market.

The *Dublin Flea Market* grew out of the overlapping socio-economic conditions and transformations of the local geographical area and broader societal trends, formative factors for the later flourishing of the markets in *Newmarket Square*. The *Dublin-Flea* was set up as a direct response to the 2008 recession and the various impacts that the global financial crash would go on to have on consumer practices, such as the valorisation and growing trendiness of vintage and growing demand for second-hand goods amidst increasing consumer concerns about sustainability.

The *Dublin Flea Market* is the largest of the four markets this thesis focuses on and was established in November of 2008 in *Newmarket Square* with just 15 trader stalls. The *Flea's* first market was held in the *Co-Op* venue and remained there over the following ten years until May 2018; by then, the *Flea* had grown to host around 100 traders each month, attracting up to 5,000 visitors to *Newmarket*.

The move to *Newmarket Square* and subsequent partnership between the *Co-Op* and the *Dublin-Flea* were crucially important in the revitalisation of the local market scene, which had traditionally characterised the *Liberties* area, resulting in the area re-emerging as a popular attraction for tourists and other attendees from across the city and beyond, each month. The

niche but growing ever-more popular products and services that the *Co-Op* and *Dublin Flea* offered (i.e., sustainable and local, organic produce, second-hand and vintage goods, eco-conscious goods from small and local businesses, etc.) were well-paired, and the growing demand for such items drew visitors to *Newmarket*, symbiotically cultivating a loyal regular clientele. As the years passed, both the membership numbers for the *Co-Op* and the number of vendors and visitors to the markets increased steadily. Ironically, this prosperity over time became one of the contributing factors that led to the gentrification and redevelopment of the area, culminating in the eventual displacement of the *Co-Op* and the shutdown and disbanding of the *Dublin Flea*.

Over time, the market grew beyond the confines of the main hall in the *Dublin Food Co-Op*, and each month, the now-100+ stalls (although trader applications consistently exceed this by over 100 applications every month) spread into the *Green Door* market a few doors further up the *Square* and spilt out onto the public *Square*. The market focused on second-hand and vintage goods, allowing customers to browse various bric-à-brac stalls and shop for everything retro and antique, as well as craft, design, and art items, all whilst sampling produce from artisan food producers.

The Dublin Food Co-Operative- A Chronology:

The *Dublin Food Co-Op* had been set up in 1983 by a collective of activists to create a community space wherein local residents would be able to procure affordable and organic food, ensuring that their members would be able to source local produce and vegetarian fare that met their shared ethical and ecological concerns. *The Co-Op's* mission was to allow members to form a buying group to buy in bulk to reduce costs and support suppliers that shared their vision, e.g., organic, vegetarian, locally sourced, conflict-free, etc. Initially located on *Pearse Street* in the heart of the city, the *Co-Op* quickly expanded to form a large and vibrant member base, functioning as a buying club and a communal space for the local community.

They remained in *Pearse Street* for the next twenty years before the need to acquire more long-term and stable premises to expand from became apparent. This led to the decision to move to *Newmarket Square* in 2007, where the *Co-Op* committee secured a long-term lease on a disused warehouse space in an overlooked and somewhat run-down part of the city. Rent

was cheap, and they could secure a multi-year lease as the property in the area was valued less than in other, more affluent areas of the county.

Over the subsequent 27 years, the *Co-Op* flourished and expanded its previous bulk-buying programme to include an on-site shop and a café, and they also utilised the ample community space to host flea markets, farmers' markets, mother and baby groups, language groups, music groups and hosted a variety of other local community meetings. During this ethnographic research, some of the most significant and recent endeavours the *Co-Op* had undertaken by mandate of its 2,000+ membership was to expand into providing zero-waste and plastic-free shopping options.

In recent years, the *Co-Op*'s security was challenged as their initial lease was due to expire. AGMs were held focusing on the members' mandate to acquire permanent and preferably fully-owned premises to secure the long-term future of the *Co-Op* better. What followed was a series of high-stakes negotiations, short-term lease renewals and fears about the long-term future of the *Co-Op* should it be unable to procure a new base of operations. As I completed my research, this became a more urgent and pressing matter with the growing uncertainty around and difficulty in ensuring the *Co-Op*'s remaining in *Newmarket Square* becoming a source of frustration, concern and anger amongst members and the local community.

At the time of writing, the *Co-Op* has successfully secured its future, having relocated across the city to *Kilmainham*, purchasing new premises and becoming integrated into the local community. As outlined in the *Introduction*, the *Dublin-Flea* parted ways with the *Co-Op* amidst their respective campaigns to secure new venues and officially disbanded as of a public statement released at the end of 2021. To put this in context, we jump back to circa 2008 and set the scene for the establishment of the flea market.

The Founding Committee of the Dublin Flea Market:

Initially founded in 2008 by three people (*Sharon Greene*, *Aisling Rogerson*, and *Luca D'Alfonso*), the committee later grew to four people with the addition of *Dave Dunn*. The vision for the flea market they would go on to manage was that of an alternative consumer space that

valorised thrift and uniqueness and supported small and local businesses. Sharon, who founded a creative events and art consulting company, *Queens of Neon*, was inspired by the flea markets she had visited and lamented the lack of a flea-market scene in *Dublin*. Whilst various markets had been set up in the city, most had since fallen by the wayside. Having had the value of thriftiness fostered in her by her mother, who collected antiques, she decided to try her hand, with some like-minded friends' support, to establish what would come to be the *Dublin Flea Market*. Another contributing influence was her previous professional role as a building conservation consultant for the *Dublin Civic Trust*, where she nurtured her love of heritage, vernacular design, and eclectic tastes.

Sharon had met and gotten to know Aisling and Luca, her fellow 'flea-market fanatics' on the festival scene, and when the recession hit, they decided to 'just give it a go'. Aisling expressed their shared conviction that 'if we wanted access to a good second-hand market, the likelihood was that others were interested too'. Luca and Aisling were business partners and had opened a café on the nearby *Fumbally Lane*. Members of the *Dublin Food Co-Op*, a short walk away, they identified it as a suitable venue to trial running a small second-hand market. The *Co-Op's* main hall provided sufficient space and had a café that would add to the ambience and appeal, and, as members, was available to hire out at a minimal cost. These circumstances meant that the founders felt they were not taking too large of a gamble or entering a long-term commitment should the market not succeed. Utilising their network of friends, artists, small business owners, and the *Co-Op* membership, the *Flea's* initial market proved to be a great success and, ten years later, had grown significantly and became one of the city's most loved markets.

Emerging from the Shadow of the Recession- An Opportunity for A Second-Hand Space.

The founding committee confirmed (in both my interviews and various media reporting and their online presence) that they had started the market as a direct response to the tumultuous fallout from the 2008 global recession and as a challenge to the excesses of consumption that had been associated with the period proceeding this, colloquially referred to within the Irish context as *The Celtic Tiger*. The market's unanticipated surge in popularity and rapid growth benefited considerably from forming a new community founded upon the moral espousement of recycling and a preference for second-hand consumer goods following Ireland's entry into

economic recession. Sharon (one of the market's founders and its curator and creative director) informed me that setting up the market at that time was a *'direct corollary of the economic crash... People were sickened by the boom and the bling. They wanted value, to be more creative, and to turn away from labels towards a more personal eclectic aesthetic'* (Interview, 2013).

This discourse of the flea market representing a more virtuous consumer practice was a frequent utterance in my interviews and casual conversations at the flea market. Participants spoke of 'being better consumers'; 'I know shopping in the flea-markets has less of an impact', 'once you realise how bad shopping in the normal stores and always buying more and more stuff... mindlessly really... to keep up with the trends you realise you have to be responsible and swap to more sustainable and ethical options like more second-hand stuff to be part of the solution and not make it worse', and finally, 'I feel better when I buy from the flea-markets as I am salvaging old stuff and it's cheaper and more unique, and I know I am helping to save the planet and behaving more ethically than I used to when I just consumed and consumed and shopped and never gave a second thought to anything other than wanting what I wanted'.

Tapping into the sentiments expressed in the interview excerpts above, the flea market offered alternative consumption practices and activities that enabled consumers to feel that they were proactively altering their problematic consumer habits. The flea market was marketed to the public and spoken about by the founders as offering an alternative, more discerning and mindful avenue for second-hand consumption, rather than purchasing mindlessly, to excess, or as the trends changed on the high street. As the beginnings of the recession and as the effects of the crash swept across the country, the *Flea* brought together a diverse variety of organisers, traders, customers and visitors until they gradually became (what one research participant referred to as) 'a modern cultural mainstay of this part of the city...bringing back the olden tradition of market selling in the *Liberties*'. From 2008 onwards, the market grew in popularity and exceeded even the most optimistic expectations of the *Dublin Flea's* founding members, stretching in scope and scale to accommodate more trading space, the knock-on effect of which generated more people, more products, more things, more variety, more trading opportunities, and more tastes catered to.

A Walk Through the *Dublin-Flea Market*:

Early Morning Set Up.

Flea-Market Sundays always necessitated an early start. Arriving at the *Co-Op* by 9 am at the latest, I could observe the comings and goings of the various traders, pulling up outside the venue with vans and car-loads of goods, greeting each other as they made multiple trips in and out to set up their stalls and wares. Later, my relaxing people-watching would be replaced by helping the traders I had come to know haul in heavy and cumbersome boxes of goods and assisting them in setting up for the day. Inside, the *Dublin-Flea* founders had already set out the tables and gazebos for the traders. Traders were greeted at the door by one of the organising members holding a clipboard ready to register them for the day and direct them to an assigned location. Unpacking the vehicles full of goods to be sold was conducted not in a rush but rather at a steady pace, allowing some pauses to chat with other traders. Ultimately, however, the quicker one could get set up for the day meant that there was time to fine-tune the appearance of their allocated space and the pre-market opening work of getting a coffee and wandering around the freshly set up market. During this final hour or so before opening to the public, the market organisers would check in with the traders, collect their stall fees and take photos for dissemination through the market's various social media platforms. As noted earlier, their busier time was earlier that morning setting up the small tents/marquees along the Square for the traders positioned outside.

A final activity that sometimes occurred at the various markets prior to opening to the general public was the arrival of some of the local and not-so-local antique dealers in search of any 'unrealised gems' that they could pick up for cheap from unsuspecting traders, especially those that traded more infrequently and may not possess the same depth of knowledge as the dealers or other more experienced traders. The perception of this activity was conflicted and sometimes contentious among my closest research participants. Some felt these dealers were like 'sharks circling...taking advantage'. They were criticised privately over their professional intrusions into a communal marketplace. Some referred to them as 'being against the spirit of the market', caring more about profiteering than the market's ethos of 'bargains' for the flea-market community.

Opening to the Public at 11 am- Early- Birds Seeking Bargains.

When the doors open to the public at 11 am, there would be a steady flow of people into the market- many of whom would have taken a cursory look around the outdoor stalls already. Whilst subject to the multiplicity of variables of any given market Sunday, e.g. weather, other events, occasions and holidays, proximity to payday, etc., one of the consistently peak busy times during a standard market Sunday was between 12 and 2 pm. *Co-op* members calling in to buy groceries, locals calling in to meet friends and family and have food together from the co-op café mingled and merged with the flea-market community, and the densely-packed hourly buses of mostly Japanese and American tourists dropped off on the Square to experience a guided tour around the new *Teelings Distillery* a few doors up, resulted in a dizzying, bustling and dynamic throng of people passing by or through, stopping to eat, browsing and bartering.

With the stalls tightly packed, navigating the market at its busiest was challenging. There were people everywhere with very little space to pass by. There were prams and dogs underfoot, goods intentionally positioned on the floor in front of stalls in order to gain more display space needed to be navigated as well as people carrying steaming paper cups of coffee and tea and various freshly-baked pastries through the crowd to the few seated areas. The most congested of these spaces was directly inside the thin, narrow entryway to *the Co-Op*, where stalls on both sides meant that squeezing through the crowd was time-consuming, stuffy and loud with the sounds of chatter, music from the nearby speakers blared out into this soundscape rendering it even more chaotic and intense. Once you had made your way past this bottleneck, the inner hall was laid out in rows of tables heaving with items and additional goods hung on the walls behind the tables, housing most of the stalls for the day.

The First Hour or Two- Traversing & 'Taking- In' the Market.

During this time, the traders and stallholders were more likely to be cradling a coffee or trying to scarf down some food for the long day ahead of them. Steadily, the main hall gradually fills with people and becomes animated and enlivened with colours, textures, smells and sounds. The food stalls shift from preparing to selling food, and the café gets busier as the seating areas tend to fill up fast. There is never enough seating, so whilst eating lunch here is still a relaxed affair, people tend to try not to loiter too long when others wait for space to sit and eat.

Stalls and goods are interspersed with each other, and the items on display change quite rapidly as you walk past them. This deliberate 'chaos by design' adds to the feeling of the market

as being a treasure-trove of chaotic browsing where you were never sure of what you would be surrounded by, and the flea market appeared as random, chaotic and delightfully messy to most. At the innermost corner to the left of the entrance, having passed by the artworks for sale laid out over the stairway as always, stalls selling unsorted piles of children's toys and retro action figures were nestled beside carefully curated stalls selling crafts ranging from handmade greetings cards and engraved wooden boxes to knitted blankets. Continuing along this line towards the back of the hall and getting closer to the café, the stalls suddenly shifted to the various hot foods being prepared and sold to the newly-forming queues of hungry visitors. The aromas of different cuisines intermingled, and most of the crowd would stop and look at the options regardless of whether they would then join the steadily growing queue or continue through the market. Now you come across the café and seating area, full of long wooden benches and a random assortment of chairs and stools, busy with people carrying plates of food and cups of coffee back and forth, stopping to read the paper or chat with friends. Just behind this seating area is a short hallway to the toilets, which are also used as an impromptu changing room for those wishing to try on some of the clothing on sale. There is also a small outside section with some seating that mitigates some of the overflow of people wanting to sit and dine when the weather is amiable.

Continuing, you cross over to the right-hand side of the hall, perusing stalls selling candles made of beeswax beside racks of second-hand clothing. Passing by the *Dublin Flea's* home base for the day, the music gets louder, and you may stop to browse the monthly posters hung up behind them and available for purchase. After another couple of stalls selling vintage furniture, crystals and singing bowls, and some taxidermy foxes and mice, you again reach the stairway out. Taking care to avoid stepping on any framed artwork on the stairs' innermost corner, you will walk past stalls selling more clothing and some old movie props and pass through the bottleneck entryway again. You pass one of the permanent stalls with beautiful, shiny and sparkling rows of jewellery trays selling rings, necklaces and bracelets, tucked in beside stalls of curios, old machine parts and tools, industrial furniture stacked beside boxes of vinyl records and stalls selling cupcakes and coffee. This random and promiscuous menagerie of eclectic display lent the flea market its charm and suitability as a hunting ground for treasure hunters seeking a unique find.

Before you pass out of the entryway to the *Co-Op* and find yourself out and into the sunshine, but most often rain, of *Newmarket Square*, you will pass the small entrance into the

Co-Op shop. This adds to the bottleneck effect as people not only pass in and out of the *Flea* but also try to carry bags of canned goods and fresh produce past the melee of people. On the Square, both sides of the street are taken up by rows of small gazebos and some vendors working out of their car boots. There is minimal traffic, and mostly the street is pedestrianised, barring some local access. Groups of people are sitting outside, browsing the stalls and queueing up for the food vans selling crepes and homemade lemonade. The air is filled with chatter, people calling back and forth to each other, kids shrieking and screaming as they run past, and dogs barking and howling.

Mid-Market- When the Flea is at its busiest.

This was when the food stalls, in particular, began to sell out of certain in-demand products and when the market traders of brand-new, second-hand, or craft items were most busy with relatively straightforward sales. These sales were characterised as when a customer spotted something of interest to them and would inquire about the object, either choosing to purchase it or continue browsing. A lot of the serious haggling and price deliberations came later in the day- subject to an object having not been scooped up by a different buyer, which is always the gamble of attempting to run down the clock (customers gambling with leaving purchasing the item until the last possible minute in the hopes that the trader will cut them a bargain in order to procure the sale- whilst always risking losing the item to a different customer. Simultaneously, the buyer is trying to hold out for the highest price without risking losing the sale or incurring a loss on their profit margin) at a flea market.

Now, people are browsing the stalls in a relaxed and leisurely manner. The small bathrooms at the back of the hall and adjacent to the café are busy with people trying on the second-hand clothes on sale. A large mirror is now placed in the hallway to the bathrooms so that people trying on outerwear or clothes that do not necessitate the privacy of a cubicle can be tried on and assessed. Attendees circle the hallway, often doing a quick sweep. Then, a more detailed stall-by-stall browse and as time passes, more and more of them are not carrying bags (mostly paper or random re-used plastic bags provided by some stalls on larger or heavier purchases or tote bags brought by themselves or procured "for a fiver" from the *Co-Op* shop bearing their logo). Deals are sometimes made to deliver heavier goods or to reserve items for collection from a stall at the end of the day once payment has been provided first. This is less frequent, though, as stallholders often want what is sold gone from their space so that they have

more space to display other goods yet to be sold, to avoid repeated inquiries about the sold good, and so that, if they decide to leave early, they are not left waiting for a buyer to return.

The experience of shopping at the market stalls varies by each stall. Some traders will seek to engage you immediately with offers of samples or encouragement to pick up, try on, tell you the tale of the item\artistic process or inform and educate you on the bargains to be had. Others will leave you to browse, merely acknowledging your presence with a tilt of the head or a smile, awaiting your questions, offers or guidance. Others will sit down with a book, appearing indifferent to your presence until they sense a sale or are invoked by the customer. Many people wandering around at this point are now carrying drinks or food from the market stalls wrapped up in brown paper bags, cardboard trays or white paper plates. The use of plastics, specifically single-use plastics, in the market has reduced significantly and appeared to buck the trend of this becoming a broader consumer issue in the last couple of years. My research notes from 2014 note that:

‘There is an emphasis on reducing plastic here. The café uses mostly real delph ware, takeaways are placed in paper packaging. Some stalls offer real cups which can be returned once finished with. The use of keep cups, rather than plastic or plastic-lined paper cups, is encouraged with discounts for people opting to use those. The co-op shop stocks two different brands of reusable cups (steel and bamboo) and these are displayed prominently in the window and at the till, as well as on the assigned shelving area. Signs above the bins note that some of the single-use paper cups sold by stalls at the market can be recycled at the co-op café but that the plastic lids need to be removed and placed in the black bin’.

As the Market Begins to Wind Down.

From 4 pm onwards, the market usually begins to wind down and clear out. There is a steady stream of people leaving the Square, purchases in hand and returning home for the evening or onto other things. That said, some people are still only arriving now and will quickly assess the remaining stall contents and decide whether or not they wish to purchase. Other visitors who have been present longer will return to certain stalls to try their luck at haggling down an item's price or to negotiate a bulk buy offer. Utterances such as 'I will buy these three things, but you need to cut me a deal and reduce the price or throw in something else to clinch the sale' are

often heard at this time. Sometimes, these negotiations appear tense and even fraught, whereas other interactions appear to have one party who is happy to yield quite quickly.

The appeal of offloading more oversized items such as furniture or delicate items like glassware or mirrors can mean that traders do not have to pack them up and transport them back to their storage areas (shop, shed, living room, etc.) and means that these types of items are often sold during this 'golden hour'. That said, regardless of whether or not they are supplementing their income by trading or merely doing it for fun and the experience, they will not let go of objects worth significant money due to their rarity or sense of potential value to be capitalised upon. For example, antiques or items with demonstratable worth, i.e., those goods where the vendors are in possession of documentation or certificates of authenticity, or goods deemed to be collectors' items that may garner a better profit elsewhere, often will not be sold if they are still with the vendor as the market begins to wrap up.

Some traders also told me stories of refusing to sell an item, even for a reasonable price, to specific customers because of their demeanour or attitude when engaging with the seller. Examples range from being insultingly low and overly-convinced that the seller would yield ('He kept saying "You know you will give it to me for €X so just agree to it" or "I'll only give you €X and you should be grateful for that price") were never well-received and whilst most of the second-hand traders were open to, or encouraged haggling stating as much on the signage on their stall, such aggressive behaviours were not well-received and even if they were happy with the price, they would refuse to sell as they wanted the object to go to a 'better, more deserving' home.

The Final Deals of the Day.

Wandering around the rapidly emptying Square, you can hear the final deals being wrapped up and logistical details being figured out. Some traders are willing to throw in local delivery as part of the bargaining process, whilst others may be open to a deposit and regular payment system, and these conversations form the final stages of the final sales and deals of the day. None of the traders I spoke to engaged in either practice very often, as both had potential drawbacks that cost more than they added to their sales. For example, as one of my participants, Malcolm, explained, a customer might try and 'string along a deposit scheme giving just a few euros every month' or so, holding up the sale and resulting in paperwork or 'a sold cabinet that

needs to be transported 'down the road' might be half an hour away. Then you get roped into helping to carry it up a flight of stairs with little to no thanks'.

Inside the *Co-Op*, stalls that sell perishable goods such as cakes or curries and everything in between will often seek to minimise their food wastage and attempt to clear out all their stock that cannot be preserved. Such practices include being more generous with portion sizes, reducing and heavily discounting individual prices, offering freebies, e.g., 'buy this falafel and you get the hummus and salad free', etc. Traders who are not involved in serious negotiations at this point will often call to the food stallholders seeking a bargain, a trade or a freebie. Joe, a trader who became a close participant in my research, told me that he would pack up and then head back inside and 'head to the foodies. I might gift them a book that we had discussed or they asked me to find and they'll give me a big generous heap of food to bring home. I'd get dinner for a day or two from it and get to try new things'. Continuing with his culinary exploits, Joe reels off a list of other foods he has gotten at the end of the day and informs me that he always looks forward to seeing what he will be gifted or treated to. "I bring a flask with me for tea and a sandwich, but the sale of the first two books always goes into my pocket for a treat at the end of the day".

Packing Up and Heading Home.

All traders would begin to pack up as it got closer to 5 pm, with some ready to leave immediately or beforehand to beat the traffic. Others would stay on, being less inclined to dash off and instead would hang back for a while to catch up with people, grab a quick bite to eat, or re-visit deals they wanted to make with their fellow sellers. Queries about where the next market they would be at, expected or upcoming stock or general plans would be discussed, and debriefing on the day's events- had it been a good or a slow day? The markets held in the *Co-Op* were friendly with each other as some of the organisers were friends. For example, the organisers of the *Fusion* market later began trading at the *Dublin-Flea*, and promotional materials for other markets were frequently distributed to the crowd on market day or posted on the walls of the *Co-Op*. This meant that it was not uncommon for specific customers and traders to follow each other around the markets, and I often heard stallholders and even the organisers of one particular market recommend attending or seeking out a specific seller of a certain type of goods at the next market if they were searching for something in particular. Any

traders that had held on to the very end would now begin getting rid of any rubbish into the nearby bins, start packing up the stall, and haul unsold goods out to their car or van.

Finishing Up the Dublin-Flea's Day.

Post-market, and once the traders had cleared out, the market organisers would often do a final sweep of the premises, ensuring everything was tidy and ready for the *Co-Op* when it opened next. Now, redundant promotional materials would be removed from the walls to be recycled. The food prep areas were cleaned- the café staff and co-op shop volunteers also completed their end-of-day tidying and shutdown, bins were moved outside and emptied, and anything out of place was returned to its spot. Later, as per their usual post-market routine, the *Dublin-Flea* organisers would leave the Square and go for dinner together. Having happened organically after the first market, they continued this as a tradition they have upheld after every market. Over food, they would discuss how the market had gone, make plans for the next one and discuss any issues that needed actioning. Consideration would be given to the original artwork to be implemented for the following month's market, and the preparations would begin again. This time was of utmost importance to the *Dublin-Flea* as the process of auditing the applications for the following market would happen a week later. With the organisers, vendors, visitors and goods cleared out for another month, there is very little evidence left of the market that had been present a few hours ago.

Having described the embodied experience of being present in the chaotic, bustling, visually and auditorily rich atmosphere of the *Dublin-Flea*, the following sections will now focus on some of the constituent threads that weave together to form the market and the circulations of people, items and practices that converge there. Charting the origins of the market and some of the key logistical processes undertaken to ensure a successful market day will add nuance to our understanding of the market as a non-homogenous entity, one in constant flux that facilitates ongoing circulations of people, practices and things.

Items for Sale.

The flea market covers a diverse range of objects which can fit into distinct categories. Here, I want to briefly distinguish between the main categories of items available at the market, as

providing a definitive list of all the items, even at just one market, would likely prove an impossible task. In order to provide an overview of the assortment of market goods, I will delineate the types of goods witnessed into the following loosely defined categories of flea-market goods.

Firstly, some sell *Second-Hand* items. These consist of various items that are old, pre-used, may or may not be in working condition, and are generally less available to purchase nowadays. Secondly, there are the *Crafters-Makers-Artists* who sell new items that they have made, created, or, on occasion, forged a commercial relationship with a charity or organisation which provides them with, for example, traditional, small-scale or rare artisans creating woven baskets, dyed fabrics, handblown glasswares or traditional crafts. Thirdly, some sell *Consumable or Perishable* goods. These range from edible items such as various beverages and foods, either at the market or for at-home consumption, but also include perishable items that are used up and do not last, like an ornament or piece of clothing. This refers to artisanal items such as soaps, candles, and lotions. Finally, there are the *Upcyclers* who take older items, dismantle them and craft them into something new, which may range from functional, e.g., a glass container turned into a light shade, to purely decorative and ornamental, such as a book turned into a carved mantel decoration.

The *Upcyclers* vendors tended to respond succinctly to the popular trends at the time. Over time, various types of goods rose and fell in popularity, partially owing to the impact of social media. Danny, one of the traders I got to know very well, adjusted his stock in response to the shifting of DIY wedding trends. Selling items that were no longer functional in a utilitarian sense, he successfully sold goods used as props and deemed desirable by *Instagram*, *Pinterest* and the wedding industry in general. Examples of this class of object include old vintage cameras (that cannot take pictures), suitcases (whose structural integrity means they cannot carry anything or be securely fastened), mismatched china cups and saucers (cracked, impractical and only for the aesthetic) and old silverware (so scratched and damaged they would not be seen as hygienic to eat off of).

Circulations and Slippages- How Flea Things Can Defy Static & Singular Categorisation.

It is impossible to definitively assign specific examples of flea market goods with any authority into a singular option within these four categories as they defy such reductionist categorisation. Flea-market goods are constantly circulating through contested and clashing systems of value-making, in addition to their movement through time and space. As such, the four categories are presented less as exact typologies and can be considered more akin to more comprehensive umbrella categories that hold similar types of goods, i.e., second-hand goods, artisanal goods, perishables, and finally, upcycled or repurposed goods. At the flea market, objects routinely slip past the attempts at containment and seep into multiple categories of goods. For example, a jacket could be second-hand (by virtue of having been made in the '70s and now being sold 40 years later), or a craft item (fabric that was designed, tailored or made into a jacket by a maker), or an upcycled piece (scrap fabric was combined with other materials to transform an item of clothing into a new one). As such, this categorical framework can only go so far as to explain the types of objects available at the *Flea*. Nonetheless, as demonstrated in Chapter Three, there are overlaps in experience between sellers and vendors that trade under one of these over-arching item categories.

As the stories of different flea goods will be used as examples of how flea market items are subjected to continuous processes of valuing and re-valuation in later chapters, I note that each month, there was a selection of the following categories of consumer goods available. This richness in diversity, type and number of goods added to the sense of possibility and serendipitous encounter to be had at the *Dublin-Flea*. Each month, in varying configurations of sizes, colours, price points and availability, the market offered a selection of the following goods. These include but are not limited to selections of clothing, purses, shoes, hats, jewellery, furniture, furnishings, retro housewares, books and magazines, vinyl records, CDs and DVDs, toys, collectables such as stamps, coins and trading cards, artwork, crafts, soaps and toiletries, ornaments, random bric-a-brac, tools and machinery, greetings cards, artisanal foodstuffs, pet accessories, plants, 'junk', old electronics and antiques.

The varied trajectories and circulations of flea-market goods and ephemera will be explored in-depth in the thematic chapters to follow, as the movement of goods to, within, and from the flea-market to the domestic context are charted and analysed. Here, I wish to convey to the reader that circulating second-hand material goods and flea things is a chaotic, ever-shifting and complex process. It is through paying close ethnographic attention to the flea-market for its material contents and as a space- both symbolic and physical, that generated

iterative, innovative and creative practices of exchange that facilitated the flow(s) of flea-market goods into and through wider networks of second-hand consumption.

Stalls, Goods & Wares at the Dublin Flea- A Sense of Scale & Stuff for Sale.

Having started with a very humble and tentative number of traders (10-15) and only a handful of visitors (recounted to me as maybe 30-40 people, mostly friends of the organisers and some random passersby who happen-chanced upon the first market), over its ten years in *Newmarket*, the *Dublin Flea* had grown to take over the entire warehouse floorspace of the *Co-Op* and much of the outside vicinity, with traders lined up and down in small gazebos along both sides of the Square. On the last Sunday of each month, there were 100+ vendors set up selling a variety of goods, ranging from second-hand clothing, retro furniture and homewares, vintage and antiques, craft, design and art, and anything else one could expect to find at a flea-market, as well as a selection of approximately 20 artisanal food producers.

Flea-Things in Flux.

It is difficult to convey a comprehensive account of the flea-market stalls and goods as they are so changeable, not just from month to month, but throughout each market; they shift and move from hour to hour as goods are added to the display, removed if they are not proving popular with the crowd, are adjusted and re-ordered, are bought and taken away, and so on. In-depth ethnographic case studies of some flea objects and the circumstances in which they found themselves at the market, moved around and left the market will be provided throughout the thesis.

As the *Dublin-Flea* grew in size and scope, the average number of stalls moved from 60 to over 100. These were spread around the *Co-Op* hall, the entryway to the hall, and spilt out onto *Newmarket Square* and, later, into the *Green Door* (an additional food-market space further up the Square that hosted weekly traders of fresh produce, a butcher (unlike the *Co-Op's* vegetarian ethos), a dried-goods food store, and the occasional trader of second-hand books or clothing). Most of the *Dublin Flea's* stalls were arranged upon a small table; however, some encompassed gazebos, hanging wall space, and, in fewer cases, the actual car boots and vans of traders parked upon the *Square*. There was a vast variety in terms of the presentation of stalls, the goods stacked upon them, and even in terms of the vendor operating them. Some

of the vendors remained standing throughout the day, and others mostly stayed seated, getting up only periodically to adjust or move their stock or to grab stock from boxes, bags and containers that they had shoved and pushed under their tables in lieu of other storage space.

Stall Presentation- Creating Chaos or Curating Content.

The appearance of the stalls was highly individualistic, regardless of the type of goods being sold. Some stalls with a refined and professional finish were highly curated and organised. These stalls tended to have tablecloths covering the battered and scratched tables provided by the *Dublin-Flea* and were as polished as any department store's visual merchandising offerings. Goods were presented in an accessible, tidy and organised manner. Staging props such as twinkly lights, draping fabrics and highly aesthetic storage or display boxes, baskets or mini-scenes were often utilised to show off and maximise the appeal of the goods. For example, those selling plant pots would add a variety of trendy succulents. This was a way to connect customers with the goods by showing them how to use the products. Other examples of this staging include jewellery or hair accessories on mannequin heads, table settings using delph-ware and china cups and saucers and scented tealights burning in ornately designed holders.

Other stalls were presented significantly, much more haphazardly and reminiscent of a flea-market style. Goods were jumbled, stacked precariously, or in piles that necessitated rummaging and rooting through to find the potential treasures within. Some stalls had a clear theme with similar items, whereas others had a mishmash of different items strewn together. Some furniture sellers allotted slightly larger spaces had created vignettes that customers could walk around and through, interacting with and trying out items as they went. For example, one of these vignettes could include a combination of goods for sale, items used for staging purposes, and some items from other stalls. Therefore, a 'living room scene' might include two mid-century modern armchairs, a rug, various lamps, some framed art, various ornamental trinkets and a bookshelf containing a selection of books. These staged setups enabled customers to envision themselves using the items for sale and think about how they could incorporate them into their living situations. The experiential ability to engage with the space and the items within the vignette was popular with customers, as evidenced by the number of people who would stop to sit in the chairs and engage tactilely with the objects around them.

As noted above, the content of the stalls was ever-changing and subject to the whims of the crowd, the surrounding stalls and the insights of the vendor as the day went on. Some stallholders preferred to pile their tables high with all the items they had brought, figuring that customers could only buy what they knew was there. For others, having fewer items on display at any one time gave buyers more chances to look at and spot an item of interest. As such, how the stalls were set up and maintained was constantly in flux throughout the day. This also rang true with the signage and visibility of price tags available for customers. Some stalls had professional-looking signage, everything was priced clearly, and many others had some items priced, some missing tags, and some things with no signage; thus, necessitating interaction with the seller should one be interested in any item on display. Preferences for the thrill and chaos of the 'treasure hunt', a phrase commonly heard in the field, were expressed by many. My participant narratives often invoked this quality of haphazardness with that of an 'authentic' flea-market shopping experience. In contrast, this exact quality caused a sense of anxious overwhelm for others who preferred a more curated shopping experience.

The Dublin- Flea Regulars - The Traders Expected at Every Market.

Here, I have conveyed a sense of the variety of stalls and appearances co-existing within the monthly markets. That said, it is essential to note that there are a select number of regular traders selling specific types of goods that happen to be present at each instance of the *Dublin Flea*. This small subgroup of traders tends to sell the same category of items and are usually positioned in the same space. There are about ten or so of these traders for whom it is very unusual to miss a market, and they tend to consist mainly of second-hand dealers rather than the revolving selection of makers and designers. These dealers tend to be known for their specialist offerings in furniture or furnishings, books, or vinyl, and as such, they become integrated into the market itself. A few of my research participants fell into this category, such as *Danny*, who always sold a selection of curios, jewellery and collectables, to *Malcolm's* lighting, furniture and furnishings, and *Sarah's* vintage clothing stalls. Each month, the stock they procured for the market would change, but they were commonly known for the categories of goods they sold and had some regular customers who would ask them to source and find specific items to purchase.

The Intricacies of Running *the Dublin Flea Market*:

The Monthly Trader Selection Process.

One of the most demanding tasks the organisers had each month was the considerable administrative effort required to process and select the traders for each market. Initially, this was done over email; however, the application process was swiftly moved to the *Dublin-Flea's* website to simplify and streamline the increasingly excessive number of applications they would receive for any one market. Traders interested in securing a spot were instructed to open up the application process portal available on the website, which would be open for applications from the Monday just after the last *Flea* took place and which would remain open for applications for seven days, i.e., from Monday to Sunday. There was no fee for applying, and the application process was only ever concerning the next upcoming *Flea*.

Traders were not allowed to make applications months in advance or to block-book/apply for more than one market at a time. This was done to ensure fairness and avoid the market becoming dull or predictable by continuously showcasing the same vendors or goods. Stressing the number of applications received for any market above the number of available spots, traders were cautioned that submitting their application was not a guarantee of selection or a stall offer. The application landing page on the website states that they tended to receive twice as many applications as they had stall spaces; however, Aisling later remarked to me that this number could surge up to 3-4 times the number of stall queries at various times during the year and that applications of the annual Christmas markets would exceed their increased capacity easily 5-6 times over.

Once a trader had started the application, they would be asked to input basic contact information, a summary of the types of goods condition they were in, and to provide an insight into the price ranges they intended to sell at. At various points in the application process, the website reminded that,

'The Flea-Market is all about bargains and that's what we look for in the stalls. It is a market of second-hand knick-knacks, bits-n-bobs, bric-a-brac, household goods, clothes and furniture, vintage, retro, pre-loved and unloved. We will always favour those that are selling **CHEAP** goods but we also know that a bargain is a bargain and value for money is recognised. The Flea is more about second hand rather than new/imported stock and there are only a few arts and crafts stalls allocated each month' [text in **bold** as emphasised on the website].

This emphasis on the types of goods and the price points that the average *Flea* customer was accustomed to would become one of the ways in which the organisers could audit and de-select applications that did not fit with the ethos or the usual wares of the *Flea*. Returning to the application process, potential traders would receive a confirmation of their application via email and would be invited to commence phase two of the application process. This stage entailed the traders sending good-quality images of their goods to the committee to aid them in their selection process. A short wait would then occur for the traders as the applications were reviewed and decided upon by the organisers, and then a further email confirming selection and the necessary logistical details for trading at the market would follow.

Those who had yet to be selected would be encouraged to apply again in future, and on some occasions, feedback about the type, quality, or price points of goods would be suggested. For the founders, the monthly selection process was an enjoyable phase of the market's temporal rhythms and a significant undertaking. Here, I note that whilst the *Dublin-Flea* was marketed as a non-profit-driven entity, it is clear that the founders presumably still benefited from this endeavour. Multiple attempts in my interviews to ascertain how much of an income the *Flea* generated for the founders were not met with open declarations; instead, the topic was not really up for discussion, with the questions about the financial payoff of the market either being dismissed, ignored, or redirected. Sensing that continued probing would not lead to any specific figure being shared and worrying that it may result in abruptly ending the interview, I chose to move on. That said, whilst the organisers had overheads such as renting the hall and securing permits, there would have been a surplus of income generated by the trading fees (as confirmed by my participants, these were €60 per trader for the monthly market, and vendor fees of €250 for the three days of the annual Christmas markets). I assume the organisers took a salary as compensation for their time and efforts in running the market. Furthermore, the media coverage of their event-planning skills and the extra footfall to the locale of the *Fumbally café* on market days must have served as additional financial perks of running the market.

In one of our first interviews, Aisling talked me through the ritual they created around the selection process from the first markets. Upon receipt of all the trader applications and images, they would print off the application documents and supporting images and meet upstairs in *The Fumbally* venue that she and Luca had opened. They would all come together and spend some time sitting in the sizeable open-space loft, catching up and chatting. Then, the serious business of selecting the traders would begin. Taking turns to sift through and examine

the piles of images, they would discuss each application's merits and begin sorting them into piles of yes, no, or maybe. Taking a host of variables into consideration, e.g., what was popular, what had been trending in the markets, what customers were responding to or not, and the comparative price points amongst traders of similar wares, to name but a few, they would discuss and gently argue about who should or should not be granted a stall space. These discussions were generally held in good spirits, occasionally becoming slightly argumentative or escalating over a difference in opinion. However, once a consensus was reached, the applications were put aside, and they would share a meal and some wine. This relaxed and slow event would often continue into the early hours. The following day, sometimes with a hazy head from the wine the night before, contacting and updating the traders would begin.

Social Media and Advertising- The Monthly Poster Commission.

One of the most exciting and effective advertising strategies utilised by the *Dublin-Flea* was implemented from the very first market in November of 2008. Each month, the founders would commission an artist or graphic designer to create a print that would be used to advertise the market on their online social media channels and distributed locally on physical flyers to promote the market. In a further demonstration of ingenuity, the poster designs would also go on to be sold as prints and postcards at the markets and constitute sought-after collector items to mark various anniversaries. For example, the market's fifth anniversary was commemorated by a set of postcards containing a print of each monthly flea poster for €25. Just recently, the *Dublin-Flea's* website was updated to include a gallery of all the commissioned posters dating back to the very first market. Each month's design is unique, and a vast array of styles, graphics and mediums are used. Details of the artist/designer always accompanied the displayed posters, and the makers were always given free creative reign over how they chose to interpret the brief of making a unique, one-off poster. The only exception was the set information to be worked into the poster, relaying the market's date, time, location, and website address. Each poster also incorporated the market's tagline- "a bizarre bazaar of vintage clothing, bric-a-brac and what nots".

Maintaining a Presence as a 'Hot Destination' across Social Media Channels.

In addition to the physical posters and their website, *The Dublin-Flea* has a considerable presence on social media and uses this as a prime means to advertise markets, share images of

the goods for sale on any particular market day and to promote the various crafters, second-hand dealers and small businesses whose goods could be found at the market. Figures provided by the organisers state that they have over 24,000 followers across *Instagram* and *Twitter* and over 27,000 'likes' on *Facebook* as of mid-2018. They have also had coverage of the market featured across the national print media and in a range of tourist guidebooks on *Dublin City*.

'Fanatics for Flea-ing'- The Flea-Market Clientele and Visitor Experience.

The *Dublin Flea Market* always attracts a diverse crowd of people each month. There were regulars to the Flea, as well as tourists, locals and *Dubliners* in search of something to do on a Sunday present at each market. Figures provided by the *Flea's* founders state that the monthly market averaged about 5,000 visitors each month, with significantly more arriving to browse the goods available at the annual Christmas markets. The attendees of the *Flea* were a vastly diverse crowd. People of various ethnicities, genders, classes, ages and life stages were present. Some people arrived to traverse the market on their own, whereas others arrived or met there in small groups, and there were also entire families, complete with kids, prams and dogs, in tow. Some arrived to spend the entire day browsing the market, stopping for lunch in the café and doing some shopping in the *Co-Op's* small shop selling pantry goods, fresh produce, sustainable toiletries and household supplies. In contrast, others viewed the market as a quick stop-off on the rest of their Sunday plans. The crowd's appearance again varied, some in their 'Sunday best', others in leisure wear, some dressed as if attending a festival with flowing and colourful attire, and everything else in between. Many residing in the surrounding locality walked to the Square; others came by car (having to find parking elsewhere), bus or cycling from across the wider city.

The visitors to the market tended to share an interest in and appreciation for second-hand, retro, vintage and pre-loved goods, and for many, shopping and browsing at the market was a leisurely activity that was not rushed and was looked forward to each month. Strolling around, coffee cup in hand, they would take their time looking through the contents of each stall, chatting to their vendors, and stopping to chat with other people they knew. As one would expect, the market attendees' purchasing decisions were quite varied. Some found the prices of the goods on offer entirely attainable, whereas this was not the case for others. Some people used the flea market as a primary means to find and purchase clothing, furniture and furnishings; others found it an ideal location to search and hunt for more unique, one-off goods

for themselves or as gifts. Examples of such flea market finds, and the motivations and circumstances of specific customers will be presented as ethnographic case studies and discussed throughout the following chapters. For now, suffice it to say that the flea market drew a diverse, dynamic and sizeable bustling crowd of customers and visitors each month.

Aside from the experience of working one's way through the market stalls and browsing through the throngs of people to browse the goods for sale, the *Dublin Flea*'s monthly inclusion of some vendors preparing and selling in situ a variety of foods was a popular aspect of the market-going experience. These stalls were usually lined up together on the back left wall of the *Co-Op* and formed a natural boundary for the stalls selling consumer goods. Passing through the *Co-Op* entailed passing by the scents and aromas of various types of cuisine and the bustling and always busy *Co-Op* café at the back of the hall, on the same side as the food stalls. Dishes such as falafel, curry, pastries, salads, and a host of other ethnic food options were available for purchase, and many people either took advantage of the seating area to sit and enjoy their food as a pit stop or would wander around the market eating as they went. Those not interested in in-situ eating could also purchase various foodstuffs to take home and enjoy later. Outside on the Square, the *Flea* founders had collaborated with several small food van operators. These proved popular, with people queueing for burgers and chips, freshly made sweet and savoury crepes and various other options. These food vans added a festival-esque vibe to the proceedings, and, especially on sunny days, people would sit down along the Square, enjoying their food, chatting with friends and showing off the bargains they had acquired.

During the Summer, other food-based attractions such as an ice-cream van selling soft-serve, slushies, and ice-pops would be top-rated and always formed a long queue as people sought a treat to enjoy in the sunshine. Adding to the chaotic soundscape of the *Flea*, children were also catered for with at least 1-2 face-painters present at the markets, set up beside a small section of the Square that, subject to nice weather, would have a small section covered in small chairs and cushions for kids to sit on, and some oversized games, toys like hula hoops, and chalks for drawing on the kerb provided. The *Dublin-Flea* was the most popular market held in *Newmarket*. However, a short synopsis of the other Sunday markets operating out of the *Co-Op* now follows, as there was significant overlap between vendors and visitors across all these markets.

The Other Second-Hand Markets in Newmarket Square:

In addition to the *Dublin Flea Market*, as noted above, this research also included some second-hand markets that occupied the *Co-Op* floor on the other Sundays of each month. There were some more sporadic and irregular markets, such as the *Rumble in the Jumble* and some one-off craft markets, that do not inform this thesis, owing to their minimal incidence during my time in the field. However, three other markets that I attended frequently and sourced interviews from, and which took up residence on the three other Sundays of the *Co-Op*'s monthly calendar, were the *Brocante* market, *Pure Vintage* market, and *Fusion* market.

Brocante was most similar to the *Dublin Flea*, emphasising vintage, retro and second-hand goods. This market mainly dealt with vintage fashion, mid-century modern furniture and furnishings, records and other miscellanea. Drawing the biggest attending of the three other markets, the *Brocante* was still significantly less busy and with fewer, perhaps two-thirds of the stalls of the *Dublin-Flea*. *Pure Vintage* was similar to the *Brocante* but was smaller again and included many craft, art and food goods, averaging about 40 stalls each month. Finally, the *Fusion* market was the most distinct of the markets. There were some second-hand goods on display, but most of the vendors were selling products curated to showcase multicultural products. These included a diverse selection of various ethnic traditional craft items, food and beverage vendors, as well as clothing attire, jewellery and alternative lifestyle products such as crystals, tarot and ritual items, e.g., sage for cleansing spaces and spiritual energies. The *Fusion* market had by far the most significant emphasis on food products and stalls offering a selection of international street foods and snacks and a traditional *Arabic* Tea Tent. Another atypicality of the *Fusion* market was that, unlike the other markets, each market day included workshops, performances, classes, interactive holistic experiences such as massage, henna, yoga or card-reading sessions, and trading stalls.

All three of these markets demonstrated significant overlap with The *Dublin Flea-Market*, not just by virtue of their shared venue but also with the people, goods, and practices that merged and interacted at the *Dublin-Flea* and, as such, will be referred to on occasion throughout the chapters to follow.

The *Dublin Flea*'s Mission Statement- A Statement of Intent or Ideological Wishlist?

The flea market was continually invoked as a moral space in the narratives of my participants. For example, in our interviews, the market founders often spoke about the *Flea*, not in terms of it being a commercial entity, which it undoubtedly is, but rather as a non-profit, values-driven social enterprise. They stressed that their agenda was to develop a thriving market scene that would also act as a means to facilitate and nurture Irish-based startups and micro enterprises, as well as create a hub for showcasing and encouraging local creatives, artists and makers. The flea market would enable many people to experiment with selling, e.g., testing ideas or gaining confidence before opening a business, etc., and buying.

In a pretty direct nod to the impacts of the *recession*, the founders also noted that the Flea could be a suitable space for shops going out of business to sell off their stock, or when people are forced to emigrate, they could sell off their belongings and make some money from the goods that would not be accompanying them across the seas. Other common stories behind the stalls included people downsizing from bigger to smaller homes, clearing out attics or sheds, or dealing with the contents of a home upon the death of a family member. (This discourse of the capitalistic aspect of the market being downplayed or entirely overshadowed by the social good it could enable was a common narrative throughout my research and will be examined and critiqued elsewhere in the thesis).

The organisers were keen to raise awareness about the social benefits such alternative marketplaces can add to the local community and the opportunities such enterprises can provide for small and emerging businesses. Their mission statement, available on their website, also focuses upon the social good they argued that the market could achieve, stating that '*Dublin Flea-Market* is a Non-Profit driven Social Enterprise that promotes Sustainability and Opportunity in the wider community. It is as much about Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Collaboration as it is about Fun, Haggling and Friendship'. Moreover, further declaring and expanding upon the positive attributes of the market, they noted on their website and social media platforms that the flea market represented one of the city's few social outlets on Sundays that did not revolve around alcohol and where a community would naturally converge and grow from. The commercial aspects of the market were spoken about in terms that also downplayed the inescapable capitalistic nature, focusing less on the transactional exchange of money for material goods and instead reiterating the sociable and community-building vibes they would cultivate. This intentional cultivation of a community-focused alternative consumption experience required considerable labour to produce.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this descriptive chapter has provided an account of some of the various localised sociological factors that directly or indirectly contributed to *The Dublin Flea-Market's* ten-year existence. The relocation of the *Dublin Food Co-Op* to *Newmarket Square* in 2007 set the scene for the emergence of this area of the *Liberties* as a hub in the city for alternative forms of consumption that were morally imbued with connotations of being more ethical, sustainable, 'green' and desirable. The ethos of the *Dublin Flea-Market* as also being a moral enterprise, emphasising its social and communal values over its intrinsically capitalistic nature, meant that the *Co-Op* and the *Flea* attracted consumers who desired to participate in more alternative provisioning practices, such as buying local and organic, and shopping in second-hand markets, and over time had built a loyal clientele as well as attracting visitors from across the city and beyond.

The move of the *Co-Op* to *Newmarket Square* in 2007 and the formation of the *Dublin-Flea* in 2008 occurred right as the effects of the *2008 Global Recession* and subsequent period of austerity started to be felt. The subsequent shift for many Irish consumers, including my participants, to more conscious forms of consumption, shopping locally and embracing second-hand are significant factors in the market's growth, flourishing and success. Ironically, the proliferation of the markets and the increasing membership of the *Co-Op* over the years would further cement the *Liberties* and specifically *Newmarket*, as a destination for alternative and second-hand consumption, and, as the area started to prosper and develop in terms of more small businesses, markets and craft fairs, *Co-Op* events, etc., the potential for the area to be redeveloped was commandeered by local Government and venture capitalists, eventually leading to the displacement of the markets and the *Co-Op*.

Rising from the ashes of the *2008 Recession*, the markets had endured in *Newmarket*, and yet, their very success likely contributed to the gentrification and redevelopment of the area. The *Co-Op's* warehouse building was literally knocked to the foundations, and the markets made way for hotels, office blocks and 'luxury student accommodation' that was later found to be primarily used as short-term letting for *AirBnB* apartments. This contentious 'bait and switch' by the developer was also a source of anger for locals as the initial planning application submitted for the redevelopment had shown space for a market included in the new plans; however, mid-way through the planning review process, they submit revised plans with

the market space omitted, instead, converting it into a generic retail unit. This resulted in many people (locals and those involved in the market community and *Co-Op* that I interviewed) feeling that the initial inclusion of the designated market space had been nothing more than a ploy to placate the locals and that the developer had later attempted to rescind covertly to minimise planning objections from the local community that could threaten the development being approved.

Returning to *Newmarket Square* prior to the later demolition of the *Co-Op* building, we shifted in scope to provide an in-depth examination of the history and later growth of my primary field site- the *Dublin Flea- Market*. Curating a sensorial 'walk through' account of the market, the chapter aimed to imbue a sense of ethnographic familiarity with the market's multiplicity of circulating goods, layouts and monthly rhythms. This was then supplemented with an account of the market's origins, its ethical ethos and an overview of some of the logistical and operational practices that go into running such a large and dynamic consumer event each month- both in 'normal' and crisis times. Paying particular attention to the ever-changing variety and types of consumer goods (second-hand, craft, consumables, etc.) and beliefs about value(s) to be found circulating at the market, the thesis thus begins here to lay the foundations for the later discussions of second-hand goods and the sentiments they can evoke, both positive and negative, that will form the basis for later thematic chapters.

In this manner, the *Dublin Flea Market* functions as a critical site, both physically and symbolically, that can reveal connections and cultural insights across a broad network of second-hand consumption spaces, resulting in the visibility of practices, norms, and object encounters that emerge from, and circulate through each of the flea-market exchanges. It is interesting to note that, as touched on above, it is the repeating of the very structural conditions that initially contributed to the origins of the market that represent the same conditions that would lead to its eventual eviction and loss in May of 2018. The growth and subsequent decline of the market thus mirror the economic patterns to be witnessed in *Newmarket Square*- from ignored and overlooked community to the successful proliferation of an alternative-consumption hub, and finally, the displacement of market activity in the name of gentrification and redevelopment.

This chapter has demonstrated how such alternative consumption spaces and practices have been affected by and mirror Ireland's concurrent economic crash, austerity, and 'recovery'

period. This argument will be developed and nuanced throughout the following chapters by examining how other societal trends, such as new discourses of waste, clutter, and 'ideal' domesticity, have also shaped second-hand consumption practices. The market, as an entity, and the physical location of the market are not homogeneous- they are contested spaces that contain multiple complex categories of distinctive (but also at times overlapping) positionalities, e.g., insiders and outsiders, locals or tourists, etc. These converge in *Newmarket Square* with socio-economic differences demarcating the landscape (i.e., where people should be and where they are out of place, who has the financial resources and political power to determine the area's future, etc.). This is a contested space with contested values and visions of what the future ought to look like, i.e., who gets to trade at the market is a selective process, as is who gets to determine how the area is redeveloped and used, etc.

The transforming meaning of the space and the location (both during my fieldwork and more broadly between 2007 and 2018) meant that the area had become so gentrified that initiatives such as the *Co-Op* and the *Dublin-Flea* were either displaced or folded entirely. The aftermath of the loss of the markets and the subsequent bulldozing of the area further heightened local beliefs and frustrations about the poverty: gentrification divide they felt, and disillusionment with the state (as directed at "*the Corpo*") was expressed by my participants as they attempted to mobilise, both as a collective to protest the eviction of the markets, but also individually scrambling to identify other suitable markets to trade at to ensure their livelihoods.

Through charting the growth and later loss of the *Co-Op* and the *Dublin-Flea* within *Newmarket Square* and the *Liberties* area more broadly, we can see how the circulation of second-hand goods and the spaces they flow within and without can also be read as a socio-cultural and economic chronology that charts how this area and the people that lived, worked, visited and circulated through it underwent processes of economic prosperity and innovation but were also subjected to gentrification and loss, leading to a new form of dispossession (in the form of their eviction) that resulted from the very economic growth that had sustained the area in the aftermath of the *2008 Recession*. The success and community-led reinvigoration of the area (of which the *Co-Op* and the *Dublin-Flea* were key contributing players) eventually was subsumed and co-opted by external entities such as investment and vulture funds and *Dublin City Council*. The markets' own success was what would eventually contribute to the displacement of the people, things, values and practices that had flourished there.

Chapter Three follows on from this scene-setting account, shifting to focus on ‘what is a flea-market?’ and ‘what is/has value?’ this chapter will challenge conventional understandings of the market as homogenous and stable, instead arguing for an understanding of the market as being continuously disassembled and reassembled through the circulation of people, objects and practices that converge there. Following this, I provide a typology of traders and distinguish between the types of objects to be found at the market, drawing out and enlivening the theoretical discussion of second-hand objects, their ability to entice or repulse, and how their social biographies, movements and re-valuations at market speak to broader cultural trends (i.e., popular discourses around clutter, homes, waste, and consumer shame, etc.). In so doing, I cast light on how relationships and affectations between people and pre-loved goods are formed, shaped, evolved and maintained. Through an ethnographic sensibility to flea-things in circulation, entire networks of second-hand consumption and meaning-making become tangible, visible and materialised.

Chapter Three: The Market.

Introduction:

In the previous chapter, I introduced the reader to my primary research site, the *Dublin Flea Market*, and gave an overview of some of the main sociological conditions and broader cultural trends that enabled the second-hand markets to become part of the social fabric of both *Newmarket Square* and the wider *Liberties* area of *Dublin* city. This chapter turns to an anthropological consideration of what a flea market is. To do this, I draw on Rachel E. Black's (2012) work on informal markets as sites of social and commercial exchange to draw out the circulation of material objects within liminal spaces of second-hand exchange and to Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia.

The flea market differs from other markets regarding the monetary value and symbolic worth that objects are imbued with and how this informs how they are written about in economic anthropology. To unpack this, we will need to disentangle some threads of the *Dublin- Flea*, i.e., the convergence of people, practices and objects that come together and circulate in this place to constitute the market each month. Through paying close attention to the ways in which flea markets are distinct from other commercial markets, I aim to emphasise the significance of that key, albeit ever-changing, constituent of the market- the material objects, as well as the values and spaces - that might be missed in a more traditional discussion of the 'market'(ref). Therefore, I start by looking at the Flea as 'a different kind of space'.

The main theoretical framework this chapter uses to convey to the reader the complexity and paradoxical nature of the flea market is that of Michel Foucault's (1984) writing on the heterotopia, which can be understood as places where disparate, conflicting or multiple locations come together/ are juxtaposed within the same physical location. Foucault's concept of heterotopia presents a conceptual framework to further argue for a more nuanced understanding of the flea market as a heterotopic space.

The flea market is often seen and referred to as a separate and distinct space. However, the theoretical framework of Foucault's heterotopia lies closer to how the traders speak of the

market, i.e., how they invoke the idealised and non-commercial aspects of the market and its perceived sustainability over its commercial and transactional nature. Drawing on my ethnographic research in the *Dublin Flea-Market*, this chapter explores if Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia can be applied to flea markets, whereby they present as tenuous and conflicting spaces of otherness. Subsequently, the later chapters in this dissertation will build on this argument and continue to challenge this overly simplistic reduction of the flea market to a homogenous space by showing how the flea market is present in, flows between, and is actively made in the homes of the traders and through discourses about normative domestic spaces, and decluttering and divestment practices. For now, let us take a closer look at how Foucault conceptualises heterotopia and the defining principles he attributes to such 'counter-sites' and spaces composed of concurrent yet contested attributes and functions.

Although a different kind of space, I argue in this chapter and the next that the flea market cannot be conceived as an abstract economic system separated from the very traders and objects that constitute it. Instead, I will demonstrate that the people, objects, practices and exchanges that occur at the market combine to effectively create and re-create the market each month.

The Flea-Market as a Liminal and Layered Space:

Rachel E. Black (2012), whose ethnographic research was based in an Italian market (*Porta Palazzo* in *Turin*- said to be one of the largest open-air markets in Europe), discusses how markets (and other alternative consumption spaces) function as 'links between different realities' and argues that markets can be understood as simultaneously being three things at once- a physical place, a gathering of people, and an abstract concept of exchange (2012:x). In this way, second-hand marketspaces can be understood as sites for the exchange not only of goods (and occasionally services such as vendors being commissioned by customers to adapt or source specific items, etc.) but as layered, complicated and dynamic spaces. This liminal quality of the flea market, whereby it is at once a commercial site and a social space whose participants invoke their rejection of such commercial and capitalistic practices, is further convoluted by the flea market's transience. Temporally, the flea market exists some, but not all the time. Whilst the community of traders, organisers and attendees remain consistently

connected to their sense of being a member of the market community, the physical configuration of the market and its components (i.e., the second-hand goods, the presence of the traders, the physical layout of the market stalls and signage, etc.) itself weaves in and out of existence each month.

The flea market also enables social relations between strangers, visitors, and the objects on display. Thus, the rituals of being at the flea market (e.g., browsing the stalls, haggling with vendors, encountering goods that may invoke nostalgia, discussing/ comparing purchases with others both within and separate from the flea-market setting, etc.) further differentiate the flea market from other forms of provisioning that lack that social element. Social relations thus emerge organically from the chance meetings between vendors, customers and second-hand material goods. This aleatory quality of such impromptu encounters underpins the experience of shopping at the flea market. Different sociability and commercial exchange types exist simultaneously at the flea market. As Black (2012) surmises, 'Economic life does not negate social life... As people wait in line, choose their produce, or pay for their goods, commerce is not the only thing going on. People are discussing their everyday lives together, getting to know one another, even if only on the surface' (2012:8).

Black contends, ' The market is a sort of contained chaos [...] the market is unique because of the numerous transactions that take place during a shopping trip and because of the chaotic physical space in which these exchanges occur' (2012:24/34). Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, this chapter will argue that the flea market can be understood not only as a 'contained chaos' but as a heterotopic space. However, I continue to argue that, unlike a fixed or bounded space, the Flea is continuously being made and re-made by the circulations of objects, people and practices within it. Challenging the idea that the market is a homogenous or bounded entity, this chapter aims to demonstrate how the boundaries of what constitutes the flea market are porous and subject to slippage and, often, create flows between the homes of the market vendors and the flea market's physical location in Newmarket Square.

Foucault's Heterotopia:

Foucault presents the heterotopia as '...a sort of counter arrangement, of effectively realised utopia, in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged, and overturned: a sort of

place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localisable' (in Leach, 1997:352). The flea market can be considered as an 'other' space that is separated from, yet is intrinsically bound with, ordinary local cultural settings such as the geographical community, the economic market, etc., alongside wider and niche cultural agendas such as ethical consumption, concerns around disposability and sustainability. The flea market provides a distinctive space in which one can, through engaging with the assortment of material objects on display, simultaneously recall, modify and actualise both a nostalgic past and an idealised personalised future. Just as Foucault's heterotopia has the ability to juxtapose seemingly irreconcilable spaces, the flea market encapsulates a variety of discernibly opposed philosophies, people and material objects. Tracing the convergences and tensions underlying the flea market that circulates and reassembles each month indicates a range of economic, political and personal agendas. Yet, for its participants, the *Flea* is romanticised as the medium through which these often conflicting concerns may be remedied, e.g., making a quick profit versus forging ethically conscious trading communities and retaining control over one's consumption.

Numerous utopian ideologies are evident within the flea market, the most coveted of these pertaining to the 'rubric of revival' (Venkatesan, 2009:81) and the valorisation of upcycling and sustainability alongside the socio-spatial formation of community. However, within the market, there are also visual and symbolic clashes of the role of and value attributed to the past and the future and value attribution based on economic and/or nostalgic valuations. Whilst Foucault proposed that the museum, or the library, whose *raison d'être* is the accumulation of material culture *ad infinitum*, serves as the prime example of heterotopias of time, I question whether the contemporary flea market, with its various agendas, ruptures and inconsistencies may also be conceived of as both a popular cultural archive and therefore as a heterotopia of time.

Considering The Flea-Market through the lens of heterotopia:

Why is Foucault's theory of heterotopia relevant to my thesis research, a project which charts the rise and fall of *Newmarket Square's* multiple flea markets in the wake of the economic crash and subsequent decade of austerity of 2008 up to their disappearance in 2018? The flea markets I researched between 2013 and 2018 present a paradoxical conundrum. The many individuals with whom I spent significant time getting to know often spoke about the market in a manner that suggested that it was separate from, and therefore not subject to the same

negative associations of the all-pervasive spheres of capitalism, i.e., the expression of morally-laden fears and critiques that our supposedly evident market greed is really humanity's collective and innate greedy desire for new, for more, and for lots of it. Interrogating this sentiment, however, quickly presented a logical fallacy- the market does not operate outside of capitalism. Its ethos may strive to be more 'green', more consumer-aware and less harmful to the environment and to marginalised, often poverty-stricken workers, etc.; however, fundamentally, the flea markets and the *Food Co-Op* that hosts it cannot operate in a vacuum. They cannot exist without the very same principles (the exchange of money for goods, maximising profits to avoid loss, availability of an extensive supply of diverse goods, hierarchies and barriers as to who can/cannot participate and in what manner, etc.) that they find fault in.

The History of Heterotopia.

It was in a 1967 lecture to the *Architectural Studies Circle* in *Paris* that Foucault attempted to elaborate the basic principles common to a certain kind of cultural space in which the ordering of social relations is somehow skewed from its ordinary configuration, i.e., sites where one 'makes a temporary halt'. He argued that 'we are in the age of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, the near and the far, the side by side and the scattered... a net that links points together and creates its own muddle' (Leach translation, 1997:330). Heterotopias are spaces of alternative ordering that organise the social world in a way that is different to that which surrounds them (Foucault in Leach, 1997). These spaces are always embedded within the structure of society and serve some collective process. But in so doing, significantly alter the normative ways people relate to space, objects, time and each other. In juxtaposing diverse sites and concerns and bringing into one single narrative different times and spaces, can flea markets be compared to Foucauldian heterotopias?

Foucault wished to stress the importance of knowing 'what are the relations of vicinity, what kind of storage, circulation, reference and classification of human elements should take preference in this or that situation, according to the objective that is being sought' (Leach translation, 1997:331). Foucault warned of the need to be aware of 'opposites that we take for granted, such as the contrast between public and private space, family and social space, cultural and utilitarian space, the space of pleasure and the space of work' (ibid). I argue that the flea market represents one space that cannot be reduced to binary oppositions.

Heterotopias Versus Utopias.

It is important here to note Foucault's distinction between heterotopic spaces and utopian space, which, he argues, are 'arrangements which have no real space. Arrangements which have a general relationship of direct or inverse analogy with the real space of society. They represent society itself brought to perfection, or its reverse, and in any case utopias are spaces that are by their very essence fundamentally unreal' (Foucault, 1967:2). Contrastingly, Foucault defines heterotopias as 'real and effective spaces... a sort of counter arrangement ... in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and at the same time represented, challenged, and overturned... These other places offer a kind of both mythical and real contestation of the space in which we live' (Foucault, 1967:2). Foucault argued that there is not a single culture in the world that is not made up of/ or possesses multiple heterotopias and these spaces have the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other' (Foucault, 1967).

The Six Principles of the Heterotopia.

Foucault, arguing for this 'heterotopology' approach to the analysis of such different types of spaces and places, claims that there are six principles that are shared by all heterotopias (Foucault. 1967 in Miskowiec translation, 1984:3). Firstly, Foucault argues that the forms heterotopias may take are diverse yet they are universally present in all cultures. Whilst no universal form of heterotopia may exist, they tend to fall into two main categories: crisis and deviation. Heterotopias of crisis (Foucault also described these as 'primitive', citing examples of puberty huts, boarding schools, menstruation huts, etc.) tend to be places/spaces that are privileged, sacred, or forbidden places reserved for an individual in a state of crisis concerning the society or environment they live in, e.g., rites of passage for the transition into adolescence. The purpose of heterotopias of crisis, thus, is to enable such transitions or turning points to be separated from and managed safely and away from the regular patterns of life that they could disrupt. The other type of heterotopia- those of deviation (which Foucault described as more modern, citing examples such as prisons) serves to create/designate spaces where deviation from the norms of societal behaviours can be managed.

The second principle, Foucault claims, is that the function of heterotopic spaces changes over time. They serve different purposes in different places and can change over time.

Whilst heterotopias are primarily concerned with space, the role of time is also significant within the bounds of each individual heterotopia. They can collect together bits and pieces of time in one spatio-temporal place. For example, heterotopias 'of time' accumulate ad infinitum, e.g., museums and libraries, and these are heterotopias typical of C19th Western culture. Opposite to this are heterotopias that are time-bound and that view time as a celebration, e.g., circus and fairs, fortune-tellers, and it is to this type of heterotopia that the flea-market can be likened given its recurring yet temporary, and carnivalesque nature each month.

The third principle of heterotopias is that they can handle, or even reconcile, several incompatible elements that otherwise could not exist in real space. This juxtaposition of several settings into one place enables the space to act as a 'break' from the expected flows of time. Such heterotopic spaces are distinct from utopian places where homogeneity is valued. Contrastingly, heterotopia is about heterogeneity, incorporating that deemed 'other' and even contested ideals. Using the traditional garden as an example, Foucault details its 'power to juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are in themselves incompatible'. The garden is at once a site which gathers other locations into it but is also a site of order and discipline.

The fourth principle is that heterotopias arrange and juxtapose multiple times. Foucault defines 'heterochronies' as 'slices in time' that are connected to heterotopias for the sake of symmetry (Foucault, 1967:4). These heterotopias of time come in two varieties and are removed from the normal flow of time, displaying their own temporal proclivities, for example, how the graveyard freeze the moment of death into one location. Heterotopias of accumulation, for example, libraries or museums, desire to collect together all times- the past, present and future, into a fixed archive that can be frozen forever. The goal in such heterochronies is perpetual accumulation, to produce a sense of completion, order and permanence, or, in effect, to create and contain a location of all times. However, such bounded desires to enclose everything in one all-encompassing archive is contrary to the concept of time and its passing, and such an endeavour actually would constitute a rupturing from the conventional perception of the passage of time, temporality and its impacts. If heterotopias of accumulation aspire for order, permanence and containment, the other type of heterotopias of festivity instead contrastingly valorises the temporary and precarious. Examples of these heterotopias are festivals, fairs, carnivals, and, I argue, flea markets. Here, pleasure comes from the lack of permanence, from the temporary, fragile nature of the experience or situation, and where time

is experienced as fleeting and present-oriented rather than stretching out to some version of eternity. Within heterotopic spaces, these two variations of heterotopology, time- that of festival and accumulation- often converge and collide.

The fifth principle is that heterotopias manage entrances and exclusions. This opening and closing of the space make heterotopic spaces both isolated and permeable, and there is a price to gain access- be that monetary or symbolic (Foucault, 1967:7). These spaces tend to appear democratic in the ability to enter, however, through entering such spaces, people become demarcated and separated. At once, exclusion occurs for those within and without the space. Some such spaces can have compulsory entry (e.g., an individual forced to enter prison, etc.). In contrast, others require submission to purification and ritual (e.g., religious purification rites before prayer or hygienic purification before entering a sauna). Foucault deemed such heterotopic spaces as performative in nature as one requires capital (monetary and cultural) to gain access, and this often requires insider knowledge, language, clothing or status.

The sixth and final principle is that heterotopias serve some purpose in relation to the real spaces they oppose, i.e., they are not mere alternatives but rather work in tandem with real space and offer something to society. Foucault terms this the heterotopia of illusion and compensation, respectively. The role of Heterotopias of compensation is 'to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled'. Contrastingly, heterotopias of illusion seek to 'create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory' (Foucault, 1967:8). Perhaps the most abstract of all six principles, here Foucault shows how heterotopias expose real spaces and can be used to understand how despite their representations of (seemingly) "reality", they are in fact always temporary and reveal the visions of public life and spaces that shape them. Heterotopias of illusion, such as the brothel, expose the "interiors" and fantasy lives, whereas heterotopias of compensation, whose archetype of the Puritan colony, expose how space is temporary, messy and disorganised even in extremely disciplined and surveilled public spaces.

A Heterotopic Analysis of the Dublin Flea Market:

Now that I have explained the six principles of heterotopias, I return to my ethnographic context to discuss how the flea market can be analysed using Foucault's heterotopia conceptual model. Firstly, I wish to emphasise further how I draw inspiration from the work of Hetherington (1997), Murphy (2015) and Venkatesan (2009), whose engagements with Foucault's theory to unpack various forms of material culture, i.e., notions of modernity, design and Indian craft, respectively, offered examples on how to apply the heterotopia to the flea-market. Following this, I argue for and demonstrate the applicability of Foucault's heterotopia to my research.

Keith Murphy (2015) utilised Foucault's model of heterotopia concerning design and the production of style in Sweden. He discusses how Foucault contrasts them to 'the real space of society', and whilst they stand outside real space, they are at the same time undeniably real, always embedded within the structure of society, serving some collective purpose but in so doing significantly alter the normative ways in which people relate to space, objects, time and each other. Similarly, Hetherington (1997) emphasises this juxtaposition, referring to them as spaces of alternate ordering that organise a bit of the social world in a way different to that surrounding them. Murphy cites Lord (2006), reminding us of the need to read heterotopias 'not primarily as spaces that are different but as spaces made up of difference' (Lord, 2006 *in* Murphy, 2008:184). Moving through these elicits a 'clash' as one sees, hears and touches things in the manner prescribed by the heterotopia. At least temporarily, we are compelled to follow that particular version of reality. This impacts the experience of those passing through, as entering heterotopic space is abandoning the typical ways social and material relations work and accepting different ways to represent reality.

Similar to my approach, Venkatesan (2009) explores how Indian craft can be understood by applying Foucault's concept of heterotopia. Applying the model of heterotopia here (and within my research) allows the author to juxtapose diverse sites and concerns and collapse into one single narrative different times and spaces. In this context, the romanticised craft was concerned with the market/processes of industrialisation and with authenticity/romanticising craft workers in marginalised positions. This is because heterotopia produces social categories by placing entities in new relations with each other. Venkatesan concludes, 'For Foucault, the mirror is a good way to think about Heterotopias' (2009:92). The mirror shows something that is both here and not here. It permits juxtapositions and projections (2009:92-93). The heterotopia of traditional Indian craft [*and the flea market*] is made up of an extensive network that connects manufacturing processes, things, artisans, traders, craft

developers, the nation, the world, the past, the present, the market, the home, the ritual space, and the public space. 'Craft is the mirror through which this network sees itself. And just outside its frame continue all the concerns that press upon the different people gazing into it' (Venkatesan, 2009:92-93). The various points that make up the network of traditional Indian craft [and indeed my research] are not necessarily compatible. Nor do they function outside the particular historical moment of India or Ireland today, respectively.

The Flea-Market as Heterotopia.

In my research, I have identified several key themes that support applying the concept of Heterotopias to the context of contemporary Irish flea markets. Firstly, they have their own temporal reality. This space within the *Dublin Co-Op* becomes the *Dublin Flea Market for a few hours on one Sunday of each month*. This not only presents a barrier to entry, as it only exists within these temporal confines but also gives it a place outside the normal temporal flow as it is here now; it won't be tomorrow but will be again in the future. *The Dublin-Flea* exists as a bubble of time that repeats and differs each time. This placement outside of the regular progression of time is an aspect shared by all Heterotopias, which are removed from the normal flow of time, display their own temporal proclivities yet are localisable and 'presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at the same time' with some price required to gain access (Foucault, 1967:7).

The flea market serves a very different purpose to standard retail outlets, where new goods are sold. The *Dublin-Flea* provides an opportunity for a second life for objects otherwise discarded. This negotiation around apparently useless things and handling what some deem garbage reflects lifestyles and mentalities. Waste may be unwanted for one person, but at the same time, it can be usable, valuable and a source of livelihood for others. However, the flea market could only exist with standard retailers making these goods available in the first place. Consequently, the Flea provides an alternative market that operates simultaneously in tandem with and in opposition to the prevailing retail method. This ability to serve a purpose which simultaneously works against and alongside a seemingly opposed real space is an inherent aspect of heterotopias. As Foucault argued, heterotopias serve some purpose in relation to the real spaces that they oppose and are not mere alternatives but work in tandem with real space and offer something to society (Foucault, 1967).

At the flea market, each object has a unique sensorial quality and possessions brought to, sold at, and brought home from the market illuminate the potentiality of discourses and practices of informal exchange and the multiplicity of human-object entanglements. Through this deliberate movement of meaningful, yet no longer essential, objects to strangers, a narrative of sharing experiences and interests arises. I would question where such relationships begin and cease to be meaningful. To what extent are purchases guided by nostalgia and memory over financial or practical concerns? Contradictions and tensions around the objective attribution of meaning become most visible where subjective valuations are made, and the intersection between economic and sentimental values are evident in the contestation, negotiation and haggling over goods. Further, by hosting the *Dublin Flea*, the *Co-Op* actively fosters a community of like-minded individuals interested in promoting ecological concerns, contrasting the market's capitalist nature. This ability to juxtapose ideas and practices which are seemingly irreconcilable is crucial to the notion of Heterotopias.

Heterotopias can handle, even reconcile, several incompatible elements that otherwise could not exist in real space. At the flea market, public and private spheres mix, e.g., personal and singularised domesticated things/possessions, displayed and evaluated in public spaces. There are competing discourses of value(s); for example, selling a vintage appliance symbolically reconciles economic worth and sentimentality. At once, it can be valued for its practical use, i.e., it functionally works for its intended purpose, and simultaneously, for its aesthetic, connotations of frivolity, kitsch design, and the nostalgia such vintage appliances may evoke. Just as vintage appliances are purchased for their 'hardiness', or as my participants would utter referencing their presumed superior quality, 'they just don't make them like they used to', I also witnessed several purchases of broken appliances, missing parts, or long-since worn out beyond their ability to function, but still a repository of personal meaning for my participants.

Furthermore, the flea market acts as a form of cultural archive. As Lindqvist (2009) asserts, the idea of the cultural archive is currently expanded and deepened to incorporate the most mundane in popular culture. The flea market houses a vast array of such objects from numerous times and places, collecting them all in one location and facilitating their movement to new homes for preservation. Zeitlyn (2012) argued that 'many individuals and families maintain smaller-scale archives that function as repositories of memory' (2012:462). Such personal collections, acquired at flea markets, can be seen as the museums of the future and the

collectors, the curators of our new cultural archives. By taking these objects from various times and places and collecting them in one location and moment, the flea market further acts in a heterotopic manner.

Reflecting on the aforementioned connections between the flea market and the concept of a heterotopic space, Foucault's ideas of heterotopia are bound within the flea market. In this place, old stuff goes to die and to be reborn. With its melting pot of varied and conflicting agendas (e.g., profit versus sustainability), the flea market presents a tenuous and conflicting space of otherness. Accordingly, the flea market can be considered as an 'other' space that is separated from, yet intrinsically bound with, ordinary local cultural settings (such as the geographical community, the economic market, etc.) alongside wider and niche cultural agendas such as ethical consumption and concerns around disposability, and sustainability. The flea market provides a distinctive space where one can, through engaging with the assortment of material objects on display, simultaneously recall, modify and actualise a nostalgic past and an idealised personalised future(s). Just as Foucault's heterotopia has the ability to juxtapose seemingly irreconcilable spaces, the flea market encapsulates a variety of discernibly opposed philosophies, people and material objects. Tracing the convergences and tensions underlying the flea market indicates a range of economic, political and personal agendas, yet, for its participants, the *Dublin- Flea* is romanticised as the medium through which these often conflicting concerns may be remedied, e.g., making a quick profit, versus forging ethically conscious trading communities and retaining control over one's consumption.

Numerous utopian ideologies are evident within the flea market, the most coveted of these pertaining to the 'rubric of revival' (Venkatesan, 2009:81) and the valorisation of upcycling and sustainability. However, within the market, there are also visually and symbolically clashes of the role of and value(s) attributed to the past and the future, from both economic and nostalgic underpinnings. Whilst Foucault proposed that the museum, or the library, whose *raison d'être* is the accumulation of material culture *ad infinitum*, serves as the prime example of heterotopias of time, I argue that the contemporary *Dublin Flea-Market*, with its various agendas, ruptures and inconsistencies may also be conceived of as both a popular cultural archive and as a heterotopic space. The *Dublin-Flea* is paradoxical and contradictory; the market's ethos wants to operate outside of capitalism, but it cannot and is entirely dependent on the excess of goods produced by that to operate a second-hand market space. The market is simultaneously a space for commerce and practising social change. This is evidenced by

instances of vendors selling their unwanted goods and whose profits were to be donated to a charity of their choosing, and, additionally, by food and perishables vendors, who at the end of the market day, would gather any surplus food and donate it to charities voluntarily feeding the local homeless population each night. This demonstrates the heterotopic nature of the flea market as a space that has both a commercial role and a social commitment, functioning as a fundamentally paradoxical enterprise.

Continually reconfiguring, the *Co-Op* facilitates not just the *Dublin-Flea* but a variety of other activities (e.g., meetings, markets, educational classes, grassroots community activism, etc.). Therefore, the multi-functionality of the space and the multiplicity of meanings that emerge from the space shows how meaning(s) for both the *Co-Op* and the *Dublin-Flea* shift based on who is there, when and why they are there, and the activities being undertaken there by others. Akin to an alternative secret identity, the commercial market space of the *Co-Op* during the daytime and on market Sundays is very different to the mid-week/night-time free community space, with events ranging from mother and baby sessions to poetry slams. The flea market was a heterotopic space that opened and closed at regular intervals, and such limited opening times contributed to a sense of occasion around the market and a desire not to miss out if not in attendance, signifying it as a more elite and exclusive enterprise.

Whilst there was no entry fee for customers, the financial struggle of keeping afloat and negotiating with customers resulted in a sense of precarity for the traders, which had a gatekeeping effect, as only those with considerable financial security that could withstand the economic impact of a bad day's sales were able to trade long-term in the market. The marketplace offers completely different meanings to stall holders than for their customers, and these also change subject to when it is used for entirely other functions- market-based or not. The flea market is both a site of potential individuality for customers (i.e., they can purchase singularised items that become treasured possessions, etc.) and a site of community for vendors- or vice versa. This demonstrates how one place can carry contested and contradicting meanings, depending on the subject, and is further influenced by how the heterotopia shapes the subject. The assortment of things/ activities that the space enables and the diversity of meanings, practices, uses, and values that different stakeholders utilise in one location demonstrate the heterotopic nature of the *Dublin Flea Market*.

A further example of this sense of the flea market as a heterotopic site pertains to the actual forms of consumption undertaken there. Predominantly a leisable and middle-class clientele, shopping at the flea market is as much a space where consumer identity projects are undertaken, if not more so, than an act of provisioning. In the context of both the *Co-Op* and the *Dublin-Flea*, we can see how everyday life within contemporary spaces (and their temporal configurations) possesses tensions and contradictions. This applies to the second-hand consumption that occurs at the market that at once merges opposing concerns and characteristics, e.g., the market is a source of leisure and labour, consumers undergo shopping for basic provisioning and domestic ornamentation, and the *Dublin-Flea* is simultaneously a market space and a cultural setting all at once. There is a sense of clashing yet symbiotic objectives as second-hand goods are negotiated between traders seeking to make a living and their customers, haggling and creating a lifestyle they aspire to through acquiring particular objects. Within the heterotopia of the flea market, there occurs additional micro-heterotopias, and, in this instance, the very space of the flea-market transaction constitutes a heterotopia.

The presence and circulation of second-hand goods themselves further contribute to the sense of heterotopia to be found at the market, with things being out of time and out of place as the most obvious example. The market concentrates a variety of times and spaces, made visible by the juxtaposition of really old things and newer stuff; the 'vintage' but also just the old rubbish that people bring in. One could argue that the flea market's whole purpose is inherently heterotopic: to take the old and render it new by selling it on (and selling the idea of a lifestyle, ethos, etc). This process whereby unwanted goods are rendered new and desirable again evokes a nostalgia-driven return to older forms of provisioning and imagining alternative futures of consumer culture that both offer alternatives to and are embedded in contemporary modes of second-hand consumption. This appears as a subversion of or contested return to traditional modes of exchange. It provides consumers with goods to purchase but concurrently grants a respite or temporary escape from the norms and rules of the economy where people can engage in different kinds of future-oriented imaginations.

Flea-market goods (and the massive variety in states of previous use that they tend to come in) enable people to exert and display social status and capital by reclaiming or acquiring value from things no longer deemed worthy or useful. Trends accompanying this or aligning with the market's efforts to valorise old belongings can ease the tension between the traditional consumer veneration of newness and the actual material states of some goods. For example,

popular trends for old, vintage, "shabby-chic" aesthetics (whereby the patina of age, whether acquired through use or intentional design, can make people feel better about buying ornaments/ unnecessary items as they stand out less due to their lack of shininess or obvious newness, etc. This can ease the conflict between minimalist aspirations (not buying) and being unable to avoid the consumer society. Due to this variety of goods and variety in their condition converging together in the material chaos of the flea market each month, the market brings together time and space, and, at the individual trader level, almost functions as personal museums or subculture/trends museums. One can get insight into the personal tastes, subjective values of goods and even one's private life, which applies to selling and purchasing at the markets. If, for some, the idea of parting with old things is difficult and emotionally laden, the market both represents a more desirable outcome than the bin, i.e., the flea market rescues unwanted material goods from the category of clutter/junk. It presents an assemblage of discarded items requiring salvage from the right buyer, i.e., the flea market acts as a conduit for the accumulation of clutter.

The precarity that the *Dublin-Flea* would later contend with and be subsumed by also contributes, in hindsight, to its heterotopic quality. The market space was located on the margins, both physically and figuratively. The market was initially located in a not-quite-dead zone, but grey zone of the city but, over its ten years, came to exert influence across the city as the markets grew in reputation and visitors. This positioning was noted by the narratives of my interviewees, with a discourse of resistance to the mainstream being frequently evoked, i.e., resistance to consumer culture, resistance to capitalism, resistance to throwaway culture, etc. For many involved in the flea market, there was a sense of the market being separate from capitalism; however, this was a paradox as whilst the flea market may appear to oppose consumerism, it is enabled by and dependent upon it. This liminal positioning of the market was also evident in how people spoke of the flea market, with some deeming it a space of to-be-discovered treasure where consumption practices are elevated and reified, yet, for others, it was mostly a dump where the excesses discarded by capitalism landed. Time both accumulates and is dispersed in the circulations of the flea market, and it is, at once, a nomadic space, a transitory collection of fragments of lives, people, things, and trends, and can be considered as the material manifestation of excess, forming nothing more than a rubbish heap of time. The circulations of time, space, people and things at the flea market thus can make the markets alluring and playful; the lack of regulation, transparency, predictability, etc., means that the flea market has its own sense of time, layout, and inventory. The *Dublin-Flea* is at once both

extremely localised but also liminal. Oriented towards the fleeting, sporadic, carnivalesque, it reads as both a heterotopic space and a form of bricolage, subject to constant and changing re-configurations.

The contested and multitude of discourses around value(s) and what factors determine whether an item is/has/has no value is also heterotopic in scope due to the market's ability to juxtapose and hold and contain such diverse beliefs and meanings. Here, I reference the work of the artist Frances Heinrich's (2004) installation '*Buyer Beware*', in which she likens the flea market to a metaphor for life in the C21st, whereby everyday life is an incessant marketplace, and this is made obvious at the flea-market where we can see the commodification of everything. The flea market is a chaotic place with limited goods, time, and reliability of vendors, etc. Objects are literally presented on dirty floors with neither (in some cases) price tags nor guarantees. Therefore, such objects must be able to sell themselves (aided by the narratives the vendors craft for them) and justify their prices without the benefits of marketing. This is different again when we also consider how old, second-hand goods need to perform their desirability when also placed alongside goods from small businesses/ artisan makers. Here, I argue a link to the heterotopia with the idea of the market as a living entity where uncertainty abounds; the appeal and values afforded to goods change over time, and people seek out treasures that may no longer be deemed worthwhile in the current zeitgeist but remain meaningful for the individual long-beyond their perceived commodity worth. Therefore, part of the appeal and defining features of a 'good and proper' flea market, as explained by my participants, is a site of consumption whose logistics construct and enable a sense of the hunt, the adventure, and the inconspicuous wins to be found by those in possession of the necessary expertise and a discerning eye, etc. 'Good and proper', in this specific context, means the antithesis of high-street shopping defined by clear displays, colour/style/model options, ease of viewing and return, etc. Within the heterotopic space of the *Dublin-Flea*, 'good and proper' subverts this and instead is sourced from piles of items heaped together, requiring vigilance, sifting through and, as always, a spark of luck or serendipity.

However, the flea market is also distinctive in several ways, which blurs its definition as a heterotopic space. Spaces of second-hand consumption are spaces of commercial exchange, i.e., transactional exchanges of second-hand goods, and are simultaneously places of enchantment and entanglement between circulating goods and people. Thus, flea markets are constituted not just as a space for exchanging money for things but also as a playful,

dynamic and emerging space that enables curiosity, emotion, nostalgia and memory. Hansson & Brembeck (2015) adopt the 'flea-market hydraulics' metaphor to describe this. Here, flea-market hydraulics can be understood as 'the fluid character of consumption and the circulatory essence of (flea) markets' such as the second-hand items for sale, but also the display mechanisms, consumer flow logics and forms of subjectivities that they produce (2015: 92) as a mechanism to interrogate the various flows and circulations rendered visible at the market. Therefore, some of the more idiosyncratic logics and quirks of the flea market's operating principles differentiate it from other first-cycle consumption practices and spaces, such as shopping for commodities on the High Street, and which are necessary to understand the types of consumption, circulations and negotiations over value that occurs within and through the flea-market.

Significant dimensions of the flea market pertain to the material objects at the market, the spatial configuration of the market, and finally, the suspension of normative modes of purchasing goods at the flea market via the re-working of conventional consumer practices of accepting versus haggling over prices. Firstly, flea-market objects differ from first-cycle commodities due to their secondhandedness, variety and singularisation. As anyone who has ever attended a flea market before can attest to, and as will be detailed in the following chapters, flea-market goods tend to be in a variety of conditions (i.e., items possess varying degrees of visible previous use and may still be functional or only decorative, etc.), are often one-off's (i.e., a seller may only have limited or even single iterations of an item for sale, etc.) and elicit varying and deeply subjective notions of worth, meaning or value (i.e., economic versus sentimental worth, etc.). Such contested notions of value(s) are informed by the material qualities of both the type of object (i.e., first-cycle commodity versus second-hand flea item, etc.) as well as the forms of values attributed to it (i.e., commercial value versus sentimental value, etc.). They will be examined later in this chapter.

Secondly, the constellation of the flea-market space each month is also distinguished from conventional first-cycle retail spaces. The flea market is literally and figuratively assembled, disassembled and reassembled each month. The flea market lacks a permanent configuration in the local landscape and instead can be understood as a temporary yet recurring consumption space and set of practices. This obviously impacts the physical layout of the market and how consumers engage with and experience the space and the items within it. The trading space for the *Flea* requires an abundance of space, and as such, is located on the

outskirts of Dublin's inner city (within the city centre, space is at a premium and thus mainly unaffordable to the organisers). Comprised of individual private vendors handling their specific merchandise and displays with varying degrees of professionalisation, where visitors can appraise, touch and engage with the goods on sale, and often with the chaotic back-and-forth movement of market-goers navigating the busy and overcrowded floorspace, customers traverse the market in chaotic, unpredictable flows, moving with, against and cutting across the crowds of people crammed in amongst the stalls. This is further complicated not just by the limited floorspace but by people stopping to browse at a stall, to chat with a vendor, or to try on/ try out an item, leading to stoppages and clustering of people trying to move past. Flea-market shopping circuits can be a more experientially intense, sensual and embodied engagement, for, as Hansson & Brembeck (2015) note, this spatial overlapping means that affective arousals 'may emerge from the presence of bodies being pulled and pushed together in a room bumping in to each other' and it is due to these circulations of goods and people that we can see how 'inside the flea market space customer activity is everywhere!' (2015: 93-102).

Visitors to the flea market thus experience the space differently than in conventional first-cycle consumption spaces, and, for many, it is these unique aspects of the market that represent its lure. Flea-market devotees invoke the serendipitous nature of the market and objects to be encountered. Their narratives also often referenced the thrill of the 'treasure hunt' to be had there and the desire to 'find a bargain' they could use as a form of cultural capital when conveying the story of the object's discovery to their friends and family. Thus, consumer dispositions (i.e., pleasure, curiosity, nostalgia and surprise, etc.) as well as preferences (i.e., the ability of second-hand goods to evoke desire or disgust, etc.) all converge at the market to create a certain sense of ambience (cf John F Sherry in Hansson & Brembeck (2015:103), and what Hansson & Brembeck refer to as 'the "wild" market form (2015:105). Flea markets can thus be distinguished by virtue of both their spatial and temporal configurations and dynamic flows of objects, people and clashing assessments of value(s), worth and meanings. These flows are often sensual and sensorially-experienced as 'Bodies responded differently to the properties of the flea market- its smell, colours, ruggedness, temperature, and content' (Hansson & Brembeck (2015:109).

Thirdly, other types of intimacies are more prevalent at the flea market than in traditional spaces of first-cycle consumption. Within the flea market, and especially for second-hand goods, price is (not universally but significantly more so) not so much set/determined as

final, so much as an entryway, invitation and starting point for potential customers to negotiate with the vendor. Haggling is welcomed, if not expected, at the flea market. For many, the expectation to engage in some form of haggling and the subsequent reduction in item cost is an unwritten norm of the flea-market transaction.

Conclusion:

The main theoretical framework this chapter uses to convey to the reader the complexity and paradoxical nature of the flea market is that of Michel Foucault's (1967) writing on the heterotopia, which can be understood as places where disparate, conflicting or multiple locations come together/ are juxtaposed within the same physical location. Foucault's concept of heterotopia presents a conceptual framework to further argue for a more nuanced understanding of the flea market. To recap, he stressed the importance of knowing 'what are the relations of vicinity, what kind of storage, circulation, reference and classification of human elements should take preference in this or that situation, according to the objective that is being sought' (Leach translation, 1997:331). The point of this is to realise that 'opposites that we take for granted, such as the contrast between public and private space, family and social space, cultural and utilitarian space, the space of pleasure and the space of work' (ibid) are illusory.

Although it is a different kind of space for traders and customers, I aim to disrupt the notion that it is fixed, static, bounded or homogenous. Therefore, we move next onto the logistics of how the *Dublin Flea-Market* is run in practice. In Chapter 4, we will look at trader and object typologies to understand the variety and richness in the types of traders and second-hand goods to be found at the *Dublin Flea* to convey the significant differences amongst the traders so as not to collapse and subsume all the various lived experiences of the traders into one account, inaccurately presenting them as a singular entity. Presenting the '*vendors of the Dublin Flea-Market*' as a stable and homogenous group would diminish or even conceal the variety of experiences that different traders represented and had in the markets each month.

To demonstrate how the market is continuously being re-made through the vendors, I will also document how the traders act as nexus points in the broader circulation of second-hand objects, alongside the morality discourses that often accompany them, as well as the contested and clashing beliefs about value(s) and meaning(s) encountered at the flea-market. I

am arguing for a more nuanced understanding of the flea market as a liminal, layered and, at times, paradoxical, contested space that possesses a variety of seemingly irreconcilable and incongruous values, practices and conceptions of the flea market. Grounding this exploration of the seemingly incompatible dimensions of the flea market still amongst the traders and the second-hand objects they work with, I turn to the anthropological literature to situate and draw out the complexities of the flea market and align myself closely with Joyce & Gillespie's (2015) work on object itineraries and circulation.

Chapter Four: The Traders.

“Flea markets are fun because they are the ultimate treasure hunt. Be open to the fact that you never know what you'll find. The most beautiful, quirky, funny, scary pieces may not have an intrinsic value.”

-Lara Spencer.

Saoirse & Flea Market Frustrations:

Saoirse had been attending the markets for just under a year, selling a small variety of handmade confections and chocolates when I met her. She would later grow her small business of luxury chocolates into several other retailers and stores around Dublin. She was born in Dublin, was in her mid-40s and had left a career in the pharmaceutical industry behind as she had grown tired of 'slaving away making ungrateful rich bastards richer' and wanted to become her own boss so that she would be the one to benefit from her efforts and 'insane work ethic'. What started as a hobby, a way of blowing off steam after her long days in the lab or office, became a passion she wanted to explore further. Explaining that she would 'regret if I didn't give it a good go', Saoirse spent all her free time developing and perfecting recipes, figuring out how to scale them for bulk batches, improving the presentation of her creations, figuring out packaging, and all the other logistical aspects. This process took about 16 months, and she decided it was time to trial her products at the markets.

Initially, the excitement of people buying her items and the positive feedback she received were all that Saoirse focused on. Saoirse would sell out at her first few markets hours before closing time, although she credits that to 'not having enough stock and generally not knowing what I needed to be properly prepared'. This honeymoon period lasted about six

months; over time, she grew increasingly frustrated at the lack of craft markets focused on food and eating products/experiences. As her business developed and she invested more and more of her time, energy and money, Saoirse found it increasingly aggravating to be limited to the predominantly second-hand markets. One day, when I stopped to say hello to her at her stall, I noticed that the attendance at the market that day seemed slower than usual. There were not the usual numbers of people gathered around her stall vying to try one of her samples or purchase some of her bestsellers- the truffles in various flavours. It would be a good time to chat. I was wrong. Saoirse was in a terrible humour. She launched into a rant whilst insisting that I chose a truffle for free- as she always did and for which I always felt somewhat guilty into purchasing a couple of bars to share with friends and family to try and reciprocate her generosity. Saoirse was upset and annoyed, and she spoke in a sharp but hushed tone, angrily re-ordering and fussing over the display contents of her table as she spoke. The large glass mason jars she displayed her various truffles in clinked and jangled as she fidgeted with them, clattering them carelessly off the wooden boards piled up with samples of chopped-up truffle.

Saoirse was behind on sales for the day and was considering packing up and going home early despite another four hours of the market left to go. She hissed that she had argued with the parent of some little 'snot-nosed gurrer' that had been circling past her table, snatching handfuls of her samples, trying to stick his hand in the jars and generally pestering her and being a 'total nuisance'. Saoirse had told him to stop, and when he came back for the third or fourth time, she had had enough and had 'let a roar at the little brat. NO! STOP! You cannot have this, and you cannot touch anything else'. Her warning had startled the child, who had run off, but moments later, his furious mother, dragging the crying child by the hand across the mostly empty hall, had marched up to her. Suddenly aware of the onlookers' present watching the drama unfold, Saoirse noticed her coming across and was expecting her to apologise for

the stock the boy had contaminated by shoving his 'mucky paws' into one of the full jars before she had shouted at him to stop. Saoirse had pre-emptively run the scenario in her head, telling me how she would choose to graciously decline the mother's offer to compensate her for the jar of truffles she had had to dispose of for health and safety reasons, even though that meant she now had none of her chocolate orange truffles, a market-day bestseller.

Alas, the interaction did not go as she had mentally mapped out in those few intervening seconds. The child's mother was furious at her. She had proceeded to 'get right up in my face, wag her fingers at me and warned me that I had zero right to speak to her child like that or to tell him no... that he was a child and, of course, a child would be interested in chocolate and that it was silly of [her] to be upset by a child wanting chocolate'. Saoirse was incredulous and became even more fired up. She told the woman that she should watch her child instead of letting him run amuck, that it was 'disgraceful' how he had behaved, and that 'his mother should be ashamed of herself'. The two women exchanged barbs, becoming increasingly irate until the mother had to stop her son from sneakily reaching for another jar of the truffles, grabbing him and stalking off without uttering another word to Saoirse. This fight had happened about twenty minutes before I had stopped to speak with Saoirse, and she had been stewing in anger since then, unable to calm herself down. She went on to complain about how she had been treated, the jar of truffles she had written off, and blamed some of what had happened on the second-hand nature of the market. She said,

'it's these markets, these stupid markets full of old stuff that anyone can just go digging in. people think they are entitled to touch whatever they want and that's fine if like them over there [gestures across the hall] you are only selling old junk anyway but that's not me. My stuff is professional. It's a proper business. I am sick of children thinking they can just grab handfuls of chocolate and then they spit it out...they don't even eat it because they are only used to cheap crap or they are not going to like pistachio or rosewater... refined flavours. It

just...it just...all of this [*gestures around again*] cheapens my brand being next to broken and old and dirty crap but you have no choice. There are no markets regularly on that don't have all that junk that I can be at and build a customer base from. Instead, businesses like mine are stuck surrounded by piles of rubbish and yet I have to pay just as much as they do when they are just selling any old random shite'.

I start this chapter with Saoirse because she demonstrates how conflict in the flea market often results from incompatible beliefs and notions of value that different traders hold. This clash in values was less about an actual conflict or falling out and more about a general disdain held by one of the regular artisanal traders towards the second-hand sellers she would find herself surrounded by each market day.

Although likely heightened by the unpleasant encounter she had just had, Saoirse's rant revealed some interesting underlying assumptions about the merit or value that should be accorded to different market goods. For her, this was a passion project for which she had made significant life changes to bring it to fruition. She had poured her time, energy, money and whole self into the business, and Saoirse could not reconcile how traders who, in her opinion, 'merely' collected 'random piles of rubbish' may have had to undergo similar upheavals, investments or who had also had to make many sacrifices to get to the market. Saoirse here is less concerned with comparing chocolate truffles' material qualities with second-hand furniture. Instead, her discontent is with the lack of suitable retail spaces where she can situate herself and her products that allow her to be an emerging business owner, but one that has undergone efforts to professionalise and elevate her growing business from its emergence as a hobby at the flea market. Saoirse feels that she needs to use the local flea- and craft markets as an informal space to grow and develop her business; however, she feels that being associated with some of the other types of goods at the market, i.e., those second-hand items that may be

dusty, broken, old, damaged, etc., and that do not have to adhere to various health and safety regulations that her consumable goods do, may detract from her prestige by association.

The diminished Value that Saoirse attributes to second-hand goods and their proximity to her products somehow invokes a sense of risk or contagion for Saoirse. Dismissing those second-hand goods as mere rubbish, devoid of worth, value or meaning, means that Saoirse fails to acknowledge the very source of value that, for the second-hand traders and their consumers, emerges from their provenance, previous lives and unknown futures. This is a clash over the ability, or willingness, of different traders to imbue different categories of objects with (or a lack of) value. When there is discord, in this instance due to the perceived tainting capacity of one type of object on another due to their spatial proximity, we see how, just as is the case with the markets themselves, value is not static, homogenous, universal or stable. This instance of clashing notions of value at the flea market is one example of how contested the notion of value is.

Having considered the space(s) of the flea market, the chapter will shift focus to the traders in the market. This chapter focuses on the lived experiences of trading for my research participants. These are the various traders who form the lifeblood of the markets. To do this, I have created a conceptual typology that identifies categories of traders based on their frequency of trading and their perceived (by themselves and others) level of expertise and social status within the community of flea-market traders. Following this, I present an overview of the main types of flea-market object categories. Through the dual lens of traders and their goods, I will demonstrate that conflicting notions of value (s) often occur. Further, in my analysis of case studies of discord between traders – such as Saoirse above - and their clashing systems of

attributing worth and value to material objects, I will demonstrate how the flea market should not be reduced to a stable, uniform or singularised entity, and instead, represents an ever-shifting, contested, and contradictory set of practices and the people, objects, space and exchanges within it are constantly undergoing disruption, negotiation and transformation as the market operates on any given market Sunday. `

In this chapter, I ask what moralities surround the flea market. Is it predominantly a space of economic or monetary value or a space for converging social, financial and personal values? As my discussion unfolds, I reject a position that claims that value should only be understood as an economic property of a commodity. Instead, I align closely with Graeber's (2001) argument that expressions of value (s) are ongoing projects of meaning and purpose-making. I borrow Kluckhohn's (1951) model that values are simultaneously personal and social. This perspective supports my ethnographic findings that the very idea of value and the flea-market goods that possess it is not homogenous or stable but a moral space that is continually recreated. Clashing ideas of value in the flea market represent yet another aspect of the market's core components, i.e., its people, place, products and practices are contested and subjected to ongoing circulations of value -both economic and symbolic.

It is only through their collective labour that the markets are successful. Centring the stories of vendors of second-hand goods and antiques and other types of traders, I argue that the traders hold a central position in the markets as critical nodes in the broader network of second-hand object circulation. The traders are repositories of second-hand and flea-thing expertise; they act as curators of both the many second-hand objects they source and sell and custodians of the stories, narratives and biographies pertaining to the past lives and future

potentials of those items. Within the practices of alternative exchange at the flea market, traders can be conceptualised as nodes or junctures which objects move through. Within the flea market, traders both source and circulate flea-market goods and, subsequently, the traders act as one authority on what constitutes 'value' (including both monetary and symbolic connotations of value and worth, etc.) and desirability for the material goods they trade in within a dynamic setting where value is fluctuating, contested and often determined by a complex convening of factors.

The Traders:

Traders procure and provide second-hand and artisanal goods and are involved in all the negotiations and financial transactions at the market, i.e., they are critical players in every sale-successful or otherwise. However, they are also heavily influential in the other forms of social transactional exchanges in the market. These can include their social interactions and exchanges with visitors to the market, shaping the purchasing process through conversation, sales tactics, negotiating and haggling, etc., as well as educating their customers and own traders on the provenance, monetary value, historical significance, and any other expertise/knowledge they may possess for the items they sell.

Significant variety occurs in the types of traders who sell and trade at the markets. Though I use the term 'trader' throughout this dissertation to refer to both individual vendors and whilst referring to the traders as a collective, it is crucial to note that the 'traders' at the flea market are not homogenous. Significant diversity exists among my participants, and as such, it is now necessary to consider some of the idiosyncrasies that shape and influence each vendor.

This section will provide a classificatory overview of the numerous sub-categories that emerged from the ethnographic research, shaped by those traders involved.

Firstly, throughout my time in the markets, of the 20 or so traders I became most acquainted with, I came to classify the types of traders with the following categories, which speaks to the frequency with which they traded: *One-Offers*, *Hobbyists & Side Hustlers*, and, finally, the *Professionals*. Most traders in the market were members of the latter two categories. However, tracking the *One-Offers/ Rupture* traders is difficult as they tend to appear more sporadically at the market and are more challenging to connect with due to their limited and fleeting presence. These are neither static nor rigid categories, and the boundaries between them were porous, with traders sometimes moving between them over their years at the markets. That said, I argue that these categories are a useful way of revealing the key differences between those who hire a stall (trading space) to have some fun and to enjoy the 'buzz' of the market day and those more frequent traders whose income and thus livelihood were dependent on a successful day's trading, and who faced significant challenges should it be a slow market-day.

Secondly, shifting in focus from the traders, I foreground the objects brought to, found/encountered at, and taken from the flea market as these represent another fundamental strand of what constitutes the flea market but which are often overlooked in importance. Sketching out a framework for flea-object typologies, I will demonstrate the role in which the enormous variety of objects (and thus their accompanying competing notions of value (s)) present at the market further problematise the idea of the market as homogenous and, in fact, contribute to defining what type of trader their temporary custodians at the market function as.

The main distinctions in object categorisation that emerged from my research and to be discussed here focus on the biographical status of an item and the previous circulations it has undergone. Ethnographic examples of these object categories and their contested associations of value (s) (or lack thereof) will be discussed with an emphasis on the vendors that traded in *Second-Hand* or often spoken of as “*pre-loved*” goods and those who mainly sell *Artisanal*, craft or new products.

One-Offers: Ruptures:

The first group of traders are those whom I refer to as the *One-Offer/Ruptures* and who were the least common type of trader. This category refers to people who take out a market stall often in response to changes in life circumstances, such as profound or sudden ruptures in their lives. The decision to trade is undertaken as a strategy to manage or divest themselves of a specific set of material belongings. Often, traders in this category were motivated to try selling at the market to manage the actual physical goods and the complicated emotions that could come with a sudden influx of new belongings or a desire to purge personal possessions. Through such deliberate divestment, they attempted to rid themselves of items they had come to no longer want nor need to possess and separate themselves from obligations that they felt accompanied the ownership of certain goods.

The traders I interviewed in this category shared with me various life experiences and situations that they felt had necessitated a purging of problematic items. Many of these contributing precursors were grounded in life events they had experienced as negative, inconvenient and painful. This sense of needing to purge is best exemplified by Anna, a 37-year-old primary school teacher, whose recent dramatic and traumatic change in life

circumstances had left her feeling paralysed and overwhelmed by what to do with much of the stuff in her home. Graham, Anna's husband, had lost his battle with cancer the previous year and had passed away, leaving behind both Anna and the contents of their three-bedroom terraced home that they had amassed over their ten years of living together in their home in a suburb of county Dublin.

In our interview, Anna described how she was still deep in the grieving process, yet she felt simultaneously pressured, motivated and terrified to start dealing with Graham's belongings. Anna explained how encountering Graham's stuff- the clothes still hanging in their shared wardrobe, his half-used toiletries in the bathroom cabinet, the sterile medical supplies from his final days at home, and his 'various books, gaming stuff, and random stuff that belonged to him, as well as to us, was at once a comfort and a source of despair for her. Anna spoke openly about this conflict with me, explaining how,

‘Sometimes, the memories that are stuck in those things feel like they are haunting me and I bring a few small bits here [*to the flea-market*] to practice letting go, only the stuff that feel unimportant or not super connected to him and to see how that feels but there is so much... our entire home and all the things... I cannot get away from it and its so heavy and they keep you stuck and I feel like... well do you remember that movie with the giant flying magic dog-creature, *The NeverEnding Story*? There is a scene where one of the characters and his horse are getting dragged down in some kind of swamp or quicksand but its their sadness that traps them and well, sometimes I feel trapped and despairing about what to do with all this stuff. He’s gone, he’ll never use it and it surrounds me with all this sadness but then is getting rid of it a relief or will I regret it because it’s all I have left of him and should I not fight to keep that even if it feels like I am sinking into my own swamp of sadness?’.

For some of the other *One-Offer/ Rupture traders* I spoke with, other decisions to trade resulted from finally taking action on overdue house projects, such as clearing out overlooked domestic spaces such as attics, basements or garages, etc., and opting to sell personal

possessions after decluttering and having deemed them no longer desirable or necessary, effectively re-conceptualised them as burdensome, problematic clutter. (These processes whereby items shift and circulate between categories, divested or imbued with more or less value and worth, will be explored in later chapters). Some of the events that had been experienced as troubling or negative life changes that were invoked in the narratives of participants included but were not limited to the following: ridding oneself of the belongings of an ex-partner post-breakup/ divorce, moving home- especially relevant when downsizing, inheriting property from a deceased family member sometimes with no prior discussion which led people to feel blindsided or that specific obligation had been thrust upon them, and finally, being forced to emigrate due to feeling a lack of opportunities to be present if staying in Ireland.

Some of the *One-Offer/Ruptures* sellers were able to tap into a sense of productive purging at the markets in direct response to their shifting life circumstances, seeing the ridding of such goods as helpful, financially lucrative and somewhat, as one of my participants, Olive deemed it to be, 'freeing'. Contrastingly, for some other vendors, the experience was mired in sadness and did not necessarily bring any sense of relief to them. For example, Olive, a 24-year-old clerical administrator in the civil service, found a sense of catharsis in divesting herself of some of the items that had been gifts from a previous partner. Their breakup had been 'relatively mutual after realising we were headed in different directions', and so, they had managed to disentangle their relationship without any intense conflict, causing feelings of anger or spite. Olive's ex had bought her various trinkets from work trips abroad and clothing and accessories (shoes, handbags, etc.) that she no longer wanted to keep.

Olive had contemplated donating the items to a charity shop or distributing them amongst friends. However, she decided 'on a whim one day' to try selling them at the market, along with some other older items of clothing and household wares that she had decluttered shortly after the breakup, looking to 'refresh the flat and make it mine with just my stuff and what I want'. Olive went on to describe how she felt the clothes 'were in such good condition. I didn't want to leave them to the charity shop because they were perfect, and I knew I could make some money off them because they are quite unique and trendy, and I thought I could put the money into doing up the flat'. This decision to divest herself of her no-longer desired belongings by selling them at the flea-market, rather than donating them to a charity shop also hints at Olive's (and presumably this would be influenced by broader socio-cultural mindsets about consumption, second-hand and consumer discarding) that certain types of goods in certain types of quality and condition are best moved through different channels of divestment. This process of selecting the 'correct' channel/ route for divesting oneself of one's material belongings will be examined later in the dissertation. The latent and remaining Value that Olive attributed to the clothing items was sufficient in her eyes to justify the effort of selling them (i.e., securing a market stall, the labour and time required, etc.) as opposed to dropping them off a charity shop, reveals how personalised and subjective evaluations of value influence, shape and even determine both the trajectories of second-hand goods that converge at the *Dublin Flea*, as well as those that traverse across wider networks of alternative and second-hand consumption in Dublin, nationally and globally.

During my ethnographic research, I encountered numerous other sellers in this *One-Offers/Ruptures* category (although it is interesting to note that none of the 15 or so individuals, I interviewed under this category identified themselves as a trader in any way. For them, this was a one-off, or at an absolute most, couple of days' worth of work that meant they could rid

themselves of troubling or problematic items) sporadically, and most of these field encounters were brief with limited follow-up because this was not deemed to be overly meaningful and was often minimised in importance in their narratives. This in itself constitutes an interesting paradox whereby several of my participants explicitly stated that the market was relatively inconsequential in their day-to-day lives yet was often the chosen means through which they were able to rid themselves of items that had, at best, caused inconvenience, and even distress or trauma in the extreme. Engaging with this category of trader was infrequent and sporadic, as they tended to only turn up to a market to try to sell and divest themselves of as much of their accumulations as possible on one single day. This, in turn, meant that their financial motivations were also diverse, ranging from those trying to make as much profit as possible to those who just wished to rid themselves of the goods. I even witnessed people donating or giving away whatever remained unsold at the end of the day rather than taking them home with them again.

One of these traders, Niall, a 22-year-old accounting student, had deferred his studies for a year to go over and spend time working as a fruit-picker in Australia with his mates in order to finance 'the sessions and travel and chilling out, surfing, meeting the locals, the girls [*laughs nervously*] and just experience a bit of sunshine and the craic and taking it easy', that they had planned together. Moving out of his student accommodation, he had limited space to store his most important belongings in his childhood boxroom. His parents had agreed to store some of his most prized possessions: guitars, a gaming console, a bicycle, etc. However, Niall had decided to try and raise money for his trip by selling a load of his old clothes, games, university textbooks, kitchen equipment, as he put it, 'basically anything I don't need to bring with me down under or that I would forget about while I am gone for the year [*laughs*] and sure maybe I mightn't even be back. I might fall in love with the sun and the beach, find an

Aussie wife, and live my best life there. Niall explained that he had done a few markets, made some money that he would 'put to cover the flights' and that anything that was left behind on his stall at the end of that market was 'either getting sold really cheap and if it is still there I will see if I can throw it in a black sack and leave it to the charity shop and if they won't take it, I am throwing it in the skip 'cause I just need the stuff gone and dealt with before I leave'.

For Niall, the financial windfall of selling at the market was secondary to his need to get rid of the stuff he no longer needed before he left the country. This contrasts with Olive, as whilst both ultimately wanted to purge their belongings, for Olive, the potential financial gain was optimised by taking the time to sell at the market. In contrast, Niall was less interested in maximising his profits, caring primarily about ridding himself of his belongings. Various factors are incorporated into the routes of circulation and divestment of personal possessions at the flea market, and these will be explored in-depth later in the dissertation.

Hobbyists & Side Hustlers:

The second grouping of sellers I refer to as the *Hobbyists & Side-Hustlers*. This category of vendors refers to those who trade at the markets more frequently than the *One-Offers/Ruptures* and for whom the sociable experience of being at the market is equally as important as making a profit from the limited selection of goods they have to sell. These traders often self-identified and spoke of their trading practices due to their interest in and passion for second-hand goods. Repeatedly, they would situate their casual trader status via reiterating their limitations, repeatedly stating that they were 'no expert', that they were 'only having some fun' and that they 'only dealt in a small selection of specific stuff' and trading was 'mostly for fun' as they

‘didn’t really make much money’, but that they ‘loved the buzz of the markets and chatting to people’ and ‘doing something different’.

Take, for example, *Freya*, a 37-year-old therapist who had slowly built an occasional side hustle making hand-poured candles using soy wax, essential oils and extracts and adding tiny tumbled crystals, figurines and dried petals to decorate them. *Freya* had started making candles as a hobby and a form of self-care to help her decompress from the intense emotional labour she exerted in her job as a crisis counsellor for teenagers and young adults. Discovering a natural aptitude for blending fragrances and making aesthetic candles in little copper tins or old repurposed china cups, she had sourced at the flea market and bulk-bought ‘for a steal’. Initially, she took some beginner-level classes and purchased more supplies to craft them at home. *Freya* found the creative process really soothing and soon ended up with a surplus of candles. Gifting some to her friends and family resulted in many comments about how she should sell them, so she would take a stall at the flea market every couple of months and would sell off a lot of her inventory in order to make space to make more new candles, using the proceeds earned to buy more craft supplies or to put towards more treats or indulgent spends such as a handbag she had coveted, or a weekend trip to London to catch up with an old university friend. *Freya* was not financially dependent on selling her candles at the market. Instead, it provided an opportunity for her to top-up her finances and to invest in more craft materials- she had also started experimenting with yarn crafts, including cross-stitch, crochet and knitting, that ultimately served a self-care purpose to help her navigate the stress of her job.

In this way, these traders conceived of and presented themselves as hobbyists or those who enjoyed making extra money. They saw themselves as somewhat different to those they described as *Professional* or 'serious' traders, whose expertise was significantly more established and respected. These casual traders tended to have a more limited repertoire of goods stocked at any given time and invested less in their purchasing stock for sale. Additionally, their knowledge about second-hand goods was generally more limited and superficial than those they described as the 'serious' traders.

Professionals:

The final category of traders, whom I engaged most with and who represented the majority of traders at the flea market, were those I categorised as *Professional* traders or, as they often self-referred, the 'regulars'. For these individuals, selling at the markets formed a significant proportion of their overall livelihood, with many leaving other careers to enjoy the flexibility of being a vendor. Specifically, they praised their ability to manage themselves and their own time that accompanied it. That said, this could also be a stressful and highly unpredictable way to earn a living, and many of the traders in this category were forthcoming about the many challenges they faced, which will be discussed later in the chapter. *Professionals* constituted the traders that you would expect to see at each market. They tended to have their own regular 'spot' in the market halls (an opt-in benefit that they paid a small extra fee to the market organisers in exchange for securing a set stall location at the *Dublin Flea*). They were well known by each other and highly regarded by many of the regular market attendees. They had long since developed reputations as experts in their respective niches. They were often recommended as the 'go-to person' for anyone trying to source a specific type or style of product. For many second-hand traders in this category, selling at the markets was

supplemented by multiple other 'gigs' in connotated/related second-hand consumption spaces. Examples included owning second-hand stores, running online businesses selling wares, operating as restorers/advisors, or working in auction houses.

Within the category of *Professional* traders, a smaller group, yet those who did not deal in second-hand goods were those who identified as *crafters*, *artists*, or, more broadly, *makers*. They used the markets as a lower-stakes pilot space to gauge interest and promote their products, gaining exposure before committing to an official business strategy. Some of these start-up companies could leverage and learn from trading in the markets and would go on to develop successful and fully operational businesses/brands. One example of this from the *Dublin Flea Market* was a company named *White Maus*, whose two founders had started selling jars of handmade condiments and sauces at the market. Having started selling small batches of their products with no labels or branding, they had managed to build up a cult following, expanded their product line with enough demand to start wholesale supply for local cafes and eateries across the city, and launched their website where customers could complete one-off sales or sign up to a subscription service.

As outlined above, the diversity amongst those who sell various goods at the market means that the market traders cannot be considered one uniform collective; doing so would render the variety and scope of traders present at the market invisible. Differences in trader motivations for selling, frequency of engagement with the market, types of goods sold, and their subjective relationships to those items are idiosyncratic, complex, often- contested (as will be examined later in this chapter), and demonstrate a diverse and fluid series of encounters

with first and second-hand goods, alongside engaging with overlapping and conflicting beliefs about the value, worth, and meaning to be had in such flea-market things.

This shows us that simplistic ideas of the market as a set and bounded location or set of uniform practices fail to consider the complexity and competing practices, belief- systems and material goods that occupy the flea market each month. The market as a space and practice is best understood as an ongoing project, with various constitutive elements, such as the selection of traders on any particular Sunday temporarily in time and space, coming together to form an assemblage of people, goods and practices that make up the flea-market. Flea markets are always different, and as such, the market is constantly undergoing a transformative process of being curated, dismantled and re-formed.

Having paid attention to both the flea market as a unique configuration of economic practices of transactional exchanges and having outlined the variety in trader typology, we now consider another strand that contributes to collectively forming the market each month. On the one hand, traders 'make and re-make' the market through their selling practices, subjectively informed by their aims and objectives, i.e., maximising profit, purging no-longer-wanted goods, pursuing a side hustle or livelihood as a professional trader, etc. The traders are a crucial, core element of the making of the flea market, but of course, what also constitutes the market beyond people and practices are the objects circulating through those different traders each month. As with the diversity evident amongst and between the traders, so too exists a constellation of types of objects that converge at the flea market. It is in the discussions pertaining to their value and stages of evaluation that such second-hand objects undergo at multiple stages during their journey to and from the flea market that we can witness how

competing frameworks and conceptualisations of value (both monetary and symbolic) underscore the flea-market and further complicate the practices that are undertaken there.

Value (a loaded term unpacked later in this chapter) can be assigned to an object by a trader or customer on sentimental or nostalgic grounds. In contrast, some other flea-market goods are understood to possess or retain value on their own terms. For example, certain labels or objects whose provenance can be traced to a desirable design period or specific maker are often understood at the market as possessing more financial worth. Therefore, their value is more rooted in a monetary than a symbolic notion of value.

Discourses about value and worth at the flea market, therefore, are subjective and specific. They may include a range of factors such as object function or utility, shared monetary-based valorisation of certain categories of goods, the sense of a financial ‘bargain’ to be had, and the crafting of object charisma that traders deploy to their customers when trying to make a sale. Such object charisma is derived from the traders' ability to evoke and convey the past life (s) of an object and the latent or dormant potential that resides within it. Traders wove stories and tales about the objects and imbued them with a sense of life, vitality, magic, etc. All of these contributed to the sense of worth and value ascribed to the object, and examples of this crafting narratives about the flea-market objects will be discussed in the following chapters. For now, we turn our attention to flea-market goods as another important thread/component woven together along with the people and trading practices that occur each Sunday to create the flea market.

Flea-Market Things- Second-hand Goods, Artisanal Goods and Everything in Between:

Having established three categories of traders based on the frequency with which they traded at the markets, i.e., *One-Offers/ Ruptures*, *Hobbyists & Side Hustlers*, and *Professionals*, we now shift our focus to the types of objects present at the flea market. While it would be an impossible task, Sisyphean, in essence, to provide a definitive list of every single instance of an item that was at the market, instead, I aim to provide some umbrella categories to conceptualise the type of objects and to convey a sense of their disparate meanings, valuations, thus further problematising the idea of the flea-market as a stable, static, homogenous or singular entity. The types of objects traders dealt with also helped define them as traders. For example, Malcolm and Catherine, a married couple based in Wicklow, were Professional traders specialising in antiques and vintage goods and had developed a reputation as experts in procuring vintage goods from Ireland. In contrast, Gaye and Pat, a married couple living in Dublin, often went to France to source goods for selling at the *Dublin- Flea*. As such, customers often asked them to source specific items, such as vintage French fashion magazines, stemware, etc. Both of these couples will be discussed in greater detail later.

The main distinction I draw here in trying to present the reader with an understanding of the objects present at the flea market refers to whether the objects sold could be considered 'new' or 'second-hand'. *Second-hand* goods were those previously used by someone else, salvaged and brought to the market to find a new owner that would covet, appreciate and provide it with a new home. In a way, these can be considered pre-loved, currently, homeless possessions awaiting the possibility of finding a new owner through the chance encounters they underwent at the flea market. Contrastingly, the items I categorise as *New* goods mainly included items that had been created explicitly for sale at the market and/or other channels of alternative consumption with the intent to be sold, e.g., via the *Dublin-Flea*, a seller's independent website, other craft fairs, other second-hand markets, in select retail spaces such

as the *Co-Op* store, etc. These included craft items such as handmade candles, textile/yarn arts, original artwork, food businesses, bath and body products, etc.

During my ethnographic research, I noted that frequently, the majority of the traders to be encountered on any given Sunday, especially in the *Dublin Flea Market*, were second-hand sellers, usually representing about 80% of the overall vendors. This observation about most traders being predominantly second-hand vendors also seems consistent and generally similar to those at the *Brocante* market. Contrastingly, the *Pure Vintage* market, ironically, had a lower proportion of vintage sellers, averaging about a 50-50 split with those trading in other types of goods. Finally, the *Fusion* market, which possessed the most distinctive character of the markets I studied, often only had a 20% representation of second-hand traders. Owing to the nature of the markets as an ever-changing space, these percentages are neither a static nor a definitive analysis of the composition of the market, but rather seek to give some context for what an average day consisted of in each market and how the fluctuating numbers of second-hand traders impacted upon both the reputation of the specific market in the flea-market community, as well as the experiential experience of traversing each specific market.

It was the traders who favoured and specialised in second-hand items with whom I spent the majority of my time. These traders were also a diverse category and could be further defined as those who sold more expensive and rare antiques (generally agreed to be +100 years old), those who sold vintage (20+ years), those who sold retro (items considered 'dated' or out of style, often refers to mid-century modern style), those who sold bric-a-brac or miscellaneous old and used good of varying values and qualities, and those who sold partially upcycled or modified items. For the scope of this research, I will not be separating second-hand traders into

smaller categories. After careful consideration, and because many of the traders' changing inventories of goods included objects that belonged to many, some, or even all of these distinctions, it seems neither productive nor useful to be overly reductionist in trying to force neat containers which did not exist nor mirror what I had encountered in the field. Instead, in the case studies used throughout this dissertation, I will use the umbrella term '*Second-Hand*' to refer to such traders, giving a more specific and individual description of each vendor while discussing them specifically.

The other category of trader, based on the category of objects sold, which were represented in varying degrees at each of the markets I attended, pertains to those I refer to as *Artisanal*. As with second-hand traders, this is a catch-all term that includes those who self-identified or represented themselves as makers, artists, crafters, etc. This category encompassed traders selling consumables such as food and beverages, candles, and various body care products such as soaps and lotions. Here, I also include the traders who offered various services, such as tarot readings, art workshops, dance classes, or organic fruits and vegetables subscription boxes. To reiterate, both the *Second-Hand*- and *Artisanal*- traders categories encompass a variety of sellers, with the critical difference between them being that the artisans sold new products and the second-hand vendors sold goods that had a backstory and a previous life.

The Moralities of the Market:

The *Dublin Flea* was presented and continually enacted as a leisure space emphasising caring for and valuing second-hand goods, supporting small and local businesses, and a place to socialise, get a bargain and '*have the craic*'. This is evident in how the organisers presented

the market to the public, emphasising the sociable nature of the market as much, if not more so, than the fact that the market was a space for commercial transactions. The market organisers attempted to separate or distinguish the flea market from the dominant modes of consumption, i.e., shopping on the high street, at big-brand stores, online from *Amazon*, etc., as being more responsible, ethical, social and fun. This strategy of valorising the types of consumption that occur at the flea market and, as such, attempting to downplay the capitalistic nature of the flea market in order to present it as a more desirable shopping practice will be interrogated elsewhere in this dissertation. The *Dublin Flea* organisers thus sought to instil the market with particular values that they wished to elevate beyond the commercial nature of exchanging consumer goods for cash. This underlying ethos also shaped the market, as other consumer practices were altered and modified to fit within and exemplify this narrative of the flea market doing/ contributing to social good. Examples included traders using paper bags instead of plastic, offering refills on products to avoid excessive/surplus packaging, using local and organic ingredients for food products, encouraging customers to use reusable bags, etc.

Traders and markets were occasionally explicitly political. For example, in December of 2017, a '*Flea for Choice*' Market was held to raise funds for the *Repeal* (the fight for the Repeal of the 8th Amendment to ensure free, safe and legal abortion access) movement. At this pop-up market, there was a significant and visible emphasis on gender expression and gender politics, and this was more pronounced and centred in the presentation of the traders themselves, their stalls and the objects they sold, with the advertising on social media presenting the tagline of the market as '*Reduce, Reuse, Repeal*', and a selection of pro-choice merchandise available for purchase. The vendors at this market, on the whole, were younger, more forthcoming about their gender expression, sexuality and political beliefs, and heavily skewed female in terms of the organisers, vendors and attendees. Traders were charged a fee

stall of €30 (all donated to the *Abortion Rights Campaign*) and were free to keep any profits they generated on the day. However, any additional donations would also be accepted. Attendees had to pay a €1 entry fee and could buy merch and raffle tickets to win prizes donated by some of the artists, makers, and traders present on the day. A market such as the *Flea for Choice* market with such an explicit and intentional political aim did represent an outlier to the markets that were my main field sites and where I had spent years.

Haggling.

Specific types of transactions are more prevalent at the flea market than in traditional spaces of first-cycle consumption. Here, I am referring specifically to suspending consumer norms around accepting an item's price tag without question. That is not to say that on occasion, a customer might try to negotiate for a deal or a discount in conventional retail spaces (e.g., grocery stores, high street stores, etc.). However, the norm is that consumers tend to identify a commodity of interest, refer to the price tag, and make an evaluation as to whether they are prepared to pay that price or not, and this predominantly occurs without the input of the vendor/salesperson/checkout attendant, etc. Within the flea market, and especially for second-hand goods, price is (not universally but significantly more so) not so much set/determined as final, so much as an entryway, invitation and starting point for potential customers to negotiate with the vendor. Haggling is welcomed, if not expected, at the flea market. For many, the expectation to engage in some form of haggling and the subsequent reduction in item cost is an unwritten norm of the flea market transaction.

Vendors and sellers engage in this linguistic dance, going back and forth with counter-offers, and there is an asymmetrical power balance here between who is prepared to concede

more versus walk away. As such, haggling is also performative- both the trader and the vendor attempt to conceal the extent to which they desire the sale or the object in question, respectively, and both are simultaneously aware that the other is also attempting to downplay their desires in order to encourage the other to concede/ move closer to their position. This push-pull price negotiation is thus deeply subjective in each instance of haggling. The successful exchange and transmission of the object(s) in question can only be reached through mutual agreement, and as such, the price becomes mutually created. Other forms of non-financial exchanges influence it. Such haggles, when agreed upon, tend to be more intimate and instead of relying on a price tag, once a compromise is reached, there is a verbal acknowledgement of a deal having been struck, and this is often accompanied by a handshake- a physical commitment to seeing through the transaction based on the verbal negotiation just undertaken. Haggling is thus performative and theatrical and sometimes draws in the attention and participation of passersby, who are intrigued to see who will yield first.

Buyers and traders enact various strategies during haggling (as will be discussed in the case studies throughout this dissertation), such as appealing to the other's sense of care towards an item, offering bulk-buy discounts, invoking nostalgic feelings and promising it a 'safe' future, giving additional items as gifts, sharing projected and imagined future uses of an item, requesting 'a deal', etc. The usage of one or multiple of these tactics can be present in any single instance of flea-market haggling. That is not to say that every transaction results from haggling. Indeed, some people actively avoid haggling, finding it uncomfortable, confrontational or unnecessary. However, the socially sanctioned and encouraged norm of haggling exists in the flea market much more prominently than in other first-hand retail/consumption spaces. Through the spatiotemporal suspension of traditional consumption norms at the market, we can observe what Hansson & Brembeck refer to as the 'inter-corporeal flows [*that*] affected

consumer movement and consumer subjectivities' within the interactive and fluid context of the flea market and its "wild" circulations (2015:117).

Trader Hierarchies & Conflict: Lauren & Tony Versus Edward:

The second example of trader conflict speaks less to differing valuations of types of goods and reveals the potential risks involved in making deals with more-informed traders of similar types of goods. Lauren and her husband, Tony, were a recently married couple in their mid-30s and had only ever traded at the market once, having attended as customers for at least four years prior. Lauren was a primary school teacher, and Tony worked in corporate finance. They had met 12 years ago at a mutual friend's wedding and had dated, moved in together and spent considerable time pursuing their joint passion for travel and visiting new countries. They were both especially interested in visiting flea markets and always tried to bring back some souvenirs that they felt represented the experiences they had had during their time there. As Lauren put it, this ranged from 'tacky souvenirs that you would see everywhere' to 'more authentic pieces' that she had sourced in some 'smaller spots off the beaten track that we'd get recommendations [for] off the locals'. Over the years, they built quite a collection of statues, small paintings, crafts and home décor objects. Eventually, after much deliberation and discussion, they decided to downsize their collection after moving into a 'tiny apartment with a sky-high mortgage' in a Dublin suburb.

Lauren and Tony agreed that they wanted to hold onto the most 'meaningful pieces' that they had acquired over the years and that they would selectively pass others on to some friends who had often admired or remarked upon specific wall hangings or vases or ceramic pots. The remainder of the items, they agreed, could be sold at the flea market and could be an excellent

chance to make a little money after purchasing the apartment. They initially applied for a stall at the market but were not selected for the first three applications. Tony explained that they 'specifically want the *Dublin Flea [Market]* as there's more people around and more chances that the right person who would value [an item] enough to pay a decent price is a win-win'. They could have secured a stall at one of the other smaller markets sooner but had weighed up their options and decided to hold out until they were selected for a space at the biggest and most popular market. A few months later, that day had finally arrived, and after carefully packing up a range of items, they found themselves set up at the market and ready to try and sell as much as possible. Tony, a natural extrovert and self-described 'peoples-person', recalled feeling excited for the day ahead. In contrast, Lauren was 'a bit stressed... trying to cobble together some display without any of the fancy stuff' [such as props, display stands, table decorations, etc.] that she had seen on other stalls around her.

Relaying the story to me, the couple kept interrupting and speaking over each other, prompting the other to confirm some of the story or to amend a detail. Taking turns telling the tale, they explained how they had just finished unpacking Tony's car, getting most of the items they had brought on their table, reserving a few other pieces to, as Tony described it, 'freshen up the display during the day', when one of the other traders walked over and started browsing through the pieces they had presented in neat rows. They were both familiar with this trader, whom I will refer to as Edward, having bought some décor and soft furnishings from him a few months back. They often stopped by Edward's stall and developed a friendly rapport with him, admiring some of his pieces and even asking for his help sourcing a particular style of mid-century modern chair. After chatting with Edward for a few minutes and showing him a photo of the chair and the rug, they had recently bought from him in situ in the new apartment, they were excited when Edward asked them if he could be their first sale of the day. Sharing an

excited glance at each other, they both exclaimed 'yes' and asked what he wanted to take. Edward picked up a few of the oddities they had collected as if weighing them up physically and mentally. 'He seemed most interested in the handwoven mat from Peru, the old antique compass and magnifying set from that consignment store in Berlin and the set of antique glassware we'd picked up in Paris', Lauren explained.

Tony confirmed that those were the items that Edward kept returning to and described how he tried to offer Edward a deal: if he were to take all three items that they had valued at €185 in total, they would give it to him for €155, but the reduced price did not easily sway Edward. They continued discussing and bargaining, with both of them recalling feeling surprised when Edward offered them the full €65 asking price that they had hastily scribbled down and stuck onto the box containing the ornate coloured glassware set and then, handing over two €50 notes, said he would also take the small and delicate ceramic vase with the unintelligible maker's mark etched onto the bottom that they had picked up at a consignment store in San Francisco, declaring that he thought his daughter might 'fancy it'. In retelling the tale to me, Lauren and Tony grew noticeably annoyed as they continued with the story and the 'betrayal' they felt it represented.

Tony had noticed as he browsed the market later in the day, leaving Lauren to look after their table, that the glassware set was now on Edward's table with a new price tag of €85. He recalled thinking they had done an excellent job setting the price as 'Edward was the expert, and he was only looking for twenty quid more to profit'. He made his way back to Lauren and remembered thinking that this was a good omen. The day passed quickly, and Lauren and Tony had sold most of what they had brought, both having 'enjoyed the buzz of selling'. They had let

some pieces go for less than they had initially decided. However, they had also 'made a nice profit' on some of the other silk scarves and cushion covers they had sold when a mini bidding war erupted between two women, both vying to purchase all the silks. Exhausted but delighted, they packed up and returned home and were immensely pleased with how their first experience as traders had gone. That was until a few days later when Lauren logged onto Edward's website, where he also listed some of the upcoming stock he was bringing to the markets, along with other more expensive pieces that were available to purchase directly through his site.

Lauren, hoping to see if Edward had any 'nice Moroccan-style lighting fixtures for the bathroom renovation' she was doing, had seen 'it' first and, not quite believing what she was seeing, took a screenshot and sent the link to Tony, who was working late in and onboarding a new client. She sent the message and then, unable to wait and overcome with emotion, picked up her phone off the couch where she had flung it in a fit of temper and called Tony, pacing back and forth across the living room as it rang and rang out.

Meanwhile, Tony, who was in an important *Skype* meeting, had noticed the screen of his phone lighting up and was starting to worry something was wrong when Lauren's name kept flashing across the screen as it rang out repeatedly. Eventually, after ten minutes, he could log off and call Lauren back. 'Have you seen it?' Lauren shouted, having answered on the first ring, repeating the question, cursing and muttering as Tony tried to understand what was happening. He finally managed to get Lauren to calm down enough for her to tell him how she had been browsing Edward's stock, as she often did- the bathroom still needed a few things. She had come across a listing for 'their vase', the ceramic vase they had sold to Edward for his daughter, and that was their first sale at their first market. There was an in-depth product listing

detailing all the specifications of the vase, and at the end of the page was a reserve price listing of...€2000! Lauren interjected at this point, recalling how the phonenumber had gone silent.

The couple paused the storytelling here, exchanging a few looks indicating that they had neither forgiven nor gotten over what they believed to be a cruel betrayal from someone they had come to develop a trusting relationship with. 'He should have told us', they repeated. Lauren and Tony had been so hurt by this duplicity that, having sent Edward an angry email that, adding further indignation, was never acknowledged, they had ceased visiting the markets and had seriously contemplated getting rid of all the various pieces they had ever purchased from him. Lauren declared that she would 'never forgive him as he had options', meaning that Edward could have been honest with the couple about the object's value and not, as she felt, 'taken complete advantage'. Tony interjected, noting that even if Edward had given them a more generous 'finder's fee', he would feel better about the entire thing, and Edward would still have made a good profit. His failure to, as they put it, do the 'right' or 'moral' thing had left a lingering and profoundly hurtful impact on the couple, even causing them to temporarily move some of what had been their long sought-after and favourite home furnishings into temporary storage. In the immediate aftermath of discovering the vase's actual commercial value, the affective reminder and evocation of Edward's disloyalty from the chair and rug were, at times, too much to bear witness to.

In this case study, we witness another type of conflict about value, knowledge, expertise and the dissolution of social bonds due to economic opportunism. Lauren and Tony felt that Edward should have been honest with them and, at least, been more economically generous, as he would still have made a significant profit. They felt his expertise enabled him to take

advantage of them, and they felt hurt, betrayed and let down. Lauren and Tony had wanted Edward to prioritise their (perceived and deemed valuable and meaningful to them) shared-bond over his 'selfish' pursuit of financial gain, which arguably was his *raison d'être* for being at the markets and which served to complement his profession and source of income. The entangling of the social and the economic discussed above serves as yet another example that speaks to the multiplicity of factors, i.e., the people, products, types of exchanges that occur, etc., that can bolster and solidify the market, or can cause moments of rupture and, as in the case above, the total dissolution and destruction of social bonds.

Clashing Value(s):

The two case studies presented above clearly show how the market and its constituent parts- the practices, values and clashing aesthetics- are volatile, highly subjective, and prone to moments of rupture, further destabilising the flea market. This section further conveys how the market is not homogenous and is constantly being re-made and re-formulated upon each iteration each month. Moreover, in the moments of rupture, these wildly divergent ideas of the market (that, in turn, define the value (s) of objects and encounters) are most visible. Both examples of conflict speak to the variety of traders operating in the flea markets and how hierarchy, conflict and tension can arise amongst those who converge and transact there. Both examples demonstrate how conflict can arise when varying or ideologically opposed notions of value, obligation, or effort struggle to coexist amongst differently-minded individuals and belief systems.

Given the diversity in the trader categories detailed earlier in this chapter, it is perhaps inevitable that this could shape and influence the interactions between vendors, impacting how

they see themselves in relation to each other. Most trader interactions among my participants invoked positive expressions of community; however, this was not always the case. Traders shared their grievances with me in the private space of an interview, and I also witnessed outright hostility between traders on the market floor. Heightened tensions or strained relations existed amongst some traders, illustrating how often such disputes and confrontations were about a clash in values held by the respective traders. In this context, differing ideas of value could refer to the worth that certain types of work were granted or to differing expectations of honesty, transparency and morality. The following two examples will unpack and demonstrate this by paying attention to a clash in values between traders of different object categories and traders of different trading frequencies. Specifically, these conflicts came about, firstly, because of an *Artisanal* trader deeming themselves superior to a *Second-Hand* trader, and, secondly, the fallout caused amongst second-hand traders, one of whom was a professional. In contrast, the others involved were Hobbyists & Side Hustlers, clashing over a private deal conducted between themselves.

Let us return to Saoirse, whom we met in the introduction. For her, value is accrued through time, hard work and sacrifice. Her discontent signifies a perceived incompatibility for one type of goods to be in the vicinity of the other due to the sense of diminished worth she felt that the proximity of the second-hand goods had on her products. Saoirse's presence in the flea market was a mismatch in value attributed to new and second-hand goods. Saoirse was preoccupied with the branding and messaging in which her products were displayed. She had invested considerable resources into refining and perfecting her products and adding a veneer of professionalism. Devoid of other suitable locations to trade in until she had built the brand sufficiently to get them into several retailers, the flea market had provided an avenue for growth. However, as her operation had become more professional, her frustration and

displeasure with the flea market's chaotic and 'amateur' context had amplified, and she was irritated by the other stallholders and felt increasingly incompatible with them.

She put in considerable effort and resources to operate as a professional brand, an upmarket trader of luxury confectionery. In contrast, she saw the second-hand traders as simply selling 'tatt' that required none of the effort or labour that she had to perform. That said, it bears emphasising here that this belief is a subjective opinion and does not necessarily hold up when interrogated more closely. Second-hand traders do, in fact, give considerable time, effort and investment into their trading. Conversely, for many second-hand traders, sellers such as Saoirse did not represent the 'right type' of seller that should even be present at a flea market characterised by old and used objects. Value for these traders came more in the form of the passage of time made evident on material goods through use-marks and patina, and these tangible features were usually accompanied by the accrual of an object biography, of a tale of who had previously owned it and where it had been. This tension between value being ascribed differently to 'pristine and 'pre-loved' material objects was an ongoing and contested clash of values made tangible at the flea market and in the discourse around second-hand that accompanied my time in the field.

Similarly, the sense of betrayal and upset expressed by Lauren and Tony over Edward's 'deceit' in not admitting to the ceramic vase's commercial value speaks to the flea market's liminality and the unique character of the transactions it enables. This case study speaks instead to the dissolution of social bonds initially formed through the flea market. In *Chapter Two*, we saw how the market founders view the flea market as a moral space and something driven less by the pursuit of the bottom line and instead representing an alternative consumer space that is

more focused on values and sociability formed over the exchange of second-hand goods. Lauren and Tony's perception that Edward's actions had destroyed the important bonds of friendship and ethical consumption shows that for many members of the flea community, there are expectations about the comportment of people, and these are expectations and standards that they would not necessarily deem appropriate for other consumer spaces. Although the flea market is undoubtedly a commercial space, many involved are at pains to define the market as a moral space with (conflicting) assumptions about how these values should play out in practice.

Revisiting these instances where values diverge and result in conflict, damaging social bonds, or where traders feel that they have 'outgrown' the flea market enables us to explore the divergent approaches to value for the traders and the wider network of people, practices and objects that flow through the flea-market. There is a significant gap between the type of consumption practices romanticised there, i.e., more principled consumption, and the actuality of the capitalistic practices that happen with each exchange, i.e., each purchase is still an economic transaction with the exchange of an item for cash. During my research, a standard narrative I encountered shared and repeated by people regardless of status as market organisers, vendors, or customers was that shopping at the flea market was a more moral, responsible and righteous means of provisioning. Such narratives venerated and romanticised the flea market, attributing to it an inner logic of existing outside of capitalism, representing the antithesis of all the problems of modern capitalism. When one held such beliefs, shopping at the flea market was thus a means to demonstrate one's superior, 'green' and intentional consumer choices. In fact, I heard many people conflating their purchases at the markets with notions of being a 'good person' who had successfully bypassed the problematic shortcomings of the wider capitalist economy. Frequently, this belief was more performative, expressing middle-class ideals and aspirations more so than the reality of the consumption practices they adhered to.

This dissertation will discuss examples of this disconnect between how people discussed their consumption practices and venerated the flea market with how they actually consumed and provisioned and the transactional nature of the flea market.

Edward's opportunistic purchase of the vase for an inadequate price reveals the gap between Lauren and Tony's expectations of how exchanges at the market should be conducted. They felt that a sensibility of ethical consideration and practices of mutual care-giving should have guided the spirit of this exchange. In contrast, Edward's motivation was grounded in his desire to capitalise on a serendipitous find and to maximise personal profits. This clash between both parties evokes classical anthropological discussion on how we ascribe value to things and the differing obligations such transactions can produce. Purchases at the flea market occur upon a diverse and sometimes conflicting spectrum that illuminates how flea-market purchases can be burdened by irreconcilable values and meanings that render all transactions, particularly those of second-hand objects, much more complex than a straightforward first-hand capitalistic transaction.

To recap, what we see portrayed as a seemingly cohesive and homogenous market is actually much more diverse, and the boundaries of what makes a trader or a market are indistinct, often leading to clashes in the flea market over clashing beliefs around value; what it is, what attributes/qualities or characteristics confer value, what items at the market, therefore, possess value, and how to reconcile the need to determine monetary value on an item that may be more valuable due to subjective factors such as sentimentality, nostalgia or memories. In the following, we see two case studies of how alternative markets operate side

by side. The divergent expectations lead to a clash amongst the traders when these discrepancies become visible, or equilibrium cannot be maintained.

Anthropological Approaches to Value:

In his text, '*Variations in value orientations*' with Strodbeck in 1961, the American anthropologist and social theorist Clyde Kluckhohn argued that he had identified six dimensions of culture in his work with the *Navajo* peoples. These included the nature of people, the relationship with nature, the duty towards others, modes of activity, the privacy of space, and temporal orientations. Kluckhohn and Strodbeck claimed these six dimensions were universal yet subject to localised and context-specific iterations (1961). These six dimensions formed a cultural model to elicit an understanding of how people understood themselves, their place in the world and what they held valuable within those. Drawing on this connection between value and broader personal and social worldviews and borrowing Kluckhohn's definition of value as 'conceptions of the desirable' (1951:395), I wish to distance myself from alternative theorisations of value that only focus on the economic dimension. This approach emphasises how such wants and notions of what is desirable are informed by what real people want and socially influenced ideas about what they feel they *ought* to want. In the flea market, this is evident in how broader social trends shape the demand for certain types of objects. By this, I argue that within the flea market, paying attention to the objects (and types of objects) that determine value and hold value for consumers not only reveals what matters to people but also the larger societal structures of power and influence that shape them, but can also illuminate how people create and pursue meaning and happiness in life, using material objects to furnish the life worlds they weave for themselves throughout their lifetime.

More recently, discussions about the anthropological significance have been redirected to focus on understanding the value (s) that consumers assign to their consumption practices and the items that they exert resources on. My approach builds on these and endeavours to understand the contested values to be found at the flea market in a more holistic sense. For this approach, I align with Graeber (2011 & 2001), who argues that ‘economists tend to limit themselves to producing mathematical models of how economic actors allocate scarce resources in pursuit of profit... they do not ask what those actors are ultimately trying to achieve in life or why consumers want to consume the things they do’ (Graeber *in* Carrier, 2005:439). Through anthropological enquiry, we can see what meaning and value (s) consumers assign to commodities (Graeber *in* Carrier, 2005:439).

Graeber foregrounds the importance of a close consideration of value as a critical avenue to gain insight into the everyday lived world of consumers. This is relevant here because in my research, attending to this ambiguity about what constitutes value; we can see how ongoing contested and competing notions of what constitutes value both actively create and threaten the stability of the flea markets. Noting that anthropology tends to pay closer attention to theories of value at moments of crisis or rupture, Graeber cautions that when attempts are made to study and reconcile entire social structures, they fail to equate what people actually do and what motivates them to do so, we miss out on crucial pieces of the puzzle as, 'Here the problem was to identify the organising principle of culture' (Graeber *in* Carrier, 2005:445). In the flea market, we see how disagreement over the pursuit of profit over the value of friendship respectively became heightened and increasingly visible and represented micro-tears to the social fabric of the flea market, with individuals opting to leave the flea market community due to these irreconcilable personal differences in orientation to the concept of value.

Historically, within the canon of anthropological literature, there is a lack of discussion and attention given to the notion of value, and the question of what such an anthropological theory of value might look like remains obscure (cf. Graeber, 2001). Beginning with an overview of the emergence of the political economy school of thought circa the mid-eighteenth century, Graeber identifies an important shift in the converging of the value consumers imbued an item with that of its price. Referring to some of the most enduring and foremost figures of that period (including Adam Smith's concept of the invisible hand of the market and Karl Marx's critique of capitalism in broader examinations of moral and existential philosophy, etc.) Graeber starts to chart the emergence of more attention given to the social dimensions of economic value concepts. He proposes three main iterations of value- the philosophical, the economic and the linguistic. There is a tendency to collapse all three of these forms of value to a singular understanding that results in 'the existence of some kind of symbolic system that defines the world in terms of what is important, meaningful, desirable or worthwhile in it (ibid:439). Zooming down to the level of individual transactions at the flea market thus becomes one particular lens through which we can observe how people 'define what is beautiful, or worthwhile, or important about it. To see how meaning, one might say, turns into desire' (Graeber, 2001: x). Opting to consume at the *Co-Op* or the *Flea* is effectively a self-conscious performance of both what the traders' value and those broader moral values they feel they ought to value, e.g., reuse, shop local, thrift, etc.

For example, at the flea market, we can observe this collapsing together of these three strands of value when we consider how objects were priced. There was a sense that the second-hand and old objects were simultaneously less valuable due to their age/condition, whilst also at times more valuable due to their rarity or uniqueness (by them having become singularised due to their distance from their original availability as a commodity). Traders selling *New*

goods had more conversation with the visitors browsing through their products about the time, effort, and skill they had put in, and as such, while some deals could be made, they had a bottom line: they would not go under. In comparison, the traders selling *second-hand* goods often entered and entertained more intense negotiations about discounts. Both the traders and customers invoked the desire to reach a 'fair price', and there was more scope to haggle and negotiate about what that was for any given item. This discourse of 'fair prices' was ubiquitous at the flea market and in the discourses of my participants. This intense negotiation about a fair price is another instance in which we see how the flea market is not homogenous, nor is the sense of value assigned to flea market things stable, universal or straightforward. Determining a fair price was a form of negotiation at the flea market each month; the contentious issue is, as Graeber surmises, 'A fair or just price, therefore, should have some relation to the 'intrinsic worth' or 'value' of what you were selling. But how should that be calculated?' (Graeber *in* Carrier, 2005:442). At the flea market, beliefs about value are highly subjective and can index wider commercial, symbolic and personal concerns, practices and lived experiences.

Anthropological investigations into notions of value have tended to fall into two separate approaches- those that seek to examine those instances where people (often those from non-Western societies) do not act in 'economically efficient manners, and those that focus on how consumption is utilised in order to pursue social, rather than economic means, for example when consumers do not behave 'efficiently' from an economic perspective, but using consumption to construct identities or forge social bonds (Graeber *in* Carrier, 2005 & Graeber, 2001). This then raises the question, 'If we are not, in fact, calculating individuals trying to accumulate the maximum possible quantities of power, pleasure, and material wealth, then what, precisely, are we?' (2001:xii). This can be applied to the flea market's paradoxical nature, where commercial values coexist with social values, the balance of which is dependent on each

individual's predilections and dispositions. Ultimately, any anthropological reckoning with the notion of value (s) serves a greater end-goal which he describes as 'to understand the workings of any system of exchange (including free-market capitalism) as part of larger systems of meaning, one containing conceptions of what the cosmos is ultimately about and what is worth pursuing in it' (Graeber *in* Carrier, 2005:443). It is the work of anthropologists to pick up the mantle and pursue a holistic understanding, not of economic value, but of values, where economic Value ends. At the flea market, customers can sometimes be considered as acting irrationally from a purely- economic perspective. They purchase broken or old objects, spend more time browsing and working to find bargains at the flea market than the optimised high street shopping experience, and may even pay more for items compared to sourcing new versions on online retailers, such as the monolith, that is *Amazon*. As such, there must be more meaning to the consumer practices in the market. By paying close attention to the multiplicity of value (s) bound up in flea-market exchanges, both those transactions/haggles that succeed and those that fail, we can see the entanglement of various personal, social, socio-cultural and financial concerns and values.

Solely economically-minded approaches to the study of value that all people endeavour to accumulate and build resources need to be revised, and anthropological accounts of cultural phenomena such as the *Potlatch* illustrate this (cf. Mauss 2000; Boas 1920; Malinowski 1922, etc.). In *Potlatch* rituals, individuals compete to destroy and sacrifice as much of their accumulated wealth as possible, which disrupts such reductionist arguments about resource hoarding. Therefore, I support and build on Graeber's call for attending to the larger systems that values occur in and are shaped by demonstrates that we must consider alternative types of values and the pursuit of such values that are achieved in *Potlatch* as an equally important form

of value (s)-making. Rather than only focusing on accumulation and display, practices of destruction, decluttering and divesting equally create meaning and reshape value (s).

At times, the production of value, explicitly concerning material things, can involve both the production of an item and its destruction. Norris's (2012A) work on the creation of emergency aid blankets demonstrates that there is a 'complex, interweaving of moral values, material goods and market economies arising' in such instances where donated clothing is 'destroyed' (i.e., shredded into fibres that can be used to create the blankets) in order to be recreated (2012A:389). Norris also argues that material objects undergo context-specific reconfiguration processes, which can result in a 'moral dilemma of value translation' (2012A:390). A donated coat's trajectory may see it move from personal possession to no longer wanted clutter to a donated item. The original donor may see the value in the coat as long as it remains a functional coat, i.e., an intact garment; however, within the recycling industry, it may be more valuable to be broken down into threads/ fibres to be repurposed. Like in the flea market, many values converge when encountering second-hand goods.

Consumer practices and engagements with ideas of value at the flea market and the broader channels of circulation that such second-hand objects traverse provide an opportunity to interrogate where value is made tangible. By this, I mean that whilst attaining what is considered valuable, both subjectively and socially, is desirable for my participants, there is no consensus on how value is materialised, nor can it be fixed in space and time. As this research demonstrates, in some contexts, value comes from an abundance of material things (i.e., such as the selection at a market stall). In contrast, in others, value is derived from the conspicuous absence of material things (i.e., in the homes of participants undergoing processes of

decluttering or minimalism, etc.). Therefore, what material things and aesthetics are considered aspirational or valuable are also contested and context-specific.

As such, using this holistic discussion of value as that which extends beyond the realm of economics to encompass a variety of moral, ethical, and symbolic concerns, the flea market can be understood as a channel through which to gain insight into what is important to people, and, as Kluckhohn noted adding nuance to this foregrounding of importance, that people feel *ought* to be important to them. In practice, the flea market provides a space through which these ongoing and contested practices of determining, challenging and transforming notions of value, i.e., what value(s) does an object possess, what constitutes a fair price for second-hand goods, and finally what value(s) does this form of alternative consumption represent for the people who operate within it? Graeber notes that an anthropological sensitivity to the ways in which value is conceived of and enacted in peoples' everyday lives offers a lens through which to access and examine how 'people's own actions become meaningful to them, how they take on importance by becoming incorporated into some larger system of meaning' (Graeber in Carrier, 2005:453).

Furthermore, I draw on Appadurai's (1986) theory of value to argue the need for scholars to critique traditional paradigms of value and instead ask new questions about concepts such as value and what constitutes value when we consider the globalised flows and circulations of material objects and the exchange systems through which they pass. In other words, Appadurai sounded the call for more attention to be paid to the cultural dimension of the cultural economy, as it is, he argued, through the social life of a material object within sphere(s) of exchange that produces value (cf. Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). Linking this

understanding of value to my research means that value depends on the context, the forms of exchange, and the trajectories of circulation that flea-market goods traverse. In this way, value is the sum product of the entangling of hybrid actors- a network of material objects, people and practices. Appadurai's approach centres on how this continual forming and refining of value (s), both personal and social, inform peoples' beliefs and actions around what constitutes value and how we create meaning and thus choose to act. This is an important point for my thesis because value is emphasised as processual, continually recreated through practice (cf. Clarke 2000; Gregson et al. 2007, for further discussion on how value is constructed in selling second-hand clothing in contexts such as charity shops and resell groups.).

During my research, many of those involved in the markets evoked this very sense of processual meaning-making, discussing how shopping in the flea market contributed to 'the greater good'. For my participants, everyday practices of shopping and/or trading at the flea market were bound up in concerns about the environment and sustainability, with mortality and legacy. They were shaped by socio-cultural trends such as popular discourses about clutter, storage, waste and normative domesticity. In *'The Uses of Value'* (2008)¹, Miller argues for a new theory of value focused on how people use the term in their everyday lives. This is similar to Graeber; however, Miller is more interested in how the act of purchasing objects is often entangled in social relations and the expression of love and care. Miller argues against 'bottom-line' theories of value, instead arguing for an approach that focuses on the 'incommensurable polarity between value as price, and value as priceless, sometimes portrayed as the contrast between value and values' (*UCL Anthropology blog*, 2008). Miller notes that 'we are hardly short of theories of value' and that most of the commentary around the political economy was

¹ I accessed this at the following URL: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/people/academic-and-teaching-staff/daniel-miller/uses-value>. However, it is also available in *Geoforum* (2008). Vol.39, Iss.3, pp.1122-1132.

said in the nineteenth century. However, Miller is most interested in how conversations about value emerge and are commonplace in the ordinary everyday. This approach would consider how competing ideas and practices about the subjective idea of value are had, not just in the larger institutions of consumption but also from the individual encounters at the flea market, whereby judgements about second-hand goods are made and negotiated. Therefore, Miller suggests that in an ethnography of the colloquial discussion of value, rather than that of an abstract and intellectual debate, it is possible to '... ask what value is, is by asking what value does' (*UCL Anthropology blog*, 2008).

The term value is ubiquitous within everyday conversations and lived experiences at the flea market yet possesses a paradoxical quality. Value can be used as shorthand to assign a monetary worth to a material object. However, value can also be that very essence of a thing that enables it to evade being assigned a monetary value (cf. Weiner (1992) on inalienability where items are priceless as the price cannot be determined separately from the emotional resonances and historical traces an item retains). Miller further illustrates this destabilising effect of the term value by separating it to simultaneously mean both one thing and its opposite, i.e., value as a monetary worth and values as that inalienable worth that cannot be separated from an item- 'the economic and the other-than-economic' (*UCL Anthropology blog*, 2008). Therefore, Miller utilises the term values not as a plural of value in numbers but rather as a way to consider all the non-monetary values an object may act as a repository for.

As flagged, this is reminiscent of Annette Weiner's (1992) work on inalienability. Weiner analyses the exchange of *Kula* valuables in the Trobriand Islands to demonstrate how particular objects, when exchanged, retain an essence or *Hau* of the giver and that the ritual

exchange of *Kula* valuables confers prestige as well as meaningful social bonds that persist across time and space. In this way, a *Kula* ceremonial goods is valuable not just for its utilitarian function but due to its prestige and cultural capital. The core paradox underlying the exchange of *Kula* valuables is that the more something is attributed with a sense of inalienability (i.e., those qualities that are not monetary based and instead speak to the object's entanglement with the identity of its previous owners through time, etc.) the more financial/monetary worth it amassed. Put simply, the more priceless an item is, the higher its price when circulated to the market. This paradoxical sense of worth, both monetary and more symbolic, can also be applied to the circulation of contemporary flea-market goods, where objects are valuable as objects, but also through the accompanying sense of value to be had by virtue of their provenance and circulation, i.e., their having passed through networks of exchange, meaning and values. Values imbued to flea-market goods are in flux and unstable, continuously being re-made, and it is this ambiguity in how certain flea goods are valued from a monetary perspective and from a provenance perspective that we witness the clash of market-oriented and symbolically-oriented configurations of value.

I agree with Miller's concept that the 'commensurability of value' helps us understand the clashing value systems at work in the flea market, distanced from a labour theory of value as espoused by Marx (*UCL Anthropology blog*, 2008). Instead, it lies closer to a relativist understanding of value, i.e., individual communities define what value is/is not and create the conditions under which it can be created or destroyed (Munn, 1986). Relating this to the flea market, this approach would suggest that the constitution of value is context-dependent, and as such, value is constantly being reproduced on the flea-market floor, and each encounter of people and objects therein can either add to or deplete that perception of value entangled in the second-hand goods there.

In consumer invocations of terms such as value or its often-accompanying characteristic of quality, what is commonly actually being referred to is ‘the point of intersection between (at least) three other properties, that of function, that of design and that of price’ and it is the entanglement of these three features that objectified good value for consumers within the context of choosing to shop at *John Lewis* over its competitor brands (Miller, *UCL Anthropology blog*, 2008). For Miller's participants, consumers desired the feeling that they had carried out their task of provisioning sensibly, and this comes from a combination of considering style and function to create an understanding of value that is commensurable comparable. Through this formulation of value and values, anthropologists can observe not only what value is, but also what it enables and makes possible.

Miller's insistence on an anthropological approach to value where 'the relationship between value and values is acknowledged' demonstrates how engagements with the concept of value effectively function to 'bridge between what otherwise would be regarded as distinct regimes of value' (*UCL Anthropology blog*, 2008). For Graeber, ‘Value is the way our actions take on meaning or importance by becoming incorporated into something larger than ourselves. But almost always, this can only happen through some kind of material medium... through which it all becomes real’ (Graeber *in* Carrier, 2005:451). In the context of the flea market, discourses about value, monetary worth and personal values and influences such as nostalgia, aspiration identity expression, etc., were multiple, contentious and ever-changing’ (ibid). Accordingly, the flea market was not homogenous, nor were the people, objects or value (s) enacted at and through it. Flea-market objects possess and can be imbued with an infinite multiplicity of personal, symbolic and monetary values. At the moment of their exchange, such

contested values appear most tangible, visible and real. As Graeber surmises, 'So: meaning arises from making conceptual distinctions. Conceptual distinctions always contain an element of value since they are ranked' (2001:147). Value at the flea market thus is comparative, and relational, and emerges and exists within the broader web of social relationships around it.

In the flea market, value is continually recreated and shaped by individual taste, cultural trends and structural production and consumption processes and how these become filtered down through the flea market to individual consumer purchases. Many of the traders at the market claim to reject mainstream trends, favouring second-hand commodities over those mass-produced items currently available on the high street, yet it is through the traders themselves that certain types of flea-market goods become desirable, and this, in turn, influences consumers behaviours and desires at the market, and thus, value is created and transformed. For example, a couple of years ago, there was a surge in the popularity of more DIY (Do It Yourself) and alternative wedding trends and aesthetics. Danny, a second-hand trader in vintage goods, was one of the first *Dublin-Flea* traders who capitalised on this popular *Pinterest* trend successfully and maximised his sales of various vintage props such as antique suitcases, cameras, mismatched delph-wares, etc. As this vintage trend proliferated on social media, customers created more demand for this type of aesthetic vintage good. Danny sourced more, and more traders followed suit, recognising the demand for that type of item deemed more commercially valuable at the time. As more traders followed suit, more of those types of objects flooded the market, effectively creating an inflated sense of value around a specific type of commodity, and this had a ripple effect across the entire market- its people, products, practices and discourses of value. Returning to Kluckhohn's argument, the temporary proliferation of just one category of object in the flea market demonstrates how 'values are not necessarily ideas about the meaning of life, they are about what one could justifiably want from

it' (Carrier, 2005:446), and in this case, traders wanted to capitalise on the trend in order to maximise profits and sell inventory, whilst consumers' desires for this type of good were also being influenced by personal, as well as broader social discourses about what type of object is valuable, and in what context. In this way, value (s) are shaped by society and are idiosyncratic, subjective and deeply personal.

Conclusion:

This chapter has presented an in-depth ethnographic account of the traders at the flea market and conveys the diversity, richness and lived experience of their time at the market. As demonstrated, the traders are the most important players in the flea-market scene as it is through their curation of second-hand and artisanal goods that the markets become desirable attractions for people, both local and visitors, to travel to on a Sunday afternoon, spending hours browsing the goods on offer. The collective efforts of the *Second-Hand* traders to re-imbue previously discarded or unwanted goods with vitality and affect, combined with the experiential artisanal and craft shopping experience crafted by *New* sellers, have resulted in the market growing more extensive and more popular, with the average footfall for each instance of the *Dublin Flea Market* calculated to be 5,000 + visitors plus by the organisers.

I examined the variety of trader types and sought to emphasise the traders, not as a singular and reductive entity, but instead drew out the circumstances of the individual sellers that comprise the richness and assortment of the larger trader collective by accounting for the frequency with which one traded, i.e., *One Offers/Ruptures*, *Hobbyists & Side Hustlers*, or *Professionals*, as well as considering the object typologies of the goods to be found at the market i.e., grouping them as *Second-Hand* or *New* objects. Given the diversity of traders and

the mammoth range of items for sale, it is not surprising that the traders can have differing, even irreconcilable, ideologies of what factors constitute 'value' for both the traders and consumers and what types of objects are deemed more meaningful, prestigious, or valuable. Such hierarchies can be examined by carefully analysing moments of trader conflict and disagreement. Ethnographic case studies presenting moments of rupture and conflict were provided to highlight and draw attention to the flea market as a non-homogenous space, both figuratively and symbolically, where contested notions of value are challenged, negotiated and reformed. Overall, this chapter demonstrated that second-hand flea goods become commodified, moving through different types of commodified surroundings and discourses of context-dependent, contradictory and contested moralities.

Chapter Five: Home- Making & Domesticity.

“The ideal of happiness has always taken material form in the house . . .”

-Simone de Beauvoir.

Introduction:

This chapter shifts in ethnographic context to follow the circulations of second-hand goods from the flea market into the traders' homes. As discussed in the previous chapter, the flea market is not a fixed, homogenous and bounded thing. Here, I will demonstrate that both the flea market and the traders' homes become shaped by each other via the iterative and creative ways that second-hand goods are moved through and between each location. Arguing that the boundaries of both the flea market and the domestic context are, therefore, best understood as permeable, in-flux, and even co-constitutive, I will draw on the anthropological body of literature on domesticity and material culture in order to further challenge traditional understandings of the home as a private sphere that is separate to and separated from the public sphere of the commercial market. Instead, for the traders in this research, the flea market and the domestic home are entangled and mutually co-constitutive. Traders symbiotically circulate material goods both within and between these two spheres. Through such acts of circulation and the acts of valuation and meaning-making accompanying these flows, both the flea market and the home are continually made, amended and re-made.

In the bulk of literature that focuses on the material culture of the home, the emphasis lies on the possessions that are chosen and which constitute a sense of home for the householder (Miller 2009; Daniels 2010; Hurdley 2013 & 2006A & 2006B), but here, I show that practices of object circulation, re-valuing(s), and divestment are also present and essential for the traders'

everyday practices of domesticity and market-trading. Here, I follow Appelgren and Bohlin's argument that circulation implies things in motion but also necessitates the 'infrastructural framework to facilitate or obstruct that motion' (Appelgren & Bohlin, 2015:147). To follow that 'infrastructural framework', I will ethnographically follow my research into the homes of some of my key participants who managed (to varying degrees and with different strategies of separation or integration) to organise their homes to accommodate both their inventory of goods for sale within their own domestic material worlds, i.e., by this I mean the cumulative domestic materiality of their homes and their personal belongings and possessions.

Second-hand objects and flea things move between regimes of value within the flea market and from market to home, where they are subject to ongoing processes of re-appraisal and re-evaluation. Through these encounters, meaning, value and worth are updated, changed, or reaffirmed. Slippages between categories frequently occur. Items intended for sale may become incorporated into the home - deliberately chosen to be kept permanently - or merely temporarily overlooked. Likewise, items that appear to reside within the home permanently (or assumed to be constitutive of it, such as the example of Malcolm selling his child's bedroom door, see below) can be sold if the demand arises. Other items that are deemed to have become clutter and no longer wanted are felt to be inconvenient or even burdensome.

Domesticity and Material- Culture:

There is a large body of literature on domesticity, the home, and the material culture that constitutes it (Douglas, 1991; Cieraad, 2006; Daniels, 2015; Birdwell-Pheasant & Lawrence-Zúniga, 2020; Miller, 2001). One common theme across these is the notion that home and

domesticity encompass far more than the mere existence of a closed-off and private, structural dwelling. Instead, the experience of 'homeliness' and a feeling of 'being at home' entails using material objects and ongoing physical and emotional labour practices to transform a blank space into a home. This is an ongoing, life-long project and practices of home-making are not static nor ever fully completed. There is a long tradition within the discipline, therefore, to attend to the various practices of 'meaning-making' through material objects and the ways in which people become entangled and connected with them, which has been an intrinsic site for the classical anthropological gaze to cast its focus upon. For example, drawing on George Simmel's (1990: 241) invocation of 'cum grano salis' (something incomparable) and Mauss's (2000) notion of 'hau' (vital essence or spirit of the thing), Annette Weiner shows how an object over time inherits the cumulative identity of a specific group or individual (1992:33 & 45). As inalienable objects often extend beyond the lifetime of their owners, 'transferability is essential to their preservation', and this is often in the form of an oral narrative authenticating the origins and life history of an item (Weiner, 1992:37 & 104).

Separately, other approaches that attend to the inalienability of possessions have been located within domestic spaces. They explore ideas of 'home' and the material belongings that constitute it, focusing on the material aspects of various consumer projects such as shopping, home staging and everyday provisioning. Studies such as these frequently emphasise the material practices by which people inhabit these places through ongoing interventions of home-making and appropriation (Miller 2001; Cieraad 2006; Pink 2004; Botticello 2007; Makovicky 2007). We see this in Pink's (2004) writing, where she argues that by focusing on 'practices of housework and home decoration that are usually hidden or done alone' within the material physical home, what emerged was 'a device for self-representation' (2004:1). Experiencing

home is both sensory and embodied and is a lifelong project of adjusting and refining one's surrounding environment.

This means that normative experiences of, and understandings of 'home' are bound up with judgments both about the self, one's material stuff, and the complex relations between things and persons. Domestic material culture manifests value statements by virtue of their absence and placement (as in the case of clutter) and presence as markers of identity and personal taste. The labour that goes into making a home through practices of staging, tidying, and rearranging the home thus reveals how people create meaning and practices within their homes and sheds light on the cultural and social dimensions of domestic life. Pink's work is ethnographically situated within the home; however, the ongoing creation of and curation of the home is not limited to just the interior of that same space. Home- as a concept and as a material configuration- is shaped and assembled by an infinite variety of factors situated outside the home, such as broader socio-cultural trends, technology, the opinions of others, etc.

By focusing on the everyday practices of home-making, i.e., managing the circulations of goods in and out of the home through consuming, tidying, decluttering and divesting, etc., we can see that it is paying ethnographic attention to the banal routines, the most ordinary, quotidian and often overlooked activities that can reveal important, rich and revealing insights about the ongoing and 'sensuous link between humans and things' (Hodder, 2012:156). As Hodder (2012) describes, this human-thing entanglement can allow us to explore how ongoing relationships between oneself and the domestic are continuously evolving, re-negotiated, and in flux (see also Garvey 2001; Pink, 2004).

Objects that are not chosen.

However, while much of previous material culture research has focused on the construction of self-identity via processes of accumulation, as outlined in Veblen's (1899) theory of conspicuous consumption and Bourdieu's (1977) theory of habitus and later work by McCracken (1986); Douglas & Isherwood (1979); Slater (1997); and Miller (2012), what is sometimes missing from traditional accounts of consumption and domestic routines is an ethnographic sensitivity to the objects in the home that are not chosen. These are overlooked, forgotten about, ignored or stored indefinitely in the home's hidden spaces, such as the attic, basement, junk drawer or garage, and form the detritus of domestic life. They require intervention at some stage to avoid rupturing the domestic aesthetic and practices of material object management undertaken in the home as an ongoing practice of re-appropriation and meaning-making.

These practices of material management are shaped by discourses of clutter and the popularisation of decluttering in the name of achieving a more minimal home and have been the focus of anthropological interest in recent decades (e.g. Newell 2014; Marcoux 2001; Cwerner & Metcalfe 2003; Gregson & Crewe 2003; Woodward 2015). In these works, clutter undergoes regimes of value and categorisation (Makovicky, 2007). To understand these processes, I follow Frykman's (2005) concept of "social bracketing" and the latency of material objects and apply this to an anthropological analysis of a flea market, not just at the moment of encounter in the market but also as objects circulate and flow back and forth between the home and the market, through the traders. Through such personalised, ongoing, embodied and sensorial domestic practices, i.e., re-encountering, re-evaluating and re-ordering the home's

material contents, etc., people make material their relationship to their things and the space they call home.

My research approach also attends to the quotidian and everyday engagements of the flea market traders. However, it departs from previous works that have tended to focus solely on one context, i.e., within the boundaries of a house. Unlike much of the literature that either focuses on practices at the flea market or those that occur in integrating market goods into the home, I argue that trading practices occur not just at the market but are also present in the traders' homes. Instead, flea market traders effectively pulled double duty in managing their domestic practices. The majority of traders I interviewed (as was noted in a previous chapter) did not have external storage spaces to store and contain their inventories separate from their domestic belongings, meaning that the flea market was present in their homes and flea market things intermingled in temporary or permanent ways with their everyday, domestic, material worlds. *Flea* things and domestic things occupied the same spaces, and objects could move between these categories. Managing this seepage of the flea market into their homes resulted in traders using various strategies of separation and containment, to varying degrees of success, in order to corral and control the flows and circulation of flea-things that threatened to overtake, be subsumed or 'lost' within their homes.

In what follows, I will present two contrasting case studies that illustrate markedly different approaches to the home-making practices and the preferred domestic aesthetics of two of my participants- the maximalist and minimalist homes of Malcolm, Catherine, and Danny, respectively. Through carefully considering how they engage with both the material items they trade- with and those that they make home with, it is possible to examine how the circulation(s)

of second-hand objects are shaped concurrently by both individual preferences and broader practices of domesticity, the production of aesthetics and managing belongings in order to adhere to, or to challenge/subvert, popular cultural conventions around consumption and clutter.

Case Study- Danny & The Insisted-Upon Separation of Home and Market:

Danny was one of the most interesting characters I came to know during my time in the markets. He was an older gentleman, soft-spoken but extroverted and willing to chat with anyone. He would set up his stall and place a large chair in the middle where he would sit, drink coffee, chat with his customers and generally, as 'king of the market', hold court, as I once laughingly teased him. Danny was very receptive to participating in this project, and we would have long conversations at the market and in a pub near his home, where we agreed to meet and chat before he offered my first impromptu home visit. Danny loved the 'buzz' of trading at the markets and 'having the chats all day' and had dabbled in buying and selling for years, eventually setting up his own small business selling retro, vintage and antiques. Danny, I noticed, had a keen eye and an almost- eerie talent for predicting what types of items would become popular and in demand and always seemed to be able to get ahead of the trends in the market. He specialised in vintage and retro goods and had recently started leasing items to individual clients (e.g., vintage tea sets, suitcases and cameras as décor for hen parties) and independent and national media (i.e., as background props/ set-dressing.).

“It’s like the separation of church and state”- Containing & Confining the Spillage of the Flea Market.

One stormy December night, driving behind Danny up the dark and winding road to his home from the pub where we had sat in the snug and chatted for hours over pots of tea, I was excited to see his home. Danny's stalls at the market had always been an interesting mix of items ranging from vintage signs, old books, tools, jewellery, paintings, homewares, and various other curios and trinkets. His Facebook page for his business (whose slogan was "For a peek into Ireland fadó [*long-ago*] drop into *Danny's Curiosity Shop*. A little nostalgia is good for the soul!") also showed images of his piles of stock. Danny's store was open for a set period during the day, but he also encouraged people to book appointments to browse his wares and chat about the items for sale in a relaxed, more personalised style.

Danny's home, the first of my domestic visits, was a tale of two extremes- it was sensorially shocking to encounter the pristine, ordered, stylishly minimalist interior of his large home, only to make my way to the attic, which functioned as his storage room and be met with absolute chaos. An overwhelming abundance of material objects dominated and claimed the entire room, with items piled on the floor and hanging from the ceiling, making navigating the small space incredibly precarious and conjuring a sense of claustrophobia in this researcher. Danny explained that his family, particularly his wife, were 'usually fairly understanding... and happy enough' to support his trading and accumulations of old things, but on the condition that he ensured that it was contained to the attic and did not start to pile up in the other shared spaces of the family home. Terming this playfully as 'the separation of church and state', Danny explained that he had agreed with his wife that his 'hobby, side gig, madness, or whatever you can call it' was to be limited to the attic space. He had to ensure that it would not spill over and start taking up the rest of the home, which she expended considerable effort in maintaining the aesthetic appearance of.

Danny's home interior (with the explicit exclusion of the attic that his wife had initially 'begrudgingly banished' him to, her fear that the amount of stuff he had taken and heaped up there causing the attic to 'cave in and kill us all' notwithstanding), could have passed for a showhouse due to the careful staging and curation of every space that I was permitted access to. Danny's home, to me, felt expensive and opulent and was furnished in a way that should one have intervened just slightly by placing a fruit bowl, bountiful with fresh citrus fruits, next to a large and colourful vase of flowers on the Italian marble kitchen island unit, could have passed for an interior shot on the cover of any home interiors magazine. As noted above, my first visit was mid-December, and the house was stunningly decorated; tastefully placed garlands of fresh holly were strewn along the mantelpiece of the large fire in the living room, and I could not take my eyes off the massive Christmas tree in the foyer that served to highlight the high ceilings and the open and expansive space of the entryway. The beautifully decorated tree must have been at least 10 feet tall, with sparking red and gold baubles the size of bowling balls, yet did not dominate the room/space.

Danny's strategy (or, perhaps more accurately, his compromise with his family) of managing his inventory relegated the flea market's presence in the familial home to one set, specific, and bounded location. Until Danny later secured a secondary external premises to work/trade out of, his ability to acquire new goods for sale was limited by the physical space he could store them within. A self-described 'sucker for the old things with character and a story' meant that he had accumulated many things both for sale and those he placed in a category he termed 'probably will sell but for now I'll collect them', resulting in the staggering abundance of various second-hand things he had assembled into the small attic space. On the narrow winding steps up to the attic, a few of the top steps had piles of glassware, books, and bits of old tools/machinery; however, the rule was that they could not come down the steps and

start occupying floor space into the living room that the steps led to. A 'temporary exception' was granted for moving things into or out of the attic when he was going to market/ had acquired new inventory, resulting in items being piled by the staircase. Items were allowed to linger while he dealt with the logistics of moving them. However, this negotiated agreement required they not be left there indefinitely.

The separation of Danny's home into zones of visibility, i.e., where visible/ material flea market presence or absence was tolerated, etc., through the storage and containment practices he undertook, demonstrates how the flea market cannot be seen as a separate and distinct sphere. Instead, the complexities of trading at the flea market are made tangible in how traders manage to store, organise and contend with their (often considerably extensive) inventories brought to a few markets each month, where the odds of securing a sale for each item are pretty dismal. For *Hobbyists/ Side-Hustler* traders like Danny, this ongoing labour of managing their goods in their domestic context draws together additional locations where the market is enacted. Part of the practices of trading and market rituals the traders underwent shows the connections and relations that emerge from the circulation of second-hand goods in locations that are spatially dispersive, i.e., commercial spaces such as the market, but also within the kinship and social relations that emerge from the enactment of domesticity, family, and 'home'. Here, we see the paradox of how the flea market seeps into the home and is distributed through everyday, ordinary home-making practices. Many traders spoke of the market as a separate space they worked in; however, in practice and following the circulations, practices and labour they engaged in, we can see that the flea market is present in and impacting upon the home.

Achieving this strict distinction between the flea market and the home through carefully curating and storing material goods required ongoing labour, negotiation and surveillance from Danny and the rest of his family. The living room was the most contentious spot, as the entryway to the home and the access route to Danny's attic space. The 'battles' over what 'was/was not allowed' were mostly confronted in this space.

Separate Spaces: Circulations and Stoppages.

Anthropologists have argued that we must be cognizant that 'where the home begins and ends can be experienced as blurred' (Garvey and Wang 2023:45, see also Vom Bruck 1997). Incorporating the digital and virtual dimensions of domesticity, Garvey and Wang's participants undertook processes of shrinking or expanding both their sense of home and the social networks that they partake in. One thing that remains consistent across Pink's (2004), and Garvey & Wang's (2023) participants, is the role that processes of tending to, evaluating and managing their possessions play in the construction of a home; as both a physical space/dwelling and as a concept. Whilst the smartphone may function as a 'transportal home' or 'a place within which we now live' (Miller, 2021:866), both the physical and virtual spaces of the home require managing that space and the contents (material or digital) that accumulate within it (Garvey & Wang, 2023). Describing the processes of "right-sizing" their home, i.e., the practices of expansion or shrinking, their participants underwent in order to adjust to changing life circumstances, shows how a lack of space, or the perceived lack of a particular type of desirable space, i.e., exemplified as one devoid of clutter, etc., impacts upon one's relationship to their domestic space and the processes of domestication they undergo to make their home, through their personal possessions, their own.

What emerges from this is an attempt to manage the blurring of commercial and familial materiality and the blurring of public and private boundaries. Here, Appelgren & Bohlin's (2015) work is instructive. Borrowing Ingold & Hallam's (2017) concept of growing, they describe how the circulation of flea market goods transforms things in motion in a way that 'allows a view of the circulating objects not merely as things that events happen to, but as having agential capacities (cf. Gell, 1998), actively contributing to their fate' (2017:144). Such circulations within the domestic context, where transient items are negotiated over, stored in and contained in liminal spaces, reveal to us that 'circulation is things in motion, but also the infrastructural framework facilitating, or obstructing that motion' (Appelgren & Bohlin, 2015:147). The circulations and stoppages of second-hand goods in Danny's home are as much about and involved in creating and negotiating sociability and kinship as they are of items deemed as market commodities. This ethnographic sensibility moves beyond the social biography of a flea market thing (cf Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986) but follows its itinerary(s) and ongoing circulations to track its emergent process of becoming (Joyce & Gillespie, 2015). This is reminiscent of Anna Tsing's (2015) work, which emphasises the pathways and passage points that such objects-in-motion move between, not just their final destinations. In addition, taking a similar approach assists Minter (2019) in charting how second-hand goods move through value systems, time and space and often end up in landfills instead of new homes.

The living room was the most prominent site where items were contested. Here, discussions took place about what would be sequestered to the attic, emerging only with the hope that it could be sold. Alternatively, it was also here that objects deemed desirable and incorporated into the home as decorative pieces that contributed to the overall aesthetic were placed. Various family members might desire items that Danny had found that he felt were allowed to linger until 'we'd hold a "show and tell" where I'd show them my new finds, and

they would [*laughs*] mostly tell me to bring them upstairs'. On occasion, he had selected items that were met with approval and had been incorporated into the home, such as an ornate mirror, an antique, patina-ed bronze fireplace set, some large canvas paintings he had restored and some pieces of furniture. Certain items were assimilated into the home, while others were banished indefinitely in the attic. Familial negotiations determined what items were acceptable and where they would subsequently move to. Furthermore, this fluidity of flea things and the repulsion or attraction they activate for people demonstrates how both the flea market and the domestic can spill into each other, influencing what happens to the material goods that pass through and connect these spaces.

Case Study- Malcolm & Catherine & a Home that Embraced the Flea Market Feeling:

Contrary to Danny's strategy of containing the visibility of the flea market in his attic, Malcolm and Catherine's home was informal and homely, with a layered, lived-in and maximalist interior, and there was less of a strict division between flea-things and home-things. Objects that belonged to the home, i.e., domestic belongings and the family's personal possessions, etc., intermingled and melded with those intended for sale to produce a rich and layered domestic tapestry of things, décor, display pieces and functional everyday household goods. Malcolm's 'man-shed' at the back of the house, across a small wooden deck, although spatially separate and distinct to the home, continued this mixture of things for sale and things to keep, containing various tools, larger pieces of furniture he was actively restoring, and various other items that were destined to pass through his home temporarily. The shed was divided into two distinctive spaces; the right section contained this hodgepodge of projects in situ, stored various goods belonging to the family and housed some overflow of Malcolm's trading inventory. Rather impressively to me, in the space to the left of the shed door was one of Malcolm's latest

in-progress 'experiments' whereby he was using a variety of reclaimed materials (bought from the market, traded and swapped with dealers/clients, and those 'rescued... liberated really out of a skip') to try and build a sauna for Catherine.

Malcolm's home was also large in scale but contained a lot more visible material objects than Danny's minimalist home. The walls were adorned with framed artworks, various objects were displayed and stored on the countertops and shelves, the presses and open shelving were stacked full of mismatched kitchen wares, and the living room mantels and kitchen counters contained lots of interesting objects that drew one's attention. The abundance of things in the home felt much more casual than curated, with the layering of everyday domestic life made material visible and tangible throughout the interior spaces. Taking me on a tour upstairs, I saw that their décor choices and maximalist aesthetic continued throughout all spaces of the home I was shown. Recalling my observations on the journey home from their home, I noted in my fieldnotes that:

‘We walked through the bedrooms and downstairs living spaces; everything seemed vibrant, interesting and full of character- a veritable feast for the eyes- everyone I looked there was something interesting to see, and anytime my gaze lingered, the couple seemed to enjoy telling me about the origin story of the piece in question. Despite the abundance of old, second-hand and various sourced at flea markets items, adorning the home, the space did not feel overwhelming or messy. Walking through felt like a combination of visiting a museum, a curated flea market or showroom, and the most intimate and personal of someone else's home’.

Malcolm and Catherine were skilled in curating the assemblages of objects in their home. Sat at the kitchen table where I recorded most of our first interview, we were surrounded by various ‘finds’ that Malcolm had upcycled and incorporated into the home. The kitchen table was ensconced by a church pew from an old deconsecrated Presbyterian church, and Malcolm had

altered it to work as a bench space for the family to have their meals, with their three children often using it to complete their homework in the evenings after school. An old cabinet had been cut in half. It was bolted into the wall to act as a storage space for their most used dishes, and to the left of that was the notice board that Malcolm had also procured from the church and had utilised as a kitchen noticeboard for the, as Catherine described, usual 'junk, odds and ends and random crap' that accrued/collected and built up in the home. This included bills to be paid, letters about the kids' school life, a calendar for bin collections, flyers for various local takeaways, and various other documents pinned haphazardly underneath that top layer of domestic paperwork.

“We are *not* “Magnolia People”- Rejecting Normative/ Popular Visions of Home”.

Malcolm and Catherine were devotees of second-hand consumption, and their home was full of such items. During our interview, they often critiqued contemporary consumer culture, stating that 'people just want new things, what's popular at the time' and many peoples' homes were the same, or as they put it, 'beige and bland'. The couple saw such mainstream tastes as indicative of a lack of personal preference and often spoke in terms that positioned themselves as rebelling against the system, i.e., the current dominant or mass-produced consumer goods and aesthetics, etc., instead rejecting the popular and staging their home to act as an extension of themselves- their tastes, preferred styles and prized possessions. Throughout our time together, Malcolm and Catherine often invoked this figure of "the magnolia person", whom they defiantly opposed, labelling themselves the antithesis of.

Contrasting with Danny's strategy of zoning and separation, for Malcolm and Catherine, all aspects and spaces in their home were layered with material items that invoked

and connected to the flea market. Later, I will also present the reader with examples of how flea things and home things were entangled throughout the home, with objects continuously circulating back and forth across these categories. Where Danny's home was zoned to accommodate the commercial space of the market albeit banished to a liminal, hidden area of the home, Malcolm and Catherine resided within a layered domestic material landscape where objects had latent potential (cf Frykman, 2005) and were designated as market or home items as the serendipitous need arose.

Defining the “Magnolia People”.

Malcolm, Catherine, and their children were well-practised in incorporating flea market things into their home. They had shown me multiple examples of items that they felt possessed 'significant character', 'a sense of magic', and 'a history', 'these things have lived a life, and they have a story to tell'. Much of their home's material goods- those sourced from flea markets/other second-hand consumption spaces and those inherited or gifted from family and friends, now functioned as repositories of memory. These repository qualities were utilised as material prompts to tell stories and anecdotes about their lives- the provenance of the material goods and the family.

Rowland and Tilley argue that memory becomes 'objectified in material culture' (2006:501). They argue that our desire to collect and produce personal and institutional archives not only addresses concerns with preserving cultural heritage and a sense of continuity from the past through to the future but alludes to the fear of loss, both imagined and real, as 'we have museums for everything [. . .] as part of the fear that everything in our self-liquidating modernity is threatened with oblivion' (2006:500). Suggesting that such collections of objects

can become active agents, re-enchanting, as 'monuments and memorials exist as a means of fixing history' (2006:500). Botticello (2007), and Makovicky (2007), both discuss how personal collections are central to a variety of domestic practices including home-making, the intergenerational transmission of family history and the active creation of individual identity. Moreover, Gregson & Crewe's (2003) work on second-hand cultures further demonstrates how material culture can store and evoke memory, both directly experienced by the object's owner and what they imagine about the object.

Cultivating Domestic Bricolage.

Returning to Malcolm and Catherine, the items in their home, by their dissonant and divergent appearances, revealed that this was a home that had been built over significant periods of time, and the acquisition of domestic furnishings was not, for example, undertaken via a one-off trip to Ikea for matching sets. Their home was layered, full of individual pieces that had been brought together over time. The cutlery was not a matching set, nor were the chairs for the dining room table. Their furniture suite in the living room was composed of various mismatched pieces. This philosophy of celebrating unique, one-off and singularised pieces (cf. Kopytoff 1986) emerged throughout their home, and it was this preference for cultivating their collections and aesthetics that best summarised how they understood themselves in opposition to the majority of other people they knew.

Asking for clarification on what they meant by this phrase, Malcolm stated that "magnolia people",

'[are] the people who can't think outside of the box... that work the 9-5 jobs and the men do football at the weekends and women call themselves 'girlies and drink wine and go

shopping to buy whatever society tells them they need for themselves, their houses and the kids too and it's all the same stuff, the same look, the same lives'.

The couple understood themselves as the opposite of that lifestyle, and Catherine elaborated,

'They cannot understand us and we cannot understand them... it's a different way of mind, it's how people are reared but some people just... whether they naturally gravitate towards... or are trying to keep up with the Jones's and do what society tells them to...they just want things as... well we'd describe it as dull and bland and boring, the magnolia paint that everyone seems to use as the go-to paint colour that looks clean I suppose but there's no character, nothing special, nothing to say mine. They think old stuff should go in the bin and they just don't appreciate it. What we see as precious and valuable they see junk. They'd probably say my house is cluttered and a mess and I think that theirs are boring and empty and lack character or interest'.

Nodding in agreement, Malcolm continued to explain, stating, 'It's just their mind is just so fecking narrow-minded...they are like ", and we will go to *Ikea*, and oh that's stepping it up, flat packs, you know, and we'll go to *Harvey Norman [a franchised high-street retailer that sells furniture, home furnishings and electronics, etc.]*". Scoffing, Malcolm sarcastically rolled his eyes and dramatically exclaimed, 'Oooohhh *Harvey Norman*, what an adventure! They buy whatever they are told is fashionable and 'in' right now, whereas Tara, you'd be surprised how many kitchen chairs we have gone through around this table until we had settled on these ones, you know'.

Supporting her husband's disdain for the 'flatpack clientele', Catherine softened the critique, acknowledging that they had at times purchased such items themselves and they did not begrudge anyone for that, but explaining that she could not understand how someone would want a home where everything was sanitised of any personal meaning or exciting backstory. For them, the hunt for the 'right' piece that resonated with them far outshone any more short-term challenges/inconveniences of having to wait to find that perfect piece- such as they had opted to do with the kitchen chairs. Malcolm again noted that some 'magnolia people just

cannot understand our way of doing things too in fairness [laughs] we both think the other is the alien' but felt that their approach was not just an aesthetic or utilitarian one, but rather, both their shared trading and home décor preferences showed that 'it's a lifestyle'.

Encouraging their children to express themselves through their design choices, the couple allowed them to paint their bedrooms whatever colour they wanted, on the condition that they helped do the physical work. Their daughter, for example, had painted a large mural across her wall and painted both sides of her bedroom door to match, having agreed that her bedroom door was to stay in place. (The significance of this seemingly bizarre agreement will be revealed shortly). Neither Malcolm nor Catherine had experienced that kind of creative freedom in their upbringing. It was something they wanted to gift their children with to live in a home of their own co-creation that was colourful, interesting, and reflected themselves. After touring me around the upstairs of the home, Catherine returned to the importance in her view of colour and self-expression, expressing genuine sadness for those she felt were artificially constrained by their 'magnolia tendencies'. Conceiving of their own home as a 'forever ongoing and developing project' where trial and error and experimentation with the décor choices was embraced and celebrated. Catherine lamented how,

'I hate seeing [*their*] friends and family as magnolia people because it's like they are trapped. I don't mean to stereotype but we have a lot of friends and family still working in what you'd call professional careers like teachers and guards and that and none of them have any colour or anything different in their homes...'

Here, Malcolm interjected,

'Yeah, they are all the same sure they all look the same and they all bought the magnolia paint and the same stuff from Ikea... our home might not be to everyone's tastes but it's us, it's not *Harvey* feckin' *Norman*... it's got what is important to us and it's full of stories and unique things and historical things and in my opinion that's what your home should be. It should be personal and not just a replica of everyone else's same crap'.

Unpacking the Cautionary Tale of the “Magnolia People”.

The two case studies focus on the issue of how traders manage, agree to, and conceptualise the presence of the flea market in their homes. I have selected both of the case studies as they are simultaneously representative of the spectrum of strategies of concealing/displaying flea market goods within the home setting that the other traders engaged in and present as more extreme approaches to guarding the separation of or celebrating the incursion of the flea market into their respective domestic contexts. Firstly, Danny’s approach to storing his inventory represents an attempt to maintain separation between the flea market and his home, whereas, secondly, Malcolm and Catherine embrace the accumulation of flea-things and layering of the flea market in their home. For them, very little distinction or separation was applied to managing and categorising the material goods deemed flea market things or 'of our home' things. In contrast, both Danny and Malcolm faced the dilemma of containing their inventories in the space available in their respective homes. What is most interesting here, however, is the very different ways in which they have done so.

Malcolm and Catherine’s cautionary tale of the “Magnolia People” demonstrates how the material traces of the flea market are present, celebrated, and even co-constitutive of domesticity throughout the couple's home. Embodied experiences of homeyness and family were created by appropriating the domestic and filling their home with many items they felt were personal and intimate, reflecting their specific tastes, preferences and stories. Their home was full of beautiful things, but they also celebrated the old, the broken and the damaged things that added to the stories within the home, for example, a beautiful but cracked teapot that could no longer be used but was kept on display in the kitchen, but also, the signifiers of the passage of time and wear/use on various objects, such as the table and repurposed notice board were

equally valorised. In fact, these lingering material traces of the objects' previous lives were celebrated and added to the sense of care and value the object had for the couple. Weiner's (1992) work on how certain goods are so thoroughly imbued with, and valued for, the essence of their original owners that they become inalienable, cannot be demoted to mere possessions and actively place obligations on the receiver is applicable here. Whether the provenance of a flea market item was known or was imagined, in this household, it was celebrated and valorised, showing how 'possessions, as they move in time and space, become the carriers of more information and greater authority than other kinds of things' (1992:10)

The scuff marks, scratches, cracks and chips all animated the objects and only increased their appeal, layering and adding continuity over time as the family left their imprints on the same items as they used, 'damaged', and altered the same objects. Recalling a known past or crafting imagined pasts for flea market objects supplemented by nostalgic narrative means that pre-owned goods can function as mnemonic devices for recalling the past (Stewart, 2003), and as Weiner explains, 'the loss of such an inalienable possession diminishes the self and by extension the group to which the person belongs' and this can occur through theft, physical decay or the loss of memory, etc. (1992:6). It is interesting to consider if the entire flea market enterprise can thus be considered as an attempt to collect and stabilise time. Here I remind the reader of my mapping Foucault's (1967) heterotopia onto the flea market in an earlier chapter and refer to Weiner's concept of 'heroic dynamics' which represents 'the need to secure permanence in a serial world that is always subject to loss and decay' (1992:7). Such inalienable objects help to negotiate the instability and tensions between times of stasis and of change in society and through their imbued heritage help to maintain cultural identities throughout time via land rights, mythic knowledge and material objects (Weiner, 1992:11). Igor Kopytoff also

speaks of the how objects become singularised, possessing value based on this sense of imbued history and identity, as well as on an economic or utilitarian basis (1986:80).

That these wild and orphaned goods that circulate at the flea market eventually (for an indefinite period) become items that are incorporated into the most intimate spaces within the domestic ecology of home demonstrates Weiner's argument that 'inalienable objects are symbolic repositories [. . .] transcendent treasures to be guarded against all the exigencies that might force their loss' (1992:33). Weiner shows how an object over time inherits the cumulative identity of a specific group or individual (Weiner, 1992:33 & 45). As inalienable objects often extend beyond the lifetime of their owners, 'transferability is essential to their preservation', and this is often in the form of an oral narrative authenticating the origins and life history of an item (Weiner, 1992:37 & 104). The furniture and furnishings in Malcolm and Catherine's home, over time, will collect both the traces they impart upon the items through use, and these build on and are overlaid onto their previous lives, further singularising and personalising the items.

Malcolm and Catherine's home thus effectively functions as both a node for the circulation of flea market and second-hand things, as well as the expression of domesticity and identity. Their home mirrors their personal and business philosophy that 'every item has a story', and this core belief impacts upon and materially manifests in their trading but also persists through their own home. Garvey's (2001) work on the appropriation of home via moving furniture rendering the home an ever-temporary constellation of material goods is applicable here as the displaying and disposal of material goods in the home emphasise process and practice over notions of permanence. Whilst such interventions of rearranging the domestic

spaces result in ruptures to the status quo, they also reaffirm notions of identity, domesticity and kinship. Clarke (2001) argues that home decoration is not merely a normative practice in response to socio-cultural expectations but also makes future aspirations, dreams and identities visible. In this way, the generous inclusion of flea market goods in Malcolm and Catherine's home celebrates the past. It expresses their desires for the future, with the second-hand goods working as narrative generators for the family and visitors to their home.

Their preferences for colour, for an abundance of objects and a valorisation of the old, combine to create a plentiful and layered 'home-' or even 'clutter- 'scape' (Appadurai, 1996:33), that materialises the vibrancy (cf. Bennett 2009) of flea market goods and their home. As Young states, 'Colours bring things alive and so imbue them with power. It is in the messiness and jostle of many hues together that social affinities between concepts, things and people are generated' (2018:18). Young's (2004) work with buyers and tenants of retail estate, demonstrates how overly-personalised homes (such as Malcolm and Catherine's via their colourful design choices and visible domestic clutter) act as barriers to sales and that 'personal taste in color is to be avoided' (2004:9). Discussing the desirability of neutrality, Young argues that the materiality of home needed to conform to an aesthetic of 'spaciousness, cleanliness, and neutral-ity', with 'magnolia- coloured walls', Catherine and Malcolm's nightmare, representing that coveted quality of neutrality, where traces of the previous owner require exorcising (2004:8). In this context, anything that defies this quality of neutrality within the home constituted a lingering trace of the previous occupant, which were, unlike the use-marks on the flea market goods Catherine and Malcolm excitedly discussed, undesirable and required removing and/or concealing. Whilst 'to Live is to leave traces'², the desirability of such

² Walter Benjamin, "Paris Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 155–56.

lingering traces, or patinas accrued from past lives, are context-dependent and have the potential to repel as much as the potential to enchant.

Furthermore, Malcolm and Catherine communicate an emotional attachment to second-hand goods by socialising their children to think critically about home, material things, creative and personal expression, and what a home that encapsulates all these things can look like. Reiterating that the making of a home is a lifelong project, as they are constantly reconfiguring their space to accommodate for the circulation and flows of flea market things into, around and through their home and business spaces, their practices of trading cannot be abstracted or separated from the everyday flows of goods in their home and their daily practice of home-making and re-making. The circulation of such goods enables them to build and make the homes they wish to inhabit. That willingness to shift objects in and out of their home to the market enables them to develop and secure their business and livelihoods. Accordingly, Malcolm and Catherine welcome the presence of the flea market and use second-hand goods to design and add meaning to their experience of their home. Here, the flea market is not contained or hidden away; instead, it shows up throughout the home and market goods have been given precedence over the interior of their home. However, this willingness to accommodate the flea market in the home is not a unilinear process. The following section will remain situated within Malcolm and Catherine's home but will shift in focus to demonstrate, using Frykman's (2005) theory of bracketing and latency, how the flea market is also created through the circulation of domestic objects outside of the home into exchange transactions at the flea market.

“He took my bedroom door”- Dismantling Doors and Dis-Ordering Domestic Spaces.

During our interview, I noticed and commented upon some of the décor items in the kitchen. Specifically, underneath the repurposed noticeboard we sat beside were two quirky lamps that Malcolm had hand-crafted using old glass sweet jars and vintage lighting bulbs and connections, casting a soft and warm glow across the kitchen table. Noting my appreciation for them and the cleverness of their construction, Malcolm remarked that I '...could take one, or both of them even, **if** your price is right'. Catherine interjected, bemoaning that there had originally been three of the lamps but that Malcolm had, unbeknownst to her, sold one to a friend who had passed a similar compliment and offered the 'right price'. I found this interesting- the lamps had been a DIY project that Malcolm had partaken in for his home, yet when the opportunity for sale came up, he was willing to part with the lamp without much deliberation. I asked if this was a one-off sale or if that was something that he often did. Both of them laughed, with Malcolm remarking that 'even the nailed-down stuff is potentially for sale', as Catherine playfully sighed dramatically to signify her agreement.

Malcolm told me stories about how the family had agreed that certain things, such as family heirlooms, favoured objects and things with significant personal meaning to them, were off-limits. However, everything else in the house was potentially a commodity to be traded, so aspects of the home's interior shifted. The contents of the house were often subject to ongoing re-evaluations and reconfiguring within the home. Catherine listed several times that she had come home to find that a wardrobe, a spare set of dining chairs and even her son's bedroom door had all been claimed by Malcolm to sell as and when the need from one of his clients arose. Albeit he would eventually replace the items taken, there were certain household goods and furniture that they were all used to changing and getting replaced with little to no warning. This happened significantly less with their kids' bedroom furniture as they got older, with them voicing their protestations should their bedroom door suddenly disappear, removing their

privacy, or when their dad took 'too long' to replace a wardrobe, meaning their clothes remained scattered on the floor indefinitely.

Material objects in this home were less permanently embedded into the home. Instead, they existed in a liminal state- subject to judgements about whether they would be circulating to the flea market or remaining in the home, occurring serendipitously or as the need arose. Frykman (2005) draws on the concept of “cultural bracketing” to describe ‘areas of culture which are pendant, in waiting mode’ noting that specifically for material objects, ‘things are often latent, waiting to be put to use; they live an unnoticed life’ (2005:47-48). Frykman’s analysis of monuments in Croatia presented a classificatory dilemma, whereby ‘these objects were the remains of a state that no longer existed’, yet people seemed to overlook and seek to find a new use for the busts (2005:48). This is reminiscent of how people pilgrimage to the flea market, to encounter the multitude of ‘things in waiting’ hoping to discover new uses and sentiments for old things. Borrowing Frykman’s (2005) idea of ‘things in waiting’ and Woodward’s (2015) work on object dormancy, I connect these ideas to my research context and argue that we can consider the flea market as a temporary holding stage in object circulations. Second-hand goods can also be seen as ‘...something ever-present, as an interpretation to be uncovered’ (Frykman, 2005:49), and it is through the processes of ‘hierarchisation, categorisation, and classification’ that they are subjected to that process of valuation, meaning-making and that the flea market is continually re-created.

Indeed, Frykman’s concept of “social bracketing” and the latency of material objects can easily be applied to the anthropological analysis of a flea market, not just at the moment of encounter in the market but also as objects circulate and flow back and forth between the home

and the market, through the traders. He states, 'Things are often in-between, neither used nor ready to be thrown away. And they are far too ordinary to end up in a museum... Everyday life seems to be full of things like this, which we once put aside "in case they become handy sometime", but we have lost interest in them' (2005:49). The overlooked, or bracketed materiality of the home, i.e., those items that are rendered invisible, that fade into the background of our daily, domestic existence tend to languish in this state of bracketing or dormancy until they are re-discovered and acted upon. One example of this is the sale of the bedroom door that had been incorporated into the domestic configuration, presumed to be a permanent feature, yet was extracted and transformed into a commodity when Malcolm was presented with the opportunity to make the sale.

Reading Homes.

In this way, the spatial and decorative configuration of the home can be read as a living, fluid and ever-changing eco-system that connects and facilitates the movement of second-hand goods through both the flea market and the domestic. The examples of Danny, Malcolm and Catherine illustrate differing approaches that the traders had in managing the flea market's presence in their homes; for Danny, there was a logic of separation and containment, whereas Malcolm and Catherine had minimal distinction between home objects and flea objects. The comparison of their homes and efforts to integrate or separate the flea market in their homes reveal differing approaches that the traders adopted based on their living situations and available space. As the majority of the traders did not have access to a separate storage location, this meant that they had to grapple with limited storage space, which curtailed their ability to procure more stock, meaning that goods were constantly undergoing processes of re-valuation and were either circulating between the flea market and the home or, had become stuck and overlooked.

Many of the other traders I interviewed utilised similar strategies, and one other common discourse that emerged from the home visits I conducted was the concern with storage and clutter. Homes that tended to maximalist or minimal aesthetics managed the flea market's presence in their homes and represented differing, sometimes conflicting, concerns with individual notions of taste, aesthetics and style. These also served as springboards for discussions about broader socio-cultural discourses about the growing mainstream concern (or not) of clutter, excessive consumption and its associated consequences, such as climate change, waste production and ethical labour standards.

This topic is the focus of the following chapter and will be examined more closely. I flag that my participants often invoked concerns about clutter and decluttering terminology. When they spoke of their homes, belongings, trading and possessions, their words and stories were infused with and demonstrated a preoccupation with clutter narratives. These were not universal or singular- some spoke of their distaste for goods they deemed as clutter and bemoaned the constant crusade they felt they had to battle against it in their homes, whilst others critiqued the very notion of clutter itself and instead proffered theories that 'clutter being problematic' was just another product being sold to an unsuspecting consumer. Some traders delighted in and self-identified as participating in the 'junk' economy, whereas others believed themselves to be above it. Some saw the flea market as the cure for solving the problem of excessive clutter, whilst others saw it as contributing to the problem. These competing and contradictory conceptualisations of the flea market and its 'intrinsic' relationship to the notion of clutter will be explored later.

Storage Solutions- Managing the Flea market in the Domestic:

Storage of flea market goods was one of the central challenges for the traders who lacked access to an external storage space. As discussed earlier in this chapter, traders utilised differing strategies to either conceal and contain the visible presence of the flea market in their homes, as did Danny, or, like Malcolm and Catherine's approach, they celebrated their finds at the market throughout the home. Needing to physically manage and store the different types, volumes and numbers of objects they were trading in was a logistical challenge that resulted in some creative and idiosyncratic strategies. The boom in storage solutions and storage as a commodity, and being sold and marketed as the solution to clutter and excess, will be explored in the next chapter. For now, we briefly note how storing and physically managing one's inventory alongside one's household's material belongings was another practice of trading that occurred within the home, representing one key nexus/node in the circulations of objects to, within and from the traders' homes. To illustrate this, we will now draw on two contrasting approaches to storage: as a tool for inventory management, refining domestic configurations, and as a way to manage the presence of the flea market in the home.

Firstly, we review Barry's approach, where storage solutions rendered invisible, yet strictly organised, the goods he sold to streamline his home. Barry had built a boutique business, *Muggins & Co.* selling his hand-crafted framed vignettes containing *Lego* figurines. In his early 30s, Barry was extroverted, humorous and a pleasure to chat with. Starting his business strategically as both a creative outlet and to manage his own long-term collection of *Lego* figurines dating back to his early childhood, Barry had purchased many stackable, plastic storage bins and had divided his inventory of figurines up into the various franchises they belonged to and thus acted as a filing system for his custom-made frames. Using storage bins and other storage solutions meant that Barry could organise and separate his inventory within his home. Contrastingly, we consider Jess's alternative approach to storage and display

strategies. Jess, an artist in her early 50s, specialised in watercolour and multi-media depictions of florals and natural landscapes. Unlike Barry's concealing storage choices, Jess framed her artworks and hung her larger canvases in her home, simply rotating them in and out of her market stalls monthly. Talking me through her process, she explained that she got to enjoy them for some time before selling them at the market. She would, every month, survey the various framed pieces, choosing to move some around her home and others yet would be designated to go to market. Jess never finished a piece and brought it straight to market- even her commissioned pieces would temporarily ornament her own home, with her factoring in at least a few days to her commission timeframe that she could '... sit with the piece and mull it over and the lessons it gave me'.

Barry appreciated the 'coolness' of the various pieces he used but rarely lamented giving them away in the form of one of his creations. In contrast, Jess felt a connection to her creations and deemed it part of her process to spend time with them and to imbue them with her energy, as much as to tap into what she felt they could reveal to her. For Barry, selling was a creative outlet that also functioned as a way for him to manage accumulated domestic excess. For Jess, she was engaged in a semi-spiritual practice of creation and learning. This was extremely important to Jess and her process. I once mistakenly referred to her as a creative, and she chastised me for using that term when she was, in fact, an artist. That was a mistake I was careful not to repeat in front of her again, given the cold shoulder she had given me for the rest of the day that my clumsy utterance had offended her artistic sensibilities. Nevertheless, that was the reality of the traders' belief systems and lived experiences. They were deeply invested in and cared about the material things they surrounded themselves with- be that a second-hand object or an original creation, and how they incorporated them into their homes revealed far more than first meets the eye.

Many traders invoked narratives where they felt their work, art, or interests had been dismissed, belittled or disregarded by others. This included various experiences they recalled in our interviews and chats that had left lasting and negative feelings, such as when Jess had been told that her art was not 'good enough' to merit a career as a full-time artist or when Barry was told he should 'grow up and leave the toys to children', or when Danny had been mocked by some family members who deemed his interest in second-hand goods to be 'just messing about with useless shite'. However, all of the traders I interviewed cared profoundly and were invested in the material things they chose to surround themselves with, and this extended far beyond their need to make a living from them. Rather, the stories, the time, and the 'hunt' for an elusive special and unique item provided them with the most joy, meaning, and value. My participants' approach to trading is manifested and made visible and tangible in their respective homes and materially constituted domestic environments. Home, thus, functioned as a critical space through which they could create, optimise and reimagine themselves and the space they resided within. What emerges from this is the sense of the fluidity of the market and the strategies that traders draw upon to either separate or celebrate it within their domestic contexts.

Slippages and Stoppages- when things do not make it to the Flea market.

One final example I will include here to demonstrate further how there is overlap between the commercial and private spheres of the domestic and the flea market pertains to moments of rupture when objects deviate from or are re-routed from their intended destination- the flea market. In other words, not every item purchased with the intention to sell it at the market that was temporarily housed in the traders' homes made it out. Returning once more to Malcolm and Catherine, I will now describe how pre-loved objects can possess such character, charm and charisma that they can compel people to engage in practices of care and custodianship.

During that same home visit, Catherine brought down a set of delicate and thin porcelain teacups and saucers, setting them on the table in front of me and encouraging me to handle and examine their pretty floral and bird motif patterns, albeit that was underscored by the emphasising of my need to be careful, gentle, and certainly not drop any of the pieces. Suddenly terrified, I carefully and gingerly picked up the closest teacup and, holding it steady on the table, crouched down to examine it closer. Catherine became very emotional as she relayed to me the story of how she and Malcolm had 'saved them' from going into a skip after an estate sale in Phibsborough, a neighbourhood on the Northside of Dublin City, after the tenant, an elderly lady in her 80s had passed away. Malcolm briefly explained that they had previously run a small cleaning and salvage business pre-2008, where they often worked with both independent customers and *Dublin City Council*, and through that, they had,

‘Got into all sorts of shapes and sizes of houses around Dublin... our job was to get them ready to let again so one tenant would move out and there would be a week’s window and our job was to clean it all out and get rid of anything that was left behind after the Council did a check. So, we really did get to see all sorts of houses and I mean we live in a mansion compared to some of those places, like little gally kitchens. We were in *Terenure*, we were in *Swords*, we were in *Blackrock*, we were all over Dublin cleaning out stuff and anything we wanted to take we had to check with the Council but they would already have taken anything they thought valuable so we got a few bits that way... Basically, anything that was left behind by the Council’s inspector was for the skip so we could salvage anything that we wanted otherwise it all went in the skip’.

Malcolm and Catherine had, with permission, taken many different things during the time they had this contract with the Council, saving many items from ending up in a skip. A few items had proved financially valuable, netting them a few hundred euros at the market. However, for the most part, it was objects that they felt were interesting to look at or had a historical connection that they were most interested in and delighted in finding. Acutely aware of the clientele they most often sold to, their general philosophy was,

‘It has to have some story’ that ‘if you can fit it under your arm and walk away, well then, you’re on to a winner... we have a trailer and the van if we need to cart something bigger but you have to think about other things. A lot of people nowadays are in apartments, in little houses, we don’t all live in the big house you know and space can be tight but that’s modern living today and that’s the way it is so there’s no point having 5 massive traditional table and chairs or wooden dressers for sale if no one can fit the damn things through the door’.

Returning our attention to the tea set, Catherine explained how she had seen the tea set and immediately fallen in love. She 'could tell that lady looked after it so well and cared so much for it... and it is so lovely and delicate...she obviously took great care of it...and I just felt I couldn't let it end up in a bin or with someone who wouldn't look after it the way that old lady had. It deserved to be looked after. Malcolm snorted and explained how he had tried to convince Catherine multiple times to sell it- they neither used it nor had the space. However, Catherine was adamant that it had become a permanent fixture and would not be leaving the house. She opted not to use it for fear the delicate teacups would get smashed, and instead, she had cleared out a space in the front of a glass-fronted cabinet in the dining room where it was safely displayed. Catherine explained that she felt that the tea set was 'a little magic...the care and love of that lady living on her own to the little tea set... I can feel the love from it...and it reminds me most days to be grateful for all that I have, that I can enjoy it and share its story and imagine that lady being happy knowing I am taking care of her beloved tea set'.

I include this example to demonstrate that things circulate from the flea market to the domestic context and are subject to ongoing circuits of movement, care, and appraisal within the home. Focusing on both these channels of circulation, I view the home as one point in a broader trajectory whereby objects slip between routes 'intended' to end at the market and those 'intended' to end at the home, though they do not always result in that. As such, the nexus of these circulatory routes is the home; however, traders employ differing strategies of

concealment and display to integrate or separate the flea market detritus from their everyday domestic configurations.

Catherine's emotional connection to the salvaged tea set shows how everyday practices of homework, home-making and re-making were achieved through managing the co-existing inventories of both stock for sale and household items and the slippages between those categories. Objects looped around the home, holding a variety of statuses, meanings and physical placements as they were moved, tended to, or forgotten about by my participants. Some items' journeys were relatively short and moved on quickly with very little engagement. In contrast, other items required investments of time, such as repairs or upcycling, and others were stored in locations where they became overlooked or even forgotten about entirely, only to be re-discovered later. Some items that were deemed to be 'awkward' such as those that required a lot of storage space or that were delicate and fragile, requiring additional care, were subjected to frustration by the traders worrying about whether they may have gotten that particular purchase/investment wrong if they struggled to find a buyer and had to repeatedly bring the item in question home from the various markets, they had not managed to sell it at. Some items that had been acquired with the intention for sale and were destined for the market became too sought after to part with and had to be incorporated into the trader's home. In contrast, others got damaged, broken, gifted or passed on to someone who would hold more appreciation for them.

These circulations and flows of flea market objects occurred alongside everyday household management and provisioning practices. They could not be entirely separated from each other for the traders whose homes also had to function as repositories and storage facilities

for their trading stock. Although material goods were constantly flowing within and through the traders' homes, paying attention to the moments of circulation rupture is imperative. These are the moments of stalling, of rest, of intentional storage and of accidental dormancy that also fundamentally constituted the circuits of circulation that flea market things would travel upon. It is these processes of rupture and stasis that the following chapter turns to.

Conclusion:

This chapter has provided an account of the various strategies of concealment and display that traders employ whilst managing their sale inventories within the confines of their domestic spaces. Slippage occurs between the commercial realm of the flea market and the domestic context of the home through the circulation of second-hand goods, supporting earlier arguments that the flea market is not only present in the home but that the interplay of the market and the home are mutually co-constitutive and shaped by the ongoing valuations of material things that travel between them. Both the flea market and the home are thus distributed in the channels and things that connect them.

By paying close attention to the slippage(s) of flea market stuff and the everyday materiality of the traders' homes, we can see how the marketplace and the domestic context converge through the ongoing circulation of second-hand goods. Furthermore, it is in both the circulations and moments of temporary rest/ stoppage of those goods that both the home and the market become pivotal places where objects are evaluated anew and can become reconfigured as something else. My aim in this chapter is to demonstrate that definitions of the home and the flea market are not discrete but emerge through circulatory practices, and these

practices are also integral to specific kinds of spaces and contexts. Therefore, this chapter collapses traditional understandings of the commercial and domestic as separated spheres, i.e., that of public and private, respectively, instead arguing that the traders, through their approaches to making different kinds of homes and different kinds of domesticities, are also in effect re-making flea market objects. The flea market itself blurs the boundaries between what is commercial and what is personal.

Drawing on comparative case studies that outlined the various strategies traders used to integrate or separate the flea market into their domestic environment, as exemplified by Danny's banishing his second-hand stuff to the attic to avoid domestic conflict. They contrasted with Malcolm and Catherine's embracing and foregrounding objects from the market throughout their home. These case studies present differing ways of making homes and notions of domesticity, and it is through the treatment of the market items within the home that both flea market and domestic objects are valued, tended to, and acted upon. Using the example of Malcolm's selling his child's bedroom door when the opportunity arose, we can see how such latent objects (and the latent potential within them as commodities or singularised possessions) can be understood using Frykman's (2005) concept of cultural bracketing. Material objects that traverse various routes of circulation between the flea market and the homes of the traders are appropriated, re-appraised and re-valued in ongoing and contested ways.

Practices of trading extend into the home, meaning that domestic aesthetics and practices of home-making and cohabiting with material things are normative, performative and provocative. Circulation is complex, and second-hand and flea market things circulate into and from the traders' homes to other external spaces and within their homes and become stuck.

Thus, the flea market is paradoxical- it is both a space/source of acquisition and divestment of procuring and ridding. Building on this tension, the flea market can be at once understood as the solution to clutter accumulation and as a means through which some people accumulate further clutter. Clutter is a nuanced and morally- loaded term, both subjective and shaped by broader discourses pertaining to various socio-cultural factors, and was a common theme in my fieldwork.

Building on the ethnographic examples of the entangling of trader practices and the domestic context in the formation and sustaining of the flea market, we will now take a closer look at the enlivening discourse often attributed to material goods in the home. Some of my participants, such as Malcolm and Catherine, deliberately and intentionally cultivated a domestic ecology that was abundant, full of things and the stories they had attached to them. However, most of my other participants' narratives problematised and pathologised clutter, identifying it as an ongoing burden and imbuing it with a sense of self-replicating, ever-churning intent. In interviews, narratives of constantly battling against the insidious creep, seepage, and contagion of clutter repeatedly arose.

Chapter Five closes by illustrating to the reader how traders either sought to separate or integrate their trading inventories with their domestic settings. This continues and is expanded upon in *Chapter Six*, which will focus on object transformation and re-valuation processes. We will follow the circulations of objects- be they items for sale or items deemed as no-longer-wanted clutter, within and out of the home, and *Chapter Seven* will track their circulations into a variety of connotated spaces through processes of divestment, including practices of discard, gifting, donating and destruction.

Chapter 6- Clutter and Morality.

'We seem to think that the things themselves are fixed while the meanings we give to them swirl and change. While this may often appear true in the short time-span of ethnographic inquiry, from an archaeological perspective things seem transient, always changing, problematic and unbounded. Things are always falling apart, transforming, growing, changing, dying, running out [. . .] there is also the need to deal with the impermanence of things.'

(Hodder, 2011:160).

Clutter in the Contemporary:

Clutter is having a moment in the contemporary landscape. This is evidenced by the astonishingly large volume of popular mainstream content about its dangers and the need for intervention to 'fight back' against its insidious creeping desire to overtake our homes and lives. In self-help books, lifestyle manuals, TV shows, Internet Blogs and Long-Form Personal essays, *Twitter* threads, memes and gifs on social media, *Facebook* groups, *Instagram* hashtags, and various online challenges, training courses and workshops, to name but a few popular outputs, clutter is presented as insatiable, self-replicating, active and intentional. The portrayal of clutter is often dramatic and outrageous: a self-aware entity driven to subsume and produce more of itself with its nefarious tendrils seeking to claim and colonise all of our domestic spaces. Clutter is portrayed as a malicious threat not just to the order of our homes but to our very lives- our health, happiness and relationships all at risk from its insatiable appetite. Within the realm of Western pop culture, solutions to the clutter crisis abound in the form of self-help books, TV shows, podcasts, webinars, training courses, specialist decluttering programmes and exalted experts to enlist the help of all promising to help solve the clutter problem and to intervene in one's current home-making and materiality practices in order to ensure future happiness and wellbeing and orderliness.

Introduction:

Without being prompted by myself, clutter came up again and again during my research. People tended to speak about it in two contested ways: firstly, that the flea market was full of clutter and undesirable goods, but secondly, that the market was a way to divest of one's clutter, much

like donating no-longer-wanted goods to a charity shop. Unpacking this tension, I question if the flea market causes or cures clutter. Firstly, I will consider the market as a source of clutter that enabled people to acquire more clutter to be brought back to their homes. Secondly, and contrastingly, I consider the market as a destination point for clutter, one that actively transforms unwanted clutter objects into desirable commodities, reclaiming and salvaging clutter goods and returning them to a state of desirable commodities. Clutter, across my participants' narratives, was referred to in a mostly universal manner: unquestioned, standardised, assumed and accepted as conveying something negative, something terrible. However, paradoxically, despite the omnipresence of clutter narratives, this was not accompanied by a universal agreement as to what that same clutter was or was not. But what is clutter? Why is clutter viewed as something pejorative? And how does a material object become clutter?

There was no intrinsic definition of clutter that my participants shared unanimously, and, building on that recognition, I focus less on defining clutter and more on asking what clutter makes possible. My point in this chapter differs from previous work on clutter that deems it to be symptomatic of a biomedical pathology. Instead, this chapter explores how and when the accumulation of excess materiality becomes problematic, asking how individual home-making practices reclaim cluttered homes from a state of disorder. This chapter questions what clutter is, anthropologically speaking. Using the idea of clutter as an analytical framework, I examine how it works and what it enables in the traders' everyday lives, both at the market and in their homes.

Practices of domesticity are embodied and enacted daily within and through the home's contents. In the following, I argue that for the traders, these everyday practices of managing both their flea-things and home things mirror the practices of encountering and evaluating second-hand goods at the flea market. Paying attention to such domestic practices also contributes to examining the circulation of flea market things, specifically by incorporating the moments where objects cease to flow, become stuck, forgotten, overlooked or deemed no longer desirable, asking, is this when things become clutter? Such moments of stoppage equally contribute to an anthropological understanding of how second-hand goods traverse between

the home and the market. Storage and reduced consumption are oft-cited as the solution to the clutter crisis. This chapter will interrogate these consumer practices and liken them to moments of stoppage and rupture in the circulations of domestic and flea market things.

Drawing on Daniel's (2010) work on circulatory paths and Woodward's (2015) work on dormancy, this chapter focuses on the instances when circulation is disrupted, i.e., when items get stuck, forgotten about, or are transformed into morally loaded categories of 'clutter'. Such blockages and moments of rupture occur within the domestic context, yet the consequences of this actively impact upon the flea market. When goods intended for sale at the market cease to circulate, i.e., they pile up in storage spaces, are re-routed, are kept, or co-opted into the home, this alters or can cease the flows of objects into the flea market. I aim to connect the continual regimes of (re)appraisal at the flea market and the decluttering practices of participants within the domestic context to demonstrate how the management of material belongings, inventory for sale and household accumulation become entangled with and subjected to moments of circulation and stoppage within the home.

In order to trace the domestic circulations of second-hand goods through processes of evaluation, storage and ridding, I examine how my participants spoke of and related to the concept of clutter and question why clutter is deemed such a timely and imminent crisis in the current moment, both for my participants and in the broader cultural context. Observing that contemporary cultural discourses about clutter tend to lean towards espousing the minimal, i.e., clutter conventions are normative and morally laden, etc., I will first demonstrate the concerns surrounding clutter for my participants, seeking to understand how they manage the excesses of contemporary consumption. Drawing on the contemporary anthropological literature that attends to clutter (in particular, Newell's 2023 and 2014 work on clutter; Kilroy-Marac's 2016 work on professional home organisers; Bohlin's 2019 work on Swedish flea markets, and Daniels' 2010 work on Japanese homes). I will examine how the flea market and home intersect when second-hand objects cease to circulate, instead, becoming stuck in storage, overlooked or forgotten about.

Circulatory movements of objects from the flea market to the home, from public to private spheres, and from commercial to domestic settings were enabled and enacted by the traders on an ongoing basis. While there is extensive literature that focuses on domestic spheres or commercial settings, this chapter illustrates the ways in which focusing on separate spheres does not capture the blurring of these boundaries. Following and charting the circulations of objects from the flea markets can illuminate the commonalities between both. Instead of clutter representing worthless objects, I demonstrate the value of paying attention to what clutter does in the domestic spaces of my participants and how this, in turn, constructs the flea market. Through charting the flows and stoppages of goods within the home and how these overlap with clutter narratives and strategies of containment and concealment employed by the traders, what emerges is a better understanding of everyday practices of accumulation and divestment within entangled domestic and commercial spheres.

The Ubiquity of Clutter: Do Flea Market People Love or Hate Clutter?

As noted previously, talk of clutter saturated my research, and it was consistently a topic of discussion within my fieldwork. Moreover, none of my home visits occurred without some mention of domestic clutter and the challenges of ongoing labour it required. This is an interesting conundrum- so many people involved in the flea market could be summarised as having maximalist tendencies. Yet, there was so much talk about clutter and minimalism in a site that was normatively maximalist. As noted early in my field notes,

'It seems contradictory to me, "J" [*pseudonym*] was talking about how they get overwhelmed when their kitchen counters get cluttered and stuff piles up. Yet, they also adore going to markets and their garage is full of half-finished projects, tools everywhere and stuff in various states of disrepair. The kitchen counter having dishes or groceries or the everyday stuff that gathers there was anxiety-inducing, yet, the garage with its mess (not just 'clutter'- actual rubbish, broken parts, spilled motor oil leaving a sticky residue) was not a cause for concern'.

This led to an important realisation that notions of clutter are subjective and personal, but that material understood as clutter is often inconsistently and selectively viewed as such.

Clutter is Contextual:

However, I soon noticed that clutter-talk was context-dependent and contained contradictions; for the traders, clutter in the home was usually referred to as a problem, whereas clutter (in the form of the mass accumulation and gathering of various old, unwanted and second-hand goods) at the market each month, was valorised, celebrated and enjoyed. As was noted in the *Introduction*, methodologically, when interviewing traders about the flea market and their homes, clutter always emerged as a topic. As was detailed in *Chapter 5*, most of the traders engaged in ongoing processes of managing their trading stock within their domestic spaces, i.e., the practices of integrating or separating sale inventory from domestic possessions. Practices of ordering, storing, re-configuring and circulating objects within and out of the home were a core aspect of their trading work. It represents one space from which clutter discourse emerged frequently.

I propose to focus on some of the most critical features that accompany discourses of cluttering within my research and to use these attributes to define what characteristics objects categorised as clutter possess for my participants. Ethnographic case studies from my research will illuminate and enliven this categorisation and show how such subjective valuations impact the circulations and life narratives of second-hand flea market things. Therefore, it is not my intention here to provide a universal, comprehensive and irrefutable definition of clutter. Instead, I will focus on the specific ways it emerged and was experienced by my participants. And in so doing, I draw attention to when, how and why everyday material objects, such as those procured at the flea market, slipped in and out of the collective everyday materiality of my participants' domestic spaces and are shifted into more liminal categories such as that of problematic clutter; effectively, useless, no-longer-desirable and burdensome materiality? Before we turn to the ethnographic case studies and my participant's relationships with clutter, I first turn to the literature, asking what an anthropological sensitivity to the study of clutter reveals.

Problematising Clutter: Matter Out of Place, Time & Value?

The shared familiarity amongst my participants with the concept of clutter did not yield a simple nor universally agreed-upon definition. Nor does the academic nor popular writings on clutter agree upon a singular definition or understanding. Clutter's problematic nature partially owes to its ability to defy taxonomical containment. Clutter is challenging to define as the question of what object(s) constitute(s) clutter within a larger material system/amassment is not a straightforward nor static evaluation to make. Managing one's clutter is complex and multifaceted, and, in some respects, this understanding of clutter coincides with Douglas's (1966) matter-out-of-place approach to writing about dirt. Dirt is also difficult to classify, and its status as being 'matter out of place' is dependent on its temporo-spatial existence at any given moment. Clutter, too, defies our attempts at taxonomical categorisation and classification. Similarly, being assigned the label of clutter is not temporally or spatially fixed- instead, as this dissertation shows, material objects are in constant flows and circulations, and they move in and out of being classified as clutter over time. This shifting is also shaped by the space they inhabit and through their relationship with and proximity to the other material objects surrounding them (which themselves are also in flux). By these means, clutter is also relational with the objects in its vicinity. What is potentially valuable in the flea market might be rubbish when placed in the home, or vice versa. So how, then, do we attempt to apply a static label to an object in constant circulations of flux?

Douglas (2002 & 1966) follows Emile Durkheim's (1912) work on the sacred and profane dichotomy and how this replicates social structures in defining *dirt* as that which is out of its place, e.g., ash outside of an ashtray, etc. Douglas ties this distinction of right and wrong to the distinction between the sacred and the profane. Uncleanliness, she argues, is a cultural matter determined by actual and symbolic power structures and not any innate truth. Douglas's work is important and relevant here as ideas of clutter are also very much tied to notions of moral behaviour- to right and wrong ways of doing things, and specifically, for my participants, when an object is deemed clutter or not is dependent on time, space, and the moral value(s) ascribed to the item and its current location and usage. Returning to Douglas's emphasis on how time and space render an item as 'dirt', I argue that this conceptual framework can also be applied successfully to the flea market. Objects at the market are figuratively and literally extracted from time and space, brought together into one giant collection to be experienced,

examined and extracted from. Hetherington critiques the lack of attention given to movement in Douglas's work and further develops this idea of movement to focus on how social ordering attempts to reconcile ambivalence by using 'boundaries as a means of relational ordering' (1997:64). Hetherington's (1997) approach to remove such ambivalences (e.g., what is dirt? What is clutter?) is to utilise a process of utopics using principles of order and certainty to avoid boundary transgressions. Following this argument, it is possible to conceptualise how material objects and things, such as dirt, clutter, flea market junk, etc., can emerge as meaningful social residue. Such tangible things (and values) are not fixed. They are vulnerable to their eradication (through an intervention of making orderly the dis-ordered), both an act of world-making, destruction and symbolic maintenance. Newell (2023 & 2018) supports this emphasis on movement and argues that clutter is problematic because it fragments domestic ordering. Through this lens, clutter is less about 'matter out of place' but matter 'without a place' or matter 'waiting to be placed'. This 'sticky' quality of clutter, items that block up the everyday circulations and flows of goods in the home, are thus understood as 'things that have neither a proper place nor a proper time- clutter is inappropriately present, a blockage in the flow through both space and time' (Newell, 2023:234).

I build upon this approach and, shifting from the conceptual categories of dirt to clutter (meaning flea things and domestic things), utilise this framework, noting the importance of time and space contingencies to examine the degree to which my participants also focus upon both the morality of clutter and concerns with being in and out of place. Concerns about managing clutter feed into a wider moral panic about the large-scale ecological decimation of the earth and its resources, along with social justice concerns about global inequality and unjust labour conditions. However, more recent scholarship emphasises the role of movement and circulation in this process, which departs from Douglas's structural approach, and it is that approach that we will next examine.

The Anthropological Literature on Clutter:

So, what is clutter in the anthropological literature? Whilst a large body of work exists on topics closely related to clutter, i.e., those that focus on consumption and the home, etc., here, I will

synopsise some of the specific works that focus on clutter and that have influenced the arguments I make in this chapter. Anthropological discussions of clutter tend to focus on understanding clutter as a byproduct of disrupted circulation, i.e., clutter is created when objects cease to circulate. Clutter also happens when domestic surfaces and spaces are filled and used up. An abundance of excessive materiality visibly disrupts and disorders the flow and aesthetic appearance of the otherwise orderly home. Everyday routines of tidying, organising and displaying goods thus become a processual and performative practice that maintains and reproduces domestic order.

Both Bohlin's (2019) and, Appelgren & Bohlin's (2015) work on circulation within Swedish flea markets exemplifies this shift in emphasis from structuralism to circulation. They argue that second-hand goods have become more prevalent in recent times owing to a constellation of social factors such as environmental and ethical concerns, a nostalgic aestheticisation of the past, etc., and that an unprecedented growth of the second-hand sector has resulted in 'everyday objects assuming new lives through the rebranding of 'stuff' into vintage, retro or second-hand (2015:4). Such marketspaces act as conduits for the revaluing of that deemed to be useless or clutter which contains 'a complex cluster of moral-affective rationalities', and they argue that in the battle against excessive accumulation, flea markets and charity shops provide an 'expedient means for acting in a morally legitimate way when faced with the dilemma of neither wanting to keep or wanting to throw away' (Appelgren & Bohlin, 2015: 5-6). The flea market provides a space where clutter can be transformed back into a commodity through circulating with the various 'complex layers of circulation, of stuff, of people and of affects that tie together a specific second-hand market' (Appelgren & Bohlin, 2015:7). The flea market thus disrupts clutter and provides potential for ongoing enchantment and value salvage. Minter's (2019) work on second-hand economies and decluttering emphasises both the global flows of recycled goods and how 'the buying and selling of used stuff is intensely personal. Anyone can hold a garage sale, purge their closets on *eBay*, or visit a flea market. Reuse and resale give consumers a rare, tangible connection to the afterlife of their stuff' (2019:xiv). Minter focuses on the circulation of decluttered goods from the home noting that several potential flows open up and 'Some of that stuff will become treasured heirlooms worthy of future generations. Some will be buried in landfills, turned to ash by incinerators, or- in rare cases- recycled into new goods and heirlooms. And some will persist, packed in basements, closets, attics, garages, and storage units' (2019:xii).

Within the home, what determines clutter is subjective and highly contextual. Categorisations of clutter are also transient, and objects may shift in and out of states of clutter. Newell (2020) situates his work on clutter with an emphasis on storage noting '... 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'. Newell has written about clutter, its storage and spillages through the lens of time and space, focusing on clutter as an ontological fetish (2014), the concealment of clutter via storage solutions deemed antithetical to clutter (2018), the temporospatial dimensions of clutter and storage as a form of anti-time or anti-Kairos (2023) and as a form of material kinship (2023 forthcoming). Newell sounds the call for anthropologists to engage more closely with not just practices of consumption, accumulation and domestic display but also those ordinary processes of storage, decluttering, and waste and consider them as both domestic practices of home-making and as material practices of kinship, where both the cherished and burdensome material belongings of the home, i.e., those deemed to be clutter, useless, rubbish or unwanted also constitute a form of material kin.

Clutter, for Newell, is the material manifestation of an inappropriate presence that blocks the domestic flows, and enlivening clutter as possessing a 'parasitic vitality' that spreads and takes over empty surfaces (2023:234). Newell discusses how objects termed as clutter have an 'in-your-face materiality' that demands an inappropriate spatial occupation within the home, and that defies neat containment within ordered categories and trajectories (2023:230). Nevertheless, Newell also foregrounds how clutter is a byproduct of human (in)action. Clutter is created, he argues, because people do not find a place for their material belongings always to be returned to, such as through practices of tidying, storing, etc. This deferral may be reminiscent of De Beauvoir's feminist critiques of the drudgery and repetitive nature of housework, where she laments that 'Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present' (1953:438). Such doomed yet necessary practices of home-making and 'battling clutter' thus converge a variety of temporalities, i.e., the past when an object is coveted, the present where it is problematic and the future where it may be helpful again.

Newell's work tends to pair his discussions of clutter with that of storage, deemed the solution to the clutter issue. Newell problematises such binary conventions, i.e., where clutter is presented as the problem and storage is the solution, as storage often acts as a veneer. It may not solve the clutter problem; instead, it contains excess and 'allows the illusion of order within public spaces of the home.... With only the weakest efforts at classification or signposts for future retrieval' (2023:237). As the topic of storage as one potential solution traders weaponised in their battles against clutter will be discussed in the following chapter, here, I flag the conflation of storage as a solution for clutter discourse for further examination. Framing clutter as 'the activity of unsorted things, clutter is matter in motion, the gradual layering of detritus silently marking the passage of time', Newell's discussion emphasises the 'monstrous vitality' clutter possesses alongside its ability to spread, self-replicate and subsume much of the surfaces and passages of the home (2023:246). Through this lens, perhaps clutter can be considered the stagnant opposite of circulation, moving only to subsume more materiality into its liminality.

Notwithstanding Newell's desire to connect that earlier body of anthropological literature (via a material culture lens) to the study of contemporary domestic processes of clutter and storage, i.e., the literal and figurative containment of our material excesses, I note that when this topic is broached in the literature on domesticity, theorists have tended to assume or take for granted that these things constitutive clutter. However, clutter is liminal. Clutter items often tend to refuse categorisation as useful or useless. In this way, they dangle between usefulness and rubbish. Instead, I ask what happens when things are indeterminate, not clutter, not possessions, not particularly valuable nor invaluable. Instead, they have a latent value that must be fixed yet is necessarily fluid as traders continuously transition objects between the domestic and the commercial zones of the home and the flea market. Therefore, this 'fixing' is temporary because as they move on in their circulatory routes, they participate in different regimes of value and will be re-categorised again and again (cf. Kopytoff 1986 on object biographies but also Joyce & Gillespie's 2015 counter-framework of object itineraries).

For example, we see this in Marcoux (2001), whose ethnography of house-moving in Montreal focused on how older people choose what to take with them and what to leave behind when moving into residential care. Focusing on the *Casser Maison* ritual, i.e. the act of 'breaking the house', he notes that it is through practices of sifting and removal that people

become unentangled and separated from their belongings. Divestment in this context enabled people to update their own biographies and object collections by keeping things that remained sentimental/ imbued with memories and discarding those that had become less meaningful. In this context, the ritual enables the refining of the self via the divestment of clutter and no longer meaningful goods. Passing on other important material things to one's kin also reaffirms kinship bonds, and, in this context, objects are used as mediators of kin and identity in a context of loss.

Clutter is often accepted to be a negative thing, one that disrupts, blocks and endangers the home and those who reside within it. However, this is only sometimes the case, as clutter is socially and culturally diverse. Makovicky (2007) details how, in Central Slovakian, homes are expected to grow and accumulate clutter with cabinets and closets used to store and display that domestic surplus. Under the 'clutter' they physically store, these storage receptacles acquire status and a 'symbolic weight' that materialises and stores what Makovicky terms the desired and sought-after 'layer cake' effect (2007:293). This aesthetic of accumulation is celebrated, and here, clutter items such as plants, mementoes, decorative objects, textiles and figurines combine to create a cosy and welcoming aesthetic. Whilst empty surfaces may be desirable and coveted in minimalist settings, here, this layering and material accumulation represents family history and continuity over time. This celebration of clutter is atypical in the anthropological literature, where clutter is often presented as a barrier to domestic and personal contentment.

For example, contrastingly, Garvey (2018) discusses the enduring popularity of Scandinavian design with its 'naturalisation of tidiness [*and*] the easy acceptance that clutter must be combatted' (2018:104). Her work reveals how *Ikea* furnishings both facilitate the movement of domestic objects within the home and could also be seen to produce clutter. Similarly, Daniels' (2010) work on Japanese homes argues that a predominant ideology of tidiness shapes daily domestic life. She states that containment was a significant concern for her participants in how they sought to manage 'troublesome things' to avoid domestic disarray (2010:157-158). As clutter was experienced as both an unwanted material presence and a source of emotional distress, the need to control one's domestic spaces by containing or eradicating excess becomes part of the daily experience of the home. Display cabinets were used as ordering devices to store ornaments and keepsakes accumulated over time, indexed

kinship relations and threatened the domestic aesthetic. Daniels, discussing this 'tyranny of ornaments', noted the ambiguous nature of the ornaments/ clutter as they both positively materialise social networks and could be felt as oppressive, demanding space, labour and tending to. Clutter, then, is static. This demonstrates that discussions of clutter often appear superficially pejorative; the clutter itself can have multiple, contested and even contradictory meanings and values and is complicated by social practices such as gifting and inheritance.

This approach whereby clutter is deemed to result from a cessation in circulation is shared in Daniels' (2010) work on Japanese homes, and Woodward's (2015) work on dormancy and domestic accumulation in the UK. Circulatory flows ensure the home is tidy and organised and symbolically linked with ideas of cleanliness and respectability. Storage to manage this is a highly desirable commodity and will be discussed in the following chapter. Daniels' work demonstrates how 'the ideology of tidiness might be prominent but in practice, homes vary enormously in degrees of orderliness' (2010:1363). This affirms earlier discussions of clutter as being contextual, subjective, evasive and ongoing. Woodward (2015) also attends to clutter management as an ongoing intervention in the home that can never be completed and critiques simplistic explanations that 'clutter = excessive consumption' in a throwaway society. She goes on to rally the call for further research that focuses on 'the everyday patterns of use and storage of things within the home that is not spectacular but rather how people enact their everyday lives and relationships through things' (2015:216). Applying the concept of objects at rest and of 'dormancy', Woodward explains that 'in order to avoid reducing the domestic life of things to their use by people, as most things spend at least some time in storage, whether this is as a precursor to being disposed of or to being reused, it is therefore important to consider this phase of the life of things' (2015:217). Clutter is difficult to categorise because periods of dormancy are woven into the lives of domestic objects as much as they are circulated through human intervention (Woodward, 2015).

Hurdley (2013) writes on mantelpieces as focal points of the home and critical sites where daily practices of adorning, tidying, dumping and contesting space also entangle with clutter discourses. Hurdley notes that clutter can be utilised in this space as a positive display of kinship, past experiences, accomplishments and memories through the presence of various trinkets, photos, mementoes, etc., that, together, formed a tableaux, yet, individually could be

considered clutter. However, for many, the mantelpiece acted as an enticing lure for clutter to accumulate and stagnate and objects placed there were coloured by and experienced as 'laziness, dust, hesitation, failure, frailty, anxiety, squabbling and thing-yet-to-be-done' (Hurdley, 2013:103). Earlier research within the UK context on clutter and storage by Cwerner & Metcalfe (2003) also used a circulatory framework, stressing the need to follow those domestic flows and stoppages, paying attention to where items tend to pile up and cease to flow. They argue that the home is not just a space to dwell or reside within; instead, it is 'also a set of spaces, channels and flows, as objects and people find their way into, though, and sometimes out of' (2003:229).

Clutter, therefore, becomes the barrier to such smooth flows and must be foregrounded in scholarly approaches to the home and to the normative practices of ordering that occur there. Cwerner & Metcalfe define clutter as 'the seemingly disordered, unkempt array of objects that are found around the home, almost invariably out of place and blocking the flows of everyday life' (2003:229). Clutter is localised to specific troublesome areas of the home and is a personal and social problem that must be re-ordered through ongoing storage and divestment interventions. Likening clutter to a clot that disrupts the domestic, they also invoke the temporal connotations of storage and focus on how 'absence, forgetting and remembering are central elements in the hard work of ordering the home' (2003:230). This means that the home is not just a site of domesticity but should be optimised to ensure perfect and uninterrupted flows of things. Otherwise, 'Improper practices combined with poor storage systems are deemed to lead inevitably to imperfect flows, clots and blockages, that is clutter' (Cwerner & Metcalfe, 2003:234).

Arnold et al. (2012) used an approach of 'ethnoarchaeology' to interrogate the rich material worlds of their Californian participants, questioning if their belongings burden them. This entails cataloguing all visible possessions in the home, documenting their usage and conducting ethnographic research to contextualise and capture the tensions and atypical behaviours that occur within the home and regarding one's material possessions. Clutter was a shared concern for their participants, who found the clutter and density of objects crammed into their homes to be 'exhausting to contemplate, organise and clean' (2012:25). Clutter was often a source of aggravation and emotional overwhelm that threatened the family and the

domestic order. Many participants cited disagreements and conflicts about managing clutter in the home, conflating mess and stress. Gregson (2011) also finds that this ongoing attempt to manage the movement of things through and within the home functions to reaffirm sociality and kinship. The movement of things within the home, she argues, is 'fundamentally bound up in practices of inhabitations. But many of these practices of inhabitations disrupt the spatial holdings and orderings of things' (Gregson, 2011:162). Clutter is simultaneously enduringness and transience and consists of continual interventions of holding, keeping and ridding.

These approaches all focus on the clutter interventions enacted within the domestic realm by the inhabitants of that space. However, a more recent body of literature (including Newell's work cited above) that focuses on the outsourcing of this labour to achieve normative ordering has begun to emerge within the social sciences, and I refer more extensively to these in later discussions of minimalism and decluttering in this chapter. For now, I wish to flag that this innovative scholarship foregrounds clutter as the material focus and charts the emergence of the professional decluttering industry, where householders can pay experts to guide them through the process in a quasi-spiritual practice of self-attainment via mastering one's domestic environment, transforming 'overwhelmed homes' into domestic bliss. Tasia (2023) and Kilroy-Marac (2022, 2018, 2016) write on this 'magical' dimension of decluttering and agree that domestic processes of decluttering tend to be normatively gendered, with women responsible for the bulk of this decluttering labour- this also was representative of my participants. Ouellette (2019) also connects decluttering practices to feminist scholarship on 'compulsory happiness' and 'women's labour in the home' where the need to curate the home may be felt to provide greater well-being but also exerted additional demands on women who were already overburdened with material management. *'Sparkling Joy'* was a lofty goal given the burdensome nature of managing material abundance.

Finally, both Sandlin & Wallin (2022), and Belk, Yong Seo & Li (2007) speak to clutter being problematised as chaos and found that staging interventions, through hiring a professional expert, resulted in a sense of domestic and material respite where people felt better about themselves and their environment after at least partially decluttering their lives. Belk et al. (2007) examined how 'the dramatic accumulation of possessions and the limitation of organisation skills among individuals create frustration and panic in managing time and space,

resulting in home clutter and chaos' (2007:133). This resulted in frustration and moral panic, and people needed to acquire the support of tidying and decluttering professionals in order to manage their domestic accumulations and homes, felt to be a 'dirty little secret' (2007). Sandlin & Wallin (2022) disrupt the valorisation of decluttering as the solution to excessive domestic abundance; however, they argue that 'For as much as the fashion of minimalism gestures to the aspirations of anticonsumerism, it is concomitantly the positive condition upon which the overflowing possessions of a Western consumer class are fated to become trash' (2022:96). They argue that the contemporary drive to 'joyous decluttering' (popularised by the decluttering guru Marie Kondo and which also expresses self-control and discipline) whilst popular and aspirational, also reveals connections between minimalism and waste, and such interventions may in fact effectively create rather than manage or reclaim clutter. They reveal the double-bind or paradoxical nature of divestment within a capitalistic context. They conclude that

'What this disposal process obfuscates, however, is a twofold perpetuation of consumerism in late capitalism. On the one hand, the *KonMari* method functions as a contemporary fulcrum for the "happy" disposal of objects... the aspiration to "declutter" obscures a second fidelity to consumerism. That is, despite the re-enchantment of human-object relations dramatised in Kondo's shows and writings, the object is nonetheless fated to become garbage. While Kondo's method revels in the ideal of harmonious decluttering, it obfuscates the fate of the object to planetary landfills, garbage dumps, and an eternity of decay' (Sandlin & Wallin, 2022:99-100).

Having provided a brief synopsis of some of the most influential and formative conversations about clutter for this research, let us now take a step back and re-embed into the specific setting of my research and examine how clutter was encountered, understood and mitigated in the homes of the flea market traders.

My Approach:

Now we understand what the anthropological literature on clutter says; here, I shift in focus to consider what clutter is for my participants. Clutter, as both a physical thing and a colloquial terminology, is so omnipresent in contemporary parlance that most will already have a culturally mediated understanding of it. Yet, the degree to which one identifies an absence or

excess of clutter remains subjective. The traders within this research all expressed familiarity with the concept of clutter and spoke of their frequent engagement with it in their own homes, trading practices and wider lives, yet had differing relationships with the notion of clutter.

I propose to focus on some of the most critical qualities frequently attributed to notions of clutter by my participants, using these characteristics to share the various features that objects categorised as clutter were deemed to possess. Ethnographic case studies from my research will illuminate and enliven this categorisation and show how such subjective valuations impact the circulations and life narratives of second-hand flea market things. Therefore, as stated earlier, it is less my intention here to provide a universal, comprehensive and irrefutable definition of clutter than to focus on the specific shapes and forms it formed for my participants. Furthermore, in so doing, I draw attention to when, how and why everyday material objects, such as those procured at the flea market, slipped in and out of the collective everyday materiality of my participants' domestic spaces and are shifted into more liminal categories such as that of problematic clutter; effectively, useless, no-longer-desirable and burdensome materiality? Rather than imposing a singular definition of clutter to use in the chapter that follows, I focus on what it evokes of the traders, i.e., how they think about, experience, and qualify clutter. This, I hope, conveys the slipperiness, subjectivity and complexity of clutter that I encountered in the field.

Also, at the point of encountering clutter in the home, it repeatedly defies a simple solution due to its importance, worth and value being contingent upon its placement in various spatiotemporal configurations, both real and imagined in the future. How the household is configured, literally in terms of size, function and space available, as well as figuratively, how the unyielding flow of goods circulate or become dormant within it, as well as those that reside within it choose to engage with discourses about managing clutter and belongings, all affect the lifespan of things that come to reside within the home. For the traders, this is further complicated by the need to manage (via processes of separation or integration as was discussed in the previous chapter) all of this for their trading inventory and personal belongings within the domestic setting.

Qualities of Clutter- How My Participants Spoke of Clutter:

The discussions I had with my participants about their experiences of and feelings towards clutter occurred in many different settings- at the market, in their homes, and, for two female traders in the *One-Offers & Ruptures* typology, that occurred at some of the decluttering workshops we attended together. Three features were consistently mentioned across these conversations about clutter; firstly, clutter was used to describe an excessive amount/ amassment of things, i.e., "I have so many clothes spilling out the wardrobe and kitchen presses and no one person needs that many cups or jeans or coats" (Interview, 2016); secondly, clutter was used as a linguistic shorthand to refer to certain types or categories of things that were often encountered as spatially- problematic, i.e., "every drawer is full of random stuff, and so is the shed and the attic and there is only so much you can shove into a small apartment" (Interview with a *One-Offer/ Rupture* trader who was selling at the flea market, post decluttering, etc.) and, thirdly, clutter could also mean a more emotional and embodied sense of the feelings that an excess of material goods conjured for people. Here, clutter was more of an abstract, subjective feeling that concerned people than related to the specific volume of or type of goods, as per the other two qualities. To explain, one participant, Linda, a *Hobbyist & Side Hustler* variety of trader, dubbed this feeling of clutter as both a feature in her home where there was 'too much stuff and too many things' but also felt this sense of sensorial overwhelm and busyness in other areas of life that she connected to the idea of clutter as a 'too-much-ness'. For example, there were too many emails, too many options at the grocery market, too many streaming services with too many options, and too many demands on her time as a mother, a wife, a homeowner, an employee, a friend, etc. Taking these three qualities of clutter together, we can see that emphasis was placed upon the volume of items, the gathering together/physical build-up of things, and the sense of clutter that continually experiencing excessive things, options and choices produced. Other related qualities ascribed to clutter by the traders included the challenges faced when attempting to incorporate 'awkward or challenging' items, i.e., those with unclear trajectories of use and those with specific storage demands. For example, bulky, fragile, or cumbersome items that did not neatly fit with other items and necessitated additional space, care or consideration in the home were often the source of frustration for my participants.

Categories of Clutter- How My Participants Experienced Clutter.

Beyond the three aforementioned overarching qualities of clutter, i.e., the volume of things, problematic categories of things, and feelings that emerge from the sensorial experience of excess, specific categories of clutter are repeated in the traders' descriptions of clutter. Here, we now turn to these categories of clutter to demonstrate how objects circulate physically between various locales, i.e., the flea market and the domestic, and how they circulate through value categories of commodity, clutter item, personal possession, etc. I argue that objects become clutter when linked to specific places. Most examples focus on when items become clutter in the home due to a stoppage in their circulation. However, they retain the latent potential to be relocated to the flea market, where they become desirable in two ways: firstly, as a source of potential monetary income for the trader, and secondly, as a desirable commodity for a potential buyer to purchase and make their own.

Here, I include two excerpts from interviews where my participants described clutter and which convey some of those similar qualities of clutter that were captured across other conversations in the field.

'I find it quite stressful honestly to even bring people in here [*to the living room*]. No matter how much I clean up and I have all the matching storage boxes and the pretty baskets over there, the kids toys just seem to multiply and take over the place. They are really good at tidying up but the floor never stays empty long. I don't have space for a shoe rack in the hall...well I have never used one either to be honest so shoes pile up and they just don't have a place. I don't want to put them away and then have to go searching each time someone needs shoes but they end up in here and I mean where are you even meant to put shoes? My husband and I both work from home and so some of the paperwork ends up in here and we keep picking it up and moving it to the kitchen, to the office but it comes back and its so hard to keep any surface clear. The more space- the countertops and presses- it doesn't matter they just fill up somehow and there is so much stuff that I don't know where to put or how it keeps reappearing here'.

(Maria, a *Hobbyist/ Side-Hustler* trader who sold handmade soaps and skincare products she made in her spare time as an aromatherapy and massage practitioner).

'I learned that I need to stop buying so much because once it comes into my home it is so much harder to throw it out. I am terrible for buying little cheap things and thinking I will redecorate with them... little candle holders or crystals or ornaments and they are doing what they are meant to do in my home but I see them all the time and eventually you have a stockpile of candles and they feel precious and I don't want to burn them or use them up. So instead they just go into boxes or onto the bookshelves and they become clutter and I feel bad

looking at them all but I'll feel bad if I burn them and they are gone. And don't get me started on my books. I was reared on books and reading was always encouraged but I have so many books even my childhood ones but it feels wrong to get rid of books and I love having a collection and I keep thinking of future me who has more time and can sit and read and burn the good candles and is so zen and cosy but that's not me now so it feels like a waste so it all just sit there waiting for me to be ready. The books and candles are good to go. It's me that's making them clutter'.

(Hannah, a regular visitor to the market that I got to know who would eventually go on to sell some of her book collection at the flea market when her living situation changed and she moved in with her partner Lucy).

As the two excerpts above indicate, clutter is complex and highly subjective. Items move in and out of states of 'clutter' and can impose feelings of burden, obligation, relationship and opportunity. Many of the following seven aspects of clutter are captured in the two excerpts above, and further examples of these will be examined as the chapter progresses.

1. Abundance and excess- clutter is a byproduct of possessing too many things.
2. Layering effects- the accumulation and gathering together of those too many things with clutter becoming visible, tangible and materially obvious.
3. Ambiguity and uncertainty- an item's usefulness depends on real and/or imaginary future uses. Items that may present as clutter in the present retain usefulness in imagined future time and space.
4. Dispossessed and displaced- these things had no clear or consistent 'home' within the domestic setting. These clutter items did not fit into the normative order of the home and thus stood out and caused dis-order.
5. Sensorial and Affective- co-residing with clutter was an emotional and physiological encounter that could be a source of comfort and pleasure but could also evoke shame, guilt, stress or overwhelm,
6. Agency and Intention- clutter was often enlivened and imbued with a sense of power, threat and malintent in participants' narratives.
7. Judgement and Normativity- most participants understood (and rarely questioned) clutter to be a negative material thing that also conjured negative feelings in themselves as they related to it.

Combining these seven aspects, what emerges here is an understanding of clutter as a layering of excessive everyday life, of material things whose usefulness is uncertain, whose home is unclear and whose active presence can cause negative feelings for those that reside alongside it. This description of the qualities of clutter evoked by my participants captures and conveys a sense of un-aesthetic objects that have piled up in the home, that have neither a set location nor set role/function in the home, but that are often kept for (imagined) future uses. Clutter as a conceptual category can be applied to individual objects, as well as to the singularised and collective category of clutter composed of the accumulation of many individual objects. Such hoards or piles of clutter are further complicated due to their subsuming of other domestic objects that are not inherently understood as clutter but which, due to their proximity via the seeping out of cluttered items across domestic spaces, may become subsumed into the body of the hoard. For example, Anja, one of the *Hobbyist & Side-Hustler* traders who made decorative candle holders and photo frames, lamented that she did not have

‘a separate place to work, so everything is thrown over the kitchen table, and then the kids need the table for homework, and my things get messed up. They have lost my good paints bringing them to school, or I found homework that went missing, because it was shoved into my storage boxes and then I open it up and find English spellings and another time, geography homework, at the market’.

For Anja, her craft supplies were simultaneously the tools through which she traded at the market and were clutter in that they took up space in her home, were messy and resulted in her producing more of the items she sold, which also took up space and required storing and managing. When these sold at the market, the craft supplies were not deemed problematic, yet when the trading was slow, and she had to accommodate more of her inventory in the home, i.e., in plastic storage bins in her utility room, Anja experienced both the craft supplies and the products she created as burdensome, demanding, pejoratively dismissing them as clutter that got in the way of, and complicated her practices of cleaning and house-keeping. For Anja, once her creations were circulating out of her home and into other homes via the flea market, she was content; however, in moments of stoppage, where the items failed to circulate as fast as she hoped, they had the capacity to both become domestic clutter and, as with the homework mentioned above, could even wreak havoc in the daily rhythms of the home such that she spoke

of how the clutter (i.e., her supplies, etc.) was responsible for the lost/ misplaced items that would randomly be rediscovered later in unusual ways.

This example also reveals to us how a shared sense of sinister agency was often afforded to clutter by my participants. This imbuing of agency and malintent to clutter was present across both the scholarly literature discussed earlier in this chapter and across most of the popular media outputs from the specialist decluttering industry that has emerged/ exploded in popularity in the last ten or so years. Across those various interventions with clutter, what remains common is how clutter is imbued with a productive and self-sustaining capacity. My participants spoke of how clutter seemed to reproduce to generate more of itself and of battling vigilantly against the ever-present threat of clutter taking over. This association of contagion was deeply embedded into participants' understandings of clutter (cf. Douglas on purity and contagion). Anja, whom I had attended a *KonMari* introductory workshop with hosted by one of the few Irish consultants who had graduated from the intensive programme, remarked after the 2-hour practical session where we learned the principles of the method, how to test an item to see if it 'sparked joy', the correct order of tidying up, and practised folding techniques, that,

'I think about clutter...well 'it's almost like magical, but the black kind of magic, the bad and dangerous kind. What I mean is where there is some clutter, it makes more. You just look away or ignore one thing for a little bit of time, and then it explodes and magically transforms and takes more. And then what is and isn't clutter is confusing, because it might be or it might just not be in the right place and it casts a spell. You either don't see it, or it's all you can see. And it keeps churning, and more stuff turns into clutter if you are not careful. You have to fight it and watch out for it, and you have to tackle it quickly.'

Anja's labelling of her craft supplies as clutter shows how circulation (and moments of stoppage/rupture) impacts how domestic and flea market objects are valued, categorised and understood. Anja felt that a build-up of artwork in her home occurred when she brought items to the market but did not sell much. When they had failed to sell and accompanied her home, they both demanded storage space and, I would suggest, reminded her of an unsuccessful day's trading which, as many of the artisanal and creator-traders confirmed, had the potential to knock their confidence in themselves and their work. Everyday housework practices were

complicated and extended as the presence of such surplus items required various interventions such as display, care and maintenance, and storage. Anja was contemplating hiring a small storage space in a nearby town to accommodate not just her creations but also some other household goods, e.g., a suite of furniture, winter clothing, a collection of her children's old toys and books, etc., points to a growing reliance on the proliferating external storage industry. This increasing uptake of individuals paying for external storage spaces to manage and store their domestic accumulations provokes questions about the slippage of what was once considered home into more semi-public spaces but is outside the scope of this chapter. For now, let us move to unpack the intertwining of notions of clutter with discourses of aesthetic normativity and the moral espousement of an aesthetically minimal household within a context of excessive and superfluous things. In other words, let us now encounter and cast light upon those liminal, concealed and hidden spaces of the home, i.e., the shed, garage, attic and the ubiquitous "junk drawer", and question why they often evoke shame and embarrassment.

Clutter as Morality:

The current 'Clutter Crisis' is a Morality Crisis. Discourses and conventions on clutter tend to focus less on societal change, instead placing more emphasis on personal responsibility and individual consumer interventions, e.g., ceasing mindless excessive consumption, decluttering the home, etc., in a context where minimalism is presented as the solution to the excesses of capitalism. The redemptive promises of self-optimisation, via processes of self-discipline, self-improvement shunning unnecessary consumption, decluttering and tidying up, etc., are all entangled with the growing concern and heightened awareness about the social and ecological problems resulting from the proliferation of cheap consumer goods, concerns about the excesses of contemporary material possessions within increasingly smaller domestic spaces converging concerns about consumption and capitalism have been co-opted to function as morality discourses. Growing cultural criticism about the accumulation of more clutter and the volume of goods sent to landfills pervades our daily lives through widespread media coverage.

For example, the *NY Times* and *Time Magazine* both published several articles between 2014 and 2019 referring to the 'clutter crisis', the imminent threat of 'no more landfill'.

Nationally, *The Irish Times* also regularly published several articles on the clutter crisis, how to manage clutter, the need to divert waste flows to landfills, and tips on embracing a more minimalist and decluttered lifestyle. The need to manage material worlds and the strain it is imposing upon the earth's resources has led to a (justifiable, albeit insufficient as a solution) moral panic directed at consumers to cease partaking in the Dionysian excesses of throwaway consumer culture and to become instead more eco-aware, responsible and ultimately, consumers, of far less. At first glance, such advice may appear sound; however, this entangling of the material with the moral is complex and requires unpacking. What constitutes 'normal' engagement with things in a consumer society, and who is responsible for making that determination?

In the contemporary context where clutter is deemed a crisis of morality, the spectre of the hoarder, she who consumes excessively and whose clutter multiplies out of control, is ever-present and functions as a sort of cultural bogeyman, a cautionary tale about the danger of excessive consumption. Minimalism and tidying up, within the domestic context, in particular, thus emerge as the solution to the excesses of consumer culture through decluttering and storage solutions. Divestment becomes aspirational, and the status of being a green, responsible and minimalist consumer, made tangible through a minimalist home, becomes a form of social and cultural capital in the Bordieuan sense (1979). However, such utilitarian narratives fail to account for the emotional resonance of accumulation and the relationship that people have to material things, otherwise de-valued as junk, as clutter, etc. Here, clutter can be considered a form of kinship that connects the past and future to the present. Concerning the flea market traders, the following section will interrogate this moral imperative to declutter and challenge how influential it was for the traders I worked with.

"Clutter Equals Too Much"- Clutter as Moral Failing.

Returning to Maria, whom we met earlier, we can see how notions of clutter are bound up with moral connotations of failure, impropriety and identity projects, as she describes how her inability to 'manage the clutter' in her home becomes indexical of other ways that she feels she is struggling. Here, clutter becomes a shorthand for feeling overwhelmed and a sense of

ongoing failure to live up to the idealised and aspirational standards of perfection. Maria brought me on a tour of her home, hesitantly opening cupboards and drawers, pointing out the 'clutter that is just everywhere'. I asked her what the presence of that clutter that she had identified throughout her home made her feel, and she sat silently for a bit before responding as follows;

'To me, clutter is a failure. My mother always comments on the mess in the house and I feel like a sulky teenager being given out to about her messy bedroom again. And all this stuff piled up that I don't use or don't need but we spent the money on it so throwing it out is a waste but keeping it just for keeping it makes me feel bad too. But there is just so much stuff... the girls are given lots and I do buy too much for them in *Penneys* and I know I should be shopping at more ethical places but sometimes you don't have the time or the money or the will power. And I probably am a bad example because with the business I have so much but I need it...well most of it...my husband is always going on about there being stuff everywhere and do I need it? I have 50 different essential oils which you could say is excessive but they are for different products and then he's no saint either. He has his own stuff like games and books and he golfs so the garage is full of that stuff too. Maybe we are just a family of hoarders and there will always be stuff everywhere and I will never not feel lazy, and irresponsible about the too- much of it all.'

Maria's exasperation and shame at the clutter in her home touches upon many of the aspects of clutter discussed above. There is a sense of there being too much, and her inability to conceal or get rid of the excess of items that have built up in the home induces feelings of shame and vulnerability about her abilities to keep her home organised, both as a 'sulky teenager' and in the present. Furthermore, the ongoing battle with the domestic clutter impacts her kin relationships; clutter is a source of shame and nagging with her mother, a provocative source of conflict with her husband, and a source of concern about her children.

Maria explained that the flea market was one channel that added clutter to her home. Trading every month at multiple markets, she was constantly seeing and coveting,

'beautiful things and bargains and you can pick up lovely bits for the kids, for gifts, for Christmas. And what's also hard is that I am a small business owner too and I know how hard it can be and how much a few sales can mean. So I try to support and encourage some of the other small traders there and then I end up with lots of these little bits at home that I mean to give as gifts and then you forget about them and they just build up. My husband calls it the "emergency basket" [*laughs*] I have this big basket of random gifts and crafts and body lotions and potions and candles and all these small bits I pick up and then if we need a gift

last-minute, or someone call unexpectedly and we need something we raid the "emergency basket" so its not really clutter because eventually it will be used but a lot of that stuff ends up sitting there for months if I am being really honest'.

For Maria, then, the flea market is a source of clutter that builds up in her home. She is motivated by wanting to support other small traders with whom she feels a sense of companionship. Unfortunately, this means that the items she purchases go from desirable flea market commodities to burdensome clutter, to a contained and stored inside joke, i.e., the "emergency basket", etc., that may, one day, be excavated and retrieved and be used/transformed as a gift that reaffirms kinship and balances reciprocity. Unpacking the moralities entangled with Maria's discussions of clutter reveals what work clutter partakes in and enables. For Maria, her process of accumulation, storage, repurposing and divesting of clutter relates to commercial, familial and domestic concerns. Maria speaks of the flea market as a risky place where clutter emanates from:

'it is so dangerous for me, and it brings out the worst of the 'clutter-bug' in me because it is so easy to leave with a bagful of new things, and that's just part of the market experience. I mean, you don't go to a flea market to leave empty-handed... of course, I want to leave with lots of my stock going home in other peoples' bags, but I always bring home more stuff, new stuff and old stuff, and it just keeps piling up in my house. And that's a bad thing and that causes me problems, but at the same time, you are supporting small businesses and supporting second-hand, and we are always hearing about how we should be buying local and supporting second-hand. But honestly, the flea market definitely accounts for a lot of the stuff that's piled up in my home.

Constantly encountering desirable things that she 'just cannot resist', she brings them home. However, once they accompany her into her home, they often seem to become problematic and a source of contention: where they go, what she will use them for, the money she spent on them and ultimately, they are cast into the "emergency basket" for an unknown period, in which they are simultaneously an opportunity and a burden. The objects in this storage space are both the tangible expression of past 'mistakes', i.e., unnecessary/ excessive purchases and are also considered to be temporally-oriented solutions for future instances of kin relations that may occur and that require acts of reciprocity and gifting to resolve and maintain. Ultimately, for Maria, clutter was experienced as a negative thing, as was the case for most traders, producing feelings of overwhelm, guilt, failure and shame. However,

exceptions did occur, and whilst it was more typical for clutter narratives to trend towards the negative, this was not unanimous.

Returning to Malcolm and Catherine, I next discuss how ideas of clutter can be separated from negative feelings when the very concept of clutter is challenged, and domestic abundance is coveted rather than feared. Ultimately, clutter is not intrinsic to an object. Clutter functions as a label which people put on certain things based on normative expectations, i.e., we should all be decluttering or minimalist, we should all have tidy homes as tidy and materially minimalist homes are good homes, etc. However, such societal pressures and moral values are fraught and are prone to shifting and changing over time. As discussed earlier, Malcolm and Catherine trended towards a more maximalist aesthetic and their home's décor included and celebrated many material objects they had sourced at the flea market. Instead of objects being imbued with negative connotations of clutter, they experienced the objects they brought home, even those with no apparent or immediately discernible purpose, to be positive and 'just waiting' to be 'useful for someone for something' eventually. Malcolm explained that,

I don't always know what I'll use some of the bits I buy for but we love old things with a history and even if there are some things that get stuck in the shed for a bit, what of it. It's not a problem to not use everything straight away or all the time. Sometimes things just need time for you to think about them and what to do. I have restored stuff and sold it on, or used it in the house like the noticeboard and most of the time it works and if it doesn't sure you just get rid of it- there's the skip, the scrapyard or if it's something I can break down, I can use parts for other things or [*laughs*] its kindling for the fire'.

This statement is free of any of the sense of shame or guilt that Maria evoked earlier. Malcolm and Catherine are more tolerant of excessive things building up and accumulating in their home and, in fact, even advise that certain items should be given time to sit and linger so that they can figure out how to upcycle them or wait for the opportunity when the need for that particular thing emerges. They can then pass on or sell it. Whilst it was more typical for traders to invoke connections of clutter with the flea market, Malcolm and Catherine were defiant of this suggestion and, in our interviews at their home and with Malcolm at the market, critiqued the growing popularity of minimalism and noted their disapproval of the 'fads about getting rid of stuff and being a minimalist or whatever', as Catherine noted. If morality was imbued in the flea market for Malcolm and Catherine, it was less about rejecting second-hand goods and

embracing a minimalist lifestyle devoid of visible clutter. Instead, for them, a 'more responsible' way of managing the surplus of material things was to embrace the goods at the market and 'value more deeply older things with a past and a history'. Malcolm understood the market then as a space where clutter was transformed and revitalised as commodities again. Instead of a space to accumulate clutter, for him, the market salvaged items from that category, and thus, shopping and accumulating more at the flea market was a means to lessen clutter. When I challenged him on this, arguing that surely this approach would eventually lead to more domestic clutter spread in more homes, he immediately disagreed and commented that,

'Clutter is only clutter...hell does clutter even exist... if you can see a use, maybe now or maybe in the future, then as long as you can enjoy and want the thing, or it can be useful then it's not clutter. Clutter is made up. If you don't want clutter then don't see your things as clutter. Keep what you want and to hell with what anyone else says. It's a load of nonsense some woman on the internet tells you to get rid of stuff and you just do it? Grow up!'

What emerges here is a contradictory relationship to the flea market. For Maria, the market is a direct conduit for the movement of clutter into her home, where it often piles up and represents a source of shame and conflict. Contrastingly, Malcolm and Catherine actively defy minimalist discourses and see the flea market as a key space where goods can be salvaged from a state of being clutter, old, unwanted or abandoned. For them, the flea market actively transforms and revitalises goods. As such, they passionately rejected any arguments I made supporting Maria's opinion, and so what we see here is tension between the traders and how they see shopping at the flea market differently. Whilst both connected the flea market to morality discourses, Maria desired an aspirationally minimalist home but kept getting lured and enchanted by flea market goods, and, contrastingly, Malcolm and Catherine rejected the normative messaging about minimalism that they experienced, instead positioning themselves in opposition to it. For them, becoming a responsible consumer entailed embracing a sort of material maximalism where clutter was less of a concern as they actively tried to reject the pressure to keep an aesthetically perfect home with empty surfaces and organised cupboards. That said, Catherine did note that they were still responsible and intentional with their purchasing. They did not just mindlessly accrue goods for the sake of having stuff. They felt no shame in decorating their home with things that were 'important and meaningful' to them, and they were committed to keeping those things in their lives/homes for a long time. For the couple, they had their home, and they had their things, and ultimately, you could arrange it,

call it clutter or not, leave it a mess or be organised; it was their home and their things, and they could do whatever they wanted with it, as should be the case for everyone, even the poor "magnolia people", as Malcolm once remarked. The morality of the flea market and its role in broader discourses and critiques about consumer culture, the second-hand goods that circulate within it and the channels it creates into the domestic sphere is thus subjective and self-sustaining whether one subscribes to it or rejects it, as shown above.

Minimalism, Tidying Up and Hoarding- Merging Clutter & Morality Through Normative Discourses & Pop Culture Practices:

Contemporary and trendy pop culture was frequently invoked by my participants when we discussed the topic of clutter at the markets and in their homes. Over time, I noticed a pattern emerging. I could predict reasonably accurately that any conversations we had about clutter would inevitably feature one of if not more, of the following three cultural touchstones of clutter discourses- Marie Kondo, Minimalism, and Hoarding. These three examples were very influential in how people understood and positioned themselves to clutter and the sneaky ways in which they were influenced about associating clutter with (often negative) invocations of morality discourses in the media. Paradoxically, discussions of Kondo, Minimalism and Hoarding continually occurred at the flea market- a site of excess and abundance, rendering the tension between the market as a conduit for acquiring or casting out clutter ever-present. My fieldwork generated sufficient data to write an entire additional dissertation on this topic alone; however, much of that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, the following sections will provide an overview of how these three topics influenced my participants' confluences of clutter with morality discourses.

Hoarding & Narratives of Being a Hoarder:

As was noted in the Introduction chapter, *Hoarding Disorder* was added to the DSM-V in 2013 as a compulsive spectrum disorder with specific diagnostic criteria and standardised therapeutic interventions, understood as a difficulty with both accumulation and discarding, i.e., trouble parting with personal possessions, and persistently acquiring more objects, that fills up and overtakes one's living spaces until they are no longer functional, causing distress/danger. Categorized as a cognitive disorder where subjective beliefs about the instrumental, sentimental

or intrinsic value of objects are over-extended, people with *Hoarding Disorder* are deemed to desire to keep things regardless of their actual value. This terminology invokes a sense of individuals being afflicted with disordered value; however, this suggests a 'correct' spectrum of value intrinsic to a material object. As this dissertation has argued, the value(s) given to material goods is subjective, ongoing and complex, and this understanding prioritises the biomedical model over socio-cultural frameworks for examining hoarding behaviours.

Kilroy-Marac (2016) suggests that the inclusion of Hoarding Disorder in the *DSM-V* works to '...distinguish supposedly normal late capitalist practices of accumulation, organisation, and divestment from pathologised forms of being-with-things' that people with Hoarding Disorder (HD) are diagnosed/pathologised with (2016:442). Socio-cultural approaches instead seek to acknowledge that resolving to mediate and solve this overflow and excess of contemporary material possessions is far more challenging than the hyper-individualised advice of managing one's own home, de-cluttering one's possessions and minimising one's future unnecessary impulse purchases. This neoliberal imperative focuses less on societal change, emphasising the need for personal responsibility for individual consumers to enact their interventions. The moral imperative to change one's consumer behaviour by reducing one's material belongings is a form of social messaging that seeks to situate the problem of contemporary clutter as being indicative of individual consumers' flawed material management as the core problem of contemporary culture. For example, alternative socio-cultural approaches posit that hoarders are sensitive to the latent potential in material things that the majority may overlook. It is less my intention here to enter into that debate in earnest; instead, I want to acknowledge this contested approach to hoarding as relatively recent, ongoing and complex, requiring significant further care and attention, before commenting specifically on the modes it emerged for my participants.

Returning to my research, hoarding as terminology was frequently expressed by my participants, none of whom would fit the diagnostic criteria for *Hoarding Disorder*, and for whom hoarding was a colloquial word choice employed liberally for referring to topics such as clutter, excessive things, mess in the home, what they saw at the flea market, etc. Usage of this term was also contested, and some of the traders self-identified as 'hoarders' in a positive and playful sense. In contrast, others distinguished and differentiated themselves from the

negative associations with this term, i.e., 'I mean, I love this second-hand stuff, ***But*** I am ***not*** a hoarder. I am not like those people you see on TV whose homes are dirty and stuffed full and disgusting', as one trader remarked somewhat defensively when the word came up in a conversation between second-hand sellers at the flea market [*emphasised to reflect the speech utterance*]. Invoking the notion of a hoarder was always done on a spectrum, I found, with people quick to distance themselves from the 'real' or problematic hoarders that they saw on TV shows, as is evidenced by the comment above.

Influenced by the media representations of hoarding, traders were situated in multiple overlapping systems of first- and second-hand exchange and circulation, where the value of old things was fraught. Traders participate in practices of acquisition, exchange, selling and reclaiming of goods in various consumer spaces in order to furnish their homes, manage inventories of goods for their jobs and engage in everyday material practices of provisioning. Hoarding, as an accusation or as a self-labelled marker of identity, was morally laden and the degree of acceptance or insult that it conjured up for the traders was context-dependent, i.e., who was saying it? Where and why? Etc. For example, a trader's mother-in-law critiquing her home and calling her a hoarder was experienced as a shame-inducing insult, whereas the same word casually thrown out amongst like-minded colleagues at the market affirmed identity and was readily accepted and normalised as a non-shameful joke.

Questions of value, hoarding and clutter were evident in the monetary potential they had bound up in the inventories of sale stock they had expertly curated. We can see this in the following example, which contains an excerpt with two *Professional* traders of second-hand goods that I was privy to:

Trader 1: I care a lot about the pieces I get going to good homes. They have a history, and when they have survived this long you don't want to see them go to be broken up for parts or wrecked when people do that...what's it called... shabby-chic nonsense? Perfectly good things like old Irish dressers, literally Irish design and history, and they paint them in chalk to conceal the scratches and the knots [in the wood], but sure, that's the charm.

Trader 2: [*interrupting*] you and your bleeding heart, would you stop that nonsense? We are there to sell and make money, and it's none of your business what people do. If you care that

much, keep it, but don't act like you are doing charity or the lord's work when you want to fill your coffers...

Trader 1: I am not saying I don't care about the money. I am just saying that certain things deserve respect and...

Trader 2: [*interrupts again, directed to me*] Don't mind him. He's just a hoarder wants to keep all the history, you called it? You can't keep it all locked up forever like a museum. I buy what I know will sell, and I can turn a good profit on it because you get to identify that stuff over time. You know what will be a nice little earner, and unlike this fella beside me, wannabe hoarder of all the design and history, that's what puts money on my table, and that's the priority.

As this shows, the extent to which traders experienced any moral obligation to the goods they were selling varied, with accusations of being hoarders lobbed at those who did. Some traders were very upfront in their admission that they felt a minimal obligation to broader anti-consumerist movements; instead, they were driven by the pursuit of financial gain or the enjoyment they felt from the lifestyle perks they felt accompanied the trader lifestyle. These included the ability to orient oneself towards flexibility and creativity, unlike the traditional 9-5 they actively rejected, meeting interesting people, pursuing their interest in second-hand things, the sociable nature of trading, etc.

However, many of the traders did acknowledge their desire to, in varying degrees, contribute to a slower, more intentional mode of consumption that valorised and was open to the latent potential to be had in second-hand goods and the enchantment that engaging with such old things could conjure. Traders invoked similar narratives that situated themselves as noble mediators, enabling and encouraging consumers to be more open and appreciative of old flea market things, and that often-included mentions of the magical or even spiritual whilst also critiquing contemporary retail. This sentiment was expressed in various ways, for example, 'I can help them see the magic in [*an old wooden display cabinet*] it if they can be open to something old', 'there is a quality, a sense of the past and a history to this [*jacket*] and people cannot buy that in *Penneys*', and finally,

'if people were more willing to appreciate older things like [*a mid-century modern desk and chair*] they could get a feel for something that was built to last and has a history and

a personality, but only certain people can feel the magic and the character of things like these. You have to be the right type of person’.

The above examples demonstrate how notions of hoarding were expressed when differing value(s) between traders (and in fact between traders and flea market visitors) emerged. For the traders, being the correct type of person meant being willing to reject popular, contemporary, mass-produced and cheap consumer goods in favour of being enticed by more bespoke pieces with unknown and older provenance. This magical connection was deemed only to be accessible to certain individuals. It was a commendable trait in the eyes of the traders, who often enjoyed lengthy discussions with such customers about the objects in question, notwithstanding that they relied upon/were dependent on such 'tuned-in' individuals to fund their trading lifestyles through their purchases. This shared quality or ability to recognise another person who saw multiple forms of value in old flea market goods and their potential due to their past lives appealed greatly to the traders, who also conceived of themselves as possessing this quality and sensibility. This attuning to the magic within second-hand goods was a character trait that the traders understood themselves through, as discussed in the earlier chapters, and that enabled them to forge connections and community with other like-minded individuals at the flea market.

What we see here is that, for the majority of the traders I connected with, it was more this desire for shared understanding and appreciation, as well as their enjoyment of and love for the second-hand material things themselves, that motivated their actions, beliefs and practices, rather than their main concern being with the need for emergency consumer interventions in an ideological attempt to intervene and save the planet. As we see in the exchange between the traders above, their focus was often on the market objects themselves and their relationships to other objects in their vicinity rather than a commentary on the role of consumption in ecological crises or the preservation of history. Criticisms of hoarding and more mainstream market economies cannot be assumed to refer to critiques of capitalism *per se*. Therefore, a key question to consider when confronting the moral imperative to alter one's consumption habits we are presented with in lieu of larger systemic interventions can be considered as follows: To what degree is a consumer responsible for the destiny of their possessions? Who is responsible for the (infinite constellation of potential) afterlife(s) of

consumer goods that may outlive their owner? Do our obligations of care and responsibility extend beyond the current life of a belonging and into all potential future trajectories and aftermaths of divestments? When traders use narratives of hoarding, of clutter as a lens through which to perform and stage everyday materiality and morality within the domestic confines, and in the larger circulations of second-hand goods, questions of care, moral normativity, and what determines excess/ abundance in everyday consumption shaped and transformed. More specifically, it is interesting to consider these within the framework of the flea market and the differing senses of obligation that traders feel they owe (if any) to the second-hand objects that pass through their own homes, stalls and collections.

The Minimalists & The Aesthetics of Absence:

Minimalism was another normative practice relevant for the traders as they grappled with managing clutter in their homes and the broader impacts of consumers trending towards the minimal in higher numbers throughout the market's existence. Minimalism, as a solution to, or antithesis of clutter (typically discussed as unfavourable) for the traders, did not arise from nowhere. In *Chapter Two*, I charted the emergence of the flea market in tandem with the 2008 crash and subsequent period of economic austerity, and minimalist lifestyles emerged as a critique of capitalism, material accumulation, and the throwaway consumer culture that had led to the recession. Not surprisingly, in the environment of both the *Co-Op* and the *Dublin-Flea*, there was a valorisation of a more minimal (read as shorthand to mean more conscious and responsible consumers) lifestyle. The growing awareness of more modern, minimalist consumption practices was not free-floating but sprang up as part of this growing trend of people encountering the material/domestic excesses within their homes and having to contend with the messaging that superfluous things were no longer indexers of status and wealth, but instead represented waste and excess. The *Dublin-Flea* expanded in parallel with this period of post-recession recovery and austerity and, as is discussed elsewhere, eventually became displaced when *Newmarket Square* underwent a period of growth and transformation, eventually becoming gentrified and a victim of its growth. The paradox that emerges here, however, is the extensive discussion of minimalism in a chaotic and cluttered locale, i.e., that of the flea market. The majority of the traders present in this research had symbolically positioned themselves as already participating in a second-hand alternative consumer system

that rejected and even existed outside of the mainstream due to their participation in the flea market scene. As such, the gradual weaving together of more minimalist narratives makes sense to a degree, yet that paradoxical conundrum of aspiring for minimalism in a site of maximalism continues. Traders needed, therefore, to embrace conflicting approaches to both managing the (maximised) circulation of their sale inventory, as well as managing the flows and blockages of clutter in their (minimalised) domestic settings.

Minimalism- instruction, imperative and aesthetic.

What is minimalism, and where does it show up in the lives of the traders? Suppose clutter is understood to be a malaise of the modern world. In that case, minimalism is posited as one of the two most popular solutions, the other being the commodification of storage, which will be explored later. If clutter is presented as an ailment of contemporary excess, the solution (itself being commodified and packaged for consumers) of minimalism as a lifestyle choice and an aspirational aesthetic is one that is becoming increasingly popular. Minimalism as a consumer lifestyle is traced back to the early- 1970s *Voluntary Simplicity Movement (VSM)*. The shared philosophy of those in the *VSM* revolves around,

'a way of life that rejects the high-consumption, materialistic lifestyles of consumer cultures [...] arises from the recognition that ordinary Western-style consumption habits are degrading the planet; that lives of high consumption are unethical in a world of great human need; and that the meaning of life does not and cannot consist in the consumption or accumulation of material things'.

- 'The Simplicity Collective' Official Website.

The starting point of the modern simplistic movement is contested with some connecting the 1981 publication of Duane Elgin's *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life That Is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich* as a critical landmark, whereas others propose that the same message about the dangers of greed and materialism can be found in the teachings of the *Buddha*, and also in the *Stoics* and *Cynics* philosophers dating back to ancient Greece and Roman times- simply put, Minimalism and Voluntary Simplicity- are the same thing but packaged differently. For the present context, I will draw heavily on the teachings of two men

who are most readily associated with the minimalist movement and the contemporary rejection of materialism and consumer culture: Joshua Fields Milburn and Ryan Nicodemus, who have created an entire brand around their minimalist philosophy, boldly going by the shared moniker of *The Minimalists*. Amongst some traders that either already embraced a minimalist lifestyle or were aspiring towards it, these two, in particular, possessed a cult-like following. As with Marie Kondo's infamous decluttering practice, which will be discussed later in this chapter, Milburn and & Nicodemus were ubiquitous figures, often cited by my participants. The traders interested in minimalism did also speak about/ give examples of more local Irish examples, but, these two were repeatedly referenced as representing the most famous, influential and aspirational of practitioners. Milburn & Nicodemus argue for adopting a minimalist lifestyle as the solution to the excesses of consumption and, indeed, capitalism. Their brand of minimalism preaches the productivity of decluttering, claiming that it will enable people to master their own lives and connect to their true purpose and higher selves. Their philosophy utilises a religious/spirituality sensitivity with both redemptive promises of self-optimisation and improvement via discipline and intentional engagement with one's belongings, as well as a salvation trope- that anyone can overcome their material burden and curate a life that is more meaningful, rich and optimised through the purging of excessive belongings. Their brand has positioned them as gurus or experts to admire and whose teachings can be implemented to attain personal development and fulfilment. These morality narratives effectively function as a form of magical thinking whereby gaining mastery over one's home and belongings will automatically transfer into mastery over the self.

As noted above, Milburn & Nicodemus are prolific figureheads of the modern minimalist movement regarding cultural outputs, with numerous publications that ended up on the *NYT Bestsellers* list, podcasts, public speaking events, and film/documentary makers. They have a podcast, *The Minimalists Podcast*, that they started in 2015, with over 400 episodes aired to date. It is challenging to state the impact they have had on the cultural landscape around consumer culture as they have received widespread media coverage, and it is fair to suggest that they have been a cultural phenomenon in recent years. In a feature on minimalism featuring the pair, *GQ magazine* estimated them as having an audience of 20 million in 2017, and the year prior, in 2016, *The Washington Post* wrote that their blog, set up in 2010, had a readership of over 5 million people. Positioning themselves as leaders of the movement, they argue for a

form of materially-mediated self-help. In other words, they claim that minimalism creates a more straightforward and streamlined life by minimising one's spend on material things (both in the form of monetary expense and the labour that goes into maintaining such items), which not only benefits the individual's happiness and contentment, but that also has broader societal and ecological good. *The Minimalists*, following a Marxist line of thinking, argue that there is too much stuff, not just in our homes, but in the world due to the twin epidemics of overproduction and overconsumption. Minimalism, according to the two, is about the experience of more through having less. Their website's landing page situates their approach as follows, and this is oft-repeated in their other outputs:

'At first glance, people might think the point of minimalism is only to get rid of material possessions: Eliminating. Jettisoning. Extracting. Detaching. Decluttering. Paring down. Letting go. But that's a mistake.

True, removing the excess is an important part of the recipe—but it's just one ingredient. If we're concerned solely with the stuff, we're missing the larger point.

Minimalists don't focus on having less, less, less. We focus on making room for more: more time, more peace, more creativity, more experiences, more contribution, more contentment, more freedom. Clearing the clutter frees up the space.

Minimalism is the thing that gets us past the things so we can make room for life's important things—which aren't things at all'.

This emphasis on self-improvement through whittling down one's possessions to the most coveted possessions and barest of necessities is extremely popular. At the time of writing, they have nearly 6,000 *Patreon* supporters helping to finance their podcast, publications and various other works. However, it is important also to acknowledge that they have been subject to various critiques, most of which appear to be well-founded. *The Minimalists'* target audience is predominantly middle-class and affluent individuals, i.e., those who can pursue the aspirational aesthetic of the minimalist lifestyle and who deliberately and intentionally choose to make do with less out of choice, and not from financial necessity, which demonstrates considerable crossover with the market clientele and traders I worked with. Critiques of the pair have suggested that they are essentially encouraging and glamorising the aesthetic of poverty, but for those with the socio-economic privilege to never have to worry about going without. Coupled with that privilege/status line of critique, they have also been challenged on how their approach, as portrayed in their many outputs, focuses still so much on accumulation,

albeit less so in the form of visible materiality. For example, a 2020 article in the *New Yorker* magazine by Jia Tolentino entitled *'The Pitfalls and the Potential of the New Minimalism'* describes how a core logic of accumulation still underpins their philosophy of less material things. Tolentino writes that they have packaged and translated modern minimalism into '...a philosophy of intentional restraint into an aesthetic language through which to assert a form of walled-off luxury—a self-centred and competitive impulse that is not so different from the acquisitive attitude that minimalism purports to reject'. Tolentino suggests that this logic of accumulation as the means to improve and actualise oneself still pervades their philosophy, which is an interesting paradoxical critique towards the lifestyle.

This paradoxical conundrum at the heart of the minimalist movement is one of its most cited critiques. Many online think-pieces, personal or long-form essays, blog posts, and social media engagement such as *Twitter* threads, *Facebook* groups, and *Instagram* pages discuss, support or criticise minimalism as a lifestyle approach, as a set of life principles, and as an expression of aesthetics. Social media and online culture, in general, have fed into and boosted the visibility and popularity of minimalism by generating swathes of content for one's perusal. The online aesthetic of minimalism has been co-opted as a way to demonstrate mastery over one's home environment and material belongings. Furthermore, interestingly, it is through this curated and performative rejection of excessive materialism and the accumulation of 'too much stuff' that minimalism is portrayed to the masses through popular online content. Ironically, this aestheticisation is presented as if it is happening in real time. However, its ethos is reminiscent of the origins of austere, minimal and modest modernism with the *Bauhaus* movement (cf. Taussig 2009 on chromophobia). Absence, emptiness and space have superseded the acquisition of material things as a new way to demonstrate one's status, morality and mastery over the domestic and material realms. These same visual cues can be found across much of the online *#Minimalism* content, where empty, bare surfaces can be read as indicative of a minimalist persuasion. [This preference for and staging of empty surfaces, i.e., curating presence through absence of what is shown versus not shown, etc., also produces messages about what is being portrayed and what is true or deceptive, cf. Miller (2005 & 1998) on depth ontology]. Social media has expedited and normalised the idea that an ideal home is not just free of clutter but, indeed, one that tends towards having much less. Particularly in the context of the post-recessionary period that minimalism gathered social currency and popularity in, it

is interesting to consider whether the boom in popularity of this specific flavour of minimalism, one that is highly aestheticised and replicated in online spaces within the Irish/global context can be read as an aftershock to the financial crash?

It is important to note here that there are, of course, degrees to which any one person/household may choose to engage in minimalism. Most of the prominent figures of minimalist social media are quick to advise their followers that this is a lifestyle and not a trend or fad they must perfect in a matter of days. A lot of the 'how-to' guides for minimalism stress the fact that this is a lifetime process, a habit and form of mindset enlightenment that requires time, patience and practice to achieve. All of this sounds very reasonable, and the sheer volume of minimalist content online and in the 'bibles' (i.e., the volume of guidebooks published on the topic) serves to support, guide and instruct one through the daunting process of becoming a minimalist. However, as with many consumer interventions and alternative lifestyles, the practice can and has been subverted, twisted/co-opted on social media by various prominent 'influencers' or gurus in order to convey status and social currency to their dedicated legion of minimalist-in-progress followers/devotees. Examples of this, such as the *30-Day Minimalism challenge*, the *Minimalism Game*, or the *Live with 100 Things Challenge*, (to name but some of the multitude of aspirationally-Minimalist online challenges that proliferated during this period) alongside a latitude of varieties of decluttering challenges available online, actually competitively emphasise status through the pursuit of less. However, that absence of materiality must be perceived by others in order to validate its worth. Participants are given lists and plans of actions to take, and categories of objects to declutter and discard from their homes, but to really participate in the challenges to the full extent, participating online, sharing hashtags, uploading images showcasing their progress, and participating in members-only or public groups are encouraged. Individuals who partake receive affirmation, validation and encouragement from the group/ wider public through posting visual evidence of their work, e.g., stacks of boxes to be donated, refuse sacks piled up to be brought to the dump, and before-after photos that juxtapose cluttered piles of belongings with gleaming, bare surfaces.

Such visual signifiers of the labour of decluttering and minimalism; after all, in the minimalist context, the absence of clutter of material things equals and can be read as the labour that was required to achieve such emptiness. That labour tends to be highly gendered, with

predominantly women partaking in decluttering interventions in the home as an additional aspect of their, still unequally distributed, responsibility for the home, its inhabitants and its material possessions. More about the problematic forms of labour that minimalism and decluttering interventions often require will be explored elsewhere in the chapter. Additionally, the fundamental guiding question accompanying much of the minimalist and decluttering literature is, 'Do I *really* need this, or can I get rid of it?' But what about wanting or being obligated to goods? Such 'need it or bin it' approaches fail to account for the life forces of things and how they can act upon us. Remembering that objects can act as repositories of memory (cf. Hoskins 1998; Miller 2005; Geismar 2013, etc.), or function as objects that prompt/illicit stories and kinship ties, renders the act of decluttering more meaningful, challenging and confrontational.

Subverting Conspicuous Consumption as Status.

Attempts to remedy this version of minimalism that has become performative and normalised as the idealised and morally correct domestic aesthetic on social media have come from within the movement and are too many to represent here. However, in my research, I found the critical reframing of minimalism by the journalist Kyle Chayka in his (2020) book entitled *The Longing for Less: Living with Minimalism*, (and as noted in a 2020 *New Yorker Magazine* article, written by Jia Tolentino, discussing Chayka's work), to be one of the most astute, nuanced and comprehensive attempts to challenge and confront the commodification of minimalism that abounds in the online spaces and pop culture of popularised minimalism. Drawing parallels with Gell's (1998) work on conspicuous consumption where accumulation is not natural and Appadurai's (1986) social biography approach, Chayka's work presents stories of individuals who incorporated minimalism (minus the online performance of it) in their daily lives and, on his personal website, describes his book as 'deconstruct[ing] the contemporary fascination with minimalism, analysing the *Marie Kondo* cleaning boom and austere *Instagram* aesthetics as well as uncovering the roots of our fascination with absence in art, architecture, music, and philosophy'. Whilst the popular canon on minimalism, decluttering, and other related home-styling, lifestyle and fashion (e.g., minimalism = a capsule wardrobe) abound, Chayka's work reads less as another contribution to the massive instructive 'how-to' literature, but instead, a corrective to it- one that aims to shed the superficial 'Instagram aesthetics' association, in favour of a deeper existential engagement with messiness, meaning

and uncertainty. Declaring his approach a 'minimalism of ideas rather than things', Chayka (2020) criticises the popularised and pervasive thing-oriented minimalism that had dominated the cultural landscape.

According to Chayka, true minimalism in its purest form is "not about consuming the right things or throwing out the wrong; it's about challenging your deepest beliefs in an attempt to engage with things as they are, to not shy away from reality or its lack of answers" (Chayka 2020 in Tolentino 2020). Therefore, the vision of minimalism as a life philosophy that Chayka advocates for is not one where the optimisation of life can be achieved through the divestment of things and the performative pursuit of less is more. Rather, even contemplating the possibility that the current iteration of minimalism with its curated social media presence could effectively constitute a capitalist ruse, Chayka argues that 'taste', shaped by algorithms and spat back out to us through social media platforms, becomes normalised and homogenous. The result is people desiring the same aestheticised spaces and homes, 'which often happens to involve austere interiors, reclaimed wood, and Edison bulbs [...] or a certain faux-Scandinavian minimalism' as he wrote in an opinion piece lamenting the proliferation of what he termed 'hipster aesthetics' (2016:1).

Adding to the scholarly discourse on how the idealised aesthetic of emptiness and lack of visual clutter comes to dominate ideas of what a good home ought to resemble, Kilroy-Marac (2016) likens this trend to a subversion of Thorstein Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption- whereby the presence of material objects is used to signify and convey status and prestige and social currency. Instead, under the minimalist rubric, we see the refusal to witness the presence of clutter, which Cwerner and Metcalfe claim to be an 'almost inevitable feature of consumption' (2003:236). Effectively, minimalism encourages and promotes a focus on what is not there in the visual absence of indicators of clutter. It is this presence through absence that confers competency and prestige for those who reconfigure their homes to fit the ideals of the minimalist aesthetic, as it is through their labour and skill in practices of tidying, divesting and organising that obtaining the minimalist aesthetic is performed. Kilroy-Marac notes this emphasis on what is missing, describing how what she finds most remarkable about work done by POs is '...that these well-ordered domestic spaces isn't the careful staging of luxury items, but rather all the things that aren't there. It's not just the meticulous arrangement

of these interiors, then, but the obvious absence of clutter that signals a new form of affluence' (2016:446). This twist on Veblen's (1899) conspicuous consumption, in this context, reconfigured as inconspicuous conspicuous consumption, a lack of clutter conveys affluence and virtue, effectively forming a moralising discourse around the home, its possessions and inhabitants. This moralising discourse contains strong sub-currents that speak to 'the merits of moderation, self-regulation, and self-discipline amid endless possibilities for acquisition and accumulation' (2016:446).

Chayka goes on to take issue with the gurus of anti-consumerism that appear to obfuscate the point that simplicity or minimalism are worthy aspirations in themselves, instead promoting self-improvement through high-end and aspirational consumption practices. Terming this the difference between 'profound and superficial minimalism', he points out that the logic of the market is entangled with this version of the aspirational performance of minimalism. This is merely another form of what I term 'conspicuous inconspicuous consumption' whereby people are buying into solutions from the market in order to perpetually improve one's material accoutrements, ready for the displaying of the absence they have crafted in order to capture the admiration and validation of others. Chayka's closing advice is that individual interventions in the market can only go so far as more significant structural problems exist that are absented from popular discourse on minimalism in favour of targeting the individual and their pursuit of self-mastery over themselves, their belongings, and their world as a form of making and setting order in a chaotic world. This is the contrast between the minimalism of things and the minimalism of ideas that he advocates for

"The latter argues that ridding yourself of possessions means ridding yourself of trouble and difficulty; the former suggests that the end point of stripping away excess is the realisation that the world is more troubled, more difficult, more discomfiting, and also more wondrous and full of possibility than it seems [...] Your bedroom might be cleaner, but the world stays bad" (Chayka, 2020).

Applying this lens to current popular notions of minimalism and the pursuit of self-mastery and actualisation from simple lives via curated homes with fewer belongings enables us to see how everyday practices of home-making and managing belongings, through choosing when they circulate in the world versus remaining 'stuck' in the home, are shaped by broader

consumer discourses, including those that claim to reject the excesses of consumer capitalism. The design aesthetics that prevail and are distributed across the consumer landscape all impact how we organise our homes and curate our belongings, reflecting particular cultural desires and normative messaging. Much of the social messaging that accompanies narratives that valorise minimalism and extreme decluttering as the solutions to the cultural and moral anxiety about the excesses of contemporary throwaway consumer culture. Other design trends that were popular during this time also popularised this requirement to find a balance in one's domestic ecology with the aesthetics of *Hygge*, *Lagom*, *Wabi Sabi*, and the growing uptake of practices such as *Swedish death Cleaning (Dostadning)* and *Japanese decluttering (Danshari)* etc., respectively commercialised and desired by many middle-class homes.

This desire for and valorisation of this idealised version of an aesthetic home appeared in my research. This was often expressed in more nuanced forms, such as traders apologising for their homes and how they were 'messy' and 'not like those "proper" perfectly organised houses. Occasionally, this was expressed much more explicitly, such as when Alison, a *Professional* trader specialising in vintage fashion and jewellery, remarked, 'I want a minimalist home, but I am too much of a magpie, always wanting colour and sparkles and stuff. I want to be better, to have a better home, and I know less would be better, but I don't think I will ever manage it'. Alison had a massive collection of vintage clothing that she wore and traded but had very little storage space in her flat. Even though her goods were organised in boxes, racks, etc., having so much stuff in such a small space always meant it felt and was experienced as clutter and overwhelming to her.

As noted above, this increased consumption, in conjunction with reductions in the size of homes, therefore impacting upon storage options and clutter available within domestic spaces, has become a key cultural concern. Accumulations of consumer stuff and the cumulative entry of new goods into the home are problematised as ecological/sustainability concerns. Yet, the aesthetic value of possessing and sharing via social media a minimalist home often prevails, and many self-identified minimalists cite this self-improvement as a motivating factor for their entry into minimalist lifestyles. Minimalist homes are often praised for being thrifty, more sustainable and indicative that the inhabitants have evolved beyond indulging in the excesses of capitalism. However, as noted elsewhere, most of those encountered in this

research are, in line with the target audiences of many minimalist interventions/ workshops and online challenges, middle-class and financially comfortable, if not affluent. Here, the subscription to minimalism is less reflective of domestic practices built upon environmental care and concern. Instead, minimalism can be commodified as an elite consumer lifestyle that conveys discourses about order, consumption and the acquisition of status via curating absence.

For many traders, their discontent and rejection of minimalism for its lack of 'respect' for older things that have long passed out of their prime and may no longer be functional is also due to a clash in aesthetic ideologies. Patina was one object characteristic that my participants often cited. Patina, in the form of scratches and indentations, craquelure or crazing, scuff marks and tarnishes are not always congruent with the popular iteration of modern minimalist homes whose clean, bare and often shiny (to symbolise cleanliness and newness) aesthetics where traces of the past are rejected in favour of clean lines and blank slates, or, as Malcolm and Catherine referred to this 'default- settings' aesthetic as that of the 'Magnolia people' in the previous chapter. For the traders, especially those of second-hand flea things, patina symbolised the very appeal of second-hand things- that they had a life that was lived before this moment. It was through their careful and caring predilection to examine the wear and tear, both explicitly obvious and more subtlety in the hidden creases and cracks of goods, that value was encountered and to be celebrated. It is not sufficient to state that for minimalists' patina is undesirable and that all second-hand traders valorise it. That is not to say that there exists no minimalist that appreciates the effect of patina, but rather, this generalised preference towards patina was felt by the traders to differentiate them from those who, again quoting Malcolm, 'wanted shiny new things with no character or history'.

Invisible Minimalism as Visible Labour.

'It is frustrating if I am honest. My friends all find the same. We are always picking up after the kids and trying to manage everyone's stuff. We joke that our husbands just don't seem to see the clutter, the mess, the dirt the same way we do. And even when they help out, it's still not done right and we end up arguing about it so it's just easier to do it myself. But it is really annoying at times'.

- Clara, a *One-Offer/ Ruptures* trader on managing clutter in the home.

From the excerpt above, we can see that within a minimalist domestic setting, the absence of clutter and excessive material things must be read as labour. Time, effort, resources, and expense goes into maintaining one's home to replicate the minimal interiors and carefully curated and staged homes that have gained so much online traction and are held up as the golden standard of what a minimalist home should be. This aspirational home-making labour was mainly directed at affluent and middle-class homes whose minimalism was underscored by privilege and could be read as crafting performatively austere homes, never out of financial necessity or lack of resources. Related to this physical labour is the emotional labour that goes into moderating and configuring one's home to meet societal and normalised conventions of what a good and proper home ought to be, essentially, the production of neoliberal citizens and households (Eriksen et al., 2015). The, albeit relatively recent, body of literature on minimalism and decluttering interventions in the home repeatedly finds that the majority of this labour falls into the already overburdened realm of women's work in the home (cf. Oulette 2019; Tasia 2023; Woodward 2015; Sandlin & Wallin 2021; and Kilroy-Marac 2016, amongst others). As seen in Clara's description above, ongoing practices of battling clutter are at once physical and emotional (cf. Wulff 2007; Hochschild & Machung 1989; Hochschild 2007). The various actions required to craft and maintain minimalist and, following that logic, aesthetically pleasing homes involve ongoing practices of arranging, sorting, tidying, evaluating, and cleaning, and these are repeated on loop as new household objects, consumables, and possessions enter and leave the home. This is further impacted by the life stages and transitions within the household, with marriage or breakups, bereavements, children, pets and visiting family all shaping and adding to the emotional and logistical burden and challenges of maintaining the home.

Marie Kondo- Sparking Joy through Tidying Up & Home-Making Practices:

At least ten of the traders I worked with referred to the impact of professional decluttering gurus and tidying organisers as influential in their home-making routines. Beyond a passive familiarity with such professional decluttering experts and programs, five of those traders (all women ranging from their 20s to 60s) had deliberately sought out further expertise. They had taken workshops, attended online webinars and in-person events, bought books, subscribed to podcasts, followed influencers on social media and partaken in various online decluttering

challenges. I accompanied a smaller group of these traders to various talks and workshops and was invited to participate in/ observe their homes after undertaking various decluttering interventions. All of the women were well-versed in and excited to talk about perhaps the most famous decluttering guru of all, Marie Kondo, whom they described as the '*Queen of Decluttering*' and whose approach to decluttering and tidying they had become devotees (whether enacted or aspirational) of. That Kondo's approach to managing clutter was so embedded in the homes of my participants was interesting to me as it spoke to the normative ways in which the management of everyday practices of home-making- sorting, tidying and disposing- become entangled with notions of clutter and morality, i.e., domestic surplus/ clutter functions as the barrier to both a normative home and a better future. In this context, the message is that new possibilities and realised selves suddenly become apparent when one is no longer weighed down (literally and metaphorically) by too many material possessions.

The emergence of a new decluttering industry- professional organisers as quasi-spirituality.

A 2019 article in *The Irish Times* entitled '*How to clean up in the decluttering business*' proposed that the recent boom in the decluttering industry meant that 'Kondo's success has sparked an entire industry around decluttering and tidying up, and it's forecast to be worth up to \$11.8 billion (€10.4 billion) by 2021'. Professional organisers and decluttering experts (henceforth referred to as POs) emerge as healers of excessive materialism. Rather than merely focusing on pursuing the most streamlined number of possessions, as demonstrated by some of the online *Minimalism* challenges, they are motivated by considering in dialogue with their clients what needs the home needs to fulfil to create a place of well-being for its residents. The long-term of such decluttering interventions go beyond merely attaining a more orderly home; instead, the messaging around decluttering and tidying speaks to ordering the material environment and achieving inner order and moral equilibrium.

Professional tidying and decluttering services, which often utilise storage solutions, are filling a niche in the consumer market in response to consumers growing experience of lacking space in the context of having more stuff. The cumulative effect of wider socio-economic and cultural trends, e.g., smaller living spaces, deferred home ownership and spiralling rents, etc.,

means that tidying up, customisable storage solutions and curtailing the number of possessions one collects are all necessary practices for many people. This is where the experts of the decluttering industry step into their power, providing and teaching 'overwhelmed homes and overwhelmed clients new organisation systems- the 'life-hacks' that result in orderly surroundings and, consequently, mental and spiritual well-being. PO work effectively involves intervening, advising and monitoring people going through decluttering and trouble-shooting any logistical, organisational or emotional struggles. In a way, the POs can be understood as guiding the circulation of objects within and without the home as they oversee the decluttering, organising and tidying processes homeowners undertake to regain control over their disordered spaces.

Clutter management, here, can be emotionally laden as people are required to come face-to-face with problematic or challenging objects- those that ceased to circulate- and need to make prompt decisions about the items' destiny to avoid getting stuck and overwhelmed, meaning the project of decluttering the home stops and starts, stalling and is never completed. Some of the more challenging of these items to confront tend to consist of the embodied materiality and inalienability (cf. Weiner 1992), felt from objects used to represent self-identity/aspirational expression of a desired future self, personal archives, hand-me-downs or inherited goods/family heirlooms or generally, those with a 'sticky' emotional resonance. Kilroy-Marac captures this almost paradoxical bind of the interventions staged by POs in the homes of their clients. 'At the same time that POs attempt to sever connections between people and things, they also hold tight to another form of magical correspondence based on the belief that mind and matter may mirror, project, and affect one another' (2016:451).

Emphasising the notion that a decluttered and organised home results in an orderly mind and life, POs effectively invite their clients to engage in the form of magical thinking with them, whereby the exterior reflects the interior and improvement to the exterior will compound for the person's overall well-being and happiness. Essentially, the home becomes conceptualised as a literal and symbolic site of personal and familial growth where it is possible to become a better person through the optimised cultivation of your home. Therefore, the domestic setting is not just one's place of residence where one's stuff accumulates; rather, it is

a crucial site through which to manifest, perform and refine creativity, commitment/ self-discipline and ultimately, domesticity. This form of magical correspondence via domestic optimisation is emotionally and morally laden, offering people an opportunity to make more efficient their inner worlds, as much as their material surroundings, as long as one has the means to pay for that service and the time required to intervene in the home and manage it for perpetuity. Tasia (2023) discusses this 'magical dimension' of the work of home organisers. Tasia's work draws on how various socio-cultural messages are subsumed into decluttering interventions (e.g., minimalism self-improvement narratives), creating moral imperatives to improve the home and the self continually.

This is because the work of ordering, tidying and organising is ongoing, and decluttering can only ever be a temporary, transient achievement. My participants constantly bemoaned this reality, lamenting that 'it just keeps coming back' and 'The work in the home is never done. And yet I keep trying to get on top of it, etc. This fits with Gregson et al's argument that 'the state of feeling at home is achieved principally through acts of appropriation, through which accommodation is transformed' (2007:23). This emphasis on processual practice also recalls Ingold's (Hallam & Ingold 2017; Ingold 2005) writing on 'dwelling' where ordering and re-ordering one's home is an ongoing act of becoming that is never finished. Ingold prefers the dwelling perspective and explains that 'the forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings'. This perspective can also be traced back to Heidegger's (1971) writing as he argued that 'we do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is because we are dwellers (...) to build is in itself already to dwell (...) Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build' (Heidegger *in* Hofstadter, 1971:141-161). This captures how the production and dismantling of clutter are constituent parts of being, or dwelling, in the home. This dialectic between people and their homes is constantly re-making and re-conceptualising clutter. As Lefebvre (1971) surmises, space, in this context domestic space and the trajectories of goods that circulate in and out of it, are in a constant state of becoming as 'each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space' (1991: 169-70).

Tasia's (2023) work on decluttering equates this process of tending to the home as tending to the self, arguing that decluttering, tidying and organising interventions by home organisers (HOs) operate on a principle of both producing domestic normativity and affirming moral values, but that also promises a magical or enchanted transformation whereby 'by creating a certain order at home, one can get better' (2023:44). This underlying 'analogical principle' that combines home, body and the earth, works based on association, and forms sympathetic or magical thinking. The work of a professional decluttering specialist, then, is to disrupt the 'sympathy' (Frazer, 1890) or attachment that clients hold for their things, unentangling their affective and inalienable bonds. This 'healing work' of freeing clients from the excessive burdens of their excessive material accumulations is the core underlying premise orienting professional home organisers, yet, as Kilroy-Marac (2016) explains, this approach is at once paradoxical and even conflicting in its approach to the things themselves. For example, at one of the decluttering workshops I attended with some market traders, Caroline (a *Hobbyist & Side-Hustle* trader and stay-at-home mother to 3 young boys who crafted beautiful intricate crocheted children's clothes and blankets, as well as embroidered tablecloths and customised clothing) frustratedly commented that

'She [*the decluttering expert facilitating the workshop*] says that things are just things and it's okay to throw them away but then other books I've read tell you to sit with and hold everything and they all have energy and want to be used and cared for... which is it. How am I meant to touch a jumper my mother made for me and understand it as love and memory and childhood and also, it's just a ratty old jumper that should get tossed. It's so inconsistent. How do you ever know you are doing the right thing?'

This concern with trying to future-proof potential regret over items that were divested, donated or dumped was a common challenge for my participants who were undergoing decluttering journeys. Making the right choice as each item was evaluated was stressful, emotionally laden and posed potential future upset, loss or grief. POs seek to disenchant material things, meaning clients can divest themselves of them and move them out of their homes, circulating through various channels of gifting, donation, selling, or disposing. However, this very practice requires clients to attend to and attune themselves to the animacy and what Jane Bennett (2009) refers to as the "thing-power" of those same objects.

In this way, practices of care, decluttering and divestment directed at the home, will, ipso facto, prove beneficial, healing, and even therapeutic for the mind, body and spirit of the individual residing within it. This 'syllogistic trick' [...] establishes an analogical relationship between the interior of the house and the body [...] and because it involves an action as prosaic as cleaning, it seems like a magical act, indubitably enchanting [...] tidying, therefore, becomes a sensible way of restoring order to things present and future' (Tasia, 2023:48-50). This promise of achieving 'the good life' through an aesthetic of simplicity thus subverts previous understandings of how the accumulation of consumer goods was understood to be the key to happiness (as is marketed to us through the forces of capitalism in the form of media advertising and consumer culture). Instead, self-actualisation is now to be achieved through the combined practices of acquisition, but also divestment and the ongoing resistance to the temptations of consumer materiality. Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003) conceptualise this as the double valence of the minimal material order, meaning that '...just as simplicity and order can bring happiness, material excess or disorder can cause mental or emotional distress'. This iteration of consumer culture, as Kilroy-Marac notes, is the double-bind of consumption as, 'Consumption is still central to the food life, then, but it is a particular form of consumption that is weary of accumulation, critical of disorder, and most visible in the conspicuous display of what is not there' (2016:447).

That is not to say that these broader societal values equally impacted every trader. Returning to some of the traders we met earlier, specifically Malcolm and Catherine, and Anja, we can see that some traders, such as Anja, felt obliged and ashamed if they did not manage to live up to this aestheticised home, whereas, for Malcolm and Catherine, as they rejected this mainstream minimalist imperative, they were mostly unaffected. For Anja, domesticity was constantly experienced as a source of shame, fuelled by a sense of personal obligation. Contrastingly, Malcolm and Catherine's refusal to conform to the 'magnolia' lifestyle meant that their embodied experience of home was less negatively tinged.

Again, here, it is essential to note the homogenising effect such broader discourses and consumer cultures about the optimisation of decluttered homes and organised beings create. When there is one narrow vision of what a good home ought to manifest as, then how are

practices of self-expression and home-making changed? For instance, how are objects, people and activities that do not conform to this particular aesthetic marginalised, hidden or excluded from the home, when, as Grant and Handelman (2023), observe 'a bright, spacious, and professional kitchen that offers unencumbered counter space, abundant storage, and industrial appliances is the focus of marketing representation of what the home ought to be' (2023:893). When consumer culture, and even the very trends and lifestyles that claim to reject its messaging but ultimately become just another iteration of that same influencing force, dictate what domestic configurations and ornamentations confer good taste and appropriate levels of carefully staged materiality, then how much of our homes are modelled after that aspiration, as opposed to our own tastes, preferences and desires? For instance, subscribing to such cultural messaging may be rooted in class aspiration, wanting to act and feel like one belongs to the middle or upper-class such lifestyle and aesthetic trends are often targeted at (cf. Bourdieu 1984 on habitus). Feeling unable to, in effect, 'Keep up with the Jones' can leave people feeling excluded or less than others and even facing societal rejection or scorn. Moreover, this ensures that the normative vision of what is aesthetic, good and morally correct continues to self-replicate, as by adhering to this normative form of home-making, households effectively seek to produce and reproduce the specific order of that dominant ideology. Resultingly, the idealised vision of home is minimal, ordered, and refined, and that does not tolerate clutter or excessive accumulation.

PO interventions get granular in scope, with all the objects, spaces and practices of the home assessed and considered for optimisation. Kilroy-Marac (2016) likens POs to amateur anthropologists with their observational skills and desires to 'understand their clients' attachments to things' (2016:438). The work of POs, Kilroy-Marac writes, is to understand both the 'extreme cases of acquisition, accumulation, or excess' as well as 'the mundane, ordinary things that settle into our daily lives' (2016:438). Consequently, a core component of the work of POs is to focus on the everyday practices that occur in the home- the shopping, storing, saving, stockpiling and overflow of goods throughout the home. Identifying the channels and flows of objects in the home- the 'danger zones' where clutter tends to accumulate and multiply and designing solutions to intervene in that process is one of the most urgent and vital aspects of that home decluttering process. As well as recommending clients to purge unwanted or no longer needed goods, POs incorporate storage solutions, re-order and re-purpose spaces in the

home and systems for monitoring and managing the future flow of goods into and out of the home. When implementing a minimalist lifestyle, numerous strategies are coopted by POs. Kilroy-Marac (2016) refers to this moral obligation of managing the material flows of the household that professional organisers teach as both a practice and a process whereby 'one must know not only what to keep and what to discard, but how to arrange and store objects in their proper place' so as to create and ensure the making or order from dis-order (2016:439). These are, of course, personalised, modified, delineated and shaped by the particular PO and the system/philosophy that they espouse. That said, one of the most pervasive tools across various practitioners is the simple mantra of 'one in, one out', meaning that any new item that is brought into the home (not necessarily including consumables or perishables such as food, but more explicitly about home furnishings or clothing or decorative ornaments, etc.), must be accompanied by the twin action of getting rid of that same number of items already in the home. And in so doing, decluttering experts effectively reorient their client's relationship to their possessions 'materially, morally, and affectively' (Kilroy-Marac, 2016:440).

Professional Declutterers in Ireland.

Over the last 5-8 years, the demand for POs resulted in the expansion and flourishing of the decluttering industry both locally in Ireland and within the broader global Western context ('How to Clean Up in the Decluttering Business' article in *The Irish Times* (2019) forecasted the global decluttering industry to be worth up to \$11.8 billion (€10.4 billion) by 2021), and US-based research conducted in 2022 by *OneDesk* found that 54% of Americans said they were overwhelmed with clutter, with an average of 300,000 items in their homes and that the home organising industry had hit approximately \$11.4 billion in 2021 and was expected to continue to grow over the next few years.

Various decluttering companies and organisations emerged to exploit consumers' desire for decluttering solutions. Perhaps the most infamous (and deemed socially desirable due to the association with Marie Kondo as a figurehead of the decluttering movement and the social currency given to her prestigious training programme) and aspirational of these were consultants trained in the KonMari Method. *The KonMari Consultant Academy* was one of the

first to professionalise and distinguish their POs due to the intensive training required and financial investment to graduate under the title of *KonMari* consultant. Prospective consultants go through three phases of training- a 3-day virtual course, mandatory in-person training (held over three days, twice a year in either London or NY with the cost reported to be above £2000/\$2000, respectively, and building up of client hours, and finally, evaluation and examination resulting in certification. Progression through these phases is continually evaluated and not guaranteed. Participants must read Kondo's books and submit photos of their homes demonstrating a before and after of their deploying Kondo's method of decluttering. They must demonstrate 30 hours of consulting work with many clients before sitting their final online assessment. After this, *KonMari* consultants must pay an annual membership fee of \$500 to collect their certificates and remain registered under the programme. Graduating from the programme requires a significant financial investment, and consultants are further differentiated based on their certification level. Seven colour-coded levels confer the degree of experience and expertise that a consultant has in terms of certified hours, which, in turn, impacts upon the price that their services will entail:

1. Green- 30+ tidying hours
2. Bronze- 150+ tidying hours
3. Silver- 300+ tidying hours
4. Gold- 600+ tidying hours
5. Platinum- 900+ tidying hours
6. Finally, Certified Master representing the most experienced consultants with over 1500+ hours of tidying confirmed.

As discussed earlier, the traders that were most occupied and pressured by contemporary discourses of clutter and the morality narratives that were built into these were predominantly women. Supporting the scholarly literature findings on the gendered dimension of decluttering interventions in the home, the majority of *KonMari* consultants, and indeed, the broader industry of POs I encountered, tend to be predominantly female- for both the POs and their clients. Whilst not much has been published specifically about the Irish context, Ouellette (2019) discusses how 'social problems and tensions [are] folded into the problematisation of clutter, and its women that are expected to do this work- in the service of their families' (2019:536). Ouellette furthermore critiques how depictions of decluttering interventions in mainstream media fail to acknowledge or grapple with this gender (and class) politics. Rather, she argues that this labour is packaged as 'domestic and emotional magic' that further places

additional demands on female labour within the home. Even when POs work in a family home, it is often solicited by a female home member, often occupying multiple roles such as wife and mother. This was representative of the traders who engaged with me, as it was always women who attended the workshops, read the books and wanted to declutter for their own 'sense of peace' or 'for the family home'.

Conclusion:

To conclude, let us return to how traders managed their flea and domestic goods in their homes and how broader morality discourses about consumption and clutter shaped these. This chapter has provided an extensive account of how discourses of domesticity, clutter, minimalism and home organisation were ubiquitous in my research and formed an ongoing concern for my participants. Ultimately, as argued earlier in this chapter, contemporary clutter discourses are a form of cultural meaning and morality-making situated primarily in and directed at the home, specifically, the making and managing of the normative and idealised clutter-controlled home.

As the body of previous literature on the materiality of the home has shown, such cultural messages are responded to, interpreted, and enacted upon in individual homes in creative and iterative ways, as well as challenged through practice. Such home-making interventions are never completed; as long as objects continue to enter the home, the ongoing need for managing them exists. Instead, these practices of home management need to be thought of as a series of ongoing processual labour practices- both physical and emotional- that demand the attention, time, negotiation and effort of people as an unending series of new and old objects enter, circulate, stall and leave the boundaries of the home. For the traders, clutter management was complicated by the co-existence of flea things, material things and objects that slipped between the two types. Differing strategies of integration and separation were used creatively and iteratively to manage the circulations of those objects in the home.

Clutter emerges through ruptures of circulation, when objects become 'sticky' and fail to participate in movement from one place to another, both in the home and sometimes at the

flea market, when unsold commodities return to the home as unsuccessful, bothersome or clutter goods. Clutter is a slippery, messy and complex concept. Clutter is also enlivened, imbued with malintent, and participants frequently referenced their having to 'battle clutter' lest it overtake their homes. As discussed earlier, clutter's problematic nature partially owes to its ability to defy taxonomical containment. Whilst no neat and tidy definition of clutter was shared among my participants, they all invoked similar qualities in how they perceived it, e.g., accumulation, no set location, self-replicating and was generally considered negatively, etc. For the traders, managing material abundance was further complicated by their having to accommodate their trading inventory within their domestic confines due to a lack of other external storage space. Due to this, material objects were moving between flea market commodities, personal possessions and domestic fixtures, as was seen in Malcolm's selling of his child's bedroom door. Conversely, items intended for the market also became reappropriated and resisted being sold at the market, instead becoming embedded within the domestic context.

This chapter considered whether the flea market could be considered a solution to or cause of clutter; however, no consensus emerged from my participants. The flea market was discussed in a variety of clashing and contested ways. For some, the flea market functioned as a form of salvage capitalism (cf. Anna Tsing 2015) whereby objects stripped of their worth, value and meaning could be reborn, recommodified and rescued from 'being' clutter. Others argued that the flea market, with its emphasis on cheap bargains and the multitude of available items, encouraged people to acquire more, ultimately bringing excessive material goods back to their homes. There is no one correct answer to this question. The flea market was understood and utilised in various ways, and my participants demonstrated the scope of that relationality to the second-hand culture that underscores the flea market in the case studies throughout this chapter. How the traders understood the market and used it as a site of acquisition, divestment, or, as was most often the case, a mixture of both, was also present in their relationship to their domestic context and the morality discourses that shaped their everyday experiences of home. The traders that were most concerned with managing domestic clutter were women, who often spoke of their overwhelm at being responsible for managing the aesthetic presentation of the home for the good of the family. Their discussions of the market, their homes and material clutter repeatedly referred to three main influences: minimalism discourses quickly becoming

the normative aesthetic that conflated the concept of a 'good home' with that of a minimalist home; the impactful Zeitgeist of decluttering pop culture with many having taken workshops bought the books and attempted to stage interventions to solve the 'clutter crisis' in their homes, and finally, the ubiquity of language around hoarding being associated with them by virtue of their working in the flea market. Colloquial terminology around hoarding was contextual and could signal connection and community or be taken as a shame-inducing insult, depending on who and where it was uttered.

This chapter has shown that second-hand things not only circulate from the flea market to the domestic context but are subjected to ongoing circuits of movement, care, meaning-making, cultural values/trends, and management within the home. The chapter that follows will identify and trace some of the most common routes of divestment and circulation that traders utilised to manage problematic material culture, i.e., that devalued as clutter as a result of the various factors described in this chapter. For the traders, a material abundance deemed excessive and reconceptualised as clutter tended to be managed through two different types of interventions that attempt to resolve clutter in two different manners. Firstly, some traders undertook practices of decluttering through a logic of storage (in which case 'clutter' objects are more likely to remain dormant within the home, albeit contained and concealed, representing a temporary halt to their circulation). Secondly, and contrastingly, the second approach to managing such problematic materiality was to ensure its circulation out of the home, whether this was enacted through returning to the flea market for sale as a commodity. Other divestment channels such as selling via other second-hand retail avenues, donating to a charity shop, gifting to a new owner that would appreciate the item, or as a last resort, disposal, ending the object's circulation also occurred and will be briefly discussed.

To conclude, I end this chapter by referencing Miller's (2008) discussion of the value of clutter in his aptly-titled *The Comfort of Things* where 'every object in [*their*] room is equally a form by which they have chosen to express themselves' (2008:2). Material artefacts, including those others may dismiss as worthless junk, kitsch or clutter, were for his interviewees a medium through which to construct both a symbolic and metaphoric identity, as well as being concrete referents of ambition, dreams and past failures. Clutter, or a lack thereof, was often

expressed as the visual index of one's life and significant experiences, or as Miller states, people's belongings served as 'the material evidence for one's life, its achievements, and the sense that gradually, over the years, one has become a person of substance' (2008:77). The material goods, trinkets and belongings with which we choose to surround ourselves not only speak of our frames of reference but also constitute a form of living archive. Thus, whilst the presence of clutter can simultaneously be a source of value and a burden for the traders, it may also form 'a defence against the emptiness of space' (2008:213).

Chapter Seven: Circulations & Conclusions.

'Traces of the everyday past can float free of preferred meanings, surviving instead in fragments and lacunae, 'memory's shadows- those sleeping images which spring to life unbidden, and serve as ghostly sentinels of our thought'.

(Samuel [1994:27] in Moran, 2004: 58).

'... [The] everyday is made up of the detritus and marginalia of people's lives, that which is discarded, ignored or left behind: 'The everyday is platitude (what lags and falls back, the residual life with which our trash cans and cemeteries are filled: scrap and refuse).'

(Blanchot [1987:13] in Moran, 2004: 62).

Part 1: Circuits of Divestment:

Introduction:

This chapter picks up after the moment of domestic decluttering when objects deemed no longer wanted, needed, valuable, or burdensome clutter face being re-routed out of the home. This was an ongoing and processual practice as traders needed to evaluate and prioritise what stock they were bringing to each market they attended. Trader typology impacts this logistical practice; whereas *One-Offers/ Ruptures* traders may undergo more significant yet limited acts of decluttering and divesting, *Hobbyists & Side Hustlers* were continually creating products and monitoring their supplies as well as completed products and finally, *Professional* traders routinely rotated and managed their sale stock without the confines of their homes, as was demonstrated in *Chapter Five* using varied strategies of integration or separation.

Decluttering requires movement to be deemed complete. This means that material objects no longer deemed desirable are no longer allocated space within the home and must pass through various channels/ routes of divestment. This chapter will chart and follow some of those objects that are relocated out of or concealed within the trader's home, moved along

four lines of divestment: Dispossession trajectories via Storage Practices, Discard and Disposal via alternative second-hand and alternative consumption spaces, and, finally, via a return to the Flea-Market. Such routes of divestment and circulation of second-hand goods link the domestic context to that of the *Dublin Flea Market*, sometimes signalling a return to the market but also to a broader network of connotated alternative and second-hand consumption spaces.

Using ethnographic case studies and examples, this chapter will chart and follow flea market things and material belongings as they undergo circulations and are moved to new temporospatial locations. I also pay attention to the circulation of these same goods through processes of symbolic re-categorisation where they are subjected to contested notions of value, usefulness, worth and meaning. The inventory of flea market goods that traders buy and sell, as well as their domestic belongings, becomes more visible during these processes of evaluation and selection. Therefore, material goods (those deemed clutter, for sale and contents of the home) can be considered more vulnerable when they undergo such cycles of encountering, auditing and decluttering in messy and chaotic material contexts (i.e., the home, the flea market, etc.) when the normative aesthetic has become more ideologically minimal and free of excess. Processes of encountering and assigning value and worth to material goods happen repeatedly in cycles, both at the market and in the home.

These four trajectories of divestment via circulation incorporate strategies that relocate material goods, either within or out of the home. Whilst examples of all types of divestment will be provided, the two I focus on most closely are storage and a return to the flea market, respectively. Whilst practices of discarding and using other second-hand channels occurred frequently, the examples of storage and a return to the flea market present as more atypical and, for the traders involved, more significant moments of rupture and circulation, and so it is to those examples I will return most often.

The first case study examined will discuss instances where traders used a subjective sense of value they felt their no-longer-wanted belongings still retained to determine the most suitable divestment route for them. Using Hetherington's (2004) work on disposal, I problematise previous arguments that view discard as the final, end stage of consumption

practices. Unpacking Hetherington's (2004) assertion that 'disposal is never final' and drawing upon Thompson's (1979) conceptual framework of rubbish theory, I will situate the discussion of the four divestment routes as significant yet transient and often temporary nodes in the circulation of flea market goods and decluttered household goods. Additional literature that overlaps discussions of waste and consumption through both anthropological and discard studies³ lens' will also be explored here (cf. Minter 2019; Gregson 2011; Crewe 2017; Reno 2016; Reno & Alexander 2012; Nagle 2013, etc.).

The second case study examines practices where items are retained, using a logic of storage and are contained (or 'container-ed') and moved elsewhere in the home to a more liminal, concealed location where they are not visibly disordering the normative order of the home. Utilising anthropological scholarship that critiques the simplistic argument that the solution to clutter is simply storage, I will instead aim to show how storage can retain, exacerbate and even produce. Focusing on the re-ordering of space and time that storage solutions make possible, I will draw on Newell's (2023) work on storage as a 'haven for "anti-kairos"—things of an inappropriate time' (2023:229). Case studies provided here will also demonstrate how practices of display, storage and ridding can be emotionally laden, especially when the items in question are, firstly, experiences as repositories of memories and future aspirations, and secondly, when the placement of material objects that retain a more tangible connection to grief and loss is contested and a source of conflict and dis-ease within the home.

Shifting then to strategies of divestment via a return to the flea market, I include a case study that demonstrates how the flea market acted as a conduit that enabled, through the transactional exchange of one piece of kitchenware, one woman to cast out and free herself from the negative association of the person who had gifted it to her, whilst simultaneously allowing the other woman to both connect to a more idealised past and take a step towards her imagined future self. The same item was at once a haunting burden but also an aspirational and coveted item. Drawing here on the famous adage that 'one woman's trash is another woman's treasure', I will demonstrate how such acts of divestment connect the domestic context of the home and the flea market in the more extensive circulation networks such previously-loved (or

³ Discard Studies is an interdisciplinary field of research that takes systems of waste and wasting as its topic, including but beyond conventional notions of trash and garbage. URL: <https://discardstudies.com/>

in the case of the kitchenware example- previously-despised) flea things traverse through alternative, second-hand consumption spaces.

The final section of this chapter represents my concluding thoughts as I end my dissertation. A brief overview of the main themes and arguments and a précis of each chapter will be provided to draw this endeavour to a close.

Case Study 1- ‘Moving On’ and ‘Throwing Out’- Clutter Divestment via Discarding (or not!) and Alternative Second-Hand Consumption Channels:

As discussed in the previous chapter, objects are deemed clutter when they cease to circulate through the home and accumulate in noticeable ways. In this section, I will refer to some examples of divestment via binning and moving goods along via other second-hand channels. Choosing which goods are sent to, for instance, the charity shop, a clothes donation bin, offered to a friend, sold online, or thrown in the bin can be challenging to discern. We see this in Heather’s example below.

Strategy 1- Collecting, Culling & Caring:

Heather is a *Side-Hustler* trader in her 40s and has worked in the fashion publication industry for 20 years. Heather accumulated a ‘ridiculous amount’ of clothing’ during her years spent editing a fashion magazine and was ‘obsessed with fashion and clothes and design’ from a young age; she had also been gifted clothing by friends and family, received ‘beautiful pieces’ through her work, and was often the gifted clothing from friends and family, including items they themselves had cluttered. Heather enjoyed customising her clothes and often bought fabrics and re-imagined and redesigned some of her clothes, having ‘invested too much of my money into my wardrobe’. Heather often joked that her life savings and pension ‘was hanging in her wardrobe instead of my bank account’. Every couple of years, overwhelmed by the excessive amount of clothing, shoes, accessories, bags and hats she had collected and continued to purchase despite the lack of storage space because ‘I cannot help myself’, Heather would decide to purge some of her clothing. This was a time-consuming and laborious process.

Heather would often get frustrated trying to pull clothes out of her heaving wardrobe or misplace an item she had intended to wear and would get irate on a whim, deciding to pull everything out of one of her wardrobes, emptying drawers of clothes onto her bed into one muddled and messy pile. This initial surge of energy spent accumulating and tossing the clothes onto her bed was exciting fun; however, when it came time to start deciding what to do with the clothing, Heather struggled. She describes how

‘I would then get overwhelmed. Pick up the first thing on the top of the pile, and then you know I have to decide, but it is so hard. There are only ever a few things that I know exactly what to do with and those are mostly the things that go back on hangers and right back into safety. I try and make piles- keep, donate to friends or to charity, keep as material or to upcycle, put away for winter or summer but that whole capsule seasonal wardrobe never lasts for me. And then you feel you should be giving more away because better someone use them than have them rotting in the back of my closet but then sometimes, I just like to keep them and I do enjoy them just not all the time’.

Here, we can see the sense of connection Heather has for her clothing and the emotional connection she has to the various pieces, but also the entire collection, as she describes the relief in returning items to the 'safety of' her wardrobe, i.e., where even though they fail to circulate, they remain concealed sufficiently not to be experienced as clutter for her, at least most of the time. Heather also spoke of the difficulty in determining what items she chooses to part with should be donated to a charity shop or clothing bin versus be thrown out or cut up to make scraps for cleaning or experimenting with dyes, embroidery patterns or practising hand-stitching, etc. She picked up a worn light blue sweater, pulling it out from the middle of the pile of clothing she had created when inviting me around to observe one of her 'purges' for which I quickly realised my job was to help take things on and off hangers, offer my opinions and help her 'when I get stuck and cannot make a decision on what thing'. This caused the pile of coats, jumpers, t-shirts and cardigans she was focusing on to topple over, sending clothing onto the floor, across the bed and all over the piles she had already worked through and demarcated on the floor. She continued by telling me how she struggled to decide what was 'good enough to go where'.

‘For example, this sweater, I love it, but it's seen better days, and I didn't always hand-wash so it is gone a bit shapeless and bobbled and loose. If it was a bit better I might try sell it online but I don't think it would be worth much. Part of me thinks I should drop it off at the

charity shop but then you don't want to dump stuff with them. I love going shopping in charity shops and flea markets and consignment sales but some of the stuff people give... well they must be using it as another bin and then the shops aren't bothered sorting through it properly and its all cheap, bad quality and bad condition. My rule is if I wouldn't wear it then I wouldn't donate it. Sometimes I will put more damaged clothes- anything with some minor rips or tears or before I learned to fix and replaced zips, you know that kinds of stuff into those clothes' donation bins- but then you hear they all got sold for scrap or get dumped in poorer countries and you are just making more rubbish even though you try not to put it in your actual bin so you are cutting down on waste. So then you think better it does go to a charity shop where someone might get it for cheap even if its not perfect because that's better than it just going in the bin or a landfill or furnace or getting shredded and sold..'

From this excerpt, we can see Heather grapple with notions of value. She is trying to figure out how much value, or what kinds of value, are still present in the sweater for her. This informs her decision to keep or rid herself of the item. The second stage of decision-making occurs for those items she has chosen to move on and consists of discerning how the item's quality determines where she sends it. This is an exercise in imagining the types of spaces and people that might encounter the item in the future and whether they would see value in her items. I notice a hierarchy emerging here, and she tends to evaluate other items from the pile on her bed reasonably consistently. If she decides she wants to part with the item, she considers if it is worth the time and effort she would need to invest to sell and make a profit. She explains how she occasionally uses online second-hand clothes selling sites but finds them laborious, so she only uses them for items that she knows will fetch a high price, such as some of her designer or vintage pieces, 'with original labels attached, of course'. The lower the sense of value that Heather feels the clothing item retains (be that due to its poor condition or being nothing special, where special refers to qualities such as uniqueness, expensive, designer, rare, etc.), the more likely it is to be discarded, cut up for scrap materials. Items are evaluated based on whether she wants to retain them for herself and then move downwards through a conceptual framework from selling to donating to discarding, which indicates a depreciating degree of value or worth, in Heather's opinion. These subjective judgements are not always clear-cut, and sometimes Heather agonised over trying to figure out the 'right thing' to do. As the excerpt below shows, these discussions of worth and value were shaped by her belief that simply 'chucking it in the bin' was wrong and wasteful, reflecting poorly on her and her character. She said

'it is confusing though at times because you want to do the right thing. I know I could just 'chuck it in the bin' and then once the bins are emptied it is gone and not my problem but I am so aware of the impact of fast fashion in my work and it gets harder to just not think about

the ways you are adding to it. I try to be responsible but clothes I will admit are my weakness. I try to be good, to do the right thing. I recycle and I buy organic and I turn all the plugs and lights off at night. You know? It is not much but I try to do my part. And when stuff I don't want could be used you would just prefer that than throwing it out. A lot of my friends think I am mad dragging stuff to different charity shops and clothes bins and charities and then keeping scraps and bags of material but it's a waste to just throw stuff out I think'.

Heather wanted to see herself as a conscious consumer and to identify with being responsible and diligent; she was reticent to see throwing things out as an easy option. She endeavoured to place her garments in the second-hand or disposal space she felt most suitable to the garment's state of use. Crewe (2017) discusses that such geographies of fashion demonstrate how clothing is profoundly personal and emotional. She contends that 'the boundaries between cost and value, between acquisition and ownership, between memory and materiality, and between object and possession are both blurred and mobile' (2017:115). Our relationships with them continually shape the value we imbue clothing with, how we wear, care for, store, and, as Heather's example, choose to let them go. In this way, we see how value can be stubborn; it lingers, and it endures. Through the haptic encounter and re-discovery of specific clothing during the decluttering processes Heather underwent, it becomes evident that 'Clothes are repositories of accumulated sensory biographies. Clothes have memories stored, layered, deposited within them, and it is through the excavation of use and wear that consumption value may emerge' (Crewe, 2017:116). This can explain why certain items that Heather did not intend to keep managed to become more meaningful and valuable for her and thus evaded disposal and returned again to the safety of her wardrobe. (cf. Gregson & Crewe 2003, and Herrmann 1997, for examples of assigning monetary and symbolic values to divested possessions such as clothing at the charity shop and car boot sale, etc.).

This sentimental and nostalgic attachment to things was not the case for all the traders I discussed divestment with and who told me stories about the liberal use of the bin being a 'delight' when undergoing regular tidying up, decluttering and ridding. For example, Tom, a *Hustler* trader who sold various loaves of bread, cakes, preserves and spice blends, explained how he 'delighted in emptying the presses, garage, wardrobes and even his laptop's downloads folder' as 'the best feeling when you have the bin full to the brim, and you know you done solid work [*in disposal*]'. Tom explained that once the bins got collected each week, 'they were someone else's problem', noting that he 'rarely' gave the eventual destination of the rubbish he

threw out a 'second thought'. He was somewhat nihilistic, remarking that 'sure the world is fucked anyway, and the planet is burning and me throwing out a few bin loads of stuff or not is not going to change anything fundamentally'. When I questioned if he considered the potential impact if everyone tried to make those changes, he rolled his eyes and sniggered, saying that 'he wouldn't hold his breath' and 'as long as I pay for my bin, I will put as much as I want in it'.

In comparing these two examples, we can see how differing relationships with waste and the level of concern that accompanied imagined future destinations of where that waste would end up are present in Heather and Tom's differing approaches. While both traders were aware of mainstream discussions around increasing waste and the need to divert rubbish from landfills, etc., they felt personally responsible to two different degrees. Heather engaged in reuse and recycling practices to maintain consistency with her understanding of herself as a green, eco-aware and intentional consumer. Tom felt that as long as he continued to pay to access the channels of discarding, he did not need to take any further personal accountability as the problem was beyond his level of influence. Such disparities in broader systems of discard, refuse and recycling are examined by Nagle (2013) in her ethnography of New York City sanitation workers. 'Mongo', sanitation slang for 'treasure salvaged from the trash', demonstrates how that which is thrown away by one can be salvaged by another who can connect to a sense of value remaining in the item. Additionally, Nagle demonstrates that sanitation workers have different relations to the practice of 'mongoining', with some workers in especially affluent areas frequently uncovering valuable goods. However, others insisted that the practice was disdainful as 'when something has been thrown out once, it should stay thrown out' (Nagle, 2013:65). This liminal, shifting and latent capacity of objects to resist being discarded, defying the attempts to render them rubbish is also examined by Minter (2019) who traces the global pathways discarded stuff traverses and the processes where waste goods are re-enchanting and become sources of value that can be monetised and extracted. Continuing that how that deemed 'waste' is experienced and determined is subjective and is better understood as a conceptual category that illuminates how discarding is often. However, to truly be 'rubbish', such items must be totally depleted and stripped of value, worth and use, and as demonstrated in Norris's (2012A) work on emergency aid blankets, contested and even contradictory notions of value occur when material goods are moved into channels of divestment and exchange. As she states,

‘The recycling of old clothing into aid blankets constitutes two complex intertwining trajectories of the material and the moral [...] Following these parallel trajectories and discovering precisely the twists and turns in these threads reveals the dissonance at the heart of these global recycling economies. It reveals a series of disjunctures between economic bottom-lines and the cultural values associated with avoiding waste and recycling, charitable giving and caring for those in need. The situation is far more complex than suggesting that the changing object materialises the changing moral frameworks; at certain points, the regimes of value in which they circulate appear to contradict each other, and morality itself appears to be commodified. (2012A:400).

Building on these circulatory approaches to discard, Reno & Alexander (2012) suggest that ‘practices of recycling are intensely morally charged’ and are a way to problematise conventional approaches to discarding that are understood as the final stage in a commodity’s lifespan. Instead, he sounds the call for an ethnographic approach that focuses on global economies of recycling, at both the level of commodity circulation and local reappropriation, in order to understand those ‘patchy, tenuous and wondrously creative; practices that ‘defy simple moral narratives’ of keeping or ridding. This ontological approach requires further research into the ‘the lives of those who do waste work and/or dwell in the places to which it is transported become entangled with waste collection, transport, and disposal’ (Reno, 2016:1). Reno’s research in a landfill setting also raises useful considerations about how ‘Landfills have, made possible the cheap and efficient separation of people from their discards, the absence of which changes our very ideas of disposability... this transformation separates sludge and other waste from our everyday lives and forecloses the possibility of further moral reflection’ (Reno, 2016:12).

Continuing this analysis of everyday practices of managing divestment for the traders invoked a temporal and fluid quality, Hetherington (2004) critiques previous scholarship on consumption and disposal that see throwing out as the final stage; instead, he draws attention to what he terms the ‘movement, transformation, incompleteness, and return’ in practices of discarding and suggests that instead of the bin, it is better to think of the door as the metaphor for disposal (2004:157). He outlines how two focuses have emerged in consumption studies—those that traditionally attended to the shopping mall (cf. Miller 2005; Douglas & Isherwood 1979), and those more recent approaches that focus instead on alternative spaces such as the car boot sale, flea market or charity shop (cf. Gregson et al. 2022; Crewe 2017). Consumption has been explored through this body of work, and he states, ‘What we know little about,

however, is the role that disposal plays within the consumer's activity' (2004:158). Notwithstanding the need for further study on disposal, Hetherington also wishes to 'suggest that disposal be seen as a necessary issue integral to the whole process of viewing consuming as a social activity. In other words, I suggest that studying consumption makes no sense unless we consider the role of disposal as an integral part of the totality of what consumer activity is all about' (2004:158). Such an approach would challenge previous tropes whereby disposal is the actions of uncaring individuals and instead foreground divestment's social and ethical aspects. Acknowledging the anthropological body of literature on waste, particularly in the canonical texts of Mauss (1950), Malinowski (1922) and Douglas (1966), Hetherington claims that what these are missing is a sense of the dynamic and ongoing role of waste processes within consumption. Indeed, he claims that 'Waste suggests too final a singular act of closure, one that does not actually occur in practice' (2004:159). Waste, he contends, is a form of 'spectral horror' that can potentially return even that which has been turned into rubbish. Therefore, 'disposal is about placing absences, and this has consequences for how we think about `social relations' (2004:159). Disposal, as with Heather's clothing examples above, is not just about what can or cannot be considered rubbish but also represents a form of ordering and classification work (cf. Douglas on dirt as matter out of place, 1966) concerned with absence just as much as presence. In this sense, disposability effectively removes unwanted or dangerous things, thus stabilising the normative social order. However, this lacks a temporal and processual acknowledgement: 'In making something absent, either through death or destruction, a representation of social order is apparently secured but never for all time' (Hetherington, 2004:161).

Hetherington conveys how this temporal quality ruptures a linear understanding of production-consumption-disposal processes, as seen in Douglas's (1966) work. He explains that in her writing on dirt as 'matter out of place', rubbish becomes a conduit for moving things that are deemed waste beyond a threshold where they can be seen or encountered. It is when things are 'sticky' or fail to move along those boundaries of purity and danger that the social order is threatened. When classification ceases to be classifiable, in the case of dirt, clutter, etc., removing the 'unsettling qualities' of such items thus becomes necessary. However, Hetherington suggests that such disposal processes are imperfect (much like those of imbuing value or lacking thereof) and never completed. Things traverse between categories of presence and absence, and

‘seemingly disappearing only to return again unexpectedly and perhaps in a different place or in a different form. It can come and go, appear and disappear, and in so doing it remains unfinished and not fully disposed of no matter how much representational work we might do to put it somewhere where it is no longer perceived as out of place. It has a tendency to stick, even if only as a trace of what has passed’ (2004:162).

Hetherington continues that there is no ‘away’ that we can throw away to; instead, there is only a throwing elsewhere. He states that ‘the absent is only ever moved along and is never fully gotten rid of’ (2004:1662). This means that throwing one's rubbish in the bin does not actually get rid of, for example, as with Heather and Tom above, no longer-wanted clothing or expired ingredients, but merely puts them 'there' so they are no longer perceived or experienced as being 'here'. Critiquing Douglas's structural approach as one that desires a stable ordering of set categories instead of attending to the reality of the 'the classificatory in-between and sticky state' that ongoing processes of disposal entail, Hetherington (2004) argues that those absent presences cannot be fully disposed of with, especially when our conduits of disposal fail to fully render all traces of that which we desire gone, invisible, for example, the lingering smell of food in the fridge, wrappers in the bin, dishes in the sink, etc. Such haunting presences, therefore, are better understood as a form of ‘creative accounting’ through which we are held accountable for ‘the unfinished disposal’ within our daily lives (Hetherington, 2004:163).

However, such lingering traces are not necessarily all negative, and Hetherington points out that while waste can be considered a ‘spectral horror’, it can also be considered a resource. Crewe (2017) likens this ability of even the most mundane of things to cause enchantment when she discusses how clothing can sporadically act as a repository of memory (positive and negative ones) both when we retain those garments and, as 'ghosts in the wardrobe' where even when the material presence of an item is no longer present (i.e., was lost, donated in error or later regretted, disposed of, etc.) it can continue to haunt us. Whilst Tom, whom we met earlier, saw the bin as the conduit to ‘away’ and what Hetherington terms the ‘archetypal conduit of disposal’, for Heather, routinely reclaimed items previously ‘rubbished’ and discarded through various channels of disposal, e.g., charity shop donations, material she salvaged that had been Freecycled/ given away for free, that she turned into scraps or practice material or rags, etc., retained a latent potential (Frykman, 2005) for re-enchantment, repurposing and revaluing. This exemplifies Hetherington’s argument that we ought to replace the bin with the door to symbolise the role of disposal within broader consumption practices, as ‘Not only do doors

allow traffic in both directions when open, but also they can be closed to keep things outside/inside, present/absent, at least temporarily and provisionally (2004:164). UK artist Michael Landy's (2001) installation *Break Down*, where he catalogued and then destroyed every possession he owned over two weeks, evokes this sense of haunting even when the materiality of the item has been destroyed. In such moments of rupture, what is valuable appears most clearly. Landy's work fascinated me during this period, and I repeatedly watched footage of the destruction process and read about the systematic destruction of his 7,227 inventoried items. I drew parallels between Landy's work and the more contemporaneous trend of 'haul videos' celebrating consumer culture that became popular on *YouTube* in the last 6-8 years, alas, a topic for another day. Instead, in closing this brief overview of *Break Down* and how it relates to the 'spectral horror' of waste that Hetherington (2004) and Crewe (2017) discuss, I flag that types of values (i.e., sentimental, monetary, etc.) impact upon routes of divestment and disposal, and that destruction and disposal reveal a lot about circulation when goods move back and forth different social spheres and cannot be chronologically understood as moving from origin to the bin as final destination.

Thompson (1979) argues that stuff that is deemed as rubbish can re-circulate and re-obtain value, in some cases far exceeding the original value ascribed to it, is useful here to support further Hetherington's argument that rubbish is not so much an end-point as one conduit for disposal within consumption practices. Thompson (1979) describes three categories of objects, each with a differing degree of value and social prestige. These are durable, transient and rubbish objects. Durable objects have high status/ value and are recognised as socially worthwhile and important, whereas transient objects tend to lose status and value over time. However, both categories are fixed, i.e., goods are conferred with enduring or diminishing worth. Rubbish objects, he argues, occupy a 'region of flexibility' (1979:8). Hetherington draws on Thompson's concept of rubbish objects to demonstrate how rubbish is not merely 'an end point in a sequence of declining value of an object' but rather, functions as a 'conduit for objects to move back and forth' between states of durable and transience, and in this way, 'rubbish is itself a conduit of disposal- a conduit of the disposal of value- but it acts more like a door than a rubbish bin' (2004:165).

This is relevant here for the flea market and those other connotated spaces that constitute broader networks of second-hand consumption that traders such as Heather move goods through. The flea market may simultaneously offer durable goods, e.g., vintage fashion labels, mid-century modern sofas, etc., and transient goods, e.g., items that seemed to be ‘junk’, kitsch, etc. Additionally, the flea market enables visitors to reminisce or be excited about the objects on display, even those they have no intention or desire to purchase. Taking a step back, one can even question if Thompson’s (1979) notion of rubbish objects applies to the overall enterprise of the flea market, whereby it functions as a convergence of second-hand goods, a collective ‘rubbish object’, that conditional on who encounters it and where is shifting between the durable and the transient. This would also reconcile Hetherington's (2004) critique of Thompson's model because it fails to acknowledge 'sentimental value as opposed to use, exchange, or sign value' (2004:166). This focus on inalienable (cf. Weiner) qualities of goods as creating sentimental connections that render disposal more challenging, whether through processes of keeping or forgetting or rendering invisible (as is the case with objects indefinitely placed in concealed storage as many of Heather’s clothing items kept ‘just because’ or ‘forgotten about’ and hidden in the back of a closet), can be applied to those areas of the home where storage solutions (as will be discussed later in this chapter) are utilised.

Hetherington (2004) emphasises this attunement to these liminal zones of the home, noting how ‘Similarly in the home, it is not just the bin that is the conduit for disposal. The attic, the basement, the garage, fridge, wardrobe, make-up drawer, or cupboard under the stairs, even the public rooms of the house itself, are all often used in the same manner as conduits for disposing of things which are forgotten, sometimes until they are tidied away or thrown out, sometimes for a whole lifetime’ (2004:167). Hetherington's work demonstrates the fallacy of throwing out as we instead throw away. We can relate this concept of returning waste as a haunting with the flea market conceptualised as one big, transient ‘away’. The market is a liminal ‘away’ that the traders effectively move second-hand objects in, out of and through. Visiting the market renders us susceptible to haphazard rediscoveries of material things and categories of material things that are personally imbued with positive and negative hauntings. But does this mean that the flea is creative or conservative- is it rescuing items out of ‘clutter’ or creating ‘clutter’? That disposal and object circulation are ongoing and evoke different social relations at the flea market; it makes visible and close the material accumulations that are easier to forget about when thrown in the bin. How objects are disposed of and reclaimed at the flea

market, make consumption, ethical and social practices visible, etc. This is also the case for those practices of home-making, tidying, organising and decluttering that we have encountered so far.

It is to these liminal zones of the home that we next turn to explore how a logic of storage can help traders reconcile wanting to divest themselves of clutter yet not permanently commit to divesting certain goods. This is where storage practices, posited in the mainstream as the solution to the crisis of clutter and as a strategy for maintaining the order of the home, can be utilised. Here, I flag that separation, storage, and containment practices are not neutral. Indeed, as Hetherington notes, ‘The question is not specifically about how an object gets placed but about what happens to the ordering effects of that object within that placing. All acts of arrangement and ordering involve moving representations about to stabilise them but that sense of order and stillness is rarely achieved in practice’ (2004:168). We now turn to such practices of containment and storage that demonstrate how feelings of obligation can arise when trying to manage what to do and where to place troublesome things in the home

Strategy 2- Storage & Containment:

As flagged in Chapter Six, storage solutions are often deemed the necessary corrective counterpart to the problem of excessive materiality, i.e., clutter. What emerges here is yet another paradox as storage (commodified as a *space* in the form of external storage spaces one can rent, or storage commodified as an *aesthetic* as well as a functional *product*, e.g., matching Tupperware boxes, plastic tubs, decorative baskets, etc.), materialises as additional commodities and, in the case of storage solution products for the home, effectively generates more things that take up more space within the home. Storage is simultaneously portrayed as the antithesis of clutter, yet it too creates material demands and functions to halt and bypass circulation. This storage space race is also not neutral. Storage is often a resource utilised to maintain the normative order of the home, with problematic or excessive goods being concealed out of sight or creating a veneer of organised aesthetics. Storage’s primary function is to contain and, obviously, store goods. However, it has become increasingly subjected to aestheticised conventions popularised by the surge in online content on minimalism and home ordering, e.g., Marie Kondo sells a range of storage products through her website, *The Home Edit*, a US-based duo that have gained online notoriety through their colour-coordinated home

organising strategies, TV shows and curated range of products, and *The Container Store*, a US-based brand that supports customers to organise and optimise their homes with a variety of customisable storage solutions for every conceivable space/product, was reported in *Forbes* magazine (2015) to have ‘generated \$782 million in revenue and [had a] reported net income of \$22.7 million’. Such products, services and consumer lifestyles have resulted in storage undergoing its own aesthetic transformation. A significant amount of domestic storage is now as much about display as concealing or utility.

This coming section will touch on storage as an interim phase in divesting belongings and sales inventory that is often utilised as a stepping-stone for the other routes of circulation and divestment. Here, we meet Jackie, a Professional trader in her mid-30s with a wide variety of goods, e.g., jewellery, clothing, ornaments, retro homewares and furnishings, and a mishmash of tools, memorabilia, collector's items, and 'a bit of this, a bit of that, whatever takes my fancy really'. Jackie lives with her parents, having recently ended a long-term relationship where she had lived with her ex-partner for ten years. Jackie is charismatic and kind, ever-thoughtful with her responses, and frequently invites me to meet for coffee to chat, both about the research where she would tell me stories and show pictures she had taken and to catch up and chat in general.

Jackie's life had been materially upended when she had gone through her breakup about three years previously. She and her partner had 'turned into housemates', and 'we both just realised that the spark was gone'. Dismantling the apartment, they had materially woven their lives into together was a 'rough and tough and challenging' experience for Jackie. Jackie and her ex had fought about who got to keep certain sentimental items and expensive or valuable goods that had been joint purchases or gifted to them as a couple over the years. Jackie spoke of this time as 'a never-ending shitshow of packing boxes, moving boxes, checking boxes and unpacking boxes'. She had packed her belongings and moved down to the countryside to stay with her parents. Working in business consulting, she was able to relocate as her work was mainly online, and she 'needed time to pick the pieces back up again'. These boxes she had brought from the remnants of her old life were emotionally laden and challenging to navigate. She described how

‘When we were moving out, we just had to get it done, and we had fights but it was about getting stuff in the boxes and out of the flat. There wasn’t much time to really think about the implications of it and what it meant. What stuff I lost and he kept and those things we threw out. I assumed I would unpack immediately but I put it off for so long. I lived out of a pile of boxes for about a year. I just couldn’t face it. All the memories and the things in the boxes made it real. I mean it was already real. I know the relationship was over but I just was not strong enough to take those things out of storage. Even then, eventually, I needed to work with my therapist and have friends and family sit with me as I unpacked, crying each time I found something emotional and when another box was emptied. My life felt as empty as those boxes even though things were not actually that awful. But going through my things and all the memories they brought rushing back was hard. It just brought all the emotions and the tears out.’

What we see from Jackie's words is how she used storage as a form of deferred decision-making. Confronting the boxes made the reality of her breakup and accompanying grief materialise tangibly in the goods she now had to unpack, which had been dismantled from the wider tableaux they had previously resided in with her partner. Now, they felt out of place, as did she. The affective and emotional goods contained in the storage boxes were disorganised, which meant that she was vulnerable to the various memories and associations within them overcoming her as she worked to empty the boxes. Whilst the boxes had been an intentional solution to solve the problem of needing to divide belongings and vacate her home, the longer they remained piled up visibly in her room, the more 'guilt, shame, embarrassment, all of it' she felt about not tackling the contents residing within. As time passed, the materiality of the boxes, as much as the items they stored within, tormented her. This purgatory-esque state of her belongings being hidden and visible, the potential for happy but also tricky memories, and the enduring presence and absence of her ex-partner were all bound up in the pile of boxes. Such containment is also not as static or fixed as one would first assume. For example, perishable food items had expired, and some body lotions and a shower gel had leaked, damaging a cashmere jumper and some hardback books that they had spilt over and soaked into. Tickets for a play she had intended to go to with her partner were found long-forgotten months after their show date, causing a flurry of emotions for Jackie when she realised she was sad and disappointed to have missed the performance, annoyed about the wasted money, and relieved because she would not have enjoyed going knowing her ex should have been sat with her. As the various objects discussed throughout this dissertation show, meaning, value and worth are ever in flux, shifting and swirling, as things move through different regimes of practice, relations and locations.

Cwerner & Metcalfe (2003) agree with this liminal understanding of storage. Arguing that storage is not just about space but involves temporal considerations, they state that storage is equally a flow within the domestic setting that aims to make items present to varying degrees. This ordering work then is about making presence manageable as ‘people create order in the home and in the world’ and attempt to regain a sense of control over their lives in times of rupture (2003:229). Storage, thus, can be understood as the manipulation and organisation of more than just space or things but also emotion and meaning. As with Jackie above, the processing of her breakup and the transformative effect it had on her life occurred alongside a process of refusing to or choosing to engage with the items collected in the boxes. Good storage habits, they argue, become equated with being a good person and being able to avoid clotting/blocking the flow of the home through the constant critical engagement with one's material belongings to avoid the pathology of ‘clutteritis’ (Campbell in Cwerner & Metcalfe, 2023:231). Decluttering discourses ‘constantly call upon people to reassess their needs, to match them to those essential possessions that can find purposeful use in the house, and to get rid of everything else’ (2023:203). They continue that through this salvation and salvage-oriented logic of storage, it can ‘be seen as a veritable panacea capable of healing many of the physical and psychological evils associated with modern living and domestic consumption’ (Cwerner & Metcalfe, 2023:233). Robb (2018) notes this transformative agency of containers, stating that ‘Contents and container are interdependent. Even the simple act of being contained often defines the contents’ (2018:33).

For Jackie, effectively processing, dismantling, re-decorating and adorning her new space felt productive and even became a key metaphor for her healing. She discussed how she had begun ‘feeling stuck, unproductive and lazy. I lost my home, but I was turning my parents’ home into a dump with messy boxes everywhere. I started to feel pathetic, and I wanted to make a nicer space for myself with my things and where I could start this new phase of my life’. What emerges here, then, is a sense that for Jackie, dismantling the boxes became a way to re-exert control and intention over the things that had for so long haunted her as spectres of all she lost and grieved for. Dismantling the boxes and lessening the emotional hold of the items she feared re-encountering was difficult, with many painful moments. Nevertheless, through this rejection of indefinite storage and retrieving the items placed in storage and engaging with them, she could move further with her new life. Jackie admitted that ‘some things just hit you with a memory out of nowhere, and some things will always make me think of him

and the time we were together' but 'it is not as painful anymore, and it is not always there either'. The material goods she had reclaimed from storage thus were occasionally experienced figuratively as more of a dull, melancholic ache that connected her to her past and less of a sharp or visceral memory that conjured up memories so drenched in pain and grief that she felt wounded by their very presence.

Newell's work (2023, 2018, 2014) on storage and clutter also addresses how storage is a convergence of past and imagined futures. Discourses of containment and storage containers, he argues, are layered as material objects move through various categories (e.g., commodity, belonging, clutter, etc.) to be relocated into storage, and once contained, are dualistically a containment of separate and individual things, but also constitute a larger whole, that of 'the stored' that is also amassed into a singularity, i.e., storage'. Newell's work on clutter, as visited in Chapter Six, also speaks to the enlivening narratives of clutter's agency, will and desire to overtake both the home and the individual as a constant problem that requires constant vigilance to, at best, manage. It is to this sense of 'objects having an unrecorded second life when they stop being commodities and enter that kind of limbo in which they are no longer loved or valued, but still hang around on the edges of people's lives' that storage practices orient us (Moran, 2004:64). Storage becomes the means to expel or control wild things by fragmenting them from the regular temporal flows of the home. Newell (2018) argues that storage in the home effectively functions as a kind of non-space that exists tangentially and provides a 'catch-all' for cluttered things that resist placement, owing to their practical purpose or sentimental value (or combination of the two) belonging to other times. Newell's most recent (2023) work on storage posits it as a form of "anti-Kairos", and circling back to the earlier discussion of Foucault's (1967) model of heterotopia, he suggests that storage possesses both heterotopic and heterochronic properties. Newell aims to subvert previous conceptualisations of storage as being primarily about the material things it contains and the space such storage occupies in the more liminal areas of the home, i.e., the shed, attic, 'junk drawer', etc., and argues that 'There is not only storage space then, but storage time [...] Clutter is thus made up of things that have neither a proper place nor a proper time—clutter is inappropriately present, a blockage in the flow through both space and time' (2023:230/234). Returning to Jackie, we see how the stored boxes she resisted contained the past, present and future and attempting to reconcile the goods within meant encountering all these converged timelines. This 'temporal unfurling' complicates decluttering as 'Clutter oppresses not only through its occupation of the

social space of the home, but also through its temporal expansivity. Clutter is a fibrous interweaving of the debris of past moments that brought those objects into their current location and the hope of future moments where there will be time and space to put these things away' (Newell, 2023:235).

Jackie was, in time, able to confront, sit with, process and evaluate what items she wanted to keep, sell or donate, and she was forced to get rid of some of the things that had been damaged, degraded or expired during storage. The following case study aims to demonstrate how processes of storage and divestment are complicated when multiple people are involved in determining value and what things are suitable to be placed in what spaces of the home. This example also considers the negotiations undertaken when materiality is entangled with memorialisation processes. Anja, whom we met earlier, and her husband were engaged in a drawn-out domestic conflict over what to do with two urns containing the ashes of their recently deceased cats and the various accoutrements belonging to the cats that were no longer needed. The two cats, Tilly, a black short-hair cat, and Marceline, a long-haired tabby, were bonded sisters, adopted as senior cats needing new homes to see out their final years. Anja had adopted the two cats before she started dating her now-husband Frank and was distraught at their passing. Frank, not feeling the same sense of kinship with them, agreed it was sad when they passed away but had not felt overly emotional about it. Despite Frank's belief that they should just let the 'vets deal with their bodies', Anja insisted on having them individually cremated and wanted to display their ashes on the mantelpiece in the living room, along with a little shrine she had curated containing their favourite blanket to sleep on, collars and photos of them laying snuggled up together sleeping in a sunbeam. This was only after Frank refused to have Anja's initial suggestion to locate the shrine in their bedroom. Anja sought the presence of the ashes to keep the memories of the cats close. Frank, on the other hand, felt it was 'weird and a bit creepy' to have the ashes and shrine so visible and centrally placed in the home.

Prendergast, Hockey & and Kellaheer (2006) have written about ashes as a 'mobile material residue' that necessitates disposal and memorialisation strategies. They are referring specifically to the ashes of post-cremation human remains that necessitate integration when placed in the home. This 'highly ambiguous form of materiality', being 'of the person and of the corpse- and yet bearing little sensory resemblance to either' were usually either dispersed

in informal disposal or were placed in the home as sites of memory (Prendergast et al., 2006:885). They find that three kinds of decision-making are entailed when people defer what to do with painful materiality that symbolises bonds with loved ones and the memories and sense of 'personhood' that still lingers in the materiality of the ashes. Firstly, 'there are negative choices, acts of resistance to traditional sites of disposal and associated modernist practices' (2006:886). This is evidenced in Anja's refusal to concede ownership of the ashes either to the vet and their cremation practices but also in positioning the ashes in her own home. Frank wanted to 'hide away' the urns and to symbolically and physically distance himself from them. However, Anja insisted they retain a central prominence where she could interact with and reminisce about her beloved pets. Secondly, 'family members may not agree on a site or strategy of disposal – and nothing then happens (2006:886). In a way, Anja and Frank had also undergone this process. The conflict occurred over the initial placing of the urns in their shared bedroom, but, in lieu of any real sense of agreement, they were then placed in the living room as a form of temporary compromise. However, as time passed, both Franka and Anja adjusted to the presence of the ashes in differing ways; Frank, by not engaging or acknowledging the urns, allowed them to blend into the domestic background, where he was mostly oblivious to the shrine, unless Anja's actions pulled it back into his awareness, rupturing the sense of distance and casual indifference. Moments like this happened when Anja would comment on, rearrange or take something down from the shrine she had built as she recalled her cats. Thirdly, 'bereaved people may make positive choices which reflect their own wishes, or those of the deceased' (2006:887). In this instance, despite Frank's concerns that others would 'find it weird,' Anja managed to incorporate the materialised presence of the cats into the foreground of her home. This was a source of emotional comfort that served to soften her grief and ensured that the bonds of kinship between her and her beloved pets remained in place, regardless of her husband's desire to banish it elsewhere. Robb (2018) also notes how containment can both fix and render fluid memorial materiality, stating,

'Modern cremation provides a particularly interesting wrinkle; while ancient cremation served many uses, in recent times cremation seems increasingly used as a means of freeing the dead from the restrictions of traditional containers, both in terms of order (scattering one's ashes as an alternative to commitment to a conventional sacred space) and in terms of spatiality (an urn of ashes is divisible and transportable in a globalised world)' (2018:35).

Case Study 2- Transforming Clutter to Commodity via Re-Routing Things Back to the Flea Market:

The second strategy traders used was to return items they no longer wished to keep back into a commodity state by attempting to sell them at the market. This usually entailed deciding how an item could move along post-decluttering intervention. These interventions refer to sporadic home decluttering practices and the regular monitoring and managing of their sale inventory that being a trader necessitated. It was common to observe how returns to the market, i.e., the *Dublin Flea*, or the inclusion of other second-hand or alternative consumption spaces (for example, other in-person markets, car boot sales, as well as online second-hand retail spaces such as *eBay* or *DePop*, *DoneDeal*, *Adverts*, *Facebook* marketplace, and various *Freecycle* groups, etc) were utilised by the traders, demonstrating the strategies of ridding and circulation of flea things out of the home through a variety of channels of divestment. This approach utilised a logic of extracting or recouping value- mostly monetary- by re-routing objects out of the home and back into commercial spaces as desirable commodities. This divestment route also required physical and emotional labour.

For example, choosing to move goods back to the market was impacted by various factors. Gaye and Pat, whom we met earlier, shared that they often tried to schedule such evaluations of their home contents to identify potential commodities during the summer. 'There are more market visitors, and people want to treat the market as a day out to pick up some trinkets. It is very different in January; everyone has cleared out and tidied up and all the New Year resolutions are yet to be broken. People do not tend to buy as much. Gaye also explains that seasonal trends further impact the types of goods that she tries to source for the market. One example she gives is that there is more of a demand in the immediate run-up to Christmas

for items like champagne buckets as people want luxury, celebratory things and items that support, refine and elevate special meals and parties during the holidays. Thus, being a trader involves managing these material processes whilst also staying aware of what is deemed valuable and desirable and how/ when this changes for flea market clientele. Traders must ensure they select and price their goods appropriately to the market they are trading within. Gaye explains that they attend ‘Different markets for different clientele for different goods. At the Christmas markets, people are not as interested in vintage. They want gifts and pretty new things. In Newmarket, things must be reasonably financially affordable; when you go to Blackrock market, people want more expensive things’.

It is interesting to return to our earlier discussions about the paradoxical and puzzling dimensions of the flea market. Firstly, when considering whether the flea market is a cause of clutter or a solution to the abundance of clutter, these examples demonstrate how the flea market (as an assemblage of converging, albeit shifting, fluid and contested practices, people and objects) can be understood to intervene in the ‘purchase to disposal trajectory’ that flea goods are often thought of. I have no definitive answer but wish to leave the reader with a form of thought experiment: Can we consider the return of objects to the flea market as an intervention that ruptures practices of divestment, or does the return of flea things to the market merely prolong the objects journey through various states of value, use, and human entanglement as had been discussed throughout the case studies provided? Is the flea market self-sustaining through such practices of divestment and circulation that see traders facilitate the circulation of second-hand objects whose value is contested and subjective? Can we consider the flea market not just as one critical node or juncture in the wider channels of second-hand consumption in Dublin, or is it more apt to consider it its own contained ecosystem?

These are exciting and complex ideas to think about, and here, I include one final case study to help the reader contemplate those provocative suggestions. I include the following case study that recounts an encounter between two women in the flea market that occurred by selling an object- a superficially damaged *Le Creuset* dish. This particular example demonstrates many of the themes discussed in this dissertation. Contested notions of value, clutter, material obligation, inalienability, domesticity, magical thinking and divestment and how these are subjective, contextual and fluid can be seen in this example. As such, acknowledging that I am using this less as a point of analysis and more of an ethnographic vignette that captures the richness of a single flea market transaction that connects multiple locations and values into one moment in time- I close this section with an account of how the sale of one dish captures the complexity and magic to be had in flea market exchanges.

Marie and Sarah and the *Le Creuset* Dish:

One early Sunday afternoon, whilst browsing at the *Dublin Flea Market*, I came across a trader, Marie, with whom I had spoken briefly the previous month. We exchanged hello's, and as there were not many people around, we were able to catch up. Marie lamented that the day had been 'super quiet' but expected a surge of people later in the day as it had '...stopped raining and the sun is shining so that will get the crowds here for a look and some bargains'. We chatted about the various older and pre-used homewares, ornaments and recipe books she had brought to sell today. One item in particular caught my eye and even had me contemplating purchasing it myself. At the front and centre of Marie's stall, nestled between old ceramic dishes, mismatched plates and a stack of patterned teacups and saucers, was a blue *Le Creuset* branded casserole dish with a shiny lid.

Noticing my attention/gaze lingering on the dish, Marie laughed and told me to ‘buy it quick if you want it because that one is going to go fast once the younger people see it’. She took great pride in demonstrating her business acumen by recalling how she had seen some similar ‘knock-off brands’ emulating/copying the *Le Creuset* dish in various homewares stores recently, and they had been very popular. Marie had noticed that one of the smallest *Le Creuset* dishes had been advertised in a popular discount retail grocery store a few weeks prior at a discounted price for as long as stocks last. Despite already owning and not wanting her own dish, she visited her local branch early on a Sunday morning to see if it was worth purchasing more stock to sell at the markets and to her dismay, none of the four branches that she, along with having family check for her, had any stock remaining to be purchased. Bemoaning that the ‘staff probably kept them for themselves and there was never any’, she felt slighted by the missed potential to acquire more dishes that she could sell at the markets. She went on to explain that whilst there was probably not a significant profit to be made on them as they are at the higher end of her offerings, she felt that

‘they become a talking point, they attract people to the stall, and such a good product with a known history and a strong brand’ can both appeal to the ‘right customer’ as well as ‘adding ..how do I explain this...well layer of quality that people know you are not just hawking tatt...like some of what you do see here’.

This emphasis on using a brand to increase and promote the respectability and status of one's position as a seller is perhaps a way that Marie felt she could distinguish and separate herself from other traders within the markets, which in themselves, can often still carry connotations of ‘rogues, chancers, and dodgy dealings’. This concern for how she was perceived, along with the items she possessed, the tactics she used and the provenance of her products, meant that Marie felt she could not be conflated with popular stereotypes surrounding markets. When I asked her to explain further, she referenced the popular British TV sitcom

'*Only Fools and Horses*', which centred upon the antics and the many failing get-rich-quick schemes of two brothers who were market traders. Marie launched into reciting parts of the theme song, laughing, and admitting that she loved watching the show but would never want to be thought of as the characters on-screen. She sung,

‘Stick a pony in me pocket. I'll fetch the suitcase from the van. 'Cos if you want the best ones,
But you don't ask questions, Then brother, I'm your man. Cause where it all comes from is a
mystery, It's like the changing of the seasons, And the tides of the sea, But here's the one
that's driving me berserk: Why do only fools and horses work?’

And then,

‘We've got some Half price cracked ice, And miles and miles of carpet tiles, TVs, Deep
freeze, And David Bowie LPs. Ball games, Gold chains, What's-names, Pictures frames, And
leather goods, And Trevor Francis track suits. From a mush in Shepherds Bush’

Marie took a sip from her coffee cup and again stressed that she was ‘no Del-Boy’ but had seen many ‘fools but no horses...’ at the markets.

I asked her how she had come to have the dish, and she recounted a story that centred around her never really wanting, using, or loving the dish but told a tale of burden, obligation, resentment and many failed attempts to pass on the dish that always seems to return 'to haunt me'. Today's goal to sell it at the market represented her deciding to 'step up the effort to get rid of it', seeing as all other channels utilised to date had 'failed'. The dish had been a gift from her in-laws, and Marie had always felt that as she never had any interest in cooking or improving her skills, the dish represented 'a bit of a dig at me... my mother-in-law being like... oh poor Sam...his wife won't do the cooking for him'. Her mother-in-law had bought the dish at a Parisian flea market when a young couple who had failed in setting up a business sold off all their professional equipment. Marie tried out a couple of recipes initially as she felt obligated to have evidence of use and a prominent storage position for the dish that showed 'I had not

shoved this generous gift into the back of the press somewhere'. Despite her genuine attempts to develop a more positive feeling about the dish, she just never felt that she enjoyed using it or that the meals she attempted from it turned out well enough to convince her to 'sink more effort into figuring it out'. The dish was constantly commented on when her in-laws visited, and these visits were already a source of stress and tension for her as she detailed how her mother-in-law fit into many of the popular stereotypes/tropes, such as

‘constantly commenting on the house, whether it was tidy enough or when I.. and it was always I, never in relation to Sam, had last hoovered or polished... commenting on the cooking and how Sam looked half starved whilst I had started looking a little “chunkier”, and how she could show me how to do these things if I didn’t know how...really can you believe the cheek...the neck of her Tara?’.

After a couple of burnt casseroles and tearful arguments with her husband later, Marie decided enough was enough and that she was relegating the dish off the countertop and into the press. When Sam's mother was later taken severely ill and given a terminal diagnosis, Marie felt the urge to try again with the dish, but, having attempted a new recipe for a pork and bean stew that she overcooked and had to scrape the 'scalded black congealed mess' off the base of the pot, Marie became abruptly frustrated and dropping the dish into the sink, unintentionally (or so she swears) with more gusto than was called for, the base of the dish cracked, resulting in a loud popping sound, with a large vein of cracked enamel scarring the entire bottom of the dish, and splintering out into myriad other tiny little fault lines. Sam, hearing the ruckus, had come running into the room and in stunned silence, they both looked back and forth from the pot to each other before erupting into a fit of laughter that continued for long enough that they were both gasping for air and clutching their ribs. Each time one would manage to find some composure, the other would set them off again by pointing at the pot or laughing and as such, they both just stood in the kitchen with the broken pot, snorting, giggling, hiccupping and

embracing each other. 'That stupid blue pot done more in that moment for us than it had ever managed when I was using it', Marie explained.

The realisation that what could have been seen as an act of aggression or frustration was transformed into a mutual expression of tension and worry was cathartic and served to bond them further during a difficult time. Marie invoked a semi-mystical capacity of the broken dish to comfort them, perhaps not in the conventional manner of providing a warm, nutritious meal as an expression of familial care, but by allowing them both to depart into a moment of carefree release from the strain of her mother in law's health predicament. That said, Marie insisted that Sam never mention the broken dish to his mother and when she passed away a mere three months later, Marie admitted to feeling a weird sense of guilt that

'the dish came from Vera and I break the dish and then Vera dies...and I know that's crazy and I don't think the dish, or that I murdered her by breaking the dish but I cannot get over the feeling of how the two went so close to each other and that maybe the dish breaking should have been some kind of sign that Vera didn't have as long as the doctors had told us'.

This association made Marie feel 'uneasy around it', and she moved the dish to the garage from the shelf it had been placed on after the break behind her baking tins and trays.

As the dish was still presumably safe to use and later confirmed to be so by Sam having cooked a roast joint in it, Marie then decided to gift it to her sister, who was a keen cook. She held on to it for a few months but then during, what Marie deems, 'a fit of getting rid and downsizing all their crap', her sister returned the dish to Marie. This reappearance/return was not precisely delightful as she felt it was almost 'as if Vera was from somewhere saying you cannot get rid of it that easy', so again, the dish went into the back of a press. Later, when Marie's daughter was leaving home for college, she gave her the dish to bring to her new flat.

Marie was again dismayed when her daughter subsequently returned home with the dish, explaining that neither she nor her housemates ever really used it, but seeing as it was expensive, she thought she should bring it back to her mother, who had always hidden/shielded her daughter from the tumultuous relationship she shared with her grandmother.

The next attempt to move along the dish came in the form of sending the dish, full of homemade biscuits, into her husband's office, where he worked with the goal of the dish 'going missing'. Marie was aghast when, recognising the brand name, one of her husband's colleagues insisted that he carefully bring it home to his wife, who would obviously desire it returned safely. Feeling by now that the dish was some haunted entity that she could not exorcise herself from, Marie tried earnestly to use it as a storage device. She tried opening it and co-opting it as a fruit basket, using it to store potatoes, and as a container for her stash of chocolate bars. However, she could not reconcile her dislike of the dish and the negative associations it held for her. The final step she, thus, decided to pursue was to sell it at the flea market where she regularly held a stall and to keep bringing it back until someone would take it off her hands, but also, 'you know, I do not like it, but it is still a hot commodity so I would want a fair price'.

That day at the market, Marie had the dish nestled between other homewares but raised on a small plastic plinth, indicating its exalted status amongst her wares. The lid was propped just behind this, and she had placed a string of twinkling white fairy lights inside the vessel to catch the attention of people walking past. A couple of hours later, I returned to check in on whether Marie had managed to sell the dish or not. She was frustrated, as plenty of people had seen it and picked it up and enquired after the price, but none had closed the sale but remained optimistic that it would go before the day was out. As we chatted about how there were still

another few hours left to go before she would have to start closing up for the day and how, otherwise, she had sold many of her items, a young woman with curly blonde hair and a flowy red dress almost walked past her stall, yet, doubled-back once she noticed the dish. Stepping away from the stall, as I had learned to instinctively do as soon as there was a potential customer around, I busied myself browsing through the selection of records and yellowed books at the next stall whilst straining to hear what was being said.

The woman in the red dress greeted Marie, introducing herself as Sarah, and immediately commented upon how the *Le Creuset* had caught her eye. Marie did not counter with an aggressive sales pitch. Instead, she proclaimed how 'yes, it is a beautiful dish, and the colour is beautiful...unusual shade, Marseille blue they call it...you have good taste'. Sarah asked if she could pick it up, turning it back and forth in her hands, commenting on how hefty and solid it felt, and I think I could see her looking for a discreet price tag that was intentionally not provided. They both stood in silence whilst Sarah continued to turn the dish over and examine it. As she went to point to the fault lines and damage on the enamel, Marie rushed to assure her that it was 'still perfectly good to use. It got a bad knock, but it is only superficial, you see, it is only aesthetically a little off, but it is safe and perfectly good'. Sarah nodded in agreement and, with an exaggerated sigh, handed the dish back to Marie. Whilst I could not catch the exact wording she used, I could see a flash of wistful disappointment flicker across both women's faces as she told Marie that she did not think she would have the budget to splurge on this and how 'I mean if there is not a price out... cost wise that is never a good thing'.

Marie asked her what her budget would stretch to, and without quite stating a number, Sarah explained how she had only recently graduated from university and was working as an

administrative assistant in a solicitor's office. She had recently moved into a new apartment and was finding the cost of living in Dublin challenging to navigate on her modest salary. She countered by asking Marie what she had in mind, price-wise. Marie hummed and hawed for a minute or two before conceding that she knew that 'this dish would cost about €250 to buy new, but this one has been used, and it has some damage so (pauses) ...about €200 would be the best for me, but I would go to €180/170 I think... what do you think about that?'. Sarah looked visibly dejected, and, picking up the dish one more time and running her hands along the lid, tracing the carved embellishment bearing the prestigious brand name, I could hear her tell Marie that she would not waste her time negotiating further as she could not spend that much. Maybe another time for both of them.

Perhaps, feeling a pang of sympathy towards Sarah, or just a desire to be rid of the dish and wanting to capitalise on the opportunity of an interested buyer presenting themselves to her, Marie told her to hang on while she thought about it and to see if she could maybe lower the price a little further as she seemed to 'really like it, to want it, and it would be good for it to go to a special home'. Sarah responded enthusiastically, saying that if they could agree on a price, she would be delighted and stressed her genuine desire for the pot but also her limited spending ability, earnestly declaring that she was not trying to 'scam or steal it' for the sake of procuring a bargain. They continued discussing prices for a few minutes, with the proposed amount going up and down, being offered and countered, until finally, Marie agreed to significantly drop the price to €110, as Sarah offered her final offer of €90. This exchange remained pleasant and courteous, with both women trying to look after their interests whilst also accommodating the other. Finally, in true 'flea market fashion', Marie suggested that they meet in the middle and they shook hands over €100. Sarah handed over a small wad of €20 notes and, in return, wrapped up the lid and dish separately, in some paper, before surrounding

it with bubble wrap and, taping the respective packages and then placing them into a reusable shopping bag, from a stash she had placed under the table.

As she prepared the wrapping, they chatted about how excited and happy Sarah was to buy the dish and how she appreciated Marie's pricing flexibility. Sarah was chuffed and told her that her grandmother had always had one of those casserole dishes, and every Sunday, a meal was prepared for the family in this dish, and how thrilled she was to have one for her home now. Once Marie was finished, she handed over the bag to Sarah and wished her well with it. As Sarah started to walk away, I quickly returned to the stall, telling Marie I would pop back to her to chat about the dish and congratulate her on the sale. I took off after Sarah, hoping she would be open to chatting with me for a minute about the dish. As I ducked by and past people, trying not to lose sight of the red dress in the crowd, I was simultaneously giddy with excitement and apprehensive that I would come across as a lunatic chasing this poor woman through the market and ranting about 'the blue pot', but luckily having caught up with her, Sarah seemed bemused by me and after a flustering narrative about 'my research and I work with Marie and I was trying to capture the meanings and trajectories of the pot', she agreed to have a quick chat about the dish.

We walked over to the wall and managed to get a seat on one of the windowsills of the Teelings distillery that was a little away from the market's noise. After buying two coffees, I asked Sarah to tell me about her decision to buy the pot, admitting that I had been loitering at the adjoining stall to see if the pot would get sold. We laughed about this, and I again stressed how I was not trying to be nosey but was conducting ethnographic fieldwork for my thesis. After some questions about what that entailed, Sarah told me how she had always wanted a *Le*

Creuset since she was old enough to remember the one her maternal grandmother had, which was the pride of her kitchen. Sarah had fond memories of spending time with her grandmother after school and during the holidays, just the two in the kitchen, baking scones and apple tarts and bonding over sharing the details of each other's day. Her grandmother, long since widowed, had passed away a few years ago, and no one was sure what had become of the dish in the aftermath and chaos of packing up the home; this was always a deep regret for Sarah, who felt that her grandmother would have wanted the dish to be passed on to her as a reminder of their time together baking and preparing meals over the years.

Sarah even shared, somewhat abashedly, that every so often, on her walk through the city centre from her office en route to the bus stop on *O'Connell Street*, she would take a quick detour and go down into the basement of *Arnott's* to the homeware section and would admire the selection of *Le Creuset* dishes, whilst anticipating the day that she would be able to afford the lofty price tag they displayed. She had slowly built up her own assortment of various kitchenware, both decorative and ornamental, alongside some gifted to her upon moving into her new place. However, the *Le Creuset* had always remained just out of her reach. She had declined to purchase a similar knock-off version as this was 'different. I really do not care about having the best of stuff, like my furniture came from *Ikea* and most of my wardrobe is...well "*Penney's* hon" (laughs)... but that is the one thing that I really wanted to have the same as my grandmother'. She had even been considering asking her family and friends to go in on a casserole dish as a joint birthday and Christmas present, but felt that they might not understand why she would want to spend so much on a dish when you could get 'something the same, just without the name, in a load of shops'. This fear that others would not 'get' or even scorn her attachment to this particular brand and object constituted too big a threat for Sarah, who would rather not face their 'judgement, or worse, ridiculing me for being obsessed with a "dumb pot"'.

Sarah relayed to me how excited she was that Marie's generosity had enabled her to purchase the same style and colour dish that her grandmother had had, and that should have been hers, even if it was 'a bit of a splurge and it will be beans on toast for the next month', laughing, when I countered that at least she could cook 'fancy *La Creuset* beans' in the dish now. On that note, I thanked Sarah for her time, left her to finish browsing with the big bag tucked tightly under her arm, and returned through the throngs of people browsing and passing between stalls to Marie, who had leisurely started packing up for the day.

I recalled my conversation with Sarah and informed Marie that she had made her very happy and that the dish would be treasured. Marie laughed and admitted that while she had been hoping to make 'a bit more' on it, she had a gut instinct straight away that Sarah was 'the right customer to own the dish' and that she was satisfied with the arrangement they had come to, even if she could have gotten more. Joking, she laughed that Sam would be supportive of her choice to lower the price and now, as she had sold several other goods that covered her entry fees and resulted in a decent profit, the €100 from the dish could be put to something nice for herself to enjoy. I asked Marie how she felt when the moment came to hand over the dish; as for all her mixed emotions surrounding it, she had held onto it, which had been in her life for quite some time. She paused before answering and replied gently,

'It is a relief to have it go to someone to cherish it and I am delighted. I am surprised though I did have a minute of...well...how to explain... when I was wrapping it up... and this will sound ridiculous... I guess I said goodbye to it and made peace with it. And I felt like Vera was watching me and... (trailed off) ... but that is just silly talk'.

Reassuring her that I did not find it silly or unusual at all, I asked Marie what she thought Vera would say or feel about her finally getting rid and free of the pot, to which she laughed and said 'she'd probably not be happy at all with me...but maybe then again she would think it is

okay too and better it be with a woman who loves it and can cook more than eggs with it'. We laughed at that, and I bid farewell to Marie, promising to catch up with her at the next market and left the chaotic, noisy and colourful market for quieter back streets, making my way back to the city centre to catch a bus home.

When there was no one else nearby, I rushed through recounting the story into the voice recorder app on my phone, and once I had reached the bus stop, I started scribbling notes and fragments of the story into a notebook to flesh out later. I was giddy with excitement about this interaction I had had the serendipity/kismet to have encountered. Frequently, the flea market was a frustrating research site for me- everything was in motion, all the time, and fast motion at that. It was very challenging to feel that I was managing to accurately convey the chaotic reality of the market, constantly worrying about what I was missing and how I would love a small team of additional researchers to ensure that I was not missing important moments from one stall to the next, at any given time. This used and cracked *Le Creuset* dish felt like winning a research lottery and striking gold- just as the recipe book anecdote I used to open this dissertation had felt. It had not shattered upon that initial impact in the sink or been discarded in a fit of errant rage by Marie at any point in the many years that she had stored, displayed, concealed and circulated; it allowed this chance encounter to be played out in front of me today. It represented exactly what I had come to see was the most enchanting and important attribute of such flea market goods. Whilst a certain degree of being abandoned (albeit with care), relegated, moved on, or being dispossessed of, was a sorry shared fate for many of the pre-loved things that had arrived at the *Flea*, now, items such as the *Le Creuset* dish, and the tattered recipe book represented not so much material objects that merely passively stack up and spread across the flea market stalls. Instead, there was also a magical or transformative process

whereby these same objects became envied, coveted, desired and upon purchase, personal trinkets, beloved mementoes, or considered gifts.

Part 2: Conclusions.

During my time at the flea market, I had initially expected to focus mainly on the various second-hand goods that accumulated at the market to understand the qualities or characteristics those items possessed to entice or repulse potential new owners. Having conducted previous ethnographic research into individual collectors, I had envisioned this research as a continuation and expansion of that. I intended to examine what role alternative retail spaces such as flea markets played for collectors who frequented them, among other consumption spaces; instead, I found myself in a space full of contradictions, contested and continually transforming values, practices, objects and people. That first encounter I opened this dissertation with- that of Sally and Nora fighting over the value and monetary worth of an old, damaged recipe book- was the first time I realised just how fluid and prone to disruption the circulations that occur there are. Several paradoxes emerged from the flea market, namely whether it contributed to clutter through its excessive materiality or whether it salvages goods from the category of clutter and renders them desirable and meaningful again.

The *Introduction (Chapter One)* situated my theoretical orientation, and using a material culture lens, I drew on consumption and discard literature to place myself within anthropological discussions of second-hand consumption, practices of domesticity, and processes of divestment and circulation that apply an ethnographic sensibility to the everyday, ordinary, quotidian and iterative processes of consumption, storage, display and disposal that

traders use to make sense of their lives and the material accoutrements that are woven into it. Such materially mediated practices are often overlooked yet can reveal much more about the practices of meaning-making and value contestations that go into shopping practices that have traditionally been dismissed as superficial or trivial. This chapter also provided an overview of some of the more significant societal shifts and the socio-cultural context in which the *Dublin Flea Market* was founded, flourished and eventually disbanded. To set the scene for the reader, this chapter zooms out in perspective to situate the flea market in the broader context of Ireland at the time. *Chapter One* provided the reader with a comprehensive overview of how the flea market seemed to mirror national cycles of boom, bust and austerity in the aftermath of the *Celtic Tiger*. Social issues include the aftermath of the 2008 recession, the lack of sufficient domestic storage space for increased material goods, and the changing consumer sentiments where second-hand became 'cool' and desirable. This chapter also provides an overview of the research element that these arguments are based on. The research's various methodological, conceptual, ethical and logistical dimensions are discussed here.

Chapter Two focused on the immediate market context to consider how the local setting shaped and supported the market's growth over time. This chapter discussed the geographical area of *Newmarket Square*, situated in The *Liberties* neighbourhood of *Dublin City*. A sense of temporal continuity emerges here as we learn that this area has a long mercantile tradition, and this resurgence of informal trading is seen as both a nostalgic return to an idealised past and also the beginnings of a new, more conscious form of consumption practice that rejects the excesses of contemporary capitalism and consumer culture. This chapter then shifts in focus to provide a comprehensive account of the *Dublin Flea*, detailing its origins, principles and logistical practices, and a sensorial and ethnographic 'walk-through' of the market was provided to convey a sense of the market experience. A chronology of the flea market was provided as

the author advised that this was an ethnographic account of a disappearing field site. This included explaining how the market steadily grew from just 15 stallholders in 2008 to 100+ traders taking over *Newmarket Square* on the last Sunday of each month. Precarity loomed over the markets with several logistical challenges, such as procuring alternative locations for the annual Christmas markets at short notice.

Until now, the flea market had always found a way to survive and even thrive. Tragedy struck in December 2017 when a collapsed wall in the *Dublin Food Co-Op* rendered the market homeless. This was the beginning of the end for the market. The flea market organisers managed to organise a couple of pop-up markets, but ultimately, the last *Dublin Flea* to be held in *Newmarket Square* occurred on May 27 2018. Unfortunately, the market's tenth anniversary signaled the start of a hiatus; homeless with no permanent premises to trade from, the market did host some pop-up markets, but this was short-lived, and in 2021, the founding committee released a statement on their social media channels that with much regret the *Dublin Flea* had been disbanded and would no longer be trading.

Chapter Three temporally relocates the reader away from the demolition works and dissolution that came to define the ending of the market in 2018. This chapter asks what is a flea market, anthropologically speaking. Responding to this prompt, the chapter seeks to destabilise previously limited understandings of the flea market as a bounded, fixed and homogenous entity. It seeks instead to demonstrate how some of the tensions found within it can be reconciled using Foucault's (1967) concept of heterotopia, whereby one space can juxtapose and contain seemingly irreconcilable differences. I argue here that the flea market is a heterotopic space that is both liminal and layered. This chapter overviews Foucault's

heterotopia and addresses how the flea market conforms to its six defining principles. Overall, this chapter demonstrates that the flea market cannot be conceived as an abstract economic system separated from the very traders and objects that constitute it. Instead, I have demonstrated that the market's people, objects, practices and exchanges combine to create, dismantle and reproduce the market each month.

Chapter Four examines these constituent parts of the market and grapples with questions of value, meaning and worth. An analysis of value- what it is, what material objects possess or retain it, and who determines value- is addressed here. The flea market is continually experiencing clashes and ruptures in how people value second-hand goods, as was evident in the recipe book anecdote used to open *Chapter One*. Here, we encounter things displayed at the flea market that had previous lives; most traders dealt in second-hand goods, so the material objects there moved in and out of people's lives through the traders who mediated the entire process. Just as the things moved, so did their perceived value(s) and worths. The traders become nexus points that connect the flea things with the flea clientele. This means that the market is not homogenous, fixed, or stable. Its constituent parts must come together monthly to re-create and enact the flea market. I had not unanticipated that in a maximalist context, i.e., the flea market where traders work with constant streams of material goods, discourses of clutter and minimalism, underwritten with moral messaging, would be so ubiquitous. Traders positioned themselves in subjective ways to the market; some saw it as generating clutter, whereas others believed their valorisation of second-hand was not only a personal preference but was an intervention in throwaway consumer society. The market was continuously disassembled and reassembled each month, an 'other' heterotopic space that juxtaposed seemingly irreconcilable practices, values and goods and made visible tensions between the people and objects passing through it. A Typology of traders (*One-Offers/ Ruptures, Hobbyists*

& *Side-Hustlers*, and *Professionals*) was provided to demarcate between the traders, as to flatten or condense them into a singular collective would do an injustice to their individual experiences and stories. Similarly, focusing on the objects circulating through the market, these were also separated into *second-hand*, *new* and *artisanal goods*. Clashes over value were common and resulted in mini ruptures to the social fabric of the market and the sense of community that had been formed there.

Chapter Five shifts in ethnographic context; following the circulations of traders and their goods, we become situated within the domestic space of the traders, entering their private homes, where objects must be managed. This illuminates how the market slips beyond the symbolic boundaries of the flea's location each month. Instead, it is present, experienced and continually attended to when most traders manage their inventory of market goods within the confines of their domestic context of home. Everyday home-making practices accompanied this sorting work, and the mainstream obsession with clutter shaped how the traders either sought to embrace this minimalist aesthetic or actively rejected the moral message that clutter equals excess equals shameful and wrong. Some traders defied the societal messaging to conform to this normative and ideologised aspirational vision of home. In both instances, traders connected the commercial realm of the market with that of the private space of the home to continue circulating goods with shifting values. Traders utilised strategies of integration or separation to manage their material excesses, with slippages, ruptures and stalling occurring when flea and domestic things overlapped.

Chapter Six focuses on the circulations of objects within the home and how traders engaged in decluttering processes yet often became overwhelmed, emotional or defeated in

trying to manage their domestic surplus. Discourses of clutter and how this term has become morally-laden are explored here. Within popular discourses, clutter is enlivened and often taken for granted as a harmful, dangerous and contagious thing. Imbued with malintent, a desire to consume more and self-replicate, traders spoke of the ongoing battle to manage their material excesses. Here, we return to that paradoxical conundrum from earlier. Traders are at once enamoured by their shared love and appreciation for things and material stuff. However, this does not insulate them from experiencing feelings of shame when clutter is produced and increasingly present in their homes. Likewise, the flea market's relationship to clutter is also contested; it is both praised as a space that salvages goods from a state of clutter and viewed as one giant accumulation of clutter that encourages and seeks to enable people to accumulate more, disrupting waste flows and diverting 'useless' things from conduits of disposal and instead returning them to the home. This chapter provides an account of how clutter is subjective and contextual and, using a circulatory metaphor asks if clutter is created in moments of stoppage or rupture, i.e., when domestic goods fail to move along the internal conduits of circulation within the home. When troublesome things are recategorised as clutter, they must be acted upon as they threaten the normative temporospatial order of the home. Using strategies of divestment and circulation, such burdensome belongings are relocated and concealed within the home using strategies of storage and containment or are re-routed out of the home through processes of disposal, discard, donation or returning to the second-hand economy.

Chapter Seven endeavours to do two things. Firstly, this chapter follows some of those routes of divestment, picking up from the moment of decluttering and identifying troublesome things. The subsequent ethnographic examples illustrate how traditional discourses around waste and its assumption to be the end phase of a linear progression from production to consumption to disposal are unsettled—using Hetherington's notion of waste as a 'spectral

horror' that can linger, continuing to haunt us long after its materiality has been divested or discarded. The imagined trajectories of decluttered belongings invoke an 'away' that does not exist as objects are only ever concealed or moved elsewhere. This section discusses some of the most commonly deployed routes of divestment, i.e., storage, discard, donation and divestment to another second-hand retail channel. The chapter closes with an extended case study of one instance where an object was returned to the flea market and mediated. What emerges from the transactional exchange of one second-hand object at the flea market is a sense of how the values, meaning and worth assigned to flea things are contextual, subjective, slippery and contested.

Second, the chapter closes with an overview of the research, reiterating the dissertation's central themes, concepts and arguments and offers some reflexive closing thoughts. In bringing this dissertation to a close, I am reminded of Carolyn Steedman's writings on dust when she points out that 'we can never remove dust completely, only disturb it until it is eventually deposited elsewhere. This is a good way of thinking about daily life, in fact, as something that remains, despite our attempts to overlook or discard it: the everyday, we might say, is where the dust settles' (Steedman, 2002:66). In this dissertation I have addressed the many ways in which second-hand goods are circulated through the flea market, connecting the commercial with the domestic via the traders. Returning to the recipe book anecdote, I tried to uncover and unpack the factors, practices and beliefs that rendered flea things repulsive, enchanting and enticing all at once. This central question of how second-hand objects transform value, meaning and worth at the flea market is informed by many overlapping contexts, morality discourses, locations and practices of trading and domesticity.

The flea market presented many paradoxes, tensions, questions and conflicts: does it create or cure clutter? Why is minimalist discourse so prevalent in a maximalist context? Does the flea market salvage goods or merely prolong their eventual discarding? Etc. These are *Big* questions, and, centring the voices, stories and lived experiences of the traders, I have tried less to definitively answer these than to display the complex, subjective and ongoing iterative ways in which the traders attempted to grapple with these *Big* questions. That is the reality for the traders; they operate within a shifting, contested and uncertain informal economy full of liminality, nuance, and ongoing debates about the value and meaning of the flea market for themselves and how they see their place in the world. Flea market trading was simultaneously a community practice, albeit on the margins of mainstream consumer practices, and a domestic practice and many traders spoke of the challenges of navigating shifting consumption trends when the material and moral discourses become entangled.

Much of the anthropological literature on material culture has focused on how acquiring personal possessions is a key means to actively construct, refine and communicate our sense of self. (cf. Miller 1998; Douglas 1966; Appadurai 1986, etc.). Post decluttering interventions, traders were left with a collection of items that then had to be re-routed out of the home, or, in some cases, if they were not ready to part with them, be stored somewhere inconspicuously in the home, being transformed from clutter to stored belongings for future usage. Following that line of analysis through to the later divestment of those very consumer goods opens up more insight into the role that ridding ourselves of those identity- accoutrements can provide. Ultimately, suppose we conceptualise clutter management, especially the moral imperative to declutter, as a lens to examine everyday materiality and morality. In that case, it becomes possible to interrogate the production of individual identity for the traders and the staging of normative and idealised domesticity. This reveals important insights about what belongings

remain valued enough to survive decluttering and to be kept in the home and one's life and also reveals how the construction of self, as well as that of a 'good and proper' home, is continually refined and modified through an intentional and deliberate divestment of once-treasured belongings. For the traders, trading in second-hand goods at the flea market reverberates across their lives, and these processes may entangle their personal belongings with those they intend to sell and those they deem clutter.

A Reflection on Endings.

As I was preparing to leave, the threat of the demolition and redevelopment works that would come to replace the *Newmarket Square* I had come to know drew ever closer. Already, the sense of community buzz had been decimated by the fall of the wall in December 2017, displacing the flea market. Now, the *Co-Op* was packing up, preparing to evacuate and move across the city. Those fracture lines that had become more present throughout my research reverberated, and the sense of imminent precarity increased as the *Co-Op* was cleared out. The place I had spent so much time in became a building site, dismantled and eventually disappeared. I visited a few times to see how the works were progressing. I could not help but see it as a metaphor; one's field site disappearing upon completion of the ethnographic research is the neatest form of closure one could ever expect. Each trip there, seeing cranes and diggers, piles of rubble and construction workers in hard hats and hi-vis neon yellow jackets produced a sense of the uncanny or *unheimlich*, and I eventually stopped visiting. The 2021 announcement of the official disbanding of the *Dublin- Flea* represented another ending; now, my research collective no longer existed. It, too, had dissipated just as the physical location had. Themes of circulation and rupture were ever-present throughout this project, and it feels poetic that the form mirrored the content in many ways. I had to confront my perceptions and biases of value, manage the abundance of 'clutter' that the research process generated, and reconcile the increasing urges and (productive-procrastination) impulses to declutter to feel more capable and composed when attending workshops with participants. Nevertheless, now, my site has metaphorically transformed from unstable foundations to none. Perhaps this dissertation can exist as one more remaining material fragment of a market that no longer exists, in a location that no longer exists, yet can always be recalled through the enduring things that passed through it.

"Sometimes you want to keep fragments
Sometimes things don't fit together,
Don't tally."
-Edmund De Waal.



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Fig 1: The perks of domestic ethnography.

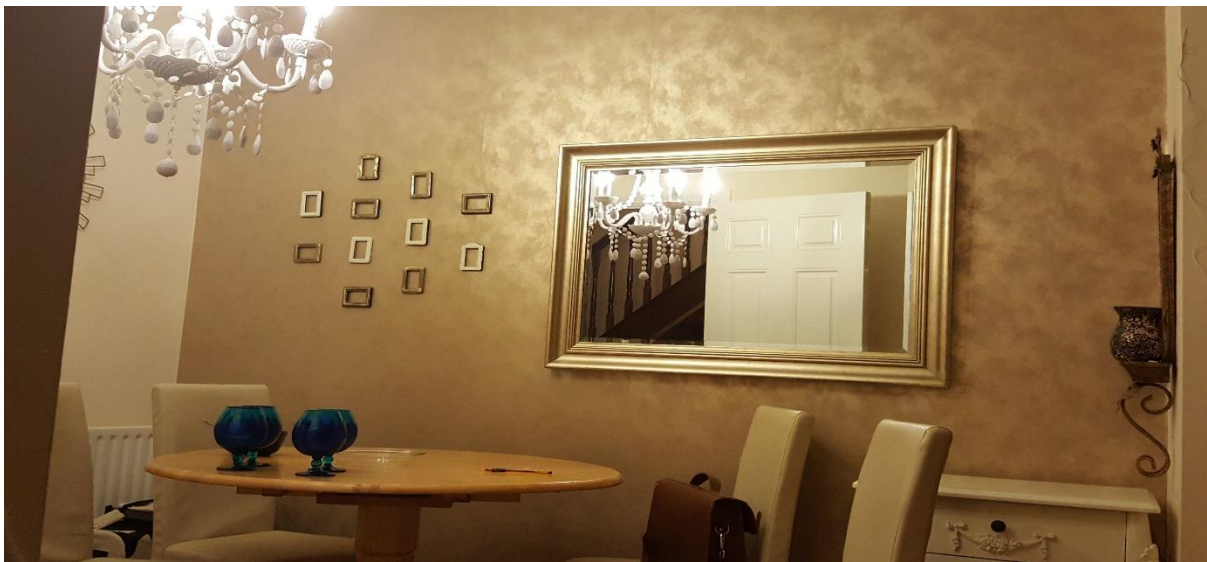


Fig 2: Ethnography in my participants' homes.



Fig 3: Bricolage interiors. [Credit: Screaming Donkeys Emporium].



Fig 4: A shopfront in the Liberties- 'This is a local shop for local people'.



Fig 5: Entrance to Newmarket Square (home of the Co-op and Dublin Flea).



Fig 6: Newmarket Square and the #SpiritofDublin.



Fig 7: The Convergence of Old and New on Newmarket Square.



Fig 8: This way to the flea market.



Fig 9: Street art around Newmarket Square.



Fig 10: Newmarket Square on market day.



Fig 11: Teelings Distillery and Newmarket Square on market day.



Fig 12: Co-Op noticeboard advising members they have been instructed to vacate the premises.



Fig 13: The entryway to the Dublin Food Co-Op on Newmarket Square.

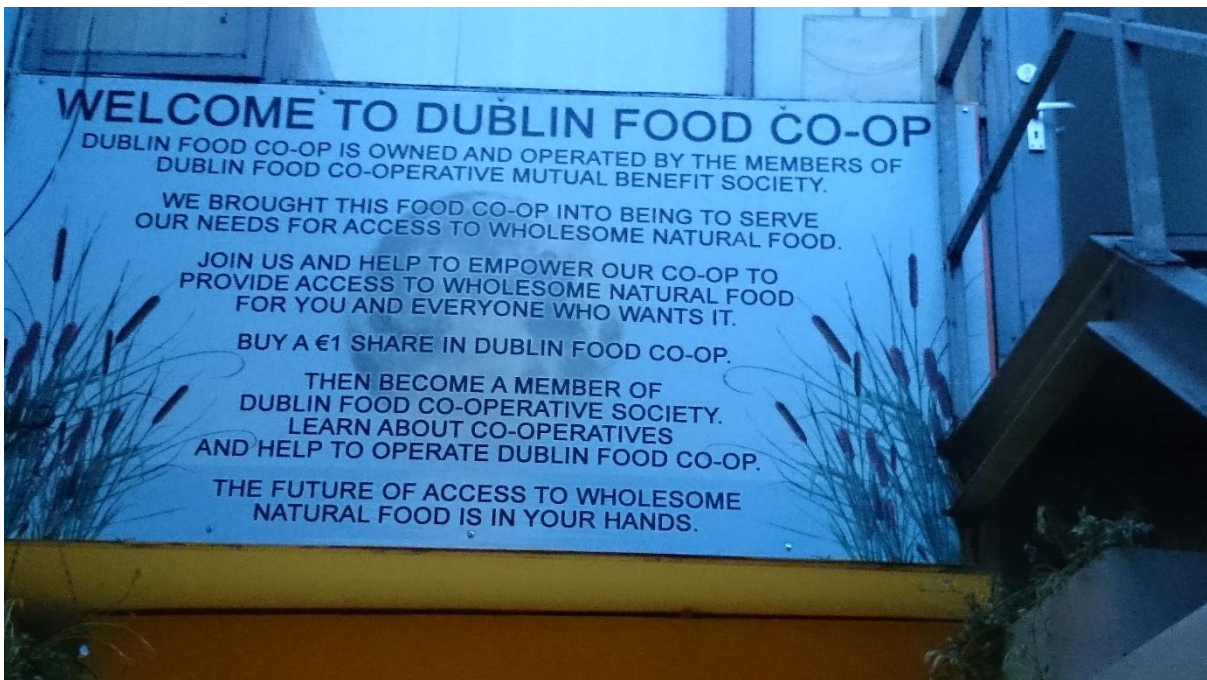


Fig 14: The Dublin Food Co-Operative's mission statement above the entryway.



Fig 15: Co-Op poster recruiting new members.



Fig 16: Advertisement for Fusion Sunday market in the Co-Op.



Fig 17: Inside the Co-op on market day.



Fig 18: The Arabic tea tent on Fusion Market Day.



Fig 19: The flea community browsing the day's wares.



Fig 20: The Dublin Flea set-up where monthly posters advertising the market are commodified.



Fig 21: The Dublin Flea memorabilia as commodity.



Fig 22: Early morning set up on Newmarket Square.



Fig 23: A trader's set up with clothing, old tools and a taxidermy fox.



Fig 24: Performance time (live music & belly dancing) during the market.



Fig 25: 2018 Street Feast on market day in Newmarket Square.



Fig 26: Celebration, community & commerce on Newmarket Square.



Fig 27: Trader sign: 'It doesn't cost to look. Feel free to browse & ask questions'.



Fig 28: A random assemblage of goods for sale.



Fig 29: Stall selling glassware with a permit from Dublin City Council to trade in bric-à-brac.



Fig 30: Stall signage declaring 'Rugs, Riches & Rubbish' For sale.



Fig 31: Stall selling textiles & clothes for €5.



Fig 32: Art for sale inside the Co-Op on market day.



Fig 33: Wares for browsing.



Fig 34: A rack of clothing & vintage fashion.



Fig 35: Books for sale with sign stating €1 each.



Fig 36: Artisanal goods for sale.

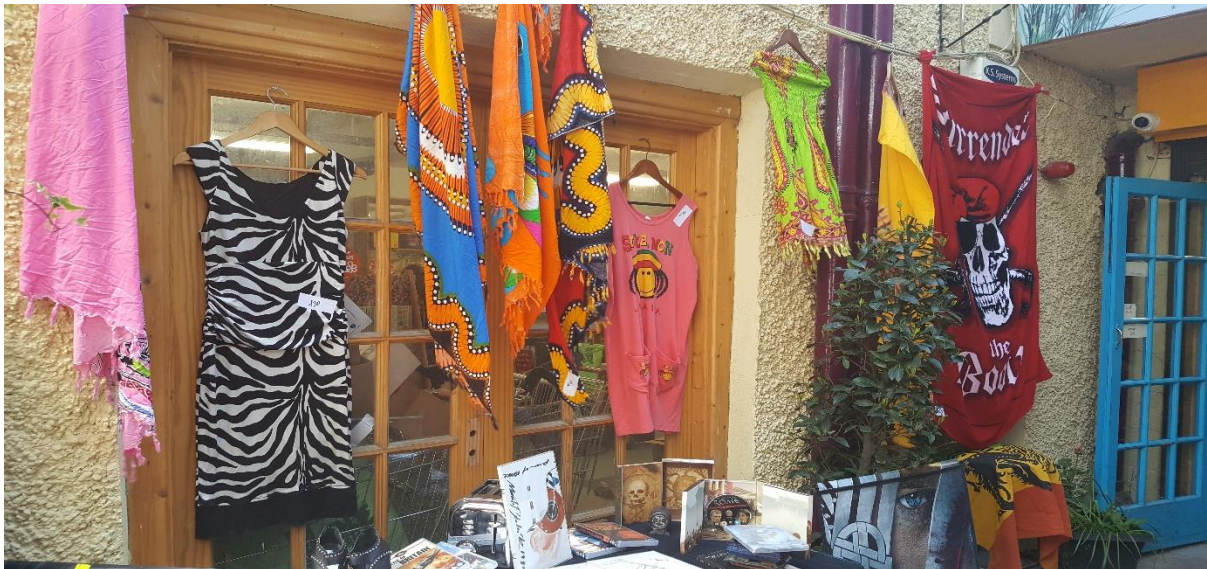


Fig 37: Clothing stall in the entryway to the Dublin Flea Market.



Fig 38: Seating or stall for sale?



Fig 39: 'Foodie' stall using samples to entice & interact with potential customers.



Fig 40: Spiritual accoutrements for sale.



Fig 41: Baked goods were always present & popular at the Flea.



Fig 42: Schedule of events for the Fusion Sunday market.



Fig 43: Stall signage stating 'just another day at the flea'.

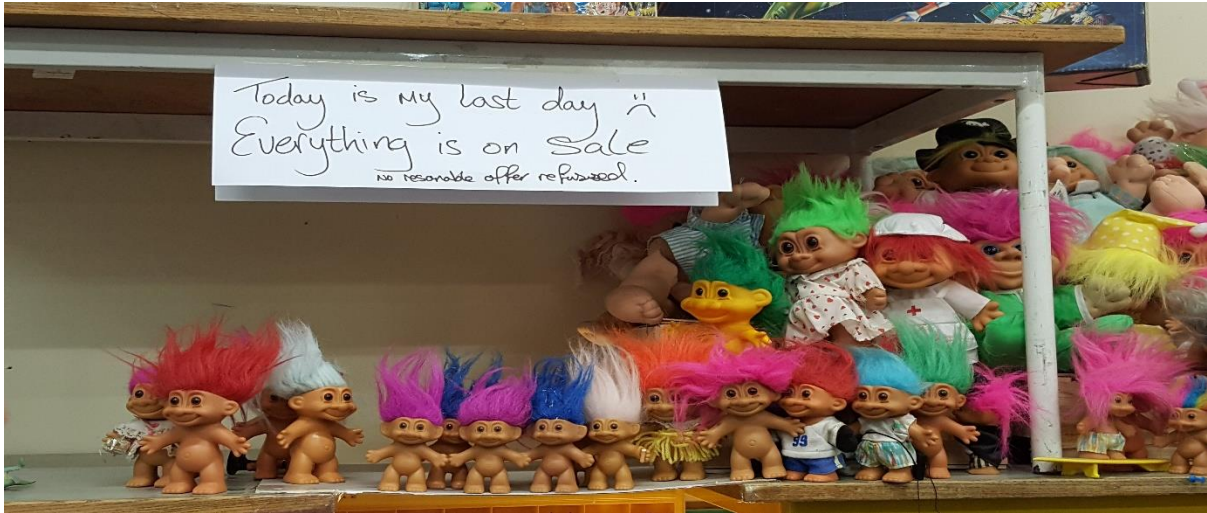


Fig 44: Trolls for sale and sign stating 'Today is my last day. Everything is on sale. No reasonable offer refused'.



Fig 45: 'Hipster aesthetics' at the Flea Market.



Fig 46: A Vignette of goods for sale- interaction entices potential customers.

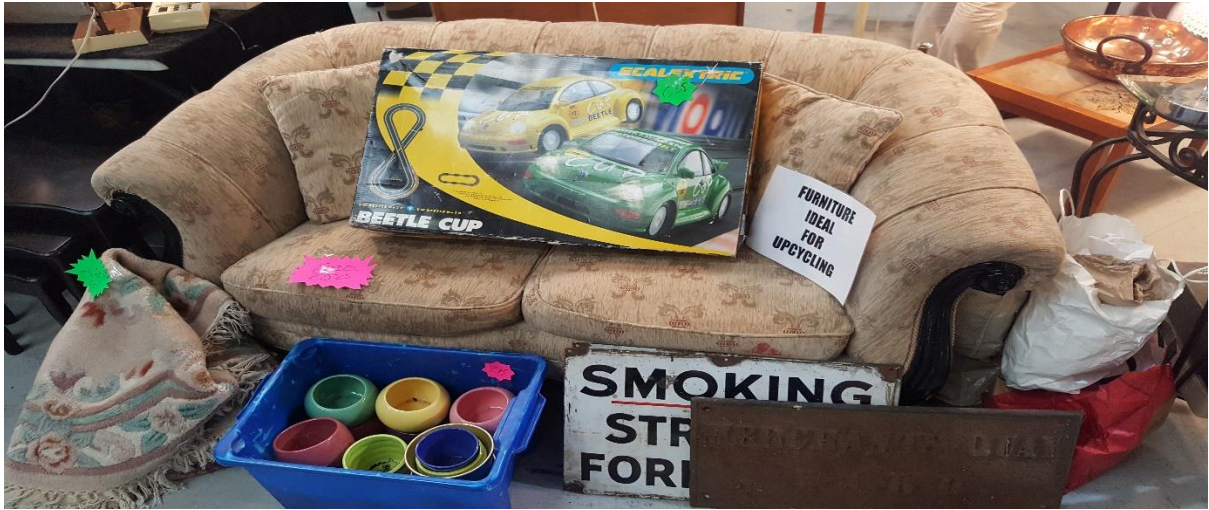


Fig 47: Various goods with signage stating 'furniture ideal for upcycling'.



Fig 48: Second-hand goods with sign stating 'Everything Must Clear! No Reasonable Offer Refused'.



Fig 49: Mannequin affirming flea market norms- sign states 'I Speak Haggle'.



Fig 50: Market stall with sign urging consumers to 'Buy Local'.



Fig 51: Second-hand flea stall advising customers that sales will fund a trip to Berlin in 2016.



Fig 52: Professionalisation of traders: card payments became commonplace amongst traders.



Fig 53: Second-hand stall.



Fig 54: Flea humour- clothing rack with a sign: 'Not all these clothes are shit!'.



Fig 55: Gendered advertising at the Flea. The sign states 'Sexy, man-shaped clothing'.



Fig 56: 'Sexy & empowering female-shaped clothing'.



Fig 57: Upcycling Lego figurines as art pieces.



Fig 58: Hygge & the commodification of cosy aesthetics at the Flea.



Fig 59: Trader displays: books on poison, medicine & vials of old poisons and substances.



Fig 60: Trader sign stating 'Fancy Goods Dept'.



Fig 61: Browsing the stalls.



Fig 62: Old photographs were a common and popular commodity at the market.



Fig 63: Commercial & charitable values merging.



Fig 64: Selling rugs that support the eradication of child labour through funding & education.



Fig 65: Kenyan crafts at the Dublin Flea Christmas market.



Fig 66: Signage for the Christmas market at the Point Village.



Fig 67: 2017 Christmas Market- 'Design, Craft & Collectibles'.



Fig 68: The Final Dublin Flea Christmas Cracker Market in 2017 at the Point Village.



Fig 69: Christmas 2017: 300 traders, 73,000 attendees & a spend of €3.5 million reported by DFM.



Fig 70: A moment in time from 6 days of visitors to the 2017 Christmas Market.



Fig 71: Religious iconographies & second-hand Commodities for sale.



Fig 72: Sale signage.



Fig 73: A vintage stall's wares.



Fig 74: Vintage French fashion magazines.



Fig 75: Quiet zone at the market with sign stating 'Welcome. Come Sit Down. Chill Out'.



Fig 76: Press coverage of the flea capturing the ethnographer- researching or shopping?!!



Fig 77: Encroaching construction foreshadowing the later loss of the Flea.

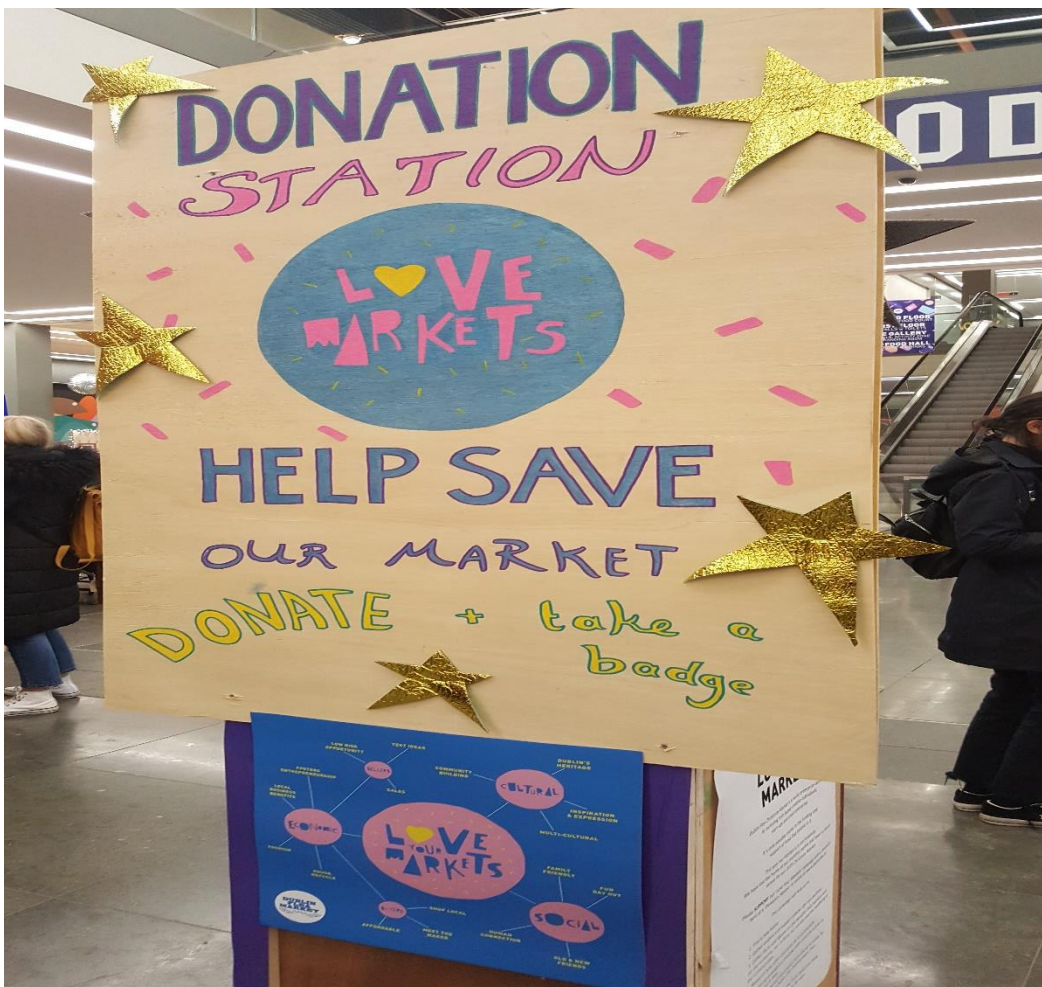


Fig 78: Donation station at the Flea to support the campaign to save the markets.

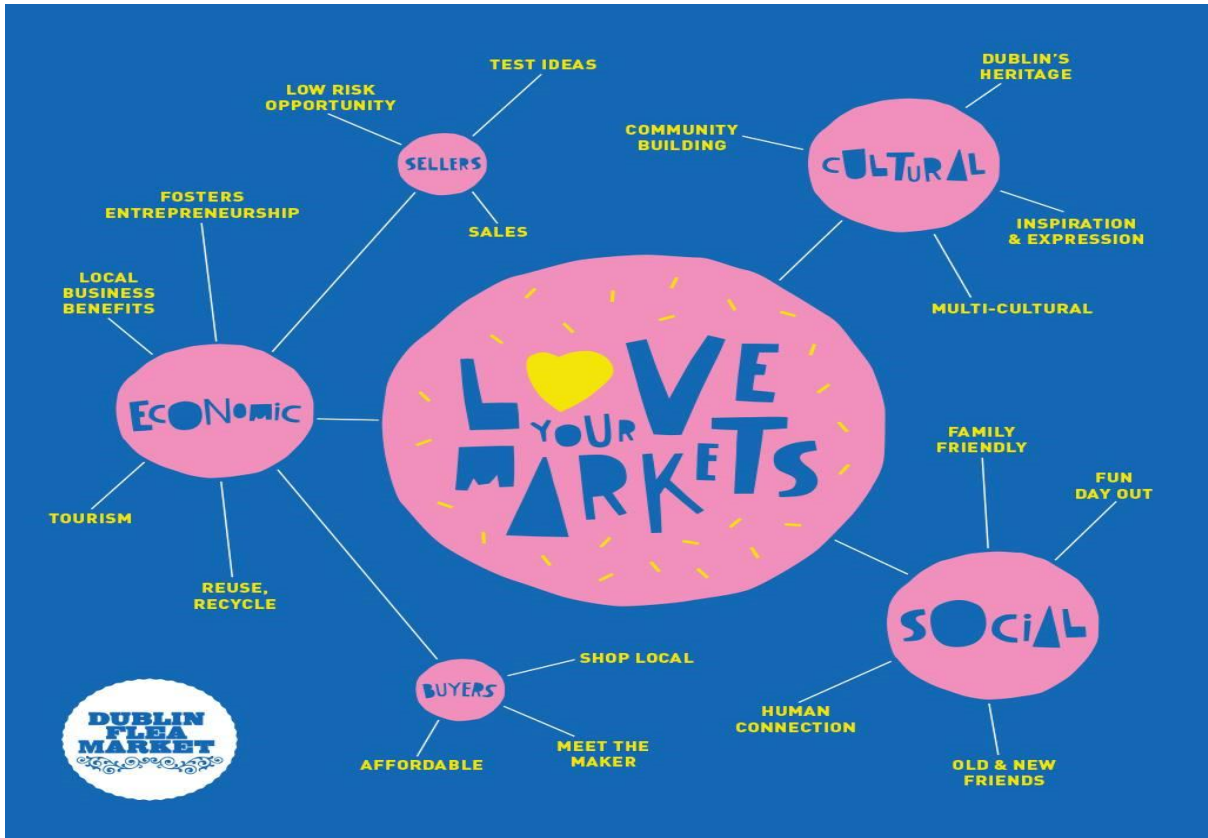


Fig 79: Love Your Market campaign infographic showing the importance of flea markets.

LOVE YOUR MARKETS

Dublin Flea Christmas Market is a social enterprise dedicated to nurturing Irish based creative individuals, start-ups and small enterprise.

It is only possible thanks to the funding and support of those that believe in it.

This year our Market is in real jeopardy. We have lost the home of our monthly market and have no secure venue for our 2019 Christmas Market.

Please **SUPPORT** our 'Love Your Markets' campaign with a donation here at a 'Donation Station' or online at www.dublinflea.ie

This campaign will help us to:

1. Find a new home.
2. Gather evidence of support (*please sign our petition*).
3. Collect facts and figures on the benefits that markets have on the economy, our culture, our society and the wellbeing of our communities.
4. Research how other countries do it successfully.
5. Request an emergency meeting with councillors prior to Local Elections in May.
6. Use all the gathered information from above to lobby for change of Policy in the Dublin City Development Plan.

Also check out our **RAFFLE** at the front welcome desk. Lots of **AMAZING** prizes to be won.

Fig 80: The Love Your Markets campaign agenda.

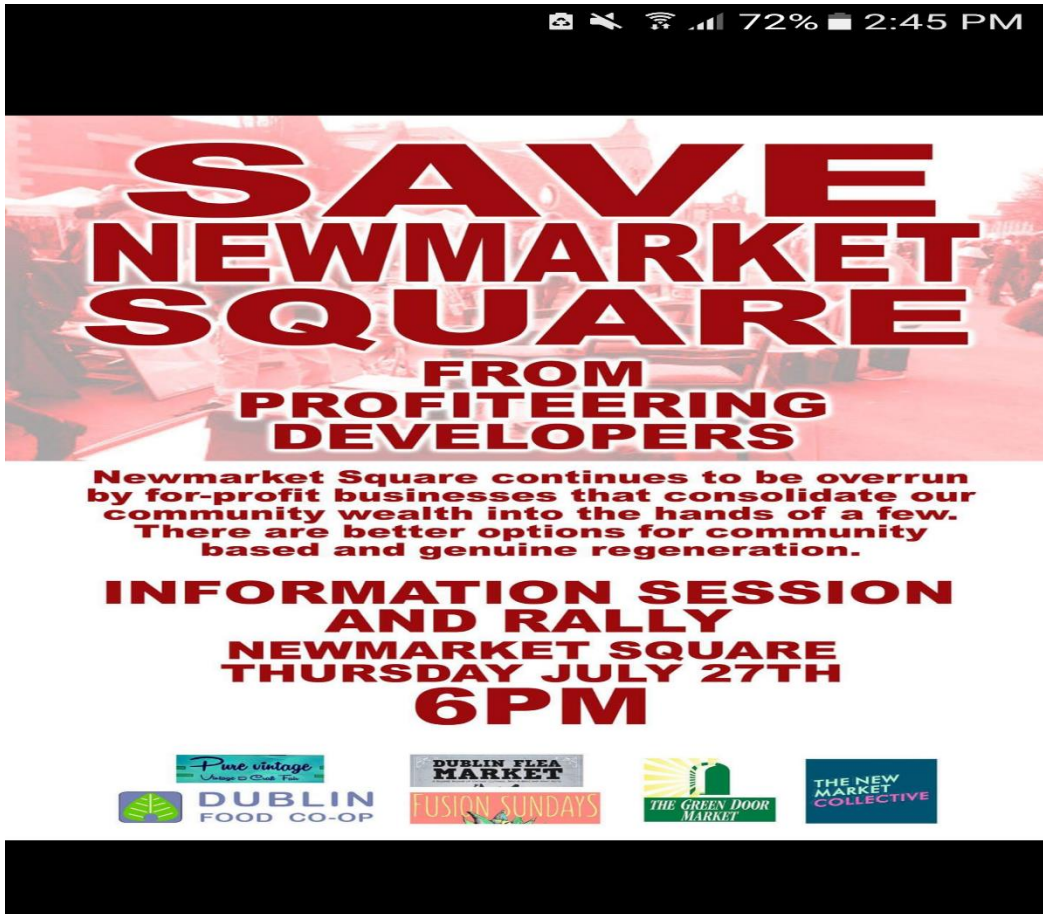


Fig 81: Social media post for a rally to save Newmarket Square from re-development.



Fig 82: Clutter discourse: recruiting participants who are hoarders in need of intervention.

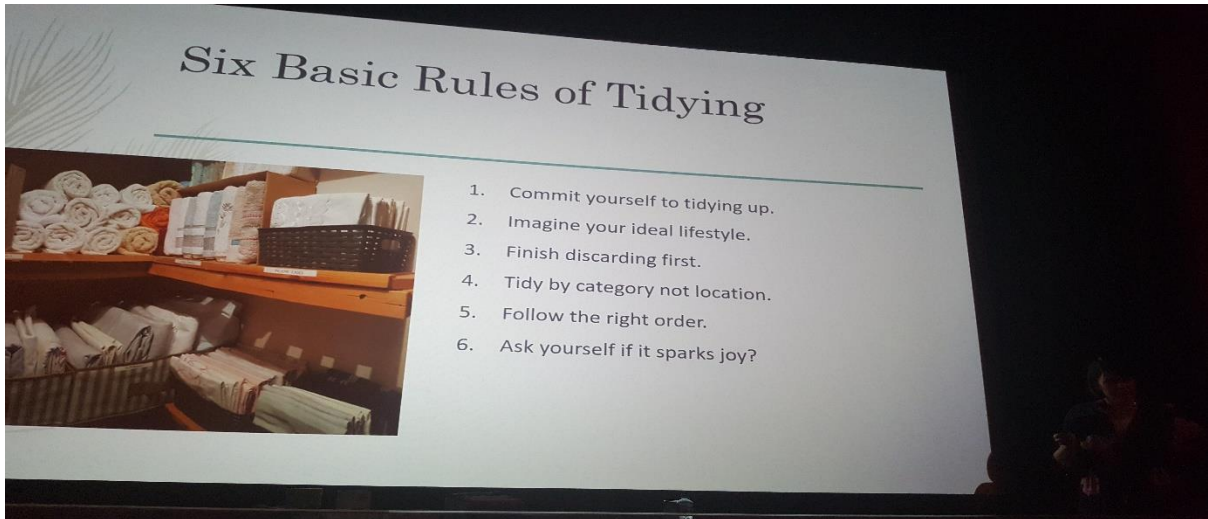


Fig 83: KonMari decluttering talk/workshop I attended with some of my participants.

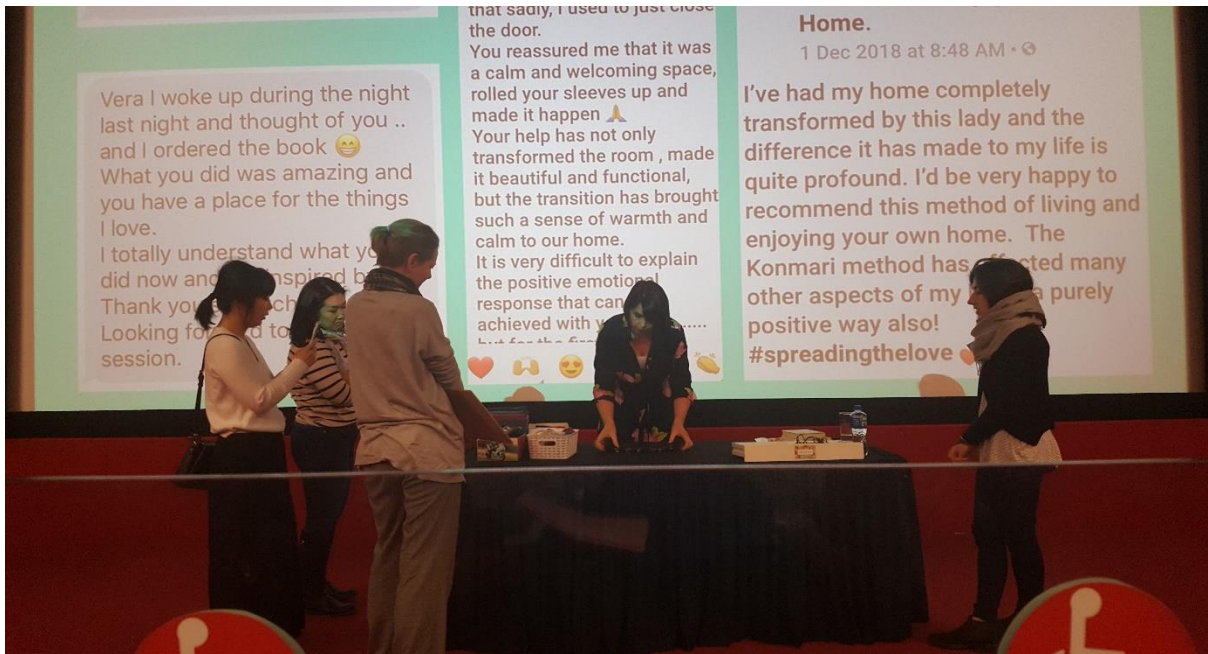


Fig 84: Learning how to fold clothing in the 'Konmari' way to 'Spark Joy'.



Fig 85: Sustainability at the Flea- encouraging water conservation & no more single-use plastics.



Fig 86: Newmarket Square graffiti in 2018: 'We Need Revolution' with 'love' emphasised.



Fig 87: 2018 National press coverage of the loss of the markets as a 'calamity'.



Fig 88: Floral tribute to the imminent loss of Newmarket Square by a local artist in 2017.



Fig 89: Final-ever poster for the Dublin Flea Market in Newmarket Square, May 27, 2018.



Fig 90: Final Dublin Flea postcards (from first 5 years) for customers to take as memorabilia.



The Dublin Flea Market

3 December 2021 · 🌐



Flea Closure

After lots of difficult and emotional discussions, we, the founders and organisers of the Dublin Flea Market, have come to the conclusion that we are not in a position to operate the Dublin Flea Market anymore. Therefore the Dublin Flea Market will officially cease operation at the end of 2021.

This was not a decision we made easily, in fact it was not a decision we feel like we had full control over. This decision was sired by the unfortunate red tape and rocketing rents of the ever difficult Dublin City, where cultural spaces are at an all time low and buildings are still being demolished to make way for more hotels and overpriced office blocks. The reality of the pandemic also played its part and the shift in focus and energy that brought many of us to exodus the constricting confines of the city walls.

The Dublin Flea was a focal point for us in Dublin. We invested our hearts and so much energy into it over an amazing eleven years. Ten of these were spent at our home in Newmarket Square between the Dublin Food Co-op and the Green Door Market and our final year was in The Digital Hub on Thomas Street. We hosted thousands of traders who travelled from all over Ireland and as far as the U.K and France to trade with us. We also welcomed hundreds of thousands of happy market visitors from Ireland and all over the world. We believe that together we created one of the country's best and most loved markets.

We know how much people miss the Flea. We know this because we are told constantly. And we know how much we miss it because our lives and Dublin are just not the same for us anymore.

Although the Flea is closing we really hope that the new energy that is out there, in the new generations of young people, artists, creatives and communities can be seen and heard by the powers that be. It is essential that this energy is nurtured and encouraged so that it can contribute and enrich the landscape of Dublin's neighbourhoods. Dublin City needs to wake up and realise it is essential to provide blank spaces for markets and experimental cultural use, as this is where so many of the seeds of contemporary culture are sown.

Although we will be moving on, our hearts will forever be full of the memories and the joy and happiness that the Flea and it's community gave us. We will update our website soon to be an archive of those special years so that the memories can live on and we endeavour to continue to advocate for markets in a city that is strongly lagging behind in terms of European Market Culture.

For now we want to thank everyone who has ever visited, supported, traded, haggled, shopped, laughed, danced, hugged and been there with us through thick and thin.

Words cannot really describe the loss we feel.

Thank you all for being there with us. It was a beautiful thing.

Aisling, Dave, Luca and Sharon
The Dublin Fleas.

Fig 91: 2021 Dissolution of the Dublin Flea Market- official Facebook post.



Fig 92: The beginnings of the demolition of Newmarket Square.



Fig 93: Rubble & Ruin: when your field disappears. What remains? What is remembered?