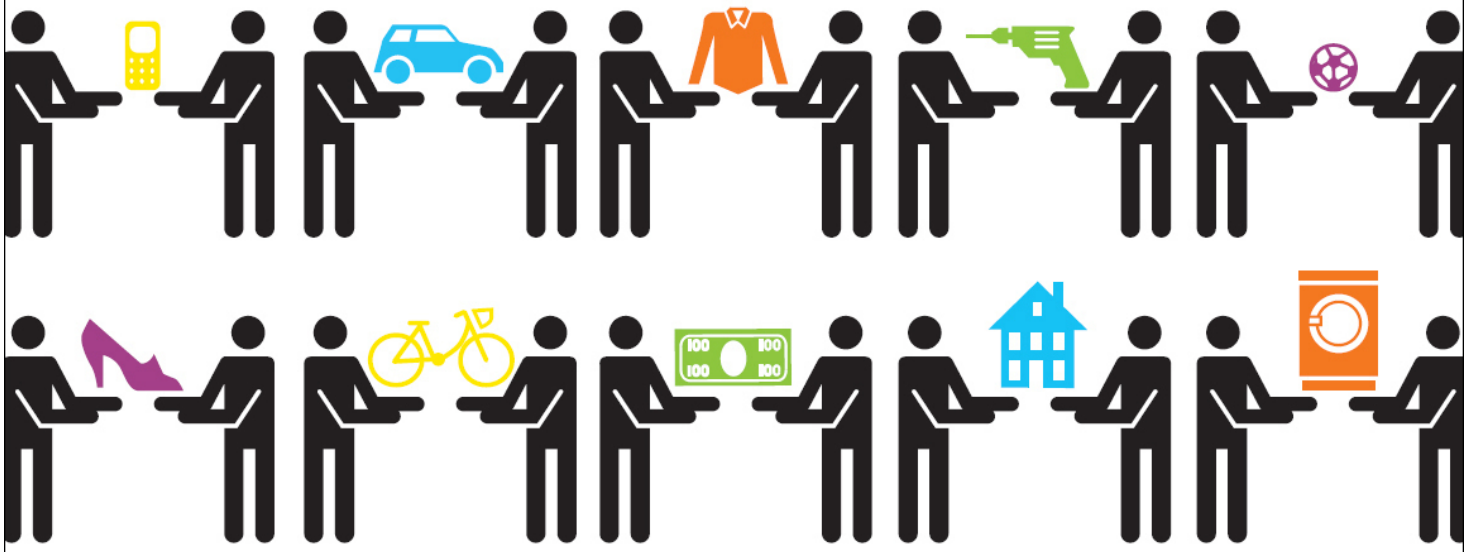
WHAT'S MINE IS YOURS

HOW COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION IS CHANGING THE WAY WE LIVE

Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers



'A VITAL GUIDE TO HOW WE CAN LIVE MORE SUCCESSFULLY' CHARLES LEADBEATER

Rachel Botsman

What's Mine Is Yours

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Botsman R.

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In the 20th century humanity consumed products faster than ever, but this way of living is no longer sustainable. This new and important book shows how technological advances are driving forms of 'collaborative consumption' which will change forever the ways in which we interact both with businesses and with each other. The average lawn mower is used for four hours a year. The average power drill is used for only twenty minutes in its entire lifespan. The average car is unused for 22 hours a day, and even when it is being there are normally three empty seats. Surely there must be a way to get the benefit out of things like mowers, drills and even cars, without having to carry the huge up-front costs of ownership?There is indeed. Collaborative consumption is not just a buzzword, it is a new win-win way of life. This insightful and thought-provoking new book by Rachel Rogers and Roo Botsman is an important and fast-moving survey of the dramatic changes we are seeing in the way we consume products. Many of us are familiar with freecycle, eBay, couchsurfing and Zipcar. But these are just the beginning of a new phenomenon. Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers have interviewed business leaders and opinion formers around the world to draw together the many strands of Collaborative Consumption into a coherent and challenging argument to show that the way we did business and consumersism in the 20th century is not the way we will do it in the 21st century.

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Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers
What's Mine Is Yours
How Collaborative Consumption is Changing the Way We Live

HarperCollins e-books

For my nana, Evelyn Amdu
Rachel

For Bernie, Ruby & Mei
Roo

Introduction
What's Mine Is Yours

In October 2007, designers from all over the world travelled to San Francisco to attend the annual industrial design conference. The city's hotel rooms had been sold out for months. Joe Gebbia and Brian Chesky, old friends and graduates from the Rhode Island School of Design, were among the ten thousand people planning to attend. The classmates had recently moved into a big loft in South of Market, San Francisco, or SoMa, as it is known, to start a business. During a conversation Gebbia and Chesky had about making some quick money to help pay their rent, they asked themselves, 'Why not rent our extra room and advertise it on the conference website?' They did, and made close to $1,000 in just one week.

Chesky and Gebbia thought that people in their twenties would respond to their offer. Three people ended up staying: a male designer from India who read about the idea on a local design blog and who saw it as a great way to meet new people; a thirty-five-year-old woman from Boston who thought it was better value than a hotel; and a forty-five-year-old father of five from Utah. 'It completely blew away our assumptions,' Gebbia recalls. The friends were also surprised that they didn't feel like they had strangers in their own home. 'They are strangers until you have a conversation with them,' Chesky explained.

Convinced they could start a business matching visitors who wanted rooms with locals who wanted to rent out extra space, Chesky and Gebbia, joined by Nathan Blecharczyk, a close friend and Web developer, built a simple website in early 2008. They initially thought of the idea 'air beds for conferences' solely for large events such as the Republican and Democratic conventions – where hotels were unavailable because they were sold out or unaffordable. 'When Obama announced he was speaking in a 75,000-seat arena, and there were only 40,000 hotel rooms in Denver, the maths just really worked in our favour,' Chesky recalls. Their website's traffic grew. They appeared on CNN and in the pages of *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal.* During the first few months of the launch, the trio were surprised by both the number and the mix of people wanting to rent out space as well as by the diversity of travellers – families, newlyweds, students, and even businessmen – willing to pay for a rented room.

Chesky, Blecharczyk and Gebbia realized that conferences were just a narrow slice of the larger market. On the whiteboard in their apartment, they drew a spectrum. On one side they wrote 'hotels' and on the other they scribbled rental listings such as craigslist, youth hostels, and nonmonetary travel exchanges such as Couch-Surfing that help people travel by creating a network of couches available to sleep on for free. In the middle was a big white space, an untapped market: people looking for reasonably priced accommodations with the added benefit of a local experience. They were, however, wary that this opportunity appeared so large and untapped for a logical reason – trust.

Was the act of attending the same event, whether a political rally, a music festival or a design conference the critical factor in building trust between strangers? Would people stay with one another if they just shared an interest such as photography? What about if they were alumni who had graduated from the same university? Was it possible to create an entirely open peer-to-peer marketplace for people to stay anywhere around the world? These were questions the three men chatted about for several months before agreeing that the answer could be 'yes' to all of the above. The success of other matchmaking services such as eBay indicated that trust could be built. By August 2008, Airbnb.com, their company's website, was born. 'The name came from the idea that with the Internet and a spare room, anyone can become an innkeeper,' explains Blecharczyk.

In October 2010, Airbnb.com had over 210,000 registered users, with more than 28,000 properties across 8,122 cities in more than 157 countries. In the UK alone, there are 13,295 Airbnb

members, with over 1,100 of them playing host in 1,362 properties. Just as eBay is for goods, the site is a diverse marketplace for spaces. Listings include everything from a 'Charming studio in Bastille, Marais' for $90 a night, to a 'Harlem Haven Private Apartment, New York' for $120, to an entire villa in the 'Bophut Hills in Koh Samui, Thailand' for $275 per night. Chesky marvels, 'When we started I never thought people would be renting out tree houses, igloos, boats, villas and designer apartments.'

For the most part, the people and places are not vetted, inspected or interviewed by Airbnb. It's up to users to determine if they want to host a guest or if they want to stay with someone based on kaleidoscopic photos of the property, detailed profiles and other users' reviews. As the site has grown, in fact, the founders have removed rules they initially thought would be required. They took away the initial cap on charges of $300 because they realized that people were using the Airbnb community for far more than budget accommodation. Today you can find castles for rent in England for $3,000 a night. The only fixed rules on Airbnb are that the travellers must be able to ask the host questions before they book, and rooms can't be a commodity, which excludes most hotels. 'A Marriott in New York City and a Marriott in Ireland will look exactly the same,' Chesky says. 'And you don't know what room you are getting or even what floor you are on. We are providing the opposite.'

Blecharczyk has since moved with his wife to a bigger apartment in Palo Alto. In January he made $1,200 from renting out their extra bedroom via Airbnb to three different individuals for a total of fifteen days in January 2010. When the founders launched, they didn't consider that the service would enable people to use their spare space as an investment rather than it being a liability. Some users have an extra bedroom in an expensive neighbourhood, so why not rent it out every now and again? Angela Rutherford moved into a large two-bedroom loft in New York's financial district. After having previously lived alone, she was hesitant about sharing her room with a full-time roommate. Instead, she decided to furnish the spare room and rent it out on Airbnb for about fifteen nights per month. 'I can control when I'm sharing the space and when I'm not,' she explained. 'I use the extra cash to help pay off my credit card debt, and it covers about half the rent.'

The motivation for hosts using Airbnb is typically a blend of making extra money and meeting new people. The children of Jill Banounou from Denver went to college: 'I have an empty room now and it's interesting to have people every once in a while.' Stephanie Sullivan from Pittsburgh needed extra money to help pay for the maintenance on her 110-year-old home and loves having people stay. Matthias Siebler from Boston used the money to pay for an entire trip to England so he could attend an old friend's wedding. Sandra Bruce from Washington is 'hosting to save for my retirement. I also like having the company.' Some people have started their own business with the extra money; for others it has helped them keep their home.

In January 2010, the team received this email from a woman named Kendra Mae Tai, a host in New York City: 'Hi Airbnb, I am not exaggerating when I tell that you literally saved us. My husband and I just married this past May after losing both of our jobs and our investments in the stock market crash last year. We slowly watched our savings dwindle to the point where we did not have enough money to pay our rent. At that point, I listed our apartment on your website and received so many requests. . You have given us the ability to keep our home and travel together and the peace of mind of knowing we can make it through this challenging time in our life. Thank you so much.'

Remarkably, out of the ten thousand completed trips to date there have been no reports of theft. Sometimes an apartment is not clean or someone does not show up, but these cases are rare. Chesky believes that a 'trusted intermediary' and secure payment system have a lot to do with this record. When making a booking, guests put the reservation on hold using a credit card or PayPal account. Hosts are not paid in full until twenty-four hours after a guest has checked in. Airbnb charges hosts a standard 3 percent service fee and travellers an additional 6 to 12 percent depending on the reservation price. Aside from turning Airbnb into a real business with a profitable revenue model that has been growing at more than 10 percent every month since they launched, the founders believe that some form of payment 'puts both parties on the best behaviour and makes the whole process more reliable.'

When Chesky told his grandfather about the idea behind Airbnb, 'It seemed totally normal to him. My parents had a different reaction. I could not figure out why at first.' Chesky later realized that his parents grew up in the hotel generation, whereas his grandfather and his friends would stay on farms and in little houses during their travels. Airbnb is not very different from that experience. 'We are not the modern invention, hotels are.' Indeed, prior to the 1950s, staying with friends or friends of friends was a common way to travel. Airbnb is an old idea, being replicated and made relevant again through peer-to-peer networks and new technologies.

There is now an unbounded marketplace for efficient peer-to-peer exchanges between producer and consumer, seller and buyer, lender and borrower, and neighbour and neighbour. Online exchanges mimic the close ties once formed through face-to-face exchanges in villages, but on a much larger and unconfined scale. In other words, technology is reinventing old forms of trust. Chesky predicts, 'The status quo is being replaced by a movement. Peer-to-peer is going to become the default way people exchange things, whether it is space, stuff, skills or services.'

The Rise of Collaboration

Over the past couple of years, we started to notice that stories and business examples like Airbnb weren't unusual. At dinner parties, instead of bragging about their new Prius, friends boasted how they had given up their cars altogether by becoming 'Zipsters' (members of the car-sharing service Zipcar). More and more friends were selling stuff on craigslist and eBay; swapping books, DVDs and games on sites such as Swap and OurSwaps; and giving unwanted items away on Freecycle and ReUseIt. On a trip to Paris, we saw cyclists pedalling around on sleek-looking bikes with the word 'Vélib' (Paris's bike-sharing scheme) on their crossbars. A friend in London told us about her new favourite Channel 4 programme called *Land-share*. And we kept hearing about the number of people joining Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programmes or local co-ops. We saw stats and stories about online cooperation and the growth in virtual communities. Every day there are more than 3 million Flickr images uploaded; 700,000 new members joining Facebook; 50 million 'Tweets'; and 900,000 blogs posted. There are twenty-three hours of YouTube videos uploaded every minute, the equivalent of Hollywood releasing more than 90,000 new full-length films into theatres each week.[1]

'Collaboration' had become the buzzword of the day with economists, philosophers, business analysts, trend spotters, marketers and entrepreneurs – and appropriately so.

We stumbled on articles about sharing, bartering, lending or swapping, often with some kind of 'co' in the headlines, such as 'Co-Housing for Gen X & Y', 'Co-working: Solo but Not Alone', 'Couch Surfing: This Isn't Just About a Place to Crash', 'Can Community Co-Ops Revive Our Towns?' 'Social Networking for Communes', 'Global Collectivist Society Is Coming Online,' 'Living Together: Modern Answer to the Commune', and 'Governing the Commons'. Even science, social psychology and economic journals brimmed with popular articles about the self-organizing behaviours of ants, the 'intelligence' of swarming honeybees, and the cooperation of schools of fish and flocks of birds.

The more we examined these trends, the more convinced we were that all of these behaviours, personal stories, social theories and business examples pointed to an emerging socioeconomic groundswell; the old stigmatized C's associated with coming together and 'sharing' – cooperatives, collectives, and communes – are being refreshed and reinvented into appealing and valuable forms of collaboration and community. We call this groundswell Collaborative Consumption.

The collaboration at the heart of Collaborative Consumption may be local and face-to-face, or it may use the Internet to connect, combine, form groups, and find something or someone to create 'many to many' peer-to-peer interactions. Simply put, people are sharing again with their community

[1] Statistics on online networks taken from 'A Day on the Internet', www.onlineeducation.net/internet.

– be it an office, a neighbourhood, an apartment building, a school or a Facebook network. But the sharing and collaboration are happening in ways and at a scale never before possible, creating a culture and economy of *what's mine is yours.*

Every day people are using Collaborative Consumption – traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting and swapping, redefined through technology and peer communities. Collaborative Consumption is enabling people to realize the enormous benefits of access to products and services over ownership, and at the same time save money, space and time; make new friends; and become active citizens once again. Social networks, smart grids and real-time technologies are also making it possible to leapfrog over outdated modes of hyper-consumption and create innovative systems based on shared usage such as bike or car sharing. These systems provide significant environmental benefits by increasing use efficiency, reducing waste, encouraging the development of better products, and mopping up the surplus created by over-production and – consumption.

In this book, we have organized the thousands of examples of Collaborative Consumption from around the world into three systems – **product service systems, redistribution markets** and **collaborative lifestyles**. Together these systems are reinventing not just *what* we consume but *how* we consume.

Although the examples of Collaborative Consumption range enormously in scale, maturity and purpose, they share similar underlying principles essential to making them work that we explore throughout this book – **critical mass, idling capacity, belief in the commons** and **trust between strangers**.

Collaborative Consumption is not a niche trend, and it's not a reactionary blip to the 2008 global financial crisis. It's a growing movement with millions of people participating from all corners of the world. Many of these participants may not even realize that they are part of this groundswell. To illustrate the explosive rise of Collaborative Consumption, let's first look at the growth stats behind a few mainstream examples: Bike sharing is the fastest-growing form of transportation in the world,[2] with over 500,000 trips being made in the first six weeks of operation for London's Barclays Cycle Hire. Zilok, a leader in the peer-to-peer rental market, has grown at a rate of around 25 percent since it was founded in October 2007.[3] Two billion dollars worth of goods and services were exchanged through Bartercard, the world's largest business-to-business bartering network in 2009, up by 20 percent from 2008.[4] UK-founded Zopa, the first online peer-to-peer lending marketplace in the world, did more business in its fifth year, at £35.5 million (March 2009 to March 2010), than in the previous four years combined at £34.5 million. By October 2010, Zopa members had lent over £100 million between each other. Freecycle, a worldwide online registry that circulates free items for reuse or recycling, has more than 5.7 million members across more than eighty-five countries. More than twelve thousand items are 'gifted' every day through the network.[5] U-Exchange, one of the most successful of all swap sites, saw a 70 percent increase in new members in 2008, and the membership of the trading site Swap grew tenfold in 2009 over the previous year. On thredUP, a clothing exchange for children's clothes, approximately twelve thousand items were exchanged within the first eight days of launching in April 2010. Landshare, a site that connects gardenless would-be growers with unused spare land, has more than 55,000 members across the UK today. CouchSurfing, a global website that connects travellers with locals in more than 235 countries and territories, is

[2] Abha Bhattarai, 'Bike-Sharing: Cycling to a City Near You', Fast Company (26 June 2009), www.fastcompany.com/blog/abha-bhattarai/abha-bhattarai/bike-sharing-cycling-city-near-you.

[3] Statistics on Zilok taken from Reuters release, 'Rent Your Way Out of the Credit Crunch Online' (5 December 2008), http://www.reuters. com/article/idUSTRE4B44DE20081205.

[4] Statistics on bartering taken from William Lee Adams, 'Bartering: Have Hotel, Need Haircut', Time (2 November 2009), http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1931665,00.html.

[5] Statistics on Freecyle taken from Freecycle press release, 'Largest Environmental Web Community in the World' (9 September 2008), www.freecycle.org/pressreleases/08-09-09_Freecycle_press_release. pdf?.

currently the most visited 'hospitality service' on the Internet.[6] In the United States, there are more than 2,50 °CSA schemes – where people pay a sum of money at the beginning of the year to a local farmer who will deliver a weekly box of fresh produce throughout the growing season – compared with only 1 in 1985. In the UK, there are more than 100,000 people on the waiting list for an allotment (a plot of land that can be rented by an individual for growing fruits and vegetables) and in some parts of London the wait is up to forty years.[7] In the midst of the global financial crisis, when the federal government was bailing out the 'Big Three' car companies, car-sharing membership increased by 51.5 percent in the United States.[8] By 2015, it is estimated that 4.4 million people in North America and 5.5 million in Europe will belong to services like the one from Zipcar, whose membership alone more than tripled in 2009.[9] UK-based WhipCar, the first neighbour-to-neighbour car-sharing service had over 1,000 owners accepting bookings within the first six months of launch. We could go on. Collaborative Consumption is a snowball idea, one with enough heft to keep gathering momentum and enough adhesion to keep growing bigger.

Many of the companies we explore in this book are already profitable or have growing revenue models. The more established companies are making hundreds of millions in revenue (Netflix made $359.6 million and Zipcar $130 million in 2009), while others like SolarCity and Swap are just starting to turn a profit. Specific sectors of Collaborative Consumption are predicted to experience phenomenal growth over the next five years. The peer-to-peer social lending market led by the likes of Zopa and Lending Club is estimated to soar by 66 percent to reach $5 billion by the end of 2013.[10] The consumer peer-to-peer rental market for everything from drills to cameras is estimated to be a $26 billion market sector. The swap market just for used children's clothing (0 to 13 years) is estimated to be between $1 billion and $3 billion in the United States alone.[11] Car sharing or per hour car rental is predicted to become a $12.5 billion industry. Even organizations such as CouchSurfing and Freecycle that were set up for a purpose not explicitly about profitability are helping create consumer acceptance and paving the way for similar businesses with a revenue model. CouchSurfing, a nonprofit organization, created the space for the likes of Airbnb and CrashPadder. And it's not just the companies making money. As *The Economist* noted, individuals involved in Collaborative Consumption are becoming 'microentrepreneurs.'[12] Some people are making a little money on the side and others are making significant income from peer rental of products and spaces that would otherwise be sitting unused and idle. The average New Yorker participating in Airbnb is making $1,600 per month. And that is just the average. Renters on Zilok are making over $1,000 a year from renting out just one item such as a camera or bike. It is estimated that an owner of a saloon car such as a Camry can make over $6,250 per year through peer-to-peer car rental sites such as RelayRides, Gettaround and Whipcar by renting the car for twenty hours a week. Some owners, such as 'Dave,' a twenty-six-year-old designer, are using Whipcar to help pay for general living costs. Others, such as sixty-six-year-old 'Maureen', hardly use their car and use the extra rental money to pay for holidays.

People may throw an 'out of necessity' brick at Collaborative Consumption, claiming that it will slow down or crumble when the economy fully recovers and prosperity returns. But not only is

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[6] Statistics on CouchSurfing: http://traffic.alexa.com/graph?w=900&h =500&r=3m&y=p&u=CouchSurfing.org/ &u=hospitalityclub. org&u=globalfreeloaders.com&u=place2stay.net&u=servas.org and www.CouchSurfing.org/statistics.html.

[7] Statistics on allotment waiting lists were widely reported in the British media in August 2009, such as 'Forty-Year Wait for Allotments', BBC coverage: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/london/8193100.stm.

[8] Joseph Pisani, 'Car Sharing Takes Off', CNBC (4 December 2009), http://76.12.4.249/artman2/uploads/1/ Car_Sharing_Takes_Off_-_ CNBC.pdf.

[9] David Zhao, 'Carsharing: A Sustainable and Innovative Personal Transport Solution', Frost & Sullivan Automotive Practice (28 January 2010), www.frost.com/prod/servlet/market-insight-top. pag?Src=RSS&docid=190795176.

[10] Statistics from Gartner Research (5 January 2010). Retrieved January 2010, www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=1272313.

[11] Value of the market sector of used children's clothing provided by James Reinhart, founder of thredUP.

[12] L.S., 'Collaborative Consumption', posted on the Economist blog (22 April 2010), http://www5.economist.com/blogs/ babbage/2010/04/peer_to_peer_car_rentals.

Collaborative Consumption driven by consumer motivations that extend far deeper than cost savings, the habits started to stick and spread before the financial collapse of 2008. Economic necessity has just made people more open to new ways of accessing what they need and how to go about getting it.

When the great recession hit in 2008, some pundits and economists heralded the end of consumerism, while some suggested that consumers needed to be prodded to shop again. Either way, they assumed that the traditional model of consumerism, the one in which we buy products, use them, throw them away and then buy more, would continue, even if at a hobbled rate. While the 'spend more, consume more' way out may be a short-term fix, it is neither sustainable nor healthy.

While the rampant and unregulated financial system led to investors losing millions in Ponzi schemes, hedge funds, insurance companies and even savings banks, everyday people pursuing the supposed American dream felt the worst impact. In all corners of the world, millions lost their homes, their jobs, their buying power and their confidence. But within weeks of the crash, there were signs of a new and increasing consumer awareness, tinged with anger. We have been living in a society that for more than fifty years has encouraged us to live beyond our means, both financial and ecological. As Thomas Friedman wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed, '2008 was when we hit the wall – when Mother Nature and the market both said: "No more."' While the world awaits a new big idea to reinvigorate and rebalance our economy, we believe the transformation will start to come from consumers themselves.

The convergence of social networks, a renewed belief in the importance of community, pressing environmental concerns and cost consciousness are moving us away from top-heavy, centralized and controlled forms of consumerism towards one of sharing, aggregation, openness and cooperation.

To build on an idea Charles Leadbeater discussed in his book *We Think*, in the twentieth century of hyper-consumption we were defined by credit, advertising and what we owned; in the twenty-first century of Collaborative Consumption we will be defined by reputation, by community, and by what we can access and how we share and what we give away.[13]

The phenomenon of sharing via increasingly ubiquitous cyber peer-to-peer communities such as Linux, Wikipedia, Flickr, Digg and YouTube is by now a familiar story. Collaborative Consumption is rooted in the technologies and behaviours of online social networks. These digital interactions have helped us experience the concept that cooperation does not need to come at the expense of our individualism, opening us up to innate behaviours that make it fun and second nature to share. Indeed, we believe people will look back and recognize that Collaborative Consumption started *online* – by posting comments and sharing files, code, photos, videos and knowledge. And now we have reached a powerful inflection point, where we are starting to apply the same collaborative principles and sharing behaviours to other physical areas of our everyday lives. From morning commutes to co-working spaces to the way we borrow and lend money to the way fashion is designed, different areas of our lives are being created and consumed in collaborative ways.

This book does not posit that we need to pick between owning or sharing. In the future, most of us will have our feet in both camps, just as successful business models such as Airbnb may become a hybrid of both traditional commerce and collaboration. Collaborative Consumption will sit side-by-side and eventually may go head-to-head with the old consumerist model, much as blogs such as the *Huffington Post* now compete with hundred-plus-year-old newspapers such as *The New York Times*. But in the same way that the one-way flow of information from the media is over, we are reaching the close of a pure one-way consumerist culture based on just owning more and more stuff. 'Sharing is to ownership what the iPod is to the eight track, what the solar panel is to the coal mine. Sharing is clean, crisp, urbane, postmodern; owning is dull, selfish, timid, backward,' *New York Times* journalist Mark Levine commented recently.[14]

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[13] Charles Leadbeater, We-Think: Mass Innovation Not Mass Production (Profile Books, 2008), 26.

[14] Mark Levine, 'Share My Ride', The New York Times (5 March 2009), http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/08/

Concepts and connotations of 'sharing', 'collectivism' and 'communalism' need to be updated. In his classic novel *Through the Looking-Glass*, Lewis Carroll writes, '"When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that's all".'[15] Meanings of words can change as our cultural acceptance of ideas is reframed.[16] Hotels don't call their business 'bed sharing' for good reasons, and as Jonathan Zittrain, a professor of law at Harvard University, says, craigslist does not call its ride-sharing board 'hitchhiking.'

Collaborative Consumption is not asking people to share nicely in the sandbox. On the contrary, it puts a system in place where people can share resources without forfeiting cherished personal freedoms or sacrificing their lifestyle. A distinguished political scientist who shares this view is seventy-six-year-old Indiana University professor Elinor Ostrom. In October 2009, while we were writing this book, she won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, along with Oliver E. Williamson. Ostrom is the first person ever to win the award with a proven theory on the efficiency of commons-based societies and how they work. Michael Spence, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, commented shortly after Ostrom won the prize that her work demonstrates that 'economics is not really fundamentally about markets, but about resource allocation and distribution problems.'[17] From alpine grazing meadows in Switzerland to irrigation canals in Spain to forests in Japan, Professor Ostrom has spent her life studying commonly managed resources and probing how they succeed or fail. Her research has demonstrated that even in capitalist societies, if simple rules are applied, a self-organized commons can work. Individuals will cooperate to act in the common good.

Perhaps what is most exciting about Collaborative Consumption is that it fulfils the hardened expectations on both sides of the socialist and capitalist ideological spectrum without being an ideology in itself. It demands no rigid dogma. There are, of course, limits to the system, specifically situations where people simply won't and can't give up on individual ownership or doing things by themselves. But this rigidity, too, could shift.

Although this book is a good-news book about promising solutions and long-term positive change, we start out by showing how the system of consumerism that we live with today – the system that is now our collective habit – was manufactured. Entire books have been written on this subject, and it is not our goal to provide another detailed history or critique of the rise of consumerism in the twentieth century. Ultimately, we are much more interested in the future. But if we can look back and deconstruct what got us on what cultural critic Juliet Schor calls the consumer escalator, 'ever moving upward', we can then look forward to figuring out how to get off it.[18]

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magazine/08Zipcar-t.html.

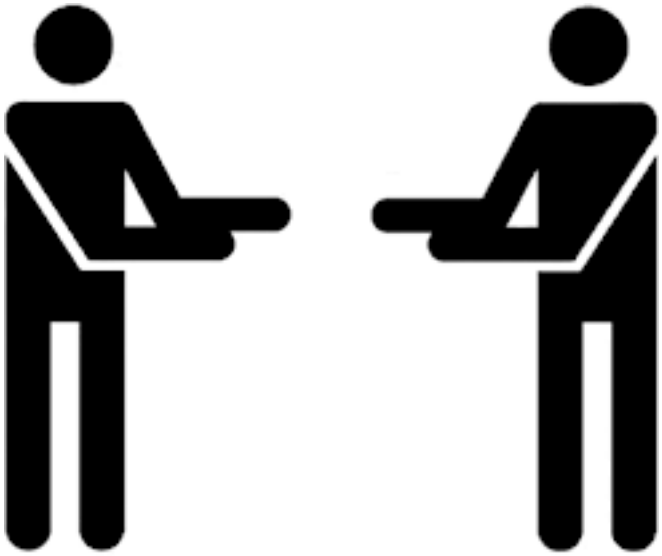
[15] Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking-Glass (Macmillan, 1871), 205.

[16] This idea was raised in the blog post 'Socialism or Not: Lessig Responds to Kelly', Adrian J. Ivakhiv (31 May 2009), http://aivakhiv. blog.uvm.edu/2009/05/socialism_or_not_lessig_responds_to_kelly. html.

[17] Michael Spence, 'Markets Aren't Everything', Forbes.com (12 October 2009), www.forbes.com/2009/10/12/economics-nobel-elinor-ostrom-oliver-williamson-opinions-contributors-michael-spence. html.

[18] Juliet B. Schor, The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need (Basic Books, 1998).

Part 1



CONTEXT

Chapter One
Enough Is Enough

Way out in the Pacific Ocean, just east of Japan and west of Hawaii, a gigantic accidental monument to the waste of modern consumerism has formed. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is the largest landfill in the world, except that it is not on land; it's in the ocean. This swirling mass of rubbish is estimated to be roughly twice the size of Texas and in some parts one hundred feet deep, if not deeper. It's a floating stew of 3.5 million tonnes of garbage, 90 percent of which is plastic, containing everything from bottle caps and toys to shoes, cigarette lighters, toothbrushes, nets, babies' dummies, wrappers, takeaway containers and shopping bags from all corners of the world.

For years the patch was out-of-sight, out-of-mind, lying just beneath the surface of the water, invisible to satellites. The patch is located in a remote part of the ocean that is usually dodged by sailors because of its gentle breezes and extreme high pressure systems and shunned by fishermen, who call it the 'desert' due to its lack of fish. Charles Moore, a sailor, environmentalist, organic farmer and onetime furniture repairman, discovered the patch by accident on 3 August 1997. He was on his way home with his crew after finishing in third place in the Los Angeles – to-Hawaii sail race known as the TransPac, when he decided to take a shortcut. He steered the *Alguita*, an aluminium-hulled catamaran, into the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre – a part of the ocean known for its vortex of swirling undercurrents that trap debris. Moore, an old sea dog who had been voyaging in the Pacific since childhood, knew that the region lacked the wind to propel the boat but was not worried, as the *Alguita* was equipped with engines and an extra supply of fuel.

In the week it took them to cross the Gyre, the crew were astonished to find themselves surrounded by so much floating rubbish in such a desolate place, thousands of miles from land. As Moore later wrote in his story about the discovery, 'I often struggle to find words that will communicate the vastness of the Pacific Ocean to people who have never been to sea. Day after day, the *Alguita* was the only vehicle on a highway without landmarks, stretching from horizon to horizon. Yet as I gazed from the deck at the surface of what ought to have been a pristine ocean, I was confronted, as far as the eye could see, with the sight of plastic.'

Moore resolved to return to the area as soon as he could on a proper trawling and research mission with marine scientists to start to learn what was going on. And so he did, just over a year later, with a team of volunteers and a net apparatus resembling a manta ray that skimmed the ocean surface. The crew found 'a rich broth of minute sea creatures mixed with hundreds of thousands of plastic fragments – a plastic-plankton soup'.[19] Venturing out on inflatable dinghies, they picked up everything from a cathode-ray tube for televisions to a traffic cone to a gallon bleach bottle so brittle it crumbled in their hands. Birds and fish mistake the plastic for food, especially the bottle caps, which Moore calls 'poison pills'. One bird, when dissected, contained 1,603 pieces of plastic.[20]

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, sadly, isn't a lone phenomenon, though it is perhaps the biggest of them all. Together, these areas could cover 40 percent of the sea. 'That corresponds to a quarter of the earth's surface,' Moore says. 'So 25 percent of our planet is a toilet that never flushes.'[21] To convey the scope of the problem, Moore likes to give the example of Pagan Island (between Hawaii and the Philippines), where there is a 'shopping beach'. 'If the islanders need a cigarette lighter, or some flip-flops, or a toy, or a ball for their kids, they go down to the shopping beach and pick it out of the plastic trash that's washed up there from thousands of miles away.'[22]

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[19] Susan Casey, 'Our Oceans Are Turning into Plastic . . . Are We?' Best Life Magazine (20 February 2007).

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] This section was heavily influenced by Richard Grant's, 'Drowning in Plastic: The Great Pacific Garbage Patch Is Twice the

Rubbish has been tossed into the seas for centuries. In preindustrial culture, it was broken down over time by microorganisms, as the materials, for the most part, were safely biodegradable. Today we have a spectacular abundance of products heavily dependent on plastic, a material that in any shape or form is 100 percent nonbiodegradable. The 100 million tonnes of plastic produced each year will always exist; it just 'photo degrades' by the sun into smaller pieces and then smaller pieces resembling confetti.[23] Even the 5.5 quadrillion lentil-size plastic polymers, known as 'nurdles', made each year for our plastic-wrapped and packaged world are too tough for even the most voracious bacteria to break down. Plastic now outweighs surface plankton six to one in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.[24]

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is a hideous illustration of the way we've ignored the negative consequences of modern consumerism. In the past fifty years, we have consumed more goods and services than in all previous generations put together.[25] Unfortunately, the consume-and-dispose engine is only going faster. Since 1980, we have consumed one-third of the planet's resources – forests, fish, natural minerals, metals and other raw materials.[26] Deforestation in the tropics destroys an area the size of Greece every year – more than 250 million acres. Americans are some of the world's worst environmental offenders. A child born today into a middle-class American family will live to about eighty years old and consume on average 2.5 million litres of water, the wood of 1,000 trees, 21,000 tonnes of petrol, 220,000 kilos of steel and 800,000 watts of electrical energy. At these rates, the average American child will produce in his or her lifetime twice the environmental impact of a Swedish child, 3 times that of an Italian, 13 times that of a Brazilian, 35 times that of an Indian and 280 times that of a Haitian.[27] If everyone on the planet lived like the average American child, we would need five planets to sustain them during their lifetime.[28]

Sadly, it would seem that the vision of unlimited consumption that Victor Lebow, a retail analyst, put forward in 1955 has come to fruition. 'Our enormously productive economy,' he said, 'demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption. The economy needs things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate.'[29]

A big part of the problem is that many of our consumer behaviours have become so habitual that we are unaware of our impact. Psychologists call this consumer 'lock-in', as it can be difficult to make deliberate choices about what to buy and what not to buy because habits, routines, social norms and cultural values lock us into unsustainable behaviours. One example would be buying bottled water.[30] These behaviours stick because individuals acting in their own self-interest feel immediate gain, but they will not feel the losses from the impact of their actions for many years to come. We are always tempted by immediate self-gratification. At the same time, our brains cannot comprehend the cumulative impact at a collective level. If all the world's 1 billion personal computers were switched

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Size of France', Daily Telegraph (24 April 2009), www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/5208645/Drowning-in-plastic-The-Great-Pacific-Garbage-Patch-is-twice-the-size-of-France.html.

[23] Statistics on annual consumption of plastic materials come from 'Plastics Recycling Information'. Retrieved August 2009, www.wasteonline.org.uk/resources/InformationSheets/Plastics.htm.

[24] Thomas M. Kostigen, 'The World's Largest Dump: The Great Pacific Garbage Patch', Discover Magazine (10 July 10 2008), http://discovermagazine.com/2008/jul/10-the-worlds-largest-dump.

[25] Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins and L. Hunter Lovins, Natural Capitalism (Rocky Mountain Institute, 1999), 4, www.natcap.org/sitepages/pid5.php.

[26] Tim Radford, 'Two-Thirds of World's Resources "Used Up",' Guardian (30 March 30 2005), www.guardian.co.uk/science/2005/mar/30/environment.research.

[27] Ervin Laszlo, The Chaos Point: The World at the Crossroads (Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 2006), 17.

[28] Global Footprint Network and WWF's Living Planet Report (September 2009), www.footprintnetwork.org/images/uploads/EO_Day_Media_Backgrounder.pdf.

[29] Victor Lebow, 'Price Competition in 1955', Journal of Retailing (Spring 1955), www.scribd.com/doc/965920/LebowArticle.

[30] Tim Jackson, 'Motivating Sustainable Consumption: A Review of Evidence on Consumer Behaviour and Behavioural Change', published in a paper by the Centre for Environmental Strategy, University of Surrey (2005), www.epa.gov/sustainability/Workshop0505/5d_Jackson_Tim.pdf.

off for just one night, it would save enough energy to light up New York City's Empire State Building – inside and out – for more than thirty years.[31] Artist Chris Jordan, who creates arresting images about unimaginable statistics of western culture, puts it this way: 'As individuals we do these things all the time every day. But when millions of people go about these unconscious behaviours it can add up to a catastrophic consequence that nobody wants, and that nobody intended.'[32]

The Emergence of Throwaway Living

In 1907, Hugh Moore and his college roommate, Lawrence Luellen, dropped out of Harvard to pursue a business idea. At the time, people drank at public water fountains from the same 'tin-dipper' cups, which were rarely washed and never replaced. The friends, aware of recent findings that diseases were spread through sharing cups like these, spotted a moneymaking opportunity. Luellen had come up with the idea of a water vending machine with paper cups, and together he and Moore bought a factory, located next door to Alfred Schindler's Dixie Doll Company. Shortly after, they introduced the first paper cup, known as the 'Health Kup'. Moore, who never liked the original name for the cup, noticed the word 'Dixie' every day, as it was printed on the doll company's front door. 'Dixie Cups' were born.[33]

The idea was not a runaway success. But eight years later, Moore and Luellen repitched Dixie Cups for 'clinical use'. The friends and business partners became known as 'The Cup Campaigners' with a widespread education blitz telling the public that single repeat-use metal cups at water fountains were the main source for germ contamination. *Only* disposable cups were sanitary. They distributed a pamphlet with a graphic illustration of a cup in the shape of a skeleton perched on a fountain. This campaign was not all propaganda. The common drinking cup did spread serious diseases, in particular tuberculosis and smallpox, and in this sense the disposable paper cup did have a positive impact on society. Fast-forward to today, and a staggering 220 billion paper and plastic cups are used worldwide per year, with 146 billion cups consumed in North America alone. A day's worth of cups is as high as a forty-two-storey building.[34]

For manufacturers, a product that is thrown away after being used, forcing the customer to keep coming back for more, creates endless profit potential; a potential first discovered in the years after World War I, when there was a great need to find new uses for the abundance of materials produced for the war piled high in warehouses. For example, an absorbent material made from celluloid that had been used for military bandages and gas mask filters later gained a new use as the disposable Kotex sanitary towel. Manufacturers also had to figure out how to transform the wartime ethic of thrift and reuse – darning socks, keeping odd pieces of string, using tea leaves to clean carpets, and sewing rags into rugs – into a culture that embraced 'throwaway habits' and the willingness to spend money on new 'stuff'. During the war, the US government produced posters declaring 'Waste Not, Want Not.' By late 1917, the government was giving shops across the country signs to display in their windows reading 'Beware of Thrift and Unwise Economy', to help encourage repetitive consumption.[35]

Advertisers touted mass-disposable goods as more convenient, time-saving and hygienic than reusable products. They became increasingly attractive in the early fifties as more women entered the

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[31] Statistics on PC energy usage are from the 2009 P.C. US Energy Report, www.1e.com/EnergyCampaign/downloads/PC_EnergyReport 2009-US.pdf.

[32] The artist Chris Jordan talked about this idea during his talk at the TED conference (June 2008). The video can be viewed at www.ted. com/talks/chris_jordan_pictures_some_shocking_stats.html.

[33] 'Dixie Cup Company History', Lafayette College Libraries (August 1995), www.lafayette.edu/~library/special/dixie/company.html.

[34] Jordan, TED talk.

[35] Giles Slade, Made to Break: Technology and Obsolescence in America (Harvard University Press, 2006), 25.

workforce, were pressed for time and had greater disposable income. It is not surprising that it was against this backdrop that entire lines of disposable products flooded the market, including Kleenex tissues, Q-tips, Band-Aids, paper towels, paper straws, disposable shopping bags and so on. And along with these products came the boxes and cartons they were packaged in and the ads, catalogues and window displays to promote them; more stuff used and then thrown away. Thirty years later, in 1955, *Life* magazine ran a front cover with the headline 'Throwaway Living' and a photo of a three-child family tossing various disposables high in the air, including paper plates and trays, aluminium pie pans, and nappies. The overall message was liberation for housewives, as disposability became synonymous with convenience and a metaphor for freedom.[36]

Looking back on these relatively simple and useful inventions, you may wonder: What was the harm? People embraced new products in the name of progress, and these products have their benefits. The crucial shift was when the cultural acceptance of disposability broadened past health concerns. How did disposable cups become ubiquitous in our homes and offices, where people have easy access to sinks to clean their own mugs or glasses? How did disposability change from a symbol of health to one of waste and environmental mess? And therein lies the constant tug-of-war between what is seen as progress at the time and future damage.

When Leo Baekeland invented Bakelite, the first man-made plastic, in 1907 – the same year Moore and Luellen started to pursue their cup idea – he intended to make a material that could be bent, moulded, twisted and plied in a number of different ways. It's impossible that he could have foreseen that Americans alone would one day dispose of about 100 billion plastic bags each year. Most are used just once and discarded.[37] The stories of the paper cup and plastic waste both follow the 'law of unintended consequences', where the actions of people have unanticipated and unintended effects, in some cases more significant than the intended effects. Sociologist Robert K. Merton identified five sources of unintended consequences: ignorance, error, immediate interest, basic values and selfdefeating prophecy. Two of these sources are particularly relevant to hyper-consumption: first, ignorance (it's impossible to anticipate everything); and second, the imperious immediacy of interest. By the latter Merton was referring to instances in which an individual wants the intended consequence of an action (or product) so much that he purposefully chooses to ignore any long-term unintended effects. Both shoppers and manufacturers engage in a combination of these as they participate in the modern-day consumer system.

Just like the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, the environmental effects of consumerism sit just below the surface, a hidden history of materials, resources and impacts. The amount of waste matter generated in the manufacture of a single laptop computer, for instance, is close to four thousand times its weight.[38] The tiny micron chip inside that same computer requires 1.7 kilograms of materials to produce and its production generates 100,000 times its weight in waste.[39] Until recently, much of the hazardous e-waste from products including old computers, mobile phones and televisions from wealthier nations was shipped to countries in the developing world, including China, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Even though restrictions imposed in the Basel Convention by the United Nations have slowed the export of e-waste exportation, it continues on a gargantuan and destructive scale.[40] For the most part, marketers don't put this kind of information on the label. That's the 'ignorance' part of Merton's analysis. But we keep our laptops for only two years on average (it was six years in 1997).[41]

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[36] Susan Strasser, Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash (Henry Holt and Company, 1999). Strasser talks at length about the connections between disposability and woman's liberation.

[37] Kay Bushnell, 'Plastic Bags: Smothered by Plastic', a paper produced by the Sierra Club, www.sierraclub.org/sustainable_consumption/articles/bags1.asp.

[38] Hawken et al., Natural Capitalism.

[39] Sarah Graham, 'Making Microchips Takes Mountains of Materials', Scientific American (6 November 2002).

[40] Slade, Made to Break, 5.

[41] 'The E Waste Problem', posted on the Greenpeace website, www.greenpeace.org/international/campaigns/toxics/electronics/

That is a conscious choice we make in the immediacy of self-interest. As John Thackara says in *Inside the Bubble,* 'It's the accumulation of such tiny, unnecessary acts that weigh so heavily on the planet.'[42]

We are now a society addicted to 'throwaway habits', and many of us are anaesthetized to the consequences. In Britain, every man, woman and child in the country combined produces enough waste to refill London's Royal Albert Hall every two hours.[43] According to the EPA, only 30 percent of this rubbish is recycled or composted, 13 percent is incinerated, and the other 57 percent ends up in landfills. What exactly do we throw out – and why is there is so much of it?

David Chameides, an Emmy award-winning cameraman in Los Angeles, wanted to find out. He decided to conduct an experiment: he would not throw anything away for one whole year. Chameides kept every single item of rubbish that he created at home and on the road in the cellar of his house. A large tin box was used to hold bags of waste paper, and rubbish bins to hold the rest. Most of the family's leftover food was given to the dog and the rest was put into a worm composter. Dave created some rules. Any waste that was not safe – medical waste from doctor's visits, for instance – would be disposed of. The experiment did not apply to his wife and two children. Beyond that, he didn't create a masterplan for his year of no trash.[44] Dave even admits, 'If I had totally thought it through, I might not have done it.' But he did take the experiment seriously, so much so that he even brought the rubbish back in a suitcase from a romantic getaway with his wife in Mexico. Airport screeners baffled by the extra holdall of Mexican rubbish that went through the X-ray machine interrogated the couple.

Soon after he began his experiment, Dave realized the obvious solution. The best way to reduce the amount of trash he produced was to cut back on the amount he consumed in the first place. By taking his own containers to the fishmonger to avoid the wrapping and paying a company to stop his junk mail, he limited his waste for a whole year to thirty pounds (after subtracting recyclable waste), roughly the amount the average American produces *in six days.*[45]

All the 'good stuff' we throw away represents just a small amount, given that for every rubbish bin of waste we put out on the pavement, seventy additional bins of waste were produced upstream in production and distribution to make the waste in your bin.[46] Annie Leonard explains in her book *The Story of Stuff,* 'Guess what percentage of *total* material flow through this system is still in product or use 6 months after their sale in North America. Fifty percent? Twenty? NO. One percent. One! In other words. . 99 percent of the stuff we run through this system is trashed within 6 months.'[47] And the stuff we throw away is just one half of the waste. The other half is all the stuff we buy and never or rarely use.

Self-Storage Self

Think, for a moment, about something you bought that you never ended up using. An item of clothing you never ended up wearing? A book you never read? Some piece of electronic equipment that never even made it out of the box? It is estimated that Australians alone spend on average $10.8 billion AUD (approximately $9.99 billion USD) every year on goods they do not use – more than the total government spending on universities and roads. That is an average of $1,250 AUD

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the-e-waste-problem.

[42] John Thackara, Inside the Bubble (MIT Press, 2006), 22.

[43] Neal Lawson, All Consuming (Penguin, 2009), 41.

[44] Brian Walsh, 'Meet Dave, the Man Who Never Takes Out the Trash', Time (22 September 2008), www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1843163,00.html.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Annie Leonard, The Story of Stuff (Free Press, 2010). The transcript of the video can be found at www.storyofstuff.com/pdfs/annie_ leonard_footnoted_sript.pdf.

[47] Ibid.

(approximately $1,156 USD) for each household.[48] All the things we buy that then just sit there gathering dust are waste – a waste of money, a waste of time, and waste in the sense of pure rubbish. As the author Clive Hamilton observes, 'The difference between the stuff we buy and what we use is waste.'[49] Rubbish and storage are just two different endgames of the same problem.

We live in a world where our drawers, closets, walk-in wardrobes, attics, garages, sheds and cellars are bloated with mountains of objects we rarely use and forget we even have. By the early 1990s, American families had, on average, twice as many possessions as they did twenty-five years earlier.[50] So much stuff has been bought that it doesn't fit into our homes anymore, and so we rent storage to extend the capacity to own more things. Just as Cyril Northcote Parkinson, a British civil servant, mused in *The Economist* in 1955 that 'Work expands so as to fill the time available for completion,' many of us fall victim to Parkinson's Law when it comes to storage: more space increases our tendency to acquire more stuff. Just as plastic migrates to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, these things get stored away, out-of-sight, out-of-mind.

If you've ever travelled from an airport into a city, say London or New York, and noticed the abundance of self-storage warehouses along the route, you begin to see the extent of the problem. These buildings sit on the sides of orbital motorways, sprout from the landscape of suburbia or are wedged into commercial strips in a city's central core. Regardless of their location, they look the same: grey, massive cinder blocks with halogen lamps glaring 24/7.

In 1964, Russ Williams, a Texas oil industry businessman and avid fisherman, got the idea to open 'mini-warehouses' called the A–1 U-Store-It U-Lock-It U-Carry the Key from his own need to store boats and oil field equipment securely but accessibly. He designed the first facility based on the pattern of side-by-side garages often found in apartment complexes with block partitions and panel garage doors. It was just one hundred feet by thirty feet in size and was painted yellow and black to draw attention to it. Williams realized that his residential customers wanted to store not just boats but items they did not have room for in their homes. The idea caught on so fast that it was hard to keep up with the demand. Williams built more and more facilities until he eventually owned (with various partners) 2,500 across the United States.

Today there are more than 53,000 personal storage facilities – more than seven times the number of Starbucks – in the United States. This amounts to a staggering 2.35 billion square feet or more than 38,000 football fields put together in America alone.[51] If you put out your arms, you create about seven square feet around you. That is roughly how much self-storage space there is for every man, woman and child in America. It means every single person in the country could comfortably stand together inside self-storage units.[52] And self-storage is now a $22 billion-per-year industry in the United States – surpassing domestic Hollywood box-office sales. On average we spend more on self-storage than milk, coffee and even beer. Rentable storage has increased by 740 percent in the past two decades.[53] As Chris Sonne, a storage expert at Cushman & Wakefield, comments, 'That's two or more self-storage facilities opening every day for fifty years. That beats McDonald's.' About 30 percent of the storage boom comes from use by businesses storing things such as payment records, office

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[48] Clive Hamilton, 'Why Consumer Capitalism Loves Waste', quoted in his speech to the 6th Asia Pacific Roundtable for Sustainable Consumption and Production (October 2005), www.clivehamilton. net.au/cms/media/documents/articles/Consumer_Capitalism_ Loves_Waste.pdf.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Jon Mooallem, 'The Self-Storage Self', The New York Times (2 September 2009), www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/magazine/06self-storage-t. html?pagewanted=1&_r=1.

[51] Statistics on growth and size of the self-storage industry come from the Self Storage Association. Last checked on February 2010, www.selfstorageassociation.org.

[52] Chris Arnold, 'Americans Keeping More Possessions "Off-Site"', for a segment on National Public Radio (20 May 20 2005), www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4660790.

[53] Martin John Brown, 'Too Much Stuff! America's New Love Affair with Self-Storage', AlterNet (June 4, 2008), www.alternet.org/work place/86998.

equipment, and inventory, but the rest of the expansion has come from people storing possessions that no longer fit in their homes.[54]

So what are we cramming into these storage units? Camping gear, lawn mowers, roller skates, pet cages, bread makers and other electronic gadgets, back issues of *National Geographic* magazine, old souvenirs, children's bicycles, a computer monitor that just might work one day, a clarinet we played in primary school, years of bank receipts, an old sofa – the list goes on. But for the most part, it is 'just stuff' we no longer want cluttering our homes but pay to store anyway.

Rich Ellmer is a self-storage veteran who has owned and operated more than two hundred Cypress Storage Units in Austin, Texas, since 1976. Over the past quarter of a century, Ellmer has seen the same storyline unfold many times. People rent a space and start off thinking they will rent it for a month or two. They end up keeping it a lot longer, for years, sometimes more than a decade, with some renters never clearing out their stuff. Every month, a fee is automatically debited from their bank account, on average ranging from $99 to $195 depending on the amount of storage. 'Generally, after six to eight months, the money people pay for the storage exceeds the value of the items,' Ellmer says. 'It's easier just to write a cheque for another month and pay. People just don't want to be bothered.' Gradually, however, some of his tenants realize that the stuff they are keeping is worth less than what they are paying to store it and one day just ask for it all to be thrown away.[55]

[54] Ibid.

[55] Story of Rich Ellmer comes from Rob D'Amico, 'What's in Store? Has Mini-Storage Become Mega-Storage', Austin Chronicle (1 September 2000), http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/Issue/story?oid=oid%3A78464.

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