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How to cite

Marzella F. (2015), The second-hand market: the practice of reusing goods in cultures dominated by the new, [Italian Sociological Review, 5 (1), 105-122]
Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.13136/isr.v5i1.97>

[DOI: 10.13136/isr.v5i1.97]

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- 3. Article accepted for publication**
March 2015

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The second-hand market: the practice of reusing goods in cultures dominated by the new

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Abstract

This article offers a literary review with the intention of analysing the studies conducted on the topic of used goods. The need for reviewing the existing considerations and research on the subject lies in the necessity to examine this topic in an organic manner, since so far it has only been examined by social sciences and particularly by the sociology of consumption in a marginal fashion. The research presented thus far ranges from studies concerning the field of cultural geography to those about economics and marketing focusing on reasons for purchase and the geography of purchases. Used goods have also been the topic of cultural anthropology studies, which focus on the subject of consumption by contemporary societies in a variety of cultural contexts, and which have examined the different contexts, systems and rituals associated with this specific exchange practice. One specific element that emerged from anthropology studies on fashion is the *vintage* phenomenon, which has elevated used goods in this realm. The analysis of this research suggests that the study on used goods should be carried out from a material culture perspective, so that the human relationships mediated by (used) goods can be taken into account.

Keywords: used goods, sociology of consumption, vintage, new, barter, gift.

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1. The consumption of used goods in Italy: an ever-changing phenomenon

The concept of contemporary consumption is understood almost exclusively as a mass phenomenon referring to new goods, as these dominate the definitions of consumption (Lipovetsky, 2007; Setiffi, 2010). The consumer society defines consumers as buyers of new goods displayed on retailers' shelves, where goods are packaged in a more and more sterile manner and barely represent their instrumental meaning and their use-value. Dominant aspects such as the packaging, the brand and the 'spectacularisation' of goods (Baudrillard, 1972; Codeluppi, 2001) have all strengthened themselves into a dimension of new goods, where the concept of new becomes a quality that goes beyond the item itself, which is purchased because it is new, regardless of its instrumental use (Setiffi, 2009).

This interpretation dominates everyday language to the point where the consumption of *used* goods is considered a marginal practice concerning lower social classes only, or it is seen as a concept that is socially acceptable within few and well-defined categories of goods, such as cars, houses, valuables, antiques/collectibles and all those items that are used in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) where their participants are engaged in activities (e.g. photography, astronomical observation etc.) professionally or as hobbies.

The meaning of "new" is also extended to social science studies, which analyse the phenomena of consumption. The research on the consumption of second-hand goods has not been discussed in a methodical and structured manner by theories of consumption and the work carried out so far on the subject is constructed on accurate considerations, which however are not inserted into a solid theoretical framework.

These initial considerations justify the desire to analyse, also through this article, a methodical vision of the phenomenon by discussing the research carried out so far on the subject, with the intention of inserting the consumption of used goods into the interpretational context of the *material culture*. In this way it will be possible to see used goods as items that complete a cycle, starting as new goods and ending as used ones. This would then create a parallel cycle where the used goods regain exchange value and usefulness, and which in turn justifies their exchange outside consolidated retail facilities and outside those involving new goods only (Secondulfo, 2012).

Offering a literary review on this subject is useful because it would enable us to touch on the existing research, which has been carried out primarily in Anglo-Saxon and Northern European countries. This may be due to the fact that the phenomenon of second-hand goods has developed itself in more mature consumer societies, and has drawn the attention of researchers to

those areas before Italy, where the concept of used goods has raised a new interest recently.

The starting point to initiate an analysis of used goods in Italy is based on the dynamics of points of sale and, more generally, on the various types of exchange of used goods that are becoming more and more popular in this country, too. If we look at the commercial side only of these different types of exchange, since this offers us the chance to draw on solid statistics, there is a tendency in the demography of businesses that may indicate a change in the way retail facilities and consumers understand the word “used”. This is also associated with a clear expansion of the phenomenon through the web, which is demonstrated by the success of dedicated portals (Craig’s List) such as the Italian website Subito.it and the fact that eBay has created a section dedicated to auction-free advertisements (Kijiji).

As for physical locations, the number of shops selling second-hand clothes and collectibles has increased constantly in the last few years. According to the statistical analyses conducted by the Milan Chamber of Commerce¹ in 2013, the Italian points of sale have increased by 17%, meaning that the number selling this type of item has increased from 980 to 1147.

Such increases have occurred also in 2012 and 2011, i.e. in years that have witnessed various recession waves that have had a negative impact on the consumption of goods and the business demography in Italy. It is important to mention that in the same time lapse points of sale focusing on used antiques and valuables have experienced a period of closure, with a mere - 2.1% of point of sales in 2013.

The sale of used goods has experienced an increase in the number of businesses focusing on reselling collectibles, childhood items, consumer electronics, furniture without a specific historical or artistic value, clothes, accessories and books and products belonging to the cultural industry in general. At the same time, higher-end used goods belong to a smaller and less popular category, probably because of the Italian families’ loss of purchasing power.

Apart from the increase in businesses selling used goods, there are also other forms of exchange focusing on this type of selling. Among these there are organisations (which are often associations or cooperative companies) that operate with the intention of recovering the value of items that would otherwise be disposed of. In this way they carry out commercial activities that finance their projects which have specific goals, often to promote the reintegration of disadvantaged individuals or of those experiencing difficult

¹ Milan Chamber of Commerce, *L’usato che avanza*, 12th August 2014 press release.

times, and which also result in initiatives aimed at educating people to re-use items.

This category comprises all those establishments that can be defined as *charity* ones in Anglo-Saxon countries, including *charity shops*, which in Italy correspond to establishments selling used goods for charitable or solidarity-inspired purposes. They are often consolidated in the way in which they handle used goods; a valid example would be the centres managed by the *Emmaus* community where used goods become an integral part of the pauperism-inspired philosophy and of detachment from the consumer society practised by these organisations. Other establishments existing in the Italian territory regard used goods in a way that is closer to the way in which new goods are perceived, especially in terms of the distribution and the economic organisation of the treatment cycle. An example would be the cooperative company *Mani Tese*, which dedicates a good portion of its business to used goods through points of sale that are more similar to those selling new goods. Another relevant example is the Vicenza-based *Cooperativa Sociale Insieme* which has built a whole treatment cycle for re-using goods through the creation of three points of sale including one that is about 900 square metres, and which is part of a building belonging to the cooperative where items undergo numerous treatment cycles - from the receipt of goods from private individuals to the sorting of material coming from waste collection centres.

This cooperative has about 80 employees and follows the philosophy of reusing items. Its strategies includes social reintegration, educating individuals to re-use goods and present and manage points of sale in a well-ordered way, making them similar to shops selling new goods. The activities that are being carried out in that sense demonstrate how used goods can be cleared of that connotation of social marginality that it has acquired in Italy, and how it is becoming a tool to suggest new ways of interpreting the concept of consumption that are acclaimed more by consumers. In these establishments the meaning of *gift* plays a key role, as items that the previous owner or user no longer finds useful regain value.

Other establishments, although they are not as structured as the aforementioned ones, that demonstrate a higher and higher prevalence of activities linked to the consumption of used items are based on *barter* practices, by which used goods are exchanged with others without monetary rewards being involved. In this case the types of barter used are different according to the purpose and the way in which it is organised. It is possible to find recreational events that make a game out of this practice; an example would be the prevalence of *swap parties* arranged by shops, bars or simply groups of people who organise events or meetings for this purpose. In this case, used goods become the reason for arranging events and/or occasions in

which ethical demands mix with fun, amusement and the means for individuals to distinguish themselves in society. Other barter practices are alternative exchange methods and consumption of goods that criticise the value given to the commodity and that wish to draw consumers' attention to the use and exchangeability of goods, including used ones. In this case, barter has a different meaning from swap parties, and here greater attention is given to the symbolic meaning of exchanging goods without involving money and at the same time without considering the exchange as a *gift*. The requirements of this type of barter highlight the intention to criticise the features of a mercantilist society, where money has become a means to mediate social relationships and exchanges (Simmel, 2001), and which has rendered these relationships more and more sterile and impersonal.

Through this initial and brief empirical examination of the various ways of interpreting used goods, different significant phenomena emerge: the increase in second-hand shops (particularly those selling clothes, collectibles etc.) as an opposing trend to the economic crisis, the prevalence and consolidation of establishments based on social cooperation and charitable opportunities linked to the barter-based events, as well as the diffusion of the network as a means to display one's goods in the global shop window. These are all interesting examples showing a change in the way used goods are seen both in Italy and in the contemporary consumer societies.

It would be interesting to carry out a comparative analysis of the situation outside Italy, as in Anglo-Saxon and Northern European countries the concept of second-hand goods is more widely understood, although the official European statistics do not provide data that would allow us to compare the different countries in this sense as this research has been discontinued as of 2006. This may indicate that the market of used goods, in different terms, is numerically marginal in all European economies.

A comparative analysis across national markets of second-hand goods would be beneficial as it would enable us to examine all the different cultural and social features of consumers in relation to this phenomenon.

Therefore, it would be interesting to attempt to understand how the concept of second-hand goods has been analysed by social sciences - and in which national contexts - through an initial discussion of the literature dedicated to this phenomenon, in order to understand in which theoretical spheres the most structured research questions have emerged and in which societies the most obvious phenomena have manifested themselves. To this end, this analysis will be an initial annotated review of the main contributions to the phenomenon of used goods in a structured manner, with the idea of facilitating the reader and the researcher who wishes to dedicate their studies

to this topic. An initial guide to the subject, albeit not an exhaustive one, will also be offered.

2. Used goods and society: how to approach a marginal phenomenon in an inter-disciplinary manner

Browsing the different contributions from the social sciences that have studied the topic of used goods, in terms of consumption and exchange of goods, it is interesting to notice how the phenomenon has been studied in more than a cultural economic sense, and that the disciplines involved are geography - both economic and consumer geography (Gregson and Crewe, 2003) -, economics, with a focus on shadow economy (C. Williams, 1997, etc.), economic history (Stobart and Van Damme, 2010), marketing (Gujot and Roux, 2010), anthropology and studies on the culture of fashion and clothing (Palmer and Clark, 2005), and in Italy an ethnographic research study on the exchange of used clothes in street markets (Arnesano, 2010) has been accomplished. I will then offer a brief review on the work completed by the abovementioned authors whilst attempting to provide a personal position on the way the topic of used goods has been analysed. The selection of studies does not intend to be an exhaustive list of the material produced on the topic. The aim of this paper is to provide some guidelines for the study of the phenomenon that would highlight and emphasise possible future evolutions.

2.1 The economic-cultural aspect of the second-hand market: a preliminary discussion on the determiners

With an analysis of *Second-Hand Cultures* by the geographers and fashion experts Gregson and Crewe, published by Berg in 2003, I would like to offer a review of this work, since it can be considered one of the most important contributions to the topic of second-hand goods. The book is based on both empirically collected materials and theoretical considerations, and is the result of a four-year study which was divided into two biennial programmes funded by the ESRC (1994/5 and 1998/9). The two authors, together with a research group of cultural geographers, collected a wide range of data and material on the topic. Their aim was to study a then-emerging phenomenon in the UK: used goods. According to the two scholars, the exchange of used items had already been practised for a long time and in various forms. However, in the 90s new phenomena and new types of exchange emerged, which redefined the meaning of the concept. Their work is an articulated study which uses observational techniques and collection of data in both quantitative and

qualitative terms and it focuses on three different means of exchanging used goods: *car boot sales*, *retro shops* and *charity shops*. They are three different elements involving second-hand goods. The first one (*car boot sales*) is organised almost spontaneously by people and consists of selling goods “emerging” from the boot of a car in a carpark on the outskirts of a city or in the countryside, where thousands of people go hunting for bargains. The second one (*retro shops*) is about shops situated in areas subject to gentrification and which offer a mixture of second-hand and vintage items. They are also distinctive in the way in which the objects are selected, displayed and sought out. The third type is a philanthropic association/organisation, which resells used goods via a shop, called a ‘*charity shop*’. They are usually situated in city centres and in their high streets. The choice to examine these three types of exchange is due to the fact that they are new phenomena and they stand out from the consolidated methods of exchanging used goods. In addition, they turn the number of potential consumers into a higher number of actual consumers. Using in-depth interviews, participant observation, structured questionnaires, the collection of photos and informative material, the authors outline the geographical areas, query of used goods, which are the focal points of these exchanges. From the outskirts of cities to the high streets, as well as more “alternative” neighbourhoods, used goods and exchange activities shape the meaning of spaces and the practices of consumption. Moreover, information provided by the consumers of used goods defines which practices explain the course of used goods and the reasons behind reusing, seen both as a means to re-enter exchange circles and acquisition. Extensive interviews explain the ritual of ‘purification’ of goods, in particular clothes, and the strategies behind the choice of the brand, the style and the characteristics of the item. These observations enable us to reflect upon gender practices and the ability (or inability) to “run the household”, which means acquiring skills in selecting and buying new goods so that they can be reintroduced into the market or, alternatively, in choosing which used goods are worth buying. The book also deals with the joining of the second-hand market with other forms of exchange, such as gifts, commodities and the unique practice of collecting. Its broad methodological appendix proves to be very interesting, because it includes the methods used to collect information and, in particular, a brief description of the social characteristics of the subjects taken into consideration for the study. The emphasis on fun and discovery as reasons to buy used goods seems to link this practice to a type of exchange not based on economic considerations. Hence, choosing used goods represents a characteristic of the agency of the consumer who is attracted by the discovery element and by their uniqueness. On the other hand, it would be interesting to understand better the differences between those who buy for a need and those

who buy for other reasons. As the authors explained, their initial aim was to examine the agency capacity of the subjects regarding used goods. Their intention was to find out whether there were particular ethical reasons for a “detachment” from the world of new goods. However, as the study went on, their initial aim needed to be re-examined as they had to reconsider their interpretative method and admit that “*Rather than constituting an ‘alternative’ economy based on the exchange and consumption of used goods, we would argue that the expansion of the second-hand market and its proliferation in various sites in the UK through the 1990s has meant that second-hand has become more closely entwined with exchange and consumption in the first cycle*” (pp. 197-198). In this sense, the study offers a deep analysis of the practices and the cycle of the goods and the way in which these are treated and represented by consumers. However, the socio-demographic characteristics of the different worlds of used goods are not considered in this study. They could be an incentive to understand better the different dimensions of the worlds of used goods. At a later stage, the two authors, and in particular Nicky Gregson, decided to examine the life cycle of objects², focusing on the practices of *divestment*, seen as an activity that goes beyond the goods or the item itself and that sets the limits of what consumption goods are still worth keeping “alive”.

Colin C. Williams was the first to articulate an argument that criticises an excessive role of the agency in the second-hand market. He published several works at the end of the 90s and the beginning of 2000 about informal economy and the way it is socially structured. Within this research, he developed a series of articles about informal economy generated by the second-hand market. He also studied how it develops in urban spaces and rural areas and the kind of approach used by those who choose these informal means of acquiring objects. Williams offers a review of Gregson and Crewe’s main interpretation, providing data about the consumption of used goods and the different kinds of behaviour consumers belonging to different social classes exhibit when purchasing those goods. For these reasons, his work represents the strongest criticism of the commendable work of Gregson and Crewe: it underlines the strong social class implications established by the consumption of used goods. Williams proposes a critical review of the two main theses: the first one saying that the second-hand market is above all an exchange based on economic needs and the second one affirming that these exchange channels, which are an alternative to the market of new goods, are due to the need for amusement, sociality, distinction and discovery rather than

² Gregson N., Metcalfe A., & Crewe L., Moving things along: the conduits and practices of divestment in consumption, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 32, 2007, pp. 187-200.

to economic needs. Williams tries to suggest an explanation for the phenomenon that brings the two sides together, considering both the importance of social-economic restrictions of consumers and the activities deriving from the exchange of used goods. Hence, the aim of Williams' articles is to find a balance between the two theses, without denying either interpretation. His purpose is to affirm that looking for alternative forms of exchange may influence consumers to create a different kind of consumption, determined by factors that are not necessarily linked to their needs, and that used goods can turn into an essential channel for a wide part of the population living in poverty who can access the goods market only through the filter of previous buyers.

2.2 Used goods and modernity. How historical changes have influenced the exchange of goods

The two historians Jon Stotbart and Ilja Van Damme wrote an interesting work offering considerations from another point of view. They edited *Modernity and the Second-Hand Trade, European Consumption Cultures and Practices, 1700-1900*, published by Palgrave MacMillan in 2010. They collected a series of relevant contributions about the practices of second-hand exchange in pre-modern and modern European history. Their work of collecting and writing essays is based on three main aims. The first one tries to examine those who chose used goods in the past centuries throughout Europe; the second one tries to identify and describe the mechanisms through which the most common ways of exchanging used goods developed; the last one aims to outline the way used goods related to industrialisation and modernity. Their work manages to offer a historical interpretation of used goods, focusing on the specific period of passage from the pre-modern society to a fully modern society, i.e. from the XVII century to the XIX century, when an increase in regulations for the second-hand market was taking place, as this form of exchange was spreading more and more. This situation is in contrast with what we are experiencing now, as both Williams' essays and Gregson and Crewe's works underline. They affirm that the second-hand market is mostly informal and is not subject to regulations unlike the market of new goods. Aside from regulation issues, the second-hand market is interesting from a historical point of view, because of its role in developing the identities of those who will be known as citizen-consumers of the new millennium. Many current contributions reveal how used goods represent an exchange method that allows poorer groups of people to have access to "new" and valuable goods, which would not be affordable otherwise. A first general consideration

emerging from Williams' work says that used goods served as an exchange method which allowed individuals to get closer to new and unaffordable goods, promoting a first form of social mobility. This mobility was more linked to objects than professions and individuals' social classes. Although this last consideration may sound exaggerated, it aims to put the exchange of goods at the centre of the historical reflections, in particular of the crucial transition that took place in the name of the European modernity. The text may seem far removed from contemporary times, referring to an interpretation of used goods applicable to other moments in history, and this is partially true. However, the contributions of these works allow us to shift our focus to modernity, from the production to the circulation of items and manufactured goods, regarding the second-hand market as an exchange method that predicts and enlightens some fundamental characteristics of the era of novelty and modernity.

2.3 Marketing and reasons for purchase. The factors underlying the choice to buy used goods

The studies carried out so far were distinctive in their economic approach to the problem of used goods, which has been discussed in sub-disciplines such as economic geography, informal economy and economic history. Said sub-disciplines have also analysed the reasons behind consumption on different levels connecting them to the economic and social contexts of reference.

*A Second-hand Shoppers' Motivation Scale: Antecedents, Consequences and Implications for Retailers*³ by Denis Guiot and Dominique Roux provides a robust and articulated contribution to the analyses regarding the reasons for purchase of second-hand goods. The two authors also confirm that currently there is no structured literature on the topic, and that the research carried out thus far is still at an exploratory level swinging between the explanations that see the consumption of second-hand goods as an economic need and the studies that highlight the recreational side of this consumption (Williams and Widebank, 2000; Gregson and Crewe, 1997). The three objectives set by the authors with regards to used goods concern the following elements:

1. the need for completing consumption models focusing on new goods by adding the used goods element to the analyses, a topic that has not been discussed in depth in the current literature;

³ Journal of Retailing, Vol. 86, N. 4, 2010, pp. 355-371.

2. the peculiarity of used goods, seen as a type of consumption shaped by the places of consumption, which are different from those of new goods, and by the topics at the base of the exchange;
3. the desire to clarify the psychological reasons behind the purchase of used goods.

It is clear that this work does not include the exchange methods that are not necessarily linked to exchanges mediated by money. The first limitation of this work is the treatment of the topic of used goods as purchased items only, and this perspective does not include some of the most interesting phenomena related to used goods, i.e. those that combine the goods, gift and barter elements (Miller, 1998).

After an initial exploratory and qualitative study which includes 15 in-depth interviews and one focus group, a measurement range with the reasons for buying used goods was created, which was based on 224 interviews used to refine the underlying elements and which has been validated with a subsequent session of 484 interviews.

In this way, the researchers have isolated 8 dimensions that become part of a hierarchical model of motivations whose upper level is made of 3 interrelated macro motivations.

The deriving model lists three macro factors that lead the reasons for purchase: the *economic*, *critical* and *hedonistic* ones. The economic reasons certainly concern the price and the satisfaction gained from the advantages that second-hand goods offer; the critical reasons (against the market system) reflect a group of individuals who support the criticism towards the mass market and an *ethical* lifestyle that is more inclined towards a responsible and ecological consumption of goods; finally, the hedonistic reasons, which gather the most numerous factors, are based on the pleasure deriving from the discovery of unexpected goods, on the search for original products that are not standardised by manufacturing and distributional processes, on the social aspects connected to non-bureaucratised exchange systems and on the nostalgic search for the past.

The three macro dimensions listed above are interdependent as for instance price is mainly present in the economic dimension but it is also connected to the ethical and critical one. The same applies to one's desire to distance oneself from the market rationales, which are of critical but also economic nature. Equally, if we refer to the latter example, the novelty factor is mainly present in the recreational dimension but it also aims at detaching itself from the standardisation of mass-market goods and it also embodies a political drive.

Therefore, the study allows us to clarify and arrange in a structured and synoptic manner the main reasons for approaching the world of used goods;

however, it does not analyse the way in which the exchange practices relating to used goods are structured and the different social stratifications to which the different practices refer.

2.4 Fashion and second-hand goods: vintage as a feasible synthesis

The work of Alexandra Palmer and Hazel Clark, *Old Clothes, New Looks. Second Hand Fashion*⁴, examines the cultural and symbolic aspects of used goods and the contexts in which the second-hand culture has developed. The two authors have collected some essays focused on the topic of fashion and used goods, trying to reconstruct the contexts of meaning through affiliated subjects like fashion and design history, art history, anthropology, economics and sociology. They start with an analysis of the ways in which fashion has drawn inspiration from styles from previous decades in order to renew and reinvent aesthetic ideas. The main topic of their considerations is therefore the vintage culture, seen as the phenomenon of recovering out-of-production clothes and accessories, which were fashionable in a previous era. Vintage is thus the way in which the market of new goods, namely fashion, legitimates the entry of used goods into the productive and distributive channels of new goods. They start with a historical-anthropological approach, which tries to explain and interpret the life cycle of goods, as theorised by Appadurai and Kopytoff (1986), and they divide their contributions into three parts. The first one deals with history and outlines the experiences of used goods from the XVII century to the XX century. The main difference from the historical work of Stotbart and Van Damme is that the historical research on used goods stretches out to different geographical areas, without narrowing the period of analysis of the second-hand market and its practices to Europe before industrialisation. Hence, there are two contributions retracing the exchange of used goods in Japan, in particular the exchange of used kimonos, from the XVIII century to the XX century, and, in the same period, the purchase of used goods (cast-off) in Australia on its way to colonisation. The second part shows anthropological essays focusing on the ways used goods are interpreted and how they acquire different symbolic values in different areas of the world: Zambia, India, the Philippines and Hong Kong. These essays also show that there are practices of reusing and defining the borders and areas where used goods can circulate in places far from the European and North-American fashion system⁵. The rituals of dismissing items and their

⁴ Berg, Oxford, 2005.

⁵ The cultural anthropologist offered different kinds of approach from the European and the Northern American ones which interpret this form of exchange in a different way. We quote the work of Karen Tranberg Hansen, *Salanla. The World of*

purification (Douglas, 2003) play an important role, as they represent essential passages through which items, in particular clothes, are freed from their previous owners and acquire a “new” life ready to be worn. The third part is dedicated to the acquisition of used goods by some phenomena related to contemporary fashion, namely acts of item recovery such as vintage, retro or second-hand culture. The works stress how the discriminating factor defining what is vintage and, therefore, socially accepted and fashionable through the recovery of clothes from the past decades, is often mixed with what is considered used and therefore less worthy and subject to social disqualification. The recovery of nostalgia was seen as a leading way to define fashionable styles started in the 80s in New York and London and it influenced fashion in the following years. Fashion has never detached itself from the recovery of nostalgia as there is a constant tendency to re-elaborate the past. In this way, used goods exalt the noble practice of rediscovering historical objects. Palmer and Clark’s work helps to understand what Gregson and Crewe described through their research on the topic, examining in more depth the aspects related to vintage and recycling and the practice of making past fashion styles worthy again.

2.5 The second-hand market in Italy: a first anthropological study

Lastly, in this first digression of social studies about used goods, I would like to focus on Gabriele Arnesano’s work, *Seconda mano. Oggetti significati e relazioni nei mercatini di abiti usati* (Second-hand. Objects, meanings and relationships in second-hand clothes markets)⁶. It is an ethnographical work carried out with the intention of exploring the markets of second-hand clothes in the cities of Lecce and Berlin and it deals with the recovery of second-hand clothes and the ways in which relationships are built among the customers of those markets. Arnesano’s work places itself among ethnographical studies of contemporary consumption and it provides some considerations on the approach to second-hand clothes, understanding the main factors that influence the changes of consumption based on a responsible, ethical and critical level of the balance of power between manufacturer and consumer. In the first part, the author deals with some theoretical ideas perfectly harmonised with the second-hand market; an object re-interpretation through

Secondhand Clothing and Zambia, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000, in which the author deals with the second-hand phenomenon in Zambia (Salaula) in a deep and articulated way. She focuses on how the donation of clothes from the so-called first world is influencing culture, production and the social system in Zambia.

⁶ Salentobooks, Nardò, 2010

a change in the balance from production to consumer in terms of definition of the characteristics of things and the biography of the objects (Sennet, 2008). Used goods represent a moment of freedom for the consumer who is no longer tied to the material culture cycle (Secondulfo, 2012), leading consumers to a dimension where their agency is stronger and opening new considerations on the consumers' social responsibility, in particular concerning the world of fashion (Paltrinieri, 2012; Lunghi, 2007, Bovone and Mora, 2007). The second part examines more in depth the ethnographical path, which led him to study the second-hand market dynamics, starting from the origins of clothes. In the markets in Lecce, those clothes are sorted according to price, are piled up on stands and mainly (but not only) attract elderly women who turn into expert selectors of high quality clothes and accessories. In this context, it is clear that different dimensions are mixing up. Firstly, the relational dimension explains the consumers' pleasure in dealing with used objects, which are not selected and not laid out according to the new goods market rules. Consumers enjoy searching and finding a bargain, focusing on a specific material, on the manufacturing techniques, on the make or on the durability of the item. Arnesano reveals that, on the sides of mass and modern consumerism, spaces and relationships that are shaping an aware consumption are emerging, and the consumption is based on the experience and knowledge not only of the points of sale but also of the production process. These elements allow the creation of bonds and consolidated and recognisable roles, putting the second-hand market in contrast with the increasing depersonalisation of purchases and that of points of sale (Ritzer, 1997, 2000). It also plays a key role in creating sociality during the purchase and the consumption of goods, since these goods are bought according to the principles of durability and the re-introduction into the market, as an alternative to the disposable concept that is a feature of the market of new goods.

3. The second-hand market and object biographies. Some research hypotheses

The here-examined works and hypotheses are a range of ways through which it is possible to analyse the consumption of used goods with a sociological approach. The themes running through this kind of exchange of goods involve different disciplines, as emerged from this first bibliographical digression. The locations of second-hand markets are a symbolic codification of exchanges and relationships, and social differences are often the basis of the widening of a second-hand market, both from a historical and economical point of view. The reasons to purchase derive from a wide range of possible

explanations for buying used goods. An analysis of different contexts of the second-hand markets and their channels of legitimisation, in particular the vintage culture, allows us to associate used goods with a fashion phenomenon. In addition, the creation of relationships introduces an innovative way of interpreting purchasing methods.

The brief here-listed annotated bibliography allows us to underline some key points regarding used goods, which have not been examined in depth yet and to introduce some starting points for a possible research study. A first observation discusses how, in the majority of the examined works, the second-hand market is almost exclusively associated with the commodity form. On the other hand, we have established that the second-hand market also involves exchange forms similar to the donation of gifts and barter⁷, although these types of exchanges are not the most commonly used ones and the second-hand market often is parallel to the market of new goods and reproduces its forms. The chance of having different kinds of exchange is a key element in the second-hand market and this represents a strong point that would facilitate the survival of used goods as an exchange form. Is the exchange form influencing the relationships in the exchange of used goods? Is the second-hand market considered a form of exchange and consumption, which is more open to personal and emotional relationships? To answer these questions a comparison between the market of new and used goods and an understanding of how relationships between the related actors develop in the two different areas are needed.

A second element that has not been examined thoroughly enough and that has emerged from the above-mentioned anthropological works is the transnational factor. The second-hand market acquires different levels of importance and roles according to the cultural context where it is practised. However, there is no comparative study focusing on the reasons for these cultural differences and which are the ones that could help us understand the whole culture of consumption. One of the first issues to emerge is about the reasons why there is no systematic research examining the second-hand market in Italy and why second-hand studies are important in Northern European and Anglo-Saxon cultures. The first possible hypothesis that could be tested focuses on the idea that new forms of exchange developed in areas where consumers developed a more critical and disenchanted approach to

⁷ Marzella F., *Il consumo dell'usato in Veneto. Culture e pratiche di nuove modalità di scambio degli oggetti*, (suggested translation: *Second-hand market in Veneto. Customs and practices of new methods of exchanging goods*) Unpublished PhD thesis, Università di Verona, 2014.

mass consumerism. This is obviously just a hypothesis, but it is a strong concept emerging from a first analysis of the existing literature.

Deepening the understanding of the meaning of second-hand is another key point. The definition of such a form of exchange is not easy, because the exchange of objects, which maintain their intended use but go from one consumer or user to another, has a wide range of specific characteristics. Focusing on some item categories may be a first level of definition, entailing though a huge differentiation in terms of interpretation of the phenomenon. As seen above, many studies involve clothes and fashion in general, making the second-hand phenomenon a very interesting form of exchange with relevant social implications, but what happens if we take the used car market into consideration? And what about collectibles and valuable goods? Why has the second-hand market of baby clothes and accessories widened in the last few years? Does the specification of categories of goods entail the definition of micro-phenomena, which are all important and different from one another, making the second-hand phenomenon an excessively wide subject that cannot take the specific characteristics of the items into consideration? Although Gregson and Crewe wanted to deepen their knowledge of “rejection” practices, about the choice of which goods are not worth keeping, using and storing anymore, the item itself contains a piece of material culture that represents a very important factor when studying this kind of consumption. In this context, a possible study approach of the second-hand phenomenon is the material culture (Douglas, 1984), which allows us to consider goods as actors involved in the cycle of exchange and in the life of items (Secondulfo, 2012). Following this approach, the idea of studying relationships mediated by items could be a particularly productive path for a topic such as second-hand goods which, in being marginal, can reveal what is hiding in the world of new goods consumption.

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