

EDIFICE OF ACCUMULATION

Mary Beth Carolan

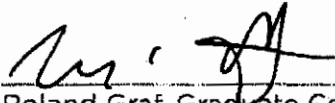
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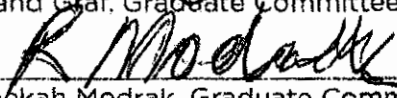
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University of Michigan
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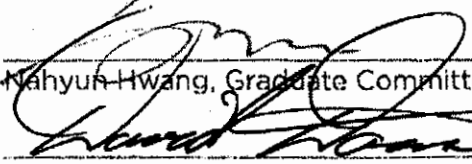
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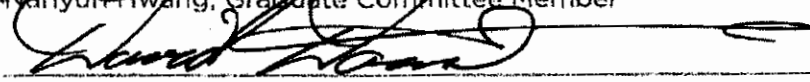
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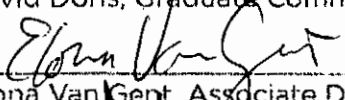
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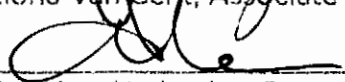
Nahyun Hwang, Graduate Committee Member



David Doris, Graduate Committee Member



Elona Van Gent, Associate Dean of Academic Programs



Gunalan, Nadarajan, Dean, Stamps School of Art and Design

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ABSTRACT

EDIFICE OF ACCUMULATION is an exhibition comprised of a sculpture and a two-channel video, which includes a biographical interview. The interview examines one man's accumulation habits that developed in response to the financial collapse he experienced in the late 70's. In this project, a story of loss, rebuilding, and adaptation also becomes a parable for the economic challenges facing our current generation.

The sculptural element of the show resembles a corncrib structure. Built from 2X4's and filled with some of the "stuff" this man has been stockpiling on his property over the years, the structure contains both broken and usable objects ranging from woodstoves and oil lamps to windows and doors. It offers the viewer an embodied experience of the way he builds edifices to store his "stash" of resources for potential shortages. Its walls are absent to reveal the edifice as a vault or a container for storing material wealth as opposed to monetary wealth.

This document illustrates the process behind the thesis project, what the intentions were in creating it, and some of the discoveries that came through its development. It also reveals the historical and contextual information most relevant in the creative work.

Keywords: Sculpture, video, accumulation, economy, building, adaptation, story, wealth, process, objects

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...stained glass lamp, vacuum cleaner belt, filler, oil, propane, fire extinguisher, wire, auto anti-freeze, orange safety paint, flooring adhesive, hand forged sturgeon spear, Eames era mirror, furniture polish, skis, vintage ice tongs, chain saws, folding camp stool, funnels, hard hats, garage door openers, WD-40, antique fishing tackle boxes, telephone, diamond saw blade, string trimmer and trimmer string, bathroom caulk, badminton racquet, gold rush vintage fry pan, shuffleboard pucks, floor squeegee, art glass light fixture, pruning shears, tape measure, fire extinguisher, propane tanks, isopropyl alcohol, 3M marine body filler, cross country ski boots, bird feeder, two ton floor jack, electric fence wire, siphon pump, air compressor, pruning shears, full synthetic motor oil, Hewlett Packard ink jet printer, air compressor, Apple computer, varmint trap, trickle charger, mail scale, oil filter, choke cable, wax bowl ring, iron, Chevy heater core, juicer, camp stove, egg cartons, knee pads, kitchen faucet , thermostat wire, bikes, bike helmets, rake, scraper, work lights, drywall pole sander, electric stove burner elements, 4" and 6" ductwork, foam brushes , magnifying glass, rust remover, graphite, accordion, dinner plate, toaster, block and tackle, water bottle , swim fins, lead ingots, Rain Bird lawn sprinkler, shelf bracket, sheet metal, PVC plumbing fittings, plumber's putty, powder actuated masonry fasteners, artist brushes, work shoes , battery powered bow lights...



INTRODUCTION

My main intention for creating the exhibition “EDIFICE OF ACCUMULATION” was to understand my father’s habit of accumulation. My father, Terry Carolan, is an antique collector, a garage sale master and a garbage picker. Through his salvage and resale efforts he attempts to create an inventory complete enough to avoid buying retail. Over the years he has amassed an unbelievable amount and array of stuff. “Why do you collect all this stuff?” is a question I have asked him many times over the years. It was also the first question I asked him when I began this project.

I knew his habits had a connection to economic losses he experienced. I knew that he viewed his collecting as a way to provide for his family. What I hoped to discover was the logic and practicality of his habits. I thought that in doing so I could share one man’s version of an alternate economic system with my audience. In practice, I ended up with a timely story of economic loss and recovery, as well as a deeper understanding of the historical and personal complexities behind his collecting.

By placing myself in the work through my role as biographer and cinematographer, I make parallels to my own life. Most directly I observe my responses to an economic system that is failing the majority of the people it claims to serve. In this work I was interested in answering the following questions:

- How do people respond when large economic systems fail to provide for their basic needs and wellbeing?
- What can previous generations teach us about economic survival?
- Do we need to create sustainable systems outside of the norm in order to thrive?
- How can people use creativity to develop alternate systems for economic survival in the face of the present day housing crisis and ongoing cycle of depression and recession?

In the late 1970s the value of the American dollar was eroding. It was during this time that the dollar was altogether separated from its fixed relationship with precious metals. Flexible exchange rates, deregulation in banking, and an explosion of new complex ‘financial products’ like variable interest loans soon followed. During this financial climate Terry went through a series of losses akin to bankruptcy. He and his family moved from San Francisco to his hometown in Iowa in 1978. There he purchased a large building with his savings, which he renovated

I conducted an interview with Terry in November of 2012. It was during this interview that I attempted to uncover the reasons behind his collecting:

Scene: Terry sits down on a step stool in the upstairs portion of his barn. It’s a brisk night. A space heater warms the air in the room. He is surrounded by accumulations on all sides. Two clip lamps light his head and torso from the side. A black trash bag acts as a barber’s cape. Terry cinches the cape with his hand from underneath as I adjust the lights and prepare to cut his hair.

MC: Ok, that’s better. Face camera please. So what are you interested in here, in terms of a haircut?

TC: Just get the wild hairs away from my ears and a little shorter in the back. The rest seems Ok, especially since winter’s coming. Keep it warm. Keep the noggin warm.



into a mixed-use business complete with shops, restaurants, and apartments. Because it was his only option, he took out a variable interest loan on the building. The development project was very successful but the interest rate quickly rose and when he fell behind on payments, the bank repossessed the building. To recoup their 'losses', the bank also took a solar spec-house that he had recently completed as well as his parent's home, which he had inherited. They also intended to take the home that we lived in, which he had purchased with cash.

In an attempt to save our home, Terry drove to Minneapolis to cash in 1,700 ounces of silver coins he inherited from his mother, Cecilia. For 20 years Cecilia worked as a barmaid for \$1.25 an hour. In 1963 she was reading the newspaper and exclaimed, "This is crazy, it says here they are going to remove the silver content from all coinage some time next year." The article she showed 15 year-old Terry was a one-inch long column buried in the back of the newspaper. For the next year, every night that she came home from the bar she emptied a handful of change from her coin belt into a footlocker. Terry exchanged those coins for \$21,000 in cash 17 years later and this act saved our home from bankruptcy.

Cecilia grew up during the depression. I asked Terry if that was why she recognized the value in the silver. He answered that it was probably due to her pragmatic view on life as she grew up in rural Iowa. The Northeastern Iowan highlands, where Terry was raised, were built on self-sufficiency and stockpiling as a necessary means to surviving a brutal climate.

After losing his investment to a deep recession and eventually moving to Michigan, Terry returned to his roots and started investing in what economist John A. Pugsley calls tangible wealth. "Such wealth, observes Pugsley, "consists of all the real products produced by man from the raw materials of nature, and by the use of which man derives survival, comfort, and pleasure" (Pugsley, p. 7).

Twenty years later I am following my father around the yard as he explains different aspects of his collecting. He stops to explain, "See this pile of copper? It has appreciated in value ever since I put it there 16 years ago. My ten-dollar roll of copper is now worth three hundred dollars."

Though not extremely lucrative according to popular standards, his investments are resilient against market fluctuations and are easily guarded on his property. Similar

MC: I do have a few questions.

TC: Sure.

MC: The first one is why do you collect all this stuff?

TC: What stuff? (Laughs)

MC: Well, we can start with the useful things, the building materials.

TC: Well, they're all useful. (Pause) I have wondered about this. For years it was simply comforting to have an inventory. I like to do a lot of different things so I like to have a lot of different materials at my disposal.

However, I have had days when it has occurred to me that there's a connection to my accumulating stuff and the business reversals that I experienced when we moved to Iowa in 1978. We were on the west coast in San Francisco and I was doing building and renovation and development and it went really well and we made a substantial amount of money. But when I got to Iowa with the recession of 78, 79, and

to the silver coins his mother stashed away in the footlocker, his investments hold their value. Like his mother and the farmers he grew up with in Iowa, Terry now chooses to invest in tangible goods. In essence, he has created his own intricate system for building wealth through the accumulation of objects he values over the monetary system in which he had lost faith.

PROJECT AND PROCESS DESCRIPTION

Sharing “EDIFICE OF ACCUMULATION” as an exhibition interested me from the perspective of an artist working in the genre of ‘socially engaged’ art. Instead of working projects out in my studio I favor experimentation in the real world. Similar to Harrell Fletcher, who runs the social practice program at Portland State University, I test out ideas in my immediate surroundings with the people and topics relevant to my own everyday life. Fletcher’s own work explores themes ranging from global conflict to local food systems and he challenges his students to work outside of the studio and consider themselves, their community, and the environment as part of the art they create. (<http://www.pdx.edu/profile/harrell-fletcher>)

Specifically, I am interested in looking at alternatives to norms and exceptions to traditional systems in predominant culture. I challenge existing paradigms with creative responses that I am compelled to share with others. My intention is to illuminate discrepancies, inviting the viewer to consider and confront their own position within these larger systems. I have engaged a variety of politically charged subjects through mediums including sculpture, performance, and video. In 2009 I wrote and performed “Cooking with Power Tools”, which literally included the act of cooking with power tools in front of an audience. By blending the ‘feminine’ act of cooking with the ‘masculine’ act of construction, I showed the parallels I see between frosting a cake and mudding a wall, or composing a meal and project management, and in doing so addressed my audience’s potential gender-driven myths. As the audience observed the process and then dined on the five-course meal, they became an integral part of the work.

My investigation into Terry’s life was a way for me to explore and share a very topical discussion about the current economic climate. I used two methods in this work: interrogation and action. For the action component, I set up a situation to test his system. I proposed that we build a small building (an element of the

sculpture) using only simple lumber and items from his accumulation. The building project was a catalyst in that it gave us a direct reason to work together and sift through his collection for useful items to complete the project. The final exhibition included the results of this 'test' as well as a video documenting our interview which contained his reflections about his accumulation of 'wealth', combined with illustrations of his collection.

'THE EDIFICE' refers to an open wooden frame built from 2X4's. It stood in the middle of the exhibition room at Popp's Packing in Hamtramck, MI. Filled with objects from my father's collection, the installation served as a passage through a private space. At the far end of the edifice there was a video diptych in the corner of the room. On one side of the video, I cut my father's hair as I asked him questions about his collecting. On the other, I illustrated the dialog with moving shots of his massive accumulation.

The shape of the edifice is that of a corncrib, a wood framed structure used to dry and store corn, "the farmers gold" for use in times of shortage. For farmers, this crib structure stores and represents precious earnings from a season of toil. Farmers can calculate net worth by taking a daily gaze at this very real property, which is easily protected with a roof and a shotgun. Typically built of inexpensive lumber, slots nailed on the outside with narrow gaps in between to allow for the circulation of air. The corncrib structure in my exhibition represents the way Terry builds edifices to store his "stash" of resources for potential shortages, its walls were purposely absent to reveal the edifice as a vault, a container for storing wealth.

The impetus for the corncrib structure was to build a small cabin, an unrealized desire of my own. The small size of the cabin represents my desire to rid myself of the need to accumulate and store excess. I have been following the 'tiny home movement' for years and personally aspire to a more austere lifestyle yet I struggle against the desire to be fully, or even over equipped with tools and resources in the fashion that I was raised. The work intersected with my own life and then fed back into it. In this way my work was similar to that of Abigail Newbold, "an artist and designer who creates installations focused on domestic objects and the environments that contain them. Her work crosses back and forth between objects that bring comfort and tools that help us survive" (www.abigailanne.com). Abigail's work has taught me that artwork can be used to fulfill a desire in one's life and then

80 I lost... I lost everything basically to the banks but I lost it to the rising interest rates, the variable interest loans and so on. So...

MC: Are those the days when you are psychoanalyzing [the collecting]?

TC: Yeah, well yeah trying to get the picture. I do believe I've reached a point in my life when I may not have time to use everything.

MC: I think I've reached that point as well.

TC: So, that has given me reason to reflect. You know that now that they count. This is all yahoo news and stuff. When you reach the age of 65 now they have a number for you which is basically the number of years more you're going to live.

MC: Oh, yeah? What's your number?

TC: Well, it depends on where you live. In Michigan as I now have turned just 65, I have about 17.8 years to figure this out.



cycle back again into that life. I watched her thesis work at Cranbrook transform three times. After her final exhibition the aesthetics of her project morphed into the interior design of her side of the duplex row house I rented to her. The paint colors and material choices she had so carefully chosen for her sculptural work, “Making Home” transformed her new apartment. The work was recycled again when she reconfigured it for a show that I curated called “Soft Scrap.” Like Abigail, my work is based on my life experience and in turn influences it once the project is complete. For example the “Edifice” frame will be utilized to build my tiny cabin. But unlike “Making Home”, “EDIFICE OF ACCUMULATION” was not a solitary endeavor as another person (my father) was involved in the project. The work resonates back into my life and my father’s life.

Terry and I collaborated from the beginning as I integrated myself into his workshop and adopted his materials as my own, constructing the edifice structure in his barn in Northern Michigan. During these five-hour drives to work with my father, the road became an extension of my studio as I recorded the project’s direction on my phone.

Initiating the building of the actual structure provided an opportunity to set the conceptual aspects of the project in motion. The building of the cabin was integral to the project because it ‘tested’ his rationale for why he collects so many building materials. I also used this building project as a catalyst. The project gave us a reason to search through his stash to find specific and useful items. I wanted to see if my father’s collection could be used to complete a building project. After all, many of the materials he collects are specifically for the purpose of building. Whereas I typically say no to many of his offerings, this time I said yes to every object he offered for this project. With the “EDIFICE” packed to capacity with building materials, the collection represents both potential and protection much like an individual’s valuables stashed in a bank vault or a farmer’s harvest stored inside a corncrib.

In essence, Terry’s proclivity to accumulate and store was very much akin to his mother’s, who stored her fortune in a footlocker and her jewelry in jars stuffed with handkerchiefs. Like his mother, Terry nestles valuable antiques among scraps and junk. For him clutter is actually a method of camouflaging value, a purposeful coded system that only he can understand. This is a way for him to hide his possession from others, like the debt collectors that repossessed his

MC: Jesus!

TC: So, it’s not like I got to do it tomorrow.

MC: Do you anticipate taking care of stuff, reducing, selling... before your number?

TC: Reducing my volume? I do. And if I did these two houses, what I call the Northern home and the Florida house, it would start to diminish quickly. But who knows if I’ll ever start that one. It’s in the hopper. It’s on the agenda.

MC: Does it burden you... All the stuff... Or that’s not the way you see it?

TC: It doesn’t burden me but I have heard things from my heirs that they’re a bit nervous... and I’m taking it to heart. You know. There is a whole bunch of stuff I can almost guarantee my heirs aren’t going to have any interest in. However I think there’s also a bunch of stuff that they would.



assets 30 years ago. One difference between his vaults and this installation is that I've organized the plucked materials into loose piles and stacks, making separate categories for like objects. One bay is composed of windows, one bay of bedding, one bay of wood stoves, etc. I employed a thrift store retail model by creating categories that grouped similar items together. My organization of the items allows the viewer to see his stockpiling through use of multiples. These multiples can easily be interpreted and viewed much like a diversified portfolio or shares of stock in an investment strategy.

With this sculptural form I hoped to discover and illustrate a unique, intricate yet thoughtfully developed system of accumulating wealth. However, through the process of assembling all of the materials my father offered to me, I realized that the objects did not always provide useful, practical materials for building the structure. Many of the items were broken, the wrong size, and in many cases repetitive. The work started to take on a different meaning. Through the process of working through these challenges I realized that Terry's methodology, while not necessarily lucrative, had merit as an illustrative lesson. His logic and methodology presented a clear alternative rife with advantage and application in the lives of others as we continue to face an ongoing economic crisis as a result of borrowing against our future and becoming indentured to our debts.

The sculpture also played another important role as it provided an embodied experience to set the stage for the video. The items inside the corncrib cabin activate the senses, surrounding the viewer with windows, cladding, wood stoves, oil lamps, bedding, fishing poles, etc., replicating the sensations of inhabiting one of his buildings. The "EDIFICE" acted as a passage through a private space. Audience members enter through one end and are received by the video on the other end. The video was projected into the corner of the large exhibition space. The video diptych sat opposite the sculpture in the corner of the exhibition room. The two-channel video was part biography of Terry and part autobiography of both of us, and our relationship to his accumulation and interpretation of wealth.

The video hinges on the haircut interview on the left hand side of the screen. In the act of cutting Terry's hair I am shaping his appearance while questioning the appearance of his stuff - a physical extension of his personality. In turn, he shapes my values through his answers. My understanding of his accumulation and my interpretation of it changed over the course of his explanation. The act of cutting

**MC: How much money do you think this stuff could make if you were to sell it?
TC: Through an auction?**

MC: Yeah.

TC: Hmm, that's a good question (let's out huge sigh). Hmm, there is a market here. You'd draw some interest. There's a certain bit of legend here involved if you get my drift.

MC: Yea, well, you've threatened the ultimate garage sale for years. You're just building up steam, right?

TC: That's right.

MC: I wonder why you wouldn't want that cash to let's say relax a little or go on a vacation?

TC: Well see, I go on vacations, I am relaxed. I don't need the money. You know?

MC: Well, you don't need the money because you have the stuff is part of it.

TC: Well, that's right. But I what I'm saying is, would I get a ticket to go to Australia? I could care less.



his hair is an intimate act, one that requires trust and encourages vulnerability on his part. The haircut also represents a topical exchange in terms of economy. Haircutting is an act that I insist to not be paid for. It is one act with which I offer to 'repay' my father for the work he does for me on my house.

The other half of the diptych, to the right of the haircut interview, is a video that illustrates Terry's collection. This video opens with a slow, panning shot across a stash of lawn equipment, bikes and a bulldozer. The camera follows my father as he walks past a trailer full of lumber, a row of boats, an outdoor storage space including two spare vehicles and a barn (one of the many outpost buildings on his property) packed to the rafters with resources. During the filming process I relied on my knowledge of Maya Deren's films, where she creates fluid movement by continuing an action through very different landscapes. I played with this act of continuum by panning up one area of the garage and down another and by allowing my father's pacing of the property to carry the viewer into the next space. Narrow trails wind through the interior space of Terry's buildings. This path and movement is reflected in the installation where a narrow trail winds down the middle of the structure, surrounding the viewer with objects stacked high in between the stud walls and hanging low from the rafters above.

I began work on the video by first collecting the interview footage and then filming his accumulation. When I turned the camera on, I had no idea where I would end up. Collecting data without a finished product in mind was a new and vulnerable place to work. I reassessed the project based on the footage I had gathered and realized that the interview, which was meant to be research, stood out as such a strong visual and narrative component, that I decided to use it in the final exhibit. In the beginning of the editing process, I cut between footage of the interview with traditional cutaways of the accumulation. I felt this style took away from the personal nature of the interview and gave me too much control over the viewer's perception. Then I watched a short film by Jesper Just entitled "This Nameless Spectacle." This film was influential in my decision to create a two-channel format for the video. Just's film consists of two films, shown on opposite sides of a room, depicting two different characters. In my video, one character is my father and the other character is his accumulation, an extension of himself. This format requires the audience to do a final layer of editing, in which the viewer becomes an active participant, like being the third person in the room watching a conversation between "two characters." I enjoyed knowing that the video would change with

MC: Right.

TC: (Sigh) I have a sailboat.

MC: One?

TC: No, not one. I have a number of sailboats. I have a number of automobiles, a number of televisions, a number of stereo systems, a number of... well I have one golf cart, a number of bicycles - possibly 26. I have a number of pieces of land, most of them paid for. I gotta keep up with property taxes but beyond that... not a lot of need for extra cash. And the things I want to do I probably have enough cash but I've also have learned a lot from our business reversals in Iowa. When I did that development project in Iowa I took an empty warehouse, 21,000 feet, put in two restaurants, five offices, eight shops, and two penthouse apartments. I had 19 tenants. I was fully leased out and everybody was digging the building - they loved it. However I started at an eight percent loan, which was high at the time. And it was also a variable interest loan, then

each individual viewing it depending on how the audience chose to 'edit' it with their gaze and their response to these two characters.

In the moving shots and the interview editing process, I tried to strike a complex and balanced view in the way that I portrayed Terry. Selfishly, I would have preferred to paint his habits in an idealistic light because I care about him and how he is viewed as my father, and in turn how this reflects on me. As an artist seeking a deeper, more complex view of his world and seeking unforeseen answers in the work, I tried to jump back and forth over that line of judgment, constantly being contradicted within the work. I wanted a realistic, not idealistic outcome for the video. In addition, I found that even in the editing phase, I still did not know how I felt about his collecting. I wanted my indecision to come through in the final product so the audience would sympathize with the topic.

This project has deepened my artistic practice by my taking the risk of allowing the subject matter to intersect with my personal life. It challenged me to work in a new way - seeking the project through its meaning instead of thinking of the end product. This work has given me the courage to accept the unexpected outcomes. It also helped me understand that my studio is in the world, not inside a room. This project drove me outside the white cube and immersed me in the environment of my subject. I drove, I interviewed. I took on a building project. I now have a clearer understanding of what compels me to create and recognize the common thread in all of my work is that I seek to challenge norms, to interrogate and then to offer alternatives to prescribed systems.

LARGER CONTEXT

By examining Terry and his collection so closely, I realized that even though I wanted to frame the whole thing as a neatly packaged economic system, emotions and compulsions also come into play. I started to see that Terry is comforted by seeing his wealth in the form of piles and rows of stuff. His fortune can be protected on his property under his watchful eye. Showing off these items, that he typically has gotten for a bargain, actually brings him great joy. In fact, he even keeps the price tags on for bragging rights. The joy of the hunt is mentioned in the book "Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things." Authors Frost and Steketee describe passionate collectors going into an altered state of consciousness during 'the hunt', losing sight of everything around them. The

euphoria and appreciation of the object become an integral element of a type of hunting story they can share with others.

In the past I suspected that Terry was a hoarder. The way that his objects occupy space and are stuffed in every corner resembles a classic case of this complex condition. “Some people collect out of a desire for an aesthetic, others for prestige, and still others for a sense of mastery. But most theories of collecting elaborate on attempts to define, protect, or enhance the self” (Frost & Stekette, p. 53). Terry collects to define himself and his work and enhance his sense of worth in a very real way. His identity as a builder is wrapped up in his supply. His values are encapsulated in the things he gathers. When he collects the pile of copper he is defining his world-view: resources are becoming scarce. He not only sees their value, he defines it for others by displaying it on his property.

In addition, I can't ignore the 'pop' press that hoarding has received in recent years on television. For example, the shows “Hoarders” and “Clean House”, which resonated with me at times during this project. The thing that strikes me most about these programs is that the clean out phase is dramatic, monumental and typically gut wrenching. Terry's behavior makes a departure from these shows where people have meltdowns, clinging to their clutter, emotionally distraught at the idea of parting with it. For example, I discovered through the interview that Terry chose to sell everything he owned, more stuff than he has now, in one week when he moved from Iowa to Michigan.

In a time of diminished expectations people often look to the media for stories that reflect their own experiences of economic downturn. One film that influenced my decision to interview my father about his experience, realizing the power of single point of view storytelling, was the documentary “Queen of Versailles”. This film depicts Jackie and David Siegal and their family as they build the Versailles house, the largest and most expensive single-family house in the United States, and the crisis they face when both the US economy and their business, Westgate, was rocked by the devastating sub-prime mortgage collapse. This film could be considered a foil to my work. When Jackie loses her home she goes on shopping sprees, loading up multiples of toys for her eight kids. I can't help but think of Terry's stockpiling after selling everything in Iowa in 1982. Emotionally distraught, both characters start to convert paper money into goods. Stekette goes on to explain: “This is borne out by people's reacting to losing things to natural disasters

the recession of '78 hit. At that time, with the volume of that project, every time the mortgage went up one percent, which in some weeks went up within six weeks, it was another 600 dollars a month. It was unsustainable. So the bankers best deal was... all right, we're going to take your building. You're going to sign it over. I mean, I was behind on the payments, I was in foreclosure. So, we're going to take your commercial project, the 21,000 square feet in the middle of town. We're going to take the solar home which you just finished and then. Oh, and we're going to take your parents home by the way. And we're going to let you stay in your house that you bought for cash when you came from California but we'll give you a \$40,000 dollar mortgage on it. So you'll borrow \$40,000 and pay us that \$40,000 and you can pay it off over the next 30 years. So I said, “really?” I said, you know what... here's what I'm going to do.... I'm going to



Song Dong's "Waste Not"



Abigail Newbold's "Making Home"

or thievery. Many collectors think of their collections as a legacy to pass on to their heirs or even the world. Physical objects provide clear and tangible verification of mastery over the world (Frost & Stekette, p. 53)."

When watching the video, "EDIFICE OF ACCUMULATION" it is easy to assume the connections to the pathology of hoarding, but hoarding is also about conservation of resources and stewardship of objects. This quality is illustrated in a recent exhibit by the artist Song Dong called "Waste Not", comprised of most of the objects obsessively collected by the artist's mother in a Beijing apartment over a lifetime, reminds us that "while hoarding can often be considered a disorder, in places like China, where economic want is either a fresh memory or a current condition for many, conserving objects is still a virtue. Sometimes it can be beautiful." (<http://www.treehugger.com/hoarding-as-an-art-form-song-dongs-waste-not>). More than a hoarder, I have come to understand my father as a steward of objects, materials, and resources as opposed to their sole owner. Accumulated vehicles get passed back and forth between his kin. Building materials are transported to job sites of friends and family. He often hunts in order to redistribute.

It has been thirty years since Terry lost a large real estate project due to inflation and rising interest rates. Currently many people in the United States, including myself, are experiencing an economic crisis that provokes questions about the sustainability of the 'house of cards' that a debt-based economy sets up. After the economic collapse of the late 2000s, the inflated housing market bubble burst and homes went 'under water,' losing tens-of-thousands of dollars in value overnight. Employment and salaries were cut while prices of commodities doubled. This effectively reduced the spending power of already squeezed salaries in half. These events also resulted in an unprecedented number of home foreclosures.

Terry's methods first became relevant to me with the recession that began with the Subprime Mortgage Crisis in 2008, during which the value of my house, a renovation and investment project, plummeted. I was the same age as my father was when he lost everything - when the five years of sweat equity I had poured into my property disappeared overnight. Interestingly, the only reason I wasn't under water with my own home was because I accepted his ways of using salvaged materials and our own labor to reduce costs. I began to suspect that perhaps there was a method to his madness and that maybe his collecting was more than a compulsion.

give you the building and I'm going to give you the solar home, and I'm going to give you my parents' home. And if you want any more than that I will simply take the money I got coming in now and you will have to proceed with the proceeding of foreclosure and with I got coming in I'll be able to fight you for at least two years, maybe three, and by golly, they let me have my house. So I started over at 30 and we moved to Michigan. And had I not gone broke at 30, I probably would have gone broke at 60... and that would have been ugly.

So now we have land in Florida, swamp land in Florida on a beautiful island, we have land here and it is nearly paid off, we have no mortgage, but we have a small line of credit on this place, and we still have a nine acre parcel in Iowa with a beautiful trout stream and woods. And to get back to the idea of the stuff here... if I just started with the top five things I wanted to sell, the things

The current American economic system is at a tipping point. There is a growing distrust that the system will take care of its citizens given the increasing gap in wealth, as seen in recent movements such as Occupy Wall Street, an international protest movement against social and economic inequity. An excerpt from the book 'We the Other People', a collection of alternative declarations, illustrates it this way; "Debt, profit, interest, rent and the competitive system of industry are hereby formally declared proved instruments of degradation and tyranny, and cancers upon the social body." (Foner, p. 34)

In the United States, most people are operating on a system that promises wealth after debt. Buying cars, houses and goods with credit is intended to be a boost to the economy, in turn, helping people obtain the wealth to repay these debts. But I look at the young professionals around me and at my own financial situation and the wealth to repay the debt is not materializing. The 99% feel the pressure to conform to the subservience of the always-in-debt lifestyle, while the top 1% benefit from this consumption. There are millions of people who work hard and are far from being able to accumulate wealth; many are barely able to survive.

When other systems fail to fulfill the individual and collective needs of a society, many people turn to Utopian fantasies and alternate systems to fend for their individual needs. On a recent research trip to The Netherlands, I looked for contemporary, alternative modes of economy. In Den Haag, Stroom, an independent foundation for art and architecture runs the Dutch branch of the e-flux Time/Bank. Time bank members earn credit in Time Dollars instead of cash. The exchange is based on hours worked and all members get paid equally for their hourly wage because of this 1:1 exchange. I found this to be a beautiful model to create an alternate currency that values everyone's time equally. There have been other examples of alternative economies in history, "most notably the Notgeld emergency money that appeared in Germany after the hyperinflation of 1923. Notgeld was unofficial 'money' issued by cities, boroughs, and even private companies to compensate for a shortage of official coins and bills. Notgeld was actually more stable than real money since its denomination was often pegged to material goods including gold, corn, and meat. Since it was not legal tender, the only people who dealt in it were those who chose to. As a result, it had a stabilizing effect on the official currency which was still in circulation." (<http://e-flux.com/timebank/about>) I studied these alternatives because exchanging one hour of one's

work with one hour of someone else's work or money tied to material goods made sense to me.

John A. Pugsley, in his book "The Alpha Strategy", states that because, "almost all of the manipulation, subterfuge, and theft of your wealth occurs while it is in paper claims, you have a simple and obvious defense: keep your wealth in real goods instead of paper claims." He goes on to say that real wealth is all the tangible goods from which man derives survival, comfort, and pleasure." (Pugsley p. 7) Using his barn as his vault, Terry accumulates and stores objects instead of money. He banks on the belief that goods such as building materials and objects provide a greater hedge against inflation than paper money. He invests in raw goods from which he derives survival, comfort, and pleasure.

While Terry's system rejects one of the main components of our economy, purchasing with credit, it also relies on the system's proclivity to discard its quality used and abandoned goods. In fact, the initial devaluing of used goods by way of new goods enables him to acquire the old products, which are usually of better quality, for little or nothing. Terry also sees that the quality of manufactured goods and the quantity of precious resources are in limited supply. The scrapping industry is already seeing significant growth around the world. What my father does on his property may look eccentric in times of plenty but when a \$10 pile of copper swells to \$300 in his yard as his children pass through middle school and high school, economy is a clear indication of value. While the wealth of others plummets in the stock market, I see my father's eccentricities morph into logic and method. In the 1970's, Buckminster Fuller, an American architect, systems theorist, author, designer, inventor, and futurist created the concept of a 'world inventory,' which was a comprehensive database providing people with an inventory of the all the world's resources, matching people and their needs to capabilities. He clearly understood the value of the world's resources, and realized that they will someday reach a finite end.

My intention to share this creative work was to inspire others to imagine an alternative response to the economic systems that have, and may, fail them. The results of the work were different than I expected. As an expression, the final installation was less politically provocative than I intended, revealing a strong narrative, a parable of loss and recovery. Through the project development process the statement I anticipated making at the start of my exploration began to seem

that have fundamental dollar value... reasonably quick sale and so on I can probably get... I have a painting that I picked up at a local store that is probably worth \$2,000.00. I could quickly sell it for about \$1,200 bucks. I have a bulldozer I could get a quick \$3,000, in fact, it's probably worth more than \$3,000 as scrap metal. It's probably worth 22,000-25,000 pounds of solid steel. I have an extra car, actually 2 that probably would bring \$3,000-\$4,000 between the two of them. So there's cash lying around if I need it. However, let's say I sold those various things, I got 8, 10 thousand dollars now, right? What do I do with it? Tell me. I put it in the bank? For a half of a percent interest? Hmmm, maybe. While inflation is eating 3 %. Right?



limited. Working with Terry, immersing myself in research and creating the final project revealed to me that perhaps it's not about the pursuit of a prescribable system but an individualized creative response to the system that is the answer.

Terry acquires objects for future unforeseen use. His building techniques are akin to the ways in which people make do because they must; they all engage in acts of salvage and recycling as part of the fabric of their lives. My father's affinity for having objects on hand stems from his life as a bricoleur. According to Claude Levi-Strauss, "a bricoleur is someone who works with his/her hands, deviating from the conventional" (Doris, p. 85). As a bricoleur my father sees value in what some might consider trash. There are many examples of this way of working in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania where people "create and sustain a considerable portion of the city's material life" through bricolage, a person often uses scraps of objects that were once mass-produced and finds new life for them. Locals describe the process as 'materials that do another work' and claim "there is not a thing to throw away; everything is wealth" (Livingwood, p. 84).

Bricolage is about creating work from things that are on hand or making do with what one has. I have come to realize bricolage is central to my work and has been for some time. "Why do I collect all this stuff?" is one of the questions I also asked myself early in this work. I know from previous works that having stuff on hand often sets the stage for a work's possibilities. The objects themselves often define the project and there is a synergistic energy to the art when materials re-present themselves in the creative process. For example, when a friend gave me a large collection of matchbooks from in and around the Detroit metro area, I noticed that an incredible amount of the businesses the books were advertising had gone out of business over the years. This salvaged material provided a history of Detroit's economic decline. I used these matchbooks to create "Bailout", a project that reacted to the housing market crash of the late 2000s. I poured five years of sweat-equity into my house, only to see that investment disappear overnight. So I built a scale model of it out of matchbooks to express my frustration. The project empathizes with the Detroit Devil's night tradition of burning down one's home or business in order to file a false insurance claim and recoup losses.

Through methods of bricolage and alternate economic structures, Detroit residents are finding ways to adapt and discover new paradigms of wealth. I was invited to exhibit this work at Popp's Packing, an art venue in Hamtramck, MI (A city located

**MC: And scrap metal is probably going up in price...
TC: Scrap metal's going up. It's not going to go down. So I really have not much incentive. What it represents to me is, not needing to jump on the treadmill. Selling it puts me on the treadmill. What do I do with the ten grand? Let's see maybe play the market? I've done well twice in the market. But other time's I've just lost... everything.**



Popps Packing

within Detroit). At Popp's, the whole operation is its own economic ecosystem. Faina Lerman and Graem Whyte run the space as a living/working space for themselves, while supplementing their income by renting out half of the space as a residency to visiting artists. Popp's was named after the owners' grandfather. Grandpa refused to let them get a mortgage for the building. Instead he loaned them the cash to purchase it outright. Every month Faina and Graem pay their grandfather back in cash. No banks, no high interest rates. Popp's is a work in progress. Graem did several renovations just before my exhibition. Some of the exhibition space remained unfinished but this quality was something I was looking for in a space in Detroit, a space that could reinforce the conceptual weight of my project. Finding alternative methods of economic survival is now an imperative. This could not be truer than in Detroit.

I believe that Detroiters are compelled to this way of life because they have seen what can happen when people rely on a larger system that ultimately fails to provide for their needs. They have already had to adapt with non-normative solutions. The automotive companies that helped to build this town were originators of 'Big Business'. But because these companies swelled at such a fast pace they left people vulnerable to shifts in the market and when jobs were outsourced to reduce bottom lines, workers were cast aside. People had to adapt to survive, uprooted from land and support networks. This resulted in an extremely difficult and challenging financial recovery. Only by adapting to these changes is recovery possible. "Perceived crisis demands alternative forms of social organization, ones that make transformational, not marginal, change." (Princen, p. 35) Small businesses are just beginning to see a resurgence. These businesses enable people to cope and invent practical methods of economic survival that thrive off the support of a community that recognizes that individualized strategies have the power to change the system by creating a new and different system all together. Current DIY and "maker" movements build off of the 'back to the land', 'hippie', and 'anarchist' movements of my father's era. These movements are inherently more localized and moderate than one might think in terms of transformational change. But as we see in Terry's story, one's power to change the system lies in the power to change one's own situation.

MC: (brushing hair off my arms) Well, I think we're done.

TC: Oh, good. Lovely. Feels much better. So, done with the hair or done with the interview?

MC: Done with the hair.



CONCLUSION

In the process of creating the project “EDIFICE OF ACCUMULATION” I investigated the curious ways of my father, starting by asking him the question, “Why do you collect all this stuff?” My intention for pursuing this creative work was to understand his curious habit of accumulation. What followed was a story of economic loss and recovery that revealed his collecting to be both practical and emotional. Through my investigation, I gained a deeper understanding of the historical and personal complexities that led to his compulsions. His tale can be seen as a parable for a current generation facing an ongoing recession. This analysis provided me a way to explore the larger concept of value and what options people might have other than storing their value in cash.

Six years after the subprime mortgage crisis and an ongoing recession, we are all dealing with an economic system that is failing the majority of the people. Distribution of wealth has changed for the worse and does not seem to be getting better in the foreseeable future. We live in an economy where value is stored in a flat piece of metal, a piece of paper, or a set of digital numbers and its worth changes on a daily basis. We have little control over these fluctuations. Instead of continuing to rely on a monetary system that failed him, Terry adapted by building his kingdom from tangible goods. He learned this method from his beloved mother and the salt of the earth farmers in rural Iowa who lived close to the land and had a clear understanding of true value, corn as good as gold stored in corncribs and protected on their property. In order to thrive we all must adapt.

This non-normative wealth may not be perfect or highly lucrative, but unlike other forms of wealth, it is not the material representation of debt like luxury goods purchased on credit. This wealth is owned outright, not borrowed from one’s future. In the past the ‘stuff’ in question most times used and sometimes broken and always nestled in chaotic piles, represented the fact that we were poor. My perception has shifted and I have come to see the ‘stuff’ - and the physical and social architecture that surrounds it - as real wealth. Terry’s current home wasn’t foreclosed on in the last recession. His wealth barely changed. In fact, in some cases it increased because the dollar value of his goods increased. I didn’t lose my house either, mainly because I took his advice and his truck loads of repurposed materials that he pawned off on me while we were renovating it. My father’s approach may seem radical but it is actually just the opposite. It’s moderate. He assessed his situation, lowered his risk, and adjusted his ways to work within a broken system.

MC: What was the last thing you salvaged... of a job site or dumpster diving...

TC: Hm...Well, I handed that condo renovation off to my neighbor Doug, and as a result when they were demolishing the place I got the appliances, which you ended up with some of them.

MC: Some of them? I ended up with two things and Kenny ended up with one of them. What I was wondering that day is... You didn’t get anything so what was in it for you?

TC: Finding a home for this stuff that otherwise would have been abandoned.

MC: But why do you care?

TC: I don’t know but I really do. It’s one of my major motivations.



I spoke with Terry after the show. He told me that he is moving on to the “next phase” because of the work we did together on this project. I thought, “is it possible that our work together on this project will alter his habits?” When the exhibition was over, I asked my father what he wanted me to do with all the stuff. (I intended to keep the cabin frame and a few useful building materials to finish the project.) I think I was hoping that something in him would have changed, that he would tell me to get rid of some or all of the stuff. Instead he said he wanted it all back. Every item. In fact, after I returned everything he asked me about a hose that went with one of the camp stoves. Amongst hundreds of different items, he noticed that this one thing was out of place. At first this was disconcerting and then I came to realize that here was a man much like the savvy businessman who can account for every item in inventory.

Perhaps his potential transformation has little to do with the physical objects. I couldn't help but wonder if he was talking about something other than physically moving on. I wondered if he was talking about a catharsis? Catharsis is an extreme change in emotion that results in renewal and restoration. In psychology a ‘catharsis’ is reached when a person relates their story. Then they can be led to a greater understanding, forgiving themselves and others and moving past the trauma. (Powell, p. 1)

By interviewing him, I gave my father a chance to reflect on a traumatic time in his life. His emotions were visible to me as I combed through the footage frame-by-frame. In the process of working through this project, I understood that Terry's collecting is a type of therapy for him. I saw the direct connection between his losses and his attempt to regain and rebuild. He collects as a stable investment for the future. He provides for his family when he acquires another vehicle for a steal or stashes away a valuable painting that could be liquidated in an emergency.

The creation of this stash is like an exercise to regain control over his life in a very physical and real way. This habit parallels my own creative practice whereby I alter reality in order to regain control over systems that frustrate me. My artistic expression is a therapeutic tool like his collection and building are, both of us crafting new realities. We both create and construct new paradigms in order to adapt to the world around us. We do this through our work. Building and creating are self-sufficient skills. These skills allow us to create

**MC: Well, one time the salvaging came in handy for me was when I was renovating my house. You know I started out thinking I was going to buy IKEA cabinets and buy all these appliances at the whatever store, I started looking around at that stuff that you brought down, those 80's grey, fleck style cabinets, and ended up refinishing them and using them.
TC: Because?**

MC: Well, they were of better quality.

TC: Made of Oak.



new realities. They can even be traded for other valuable skills.

In order to change or shift a paradigm, one must create an alternative that works. For my father this means recreating his wealth by having supplies on hand to build with, living in an energy efficient house that he built with his own hands, and focusing on storing tangible wealth in the physical form of resources such as water, land, precious metals, vehicles, boats, building supplies, and antiques. Through uncovering Terry's story I have come to explore my own financial paradigm more deeply. Terry helps his mechanic build his house in exchange for work fixing his cars. I save money by trading haircuts for massages and recently created a group with some friends to do work-exchanges on each other's house projects. Terry saves money on bills by using solar energy and I save money by duplexing my house to pay for my mortgage. Terry has a barn full of tools and supplies. I have a studio full of tools and materials. By investing in our work, our creative practice, and our relationships we expand our portfolios in our own economic systems.

Time will tell if he goes through some kind of transformation, but perhaps more importantly, something changed within me. Towards the end of the project I was standing amongst the chaos with camera in hand wondering what final shots I could take that I may have missed when I noticed a palpable change both mentally and physically. Instead of being overwhelmed by the clutter, my feelings were more neutral. By placing myself in the work and living through the story with him, the chaos suddenly didn't produce the same panicked or overwhelmed feelings as it had before. I was transformed through my understanding.

As I watch the footage of my father proudly sitting on his step stool throne with his trash bag robe cast over his shoulders, I couldn't help but think of him as a king and his property as his kingdom. He lives in a magical castle that costs pennies to heat on a clear winter day. My father didn't just collect stuff, he built an empire by focusing on what he values. Kingdoms are of our own making. As an heir to Terry's fortune, I am subject to its burdens but also privy to its benefits.

MC: And I didn't have the money.

TC: There it is. That's the key. I was just looking at my t-shirts in my dresser and I think it was Dorothy who brought it back from Galapagos, it was a Darwin quote. The quote was about the animals on Galapagos. It's not the strongest that survived, its not the smartest... he named off a whole bunch of qualities. The real difference in what survived there was the things that could adapt to change. And I really feel that that's an important characteristic of living in these times.

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