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Abstract

The aim of this research is to show that though French public policy advocates sustainable development, it unwittingly deters non-institutionalized sustainable practices. To illustrate this paradox, this research focuses on bulky item collection and the urban gleaning to which it gives rise. A qualitative study shows that urban gleaning comes into conflict with the hygiene norm that pre-exists concerns about sustainability. To ease these tensions and authorize themselves to glean, gleaners draw on a repertoire of justifications around sustainability that condemns waste and attributes altruistic intentions to disposers. In turn, to put their items out on the sidewalk, disposers must negotiate tensions in relation both to the hygiene norm (not polluting public space) and to the sustainability norm (not throwing away items that could still be used by other people). To justify their act, disposers construct an image of gleaners, to whom they can “pass on” their possessions. This double process appears to create a new form of sustainable circulation through which objects are redistributed and which has important implications for macromarketing.

Keywords

depositing, waste, refuse, sustainable consumption, inorganic waste collection, macromarketing

Macromarketing Issues, Waste, and Recycling

One of the dozen challenges for macromarketing listed by Layton and Grossbart (2006) for the coming years is that of QOL (Quality Of Life) trade-offs among generations. The state in which we leave the planet to our successors has been central to macromarketing thinking over the past twenty years (Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Prothero 1997; McDonagh 1998; McDonagh, Dobscha, and Prothero 2011). As noted by these authors, environmental degradation calls for urgent political, economic and technological changes in relation to the problems we have created. Among them, the proliferation of waste is a key issue with regard to sustainable development (Fuller, Allen, and Glaser 1996). Since the publication of the Brundtland Report (United Nations 1987) and the Oslo Symposium (Ministry of Environment Norway 1994), awareness of the environmental crisis has grown considerably. Such awareness guides thinking about what should constitute sustainable marketing and consumption, that is, the use of goods and services that meet basic needs while minimizing the depletion of natural resources, the production of toxic materials and the generation of waste, and at the same time provide a better quality of life (Dolan 2002). The environmental impact and negative externalities of production must now be seriously taken into account if the goal is to avoid compromising future generations' access to natural resources (Fuller 1994; Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Prothero 1997; Mundt and Houston 2010; Shrivastava 1994).

With regard more specifically to waste management, de Coverly et al. (2008) have helped raise awareness that “systemic smoothing mechanisms” tend to conjure away the waste from our consumption and make it disappear. The authors show how waste containment equipment and systems (garbage cans, dumpsters, sewers), the organizations that collect and process waste, together with the social *habitus* that guides behavior, all tend to make us distance ourselves from waste both in our domestic environment and in our way of thinking about it. These variously social, technological and institutional conditions give rise to a kind of “double waste disposal paradox” in which “the better we do it, the less we realize that it is being done for us, and the less we realize it is being done for us, the more waste we generate” (Shultz, Witkowski, and Kilbourne 2008, p. 214). The ease with which households can hand over responsibility for the management and disposal of their waste to a public body encourages laxity and exonerates them from proper awareness of the amount they generate.

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However, the majority of studies (Chappells and Shove 1999; de Coverly et al. 2008; Knussen and Yule 2008) focus solely on household waste and garbage management, that is consumption residues thrown in the trash can. In France where the present study was conducted, the Environmental Code (Art. L541-1) defines waste as “any residue of a process of production, transformation or use, any substance, material, product, and more broadly any discarded good or abandoned furniture that an owner intends to discard.” But the concept of waste also includes bulky items that cannot be put into trash cans. Because of their size, bulky objects are taken care of through a dedicated procedure that is often less frequent than household garbage collection (Cox et al. 2010). It involves the “reverse channel networks” inventoried by Fuller, Allen and Glaser (1996), and in particular the “waste hauler public-recovery networks” that arrange their curbside collection. Commonly referred to as “bulky” or “outsize” items depending on their volume and weight, these objects constitute “rubbish” (Thompson 1979), that is worthless objects that people want to get rid of, downgraded items of no value so long as nothing occurs to modify their destined trajectory for destruction or recycling (Kopytoff 1986; Lucas 2002).

Though little studied, the question of bulky waste disposal and management is nevertheless of particular interest. On the one hand, in environmental terms, it involves products whose volume and heterogeneous composition make them expensive (compared to household garbage) to collect and recycle, thus requiring various reprocessing procedures for each specific category of components. On the other hand, bulky items are also durable and sometimes complete objects that can have a great potential for recovery, alternative reuse or re-appropriation by people, thus presenting distinctive environmental, economic and social opportunities. For educational purposes, municipalities thus specify what may be thrown out – bikes, carpets, toys, furniture, and mattresses – and what may not. Moreover, conscious of the effort needed to encourage people to improve sorting and recycling of waste, local councils make a point of explaining what they do with the items collected and what recycling technology they use. Hence, by highlighting the virtues of public recycling, municipalities in practice greatly facilitate disposal, alleviate people’s potential discomfort about waste, and discourage them from putting things back into circulation (de Coverly et al. 2008). Yet as these authors point out, other systems exist for getting rid of unwanted objects (Hanson 1981; Jacoby, Berning, and Dietvorst 1977), such as giving them away (Arsel and Dobscha 2011; Bajde 2012; Granzin and Olsen 1991; Guillard and Del Bucchia 2012; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000), selling them (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; Chu and Liao 2009; Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2009; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; Sherry 1990), sharing (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2009; Belk 2010; Ozanne and Ozanne 2011) or renting them (Botsman and Rogers 2010; Philip, Ballantine, and Ozanne 2012). The meaning that accompanies the act of throwing an object away has features not found in other forms of disposal such as passing objects on, giving them away or selling them. Unlike these

processes for which the relationships to others are central, depositing objects on the sidewalk does not involve a priori personal links or exchanges, but solely impersonal relationships with “public-hauler recovery networks” that provide the waste collection/recycling service (Fuller, Allen, and Glaser 1996). In addition, as the physical destruction of the object results in the disappearance of the desire previously embodied in it and the need for a renegotiation of the narrative of the self (Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe 2007), throwing objects away (in the trash can or as bulky waste) requires a process of “thing disidentification” (Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe 2007, p. 685) that entails both a “de-constitution” and a structural and symbolic “de-mattering” of the object (Lucas 2002).

In legal terms too, delegating the collection and management of “bulky items” to municipalities conventionally implies a separation of ownership, since putting things out on the street expresses people’s wish to get rid of them. French law calls such objects *derelictae res*, that is things voluntarily abandoned by their owners and subsequently entrusted to the public authorities for their disposal. These temporarily “masterless” goods cannot be considered as stolen, since they are no longer the property of their prior owners. They are therefore liable to be (re)appropriated by anyone who cares to retrieve them (Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier 2012).

Recently, various studies of gleaning – originally collecting the leftovers after the harvest in rural settings and what is thrown away nowadays in urban contexts – have shown that people pick up objects and food in bins, tubs or on sidewalks, highlighting new provisioning practices (Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier 2012; Cappellini 2009; Fernandez, Brittain, and Bennett 2011). These authors reveal the pragmatic and hedonic motives, as well as present-oriented perspectives, that induce some people to retrieve what is thrown out. These studies, however, reveal two gaps: while the motivations of “gleaners” represent the core focus of the research, what gleaners may feel in taking objects that are not in principle intended for them remains understudied. Inorganic collection often seems to be a taken-for-granted practice, despite the fact that without the owner’s permission gleaning may be illegal and prohibited in certain areas (Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier 2012). By laying down the rules for depositing these items on public highways, local French authorities also institutionalize their role as collector and leave unclear to what extent gleaning is or is not tolerated. On their websites, or through posters and leaflets, they specify the terms and conditions for putting out these objects in the public domain. Because retrieval by gleaners is neither inherently obvious nor conventionally accepted, it thus seems relevant to explore how people allow themselves to glean and overcome the socio-moral tensions associated with a somewhat questionable practice.

In addition, a second gap is that there has been little or no research on the point of view of disposers, that is how they account for their own practice and/or gleaners’ activities. In other words, in focusing only on the gleaners, previous studies have not shed light on how disposers experience the act of depositing in the public space objects that can be retrieved by

gleaners though they are intended for destruction or recycling by public services.

This study thus aims at exploring the practices of gleaners and disposers simultaneously. It focuses on the tensions both groups respectively negotiate around socially constructed norms about waste. As stressed by Lucas (2002), it is particularly relevant to get a better understanding of the practices that help clarify the relation *between people and their waste*. In this perspective, analyzing the relationships that are also forged *between individuals around refuse* is crucial (Dolan 2002), as is the role of social norms in shaping “normalized practices” in relation to waste (Cherrier and Gurrieri 2013; Varman and Costa 2008). Representations of what is deemed appropriate by people who glean and/or dispose of bulky items and those who refrain from doing so impinge upon major macromarketing issues in terms of public waste management (de Coverly et al. 2008; Fuller 1994; Varey 2010). As advocated by Varman and Costa (2008), cultural embeddedness implies that individual acts need to be analyzed within a broader macro-perspective involving normalizing discourses that frame representations and practices (Dolan 2002; Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Prothero 1997). Hence, understanding the social norms around waste first calls for a brief historical digression (Peterson 2006). The overview that follows emphasizes the cyclical nature of the discourse/practices couple and its periodic oscillation between stigmatization and valorization of waste. It brings to light a potentially conflicting set of rules between a prevalent hygienist norm inherited from anthropological issues around purity (Douglas 1966) that is reinforced by theories about hygiene since the 19th century (Vigarello 1988) and a renewed “imperative of sustainability” associated with growing threats to the environment.

Fluctuating Discourses and Practices Pertaining to Waste

Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero (1997) consider sustainable consumption to be a macromarketing challenge to the Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) and call on civil society to engage in a political and ethical debate around a “new environmental paradigm.” In their view, hyperconsumption driven by the DSP leads people increasingly to disconnect the goods they acquire from their real needs, with consumption becoming an end in itself. For example, ignorance of or simply indifference to the amount of natural resources contained in products and destroyed at the end of the consumption process appears to be on the increase (Dolan 2002; Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Prothero 1997). The DSP appears as the culmination of a journey in which human activities, technological possibilities and societal expectations are all intertwined. Conversely, recycling and waste management are social activities that prolong the usual production/consumption cycle (Cox et al. 2010) and which have continued to change over a series of oscillations between practices and discourses (de Coverly et al. 2008). The situation we have reached today is not sustainable, these authors argue, unless we turn to more viable options such as the reduction of consumption (de Coverly et al. 2008, p. 299).

Insufficiently rapid moves in this direction are giving rise to counter-balancing “green commodity discourses” that stigmatize hyperconsumption and its effects (Prothero, McDonagh, and Dobscha 2010).

Understanding how we have arrived at a non-sustainable situation entails taking a step back in time. Starting at the end of the 18th century, previously sustainable practices in the general population, such as recycling activities by various networks of scavengers, began to disappear in industrialized societies. In the name of modern hygiene for urban population management, they developed new methods and techniques to handle waste disposal that replaced a set of previous sustainable social activities. This shift to a more hands-on state role had the effect of eliminating rag pickers and, in general, nullifying the endeavors of the general population to sort and reuse waste.

Until the onset of industrialization, waste management was a natural social activity based on the reuse of organic and inorganic materials by the poor populations responsible for collecting them. For example, people who emptied cesspools took recovered sludge and excrement for reuse as fertilizer in the fields. Scavengers or ragmen were employed to separate, sort and resell inorganic materials and recycle them in the appropriate production processes. Waste was a source of value constantly reused.

The European “Refuse Revolution” that started in the late 18th century marked the rise of a hygienist norm, which morally equated order with cleanliness and disorder with dirt (Cooper 2008). Rooted in anthropological considerations, dirt involves a relation to order and disorder (Douglas 1966). It encompasses all that is “out of place” (Douglas 1966), that is what does not fit into an existing classification. Dirty objects and/or practices generate physical and symbolic pollution likely to threaten the social order. Classification of what is clean and what is dirty is contingent in terms of time and place, but gives rise in each society to norms and prohibitions. Thus at both a micro and macro-sociological level, the fight against pollution produces a set of codes or basic rules that provide the normative foundations of public order (Goffman 1963). From a historical standpoint these moral foundations are not only socio-anthropological, but also shaped by scientific and political transformations. Over past centuries, the management of the cleanliness of the body sought to reduce health risks, physical collective contagion and disorder in civil life (Vigarello 1988). The modernist hygienist view in particular, helped by growing industrialization and the advance of scientific knowledge about microbes, endeavored to discipline practices in relation to cleanliness. The introduction of the “trash can” in Paris in 1873 by the Prefect Poubelle (who gave his name to it) marked a breakthrough in urban waste management and sanitation. At the same time this measure affected the situation of the “dangerous and dirty” poor classes who constituted the scavenger populations (Faure 1977). As a result, this occupation simply died out. Once residents were required by decree to place refuse in “boxes” and put these out in the morning shortly before the arrival of the tipcart, the survival of scavengers was in question. Their numbers dwindled rapidly and they

were forced to migrate outside the city walls to continue plying their trade. Waste management, like other common household practices, therefore became subject to a series of public measures whose disciplinary intent was obvious. The mechanization of the collection of household waste and the “municipalization” of waste disposal by crushing or incineration (Cooper 2008; Scanlan 2004) were arrangements for the “clean” management of urban settings, but also grounds for confinement of those populations, which up until then were involved in recycling activities. While marking the decline of the earlier recovery activities, this hygienist turn nevertheless underwent a further shift during the 20th century.

The two world wars necessarily changed the relationship with waste, as well as the discourses concerning its utility. In those times of resource scarcity the value of sorting waste took precedence over its elimination by crushing or incineration. Wartime made people aware not only of how important it was to retrieve and sort, but also of the value of waste. This period thus temporarily transformed how waste was viewed, up to the point of condemning the economic incongruity of the “refuse revolution” and calling it into question (Cooper 2008).

Overall, the conception of waste is closely linked to political and socio-cultural contexts in terms of space and time. Relocating the “history of trash” within a sociological context, Strasser (2000) emphasizes that recycling habits were undermined in the 20th century by the rise in the supply of new products, emerging ways of purchasing, and new advertising techniques based on the exploitation of an idea of freedom, cleanliness and hygiene conveyed by individualized packaged consumer goods. From the pre-industrial era to the development of mechanization, and then from the two world wars to the consumer society, various discourses and practices and their social, economic and technological underpinnings have framed people’s representations. Waste proliferation is today viewed as one of the consequences of hyperconsumption (Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Prothero 1997). Consumers purchase, signal their social status, and seek to create a social identity (Baudrillard 1998; Lucas 2002), practices that result in the emergence of a throwaway society (Cooper 2005). In turn, the throwaway society affects social practices: whereas people once kept, gave away, or altered what was no longer useful, the general tendency at all levels of society is now to throw things away. Such objects are the victims of planned obsolescence (Packard 1960) or the cycle of fashion (Baudrillard 1998). However, Gregson, Metcalfe, and Crewe (2007) show that waste-generating practices may be understood in a more balanced way that accounts for the social relationships in which these activities are embedded.

Since 1971 and the first studies on waste disposal (Shultz, Witkowski, and Kilbourne 2008) and the Brundtland Report (United Nations 1987), a new type of discourse has envisioned waste as a major societal and environmental concern. To reduce the magnitude of the environmental crisis, the social norm has been changing and rapidly turning toward promoting recycling, stimulating the reuse of materials, highlighting the importance of reducing waste at its source (Assadourian 2010; Connolly and

Prothero 2008; Kilbourne and McDonagh 1996; Lucas 2002) and, for the more radical proponents of degrowth, calling for a reduction in the volume of consumption (Cherrier 2010; Georgescu-Roegen 1975, 1993). However, as shown by the preceding historical overview, discourses periodically fluctuate between valorization and stigmatization of waste (Lucas 2002; Peterson 2006). When discourses overlap as they do at present, with the hygienist norm coexisting with the recently reassessed “imperative of sustainability,” they give rise to potential conflicts and tensions for people.

Since 2008, French consumers too have seen the rise of environmentally responsible discourses, with the economic crisis as a background. This double crisis – of the planet and of purchasing power – is encouraging the search for intelligent supply solutions and is generating more cautious behavior regarding money, as well as inciting interest in second-hand purchasing, exchange and recovery. Moreover, the proliferation of barter, donation and collaborative consumption websites similarly testifies to these societal changes, through which exchanging, acquiring and sharing other people’s goods is no longer taboo (Belk 2010; Botsman and Rogers 2010; Ozanne and Ozanne 2011).

In this “context of the context” of the changing relationship to products and consumption (Askegaard and Linnet 2011), the way in which people throw out or retrieve bulky objects acquires new meanings. Following Dolan (2002), an opportunity exists to analyze individual practices as macro processes *at work*, expressing and reflecting ambient discourses by means of actions, as well as some people’s negotiation and reinterpretation of these discourses.

Context and Method

As in many countries, France faces an ecological crisis that its public institutions have acknowledged, thus heightening general awareness of environmental issues. On the political level, the ecological discourse gradually took shape during the last forty years, first (during the 1970s and 1980s) by ensuring widespread waste collection in France and the adoption of the “polluter pays” principle; second (during the 1980s to 2000s) by weighing up the overall impact of waste processing on the environment and by developing new waste valorization supply chains; and third, since 2007, by engaging in a set of long-term decisions for sustainable development, the conservation of biodiversity, and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Communication campaigns conducted by ADEME, the public body responsible for supporting environmental initiatives, has taken as its main theme the proliferation of waste and the urgent need to reduce it. Public policies have alleviated people’s concerns about waste by developing various systems of curbside collection that take in charge household garbage as well as bulky items that cannot be put into trash cans.

Depositing bulky objects on the sidewalk is framed in time and space. Municipalities usually require disposers to take items out the previous evening after 8 p.m. and place them in front of their residence or in specially designated areas, while

Table 1. Informants' Profiles.

Gender	Name	Age	Occupation	Marital Status	Disposer	Gleaner
F	Amandine	22	Art student	Cohabiting, no children	Yes	Yes
F	Sabine	24	Consultant	Cohabiting, no children	No	No
F	Héloïse	28	Student	Unmarried	Yes	No
F	Hélène	30	Unemployed (commercial assistant)	Cohabiting, no children	Yes	No
F	Géraldine	30	Unemployed	Divorced, 2 children	No	Yes
F	Gosia	34	Commercial assistant	Cohabiting, no children	Yes	Yes
F	Bérangère	41	Teacher	Married, 3 children	Yes	Yes
F	Léa	45	Government officer	Married, 2 children	Yes	Yes
F	Anne	50	Researcher	Married, no children	Yes	Yes
F	Muriel	50	Primary school teacher	Married, 2 children	Yes	Yes
F	Patricia	54	Secretary	Married, 3 children	No	Yes
F	Bernadette	59	Retired	Married, 3 children	No	No
M	Eddy	23	Temporary gardener	Cohabiting, no children	Yes	Yes
M	Axel	30	Webmaster	Cohabiting, no children	Yes	No
M	Paul	34	Illustrator	Married, 1 child	Yes	No
M	Vincent	38	Client service manager	Divorced, 2 children	Yes	Yes
M	Philippe	42	IT manager	Married, 2 children	Yes	No
M	Alain	49	Mechanic	Unmarried	No	No
M	Joël	61	Painter	Married, no children	Yes	Yes
M	Laurent	75	Retired	Married, 3 children	Yes	No

taking care not to obstruct the sidewalk. For multi-household dwellings, a specific area for placing the objects, usually near or in the garbage room, may be designated. Non-compliance with the regulations on the procedure to follow and the type of objects permitted is, in theory, a criminal offence. The regulations also specify that bulky items for collection must be less than two cubic meters in volume, safe to handle by the municipal agents, and belong to a specified list of categories. This list excludes, for example, electrical or electronic waste, which has to be taken to the municipal dump, as well as other polluting substances, such as paint, oil, and automobile parts. The institutional framework provided by the municipal authorities makes the collection of unwanted bulky items into a public service.

To understand the reasons why gleaners authorize themselves to collect objects intended for municipal collection, and how, symmetrically, disposers view their own as well as gleaners' practices, we first analyzed how the collection of bulky items is organized in France. Source materials for analysis were obtained from a number of municipal websites (including the city of Paris), municipal information brochures, telephone interviews, and email exchanges with officials of an intercommunal association for waste management covering a large southeastern area of the Paris region, allowed us to familiarize ourselves with their discourse on bulky item management. In terms of large inorganic item collection schemes, most municipalities adopt one of the different systems depicted by Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier (2012), such as drop-off services, on-call pickup, and free weekly or limited pickup at specified dates.

We then carried out "long interviews" (McCracken 1988) with 20 gleaners and/or disposers living in and around Paris (12 women, 8 men, aged between 22 and 75). They were recruited from the researchers' acquaintances using a "snowballing technique," that is by providing them with details of

people whose behavior allowed the profiles and practices to be contrasted (see Table 1).

The interviews took place at the gleaner's/disposer's home or at the university. They lasted on average an hour and a half (ranging from 45 minutes to 2 hours 15 minutes) and were fully transcribed for analysis. Each interview began with "grand-tour" questions (McCracken 1988), asking informants if they ever disposed of and/or retrieved objects on the sidewalks. The terms "gleaner" and "disposer" were chosen to designate the informants, depending on how they answered the above questions, irrespective of the frequency or intensity of their practices. The first intention was to designate the informants in a convenient and concise way, although it was clear that the interviewees would also clarify how they viewed themselves.

From the final sample, it appears that informants exhibit the expected range of practices in terms of gleaning and depositing bulky items (depositing and gleaning simultaneously, exclusively, or not at all). It emerged that gleaners are often also disposers (9 out of 20), even though the younger and less affluent among them tend to have few items they want or are able to discard. Conversely, people who deposit items are not always gleaners (6, in this case). Finally, three people in our sample were not keen on either throwing out or retrieving such items, thus enabling us to fully understand what prevents them from doing so and providing interesting evidence of the role norms play in relation to consumption and waste (Cherrier and Gurrieri 2013).

Although we sought to maximize the contrast between profiles, we did not select people who practice "business-oriented gleaning," that is those who boost their income from regularly engaging in this activity. Only one informant (Eddy) had occasionally sold some products that he had retrieved and repaired. This decision was motivated by the goal of the research, which

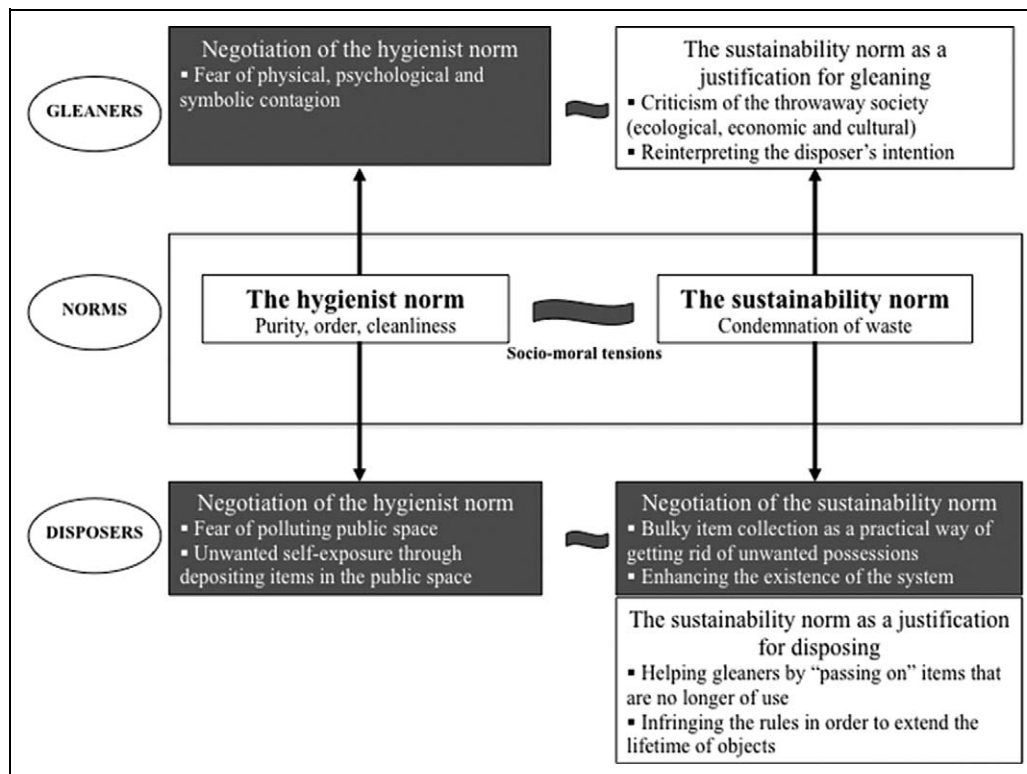


Figure 1. Negotiations of norms and justifications of their practices by gleaners and disposers.

focuses on ordinary people and their practices of depositing and/or gleaning, not on professionals whose motives are in principle more explicitly economic.

During the interviews, informants were asked to describe their practices. For gleaners, did they operate by preference at night or during the day? What did they feel when scavenging, especially when other people were looking at them? For disposers, what objects did they remember depositing and how? When depositing objects, did they notice or care whether potential gleaners might retrieve their former possessions? The length of time informants had been engaged in these practices, the link with educational level and family behavior, and the life trajectories that had led the informants to adopt them were also explored. They were strongly encouraged to recall real-life situations and the emotions accompanying them. The interviews also addressed other behaviors such as selling and/or giving away unwanted items, so as to put them into perspective with the previous behaviors when they were mentioned.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, producing a corpus of 170 single-spaced pages. Open and axial coding guided the thematic analysis carried out between the researchers. This analysis helped bring out the various themes and sub-themes that were encapsulated in the data, thus leading to an emerging framework of disposers' and gleaners' rationales, tensions, and negotiations (Patton 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1990).

The findings show that both gleaners and disposers are caught in a double system of norms – the “hygienist norm” and the “sustainability norm” – that are in tension with each other (see Figure 1). We first reveal how gleaners overcome tensions

associated with the hygienist norm and turn to the sustainability norm as a justification for gleaning. We then explore disposers' justifications for throwing things away, and their tensions with the hygienist norm and the “sustainability norm.” Our contribution is to show that both gleaners' and disposers' practices help create a de facto sustainable system for the circulation of objects that requires a negotiation of conflicting systems of norms.

Gleaners' Tensions and Negotiations of the Hygienist Norm

In contrast to what has been previously shown about gleaning, retrieving objects from the sidewalk is far from straightforward, firstly because in some places it is illegal, and secondly because it is not a socially commonplace and/or valued practice per se (Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier 2012; Fernandez, Brittain, and Bennett 2011; Lucas 2002). Furthermore, although ‘freegan’ dumpster divers seem to be engaging in a form of political protest (Barnard 2011; Edwards and Mercer 2007), not all regular gleaners are necessarily pursuing a similar agenda. In particular, our analysis reveals that most informants have to deal to some extent with the tensions associated with contagion and the prevailing “hygienist norm.” Such discomfort is firstly rooted in the fear of physical and symbolic contagion of one's self. Prescriptions around hygiene tend to limit physical contact with waste and even more so with the possible contagion arising from touching objects coming from a “dirty” place, in this case the sidewalk (Douglas 1966). Both the law of contagion and the law of



Figure 2. The sidewalk as a “dirty” place.

similarity account for the fear of being contaminated by and equated with waste (Frazer 1927; Mauss 1972; Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2008). Secondly, tensions also arise from the fear of contaminating others by taking their possessions, since gleaning represents an encroachment on the disposer’s territory. We illustrate these various tensions through the narratives of our gleaners and show how they overcome this form of psychological discomfort.

Sympathetic Magic at Work on the Sidewalk: Experiencing and Overcoming Physical and Symbolic Contagion

An intermediate area between the street and the home, the sidewalk is a place usually connoted as dirty (Douglas 1966). Activities occur there – drug dealing, prostitution, begging – that are liable to contaminate the individual and threaten public order. Prior to the 19th century, sidewalks were also used for dumping household refuse. Progress in planning and public health brought this practice to an end, but the sidewalk is still a place of transit of waste between the home and its removal by the municipal collection services. It is therefore a place of contamination, where the laws of sympathetic magic operate: the law of contagion and the law of similarity (See Figure 2).

The law of contagion states that “once in contact, always in contact” (Mauss 1972; Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2008) and assumes that everything found on the sidewalk is physically contaminating. This fear of contamination explains why nine

of our informants do not glean. Thus, for H el ene, who deposits but never retrieves objects for bulky item collection:

“... the sidewalk isn’t clean, it’s public. There’s everything there.” (H el ene)

Because of the law of contagion is reinforced by the hygienist norm, urban gleaning necessarily becomes a problematic practice even for those who engage in it. It transgresses the standards of hygiene and cleanliness as understood by Douglas (1966) – order and purity – and potentially threatens their physical integrity.

However, not all gleaners express their fear of contagion with the same intensity. Family *habitus* appears to play a significant role in reducing it. Amandine, for example, whose parents are gleaners, said she has been retrieving objects “ever since I could stand, since I was a little kid.” The practice has been incorporated into her upbringing to the point where she seems to have completely overcome any transgressions of the hygienist norm:

“There are also the smells, the smell of dust. It might seem dirty, but for me, it’s super exciting.” (Amandine)

Vincent has been recovering items for many years, though he does not come from a family of gleaners. He says:

“When I was a kid, it seems that I wanted to become garbage man. (Laughs). But seriously, I come from a background where we learned the value of things.” (Vincent)

Very concerned about ecology and recycling, Vincent gleans, repairs, reuses or gives away the things he finds and is dismissive of questions around hygiene. He says:

“There are people who are scared about the lack of hygiene associated with products that have belonged to other people. They are afraid of dirt on the other.”

Researcher: And that doesn’t worry you?

Vincent: “It makes me laugh.”

Apart from familiarity with gleaning acquired early in life, the discourses also reveal varying degrees of discomfort depending on the product. Patricia, for example, does not perceive the objects she collects – wooden wine crates that serve as shelves for her books – as dirty.

Researcher: You don’t think they’re dirty?

Patricia: “No, because if something’s really disgusting, I won’t take it... [The objects] can be very dusty, but that’s not necessarily dirty. Dirty is greasy or sticky.”

When L ea was asked about items she does not take from the sidewalk, she said:

L ea: “If it appears to be useful, I take it.”

Researcher: Even clothes?

L ea: “Yes, especially clothes!”

Researcher: You're not worried about hygiene?
Léa: "No problem with that! I wash them and that's all!"

Clothing was often mentioned, and for some informants presents a particularly high risk of contagion. Gosia, for example, indicates:

"I deposit clothes, but I don't take them", "because it bothers me wearing things that belonged to people I don't know." (Gosia)

As they are experienced as an extension of the body of another, unknown person, secondhand items of clothing are viewed as highly contaminating (Belk 1988). While Gosia will wear clothes donated by her aunt, she rejects the idea of taking clothing she might find on the street. The same goes for Anne who, on the other hand, feels no discomfort about retrieving most objects:

"... because you can wash place mats, for example, you put them in bleach." (Anne)

But she excludes things in intimate contact with the body, such as "mattresses, because of hygiene" and sofas, "because they are often disgusting." For these objects, cleansing rituals (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; McCracken 1986) or "purification impulses" (Sennett 1970) do not enable her to overcome the fear of contamination (Argo, Dahl, and Morales 2006).

To resolve the tensions related to the fear of physical contagion, that is to say, a transgression of the hygienist norm, gleaners distinguish the things that may be taken from those that may not, such as clothing or other items in direct contact with the body. Resolving these tensions also usually involves decontamination and purification rituals, by washing the items gleaned (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; McCracken 1986). Finally, during the retrieval process, informants also carefully examine the state of objects concerned. In the following extract, Amandine describes how she negotiates the issue of hygiene by weighing up her interest in the object against the effort needed to make it usable:

"For example, with undergarments such as panties, I see whether they've been worn a lot, in which case I won't take them. But a new set of lingerie I'll take. Once again there are exceptions and I won't linger on things related to hygiene, but it depends... For example, I won't take a hairbrush either, because it's difficult to wash, it's been hanging around in the street and that's not so great. But I'm not a girl who's disgusted just because something's been left in the street. For example, something that's really wet because it's been raining, I'll take it if I like it." (Amandine)

The fear of physical contagion is not the only issue gleaners have to overcome. They also must face symbolic contagion that derives from the fear of being assimilated to waste through their practice. The law of similarity (Frazer 1927; Mauss 1972), based on the idea that things which resemble each other are of the same nature, leads some informants to fear that collecting waste symbolically confers waste status on themselves.

Gleaning is viewed as a degrading practice in that it involves collecting residues, that is everything that people no longer want: the rotten, broken, the unloved, the ugly (Varda 2000). Such residues, with which poor people usually have to make do, are a marker of social deprivation. Even though the context of sustainable development is changing these representations, emphasizing in particular the structuring character of accommodating, which remains in the family setting (Cappellini 2009), the collective common-sense representation of the gleaner is of someone who is poor (Deutsch 2006). Therefore, anyone who gleanes runs the risk of feeling socially disadvantaged and consequently ashamed, as described by Gosia:

"If I feel I'm being looked at... the primary uncontrolled feeling would be shame. It's a value judgment, because in western capitalist society, one's self-image is often important. It depends on how much one has on his bank account... You can't know what people are thinking. And afterwards, what they say. I'm careful about my reputation, but it would bother me. I'd still get this feeling." (Gosia)

The fear of being associated with waste, and appearing poor, is all the more perceptible when people feel themselves to be in a financially vulnerable position, such as Géraldine:

"I've been picking up discarded objects for nearly three years. I recall the first time as if it was yesterday. I felt very ashamed, it was difficult for me to glean. I tend to do it in the evening, because I'm ashamed of it. I still can't accept my current situation, I have a lot of trouble with it. So I do it as discreetly as possible, hiding myself. I am alone when I do this." (Géraldine)

On the other hand, when gleaning is part of someone's family history, and viewed as normal, this type of fear no longer occurs in the discourse. On the contrary, for Eddy:

"One does not hide." (Eddy)

When Eddy was asked if he felt as if he was being observed, watched or judged when gleaning, he answered:

"No. No, I do not have that feeling. Well, let's say first that I do not care about how they look at me, because I'm young... I look different. And therefore, the guy can stare at me if he wants to. In the end, he has thrown something that I take and make use of. And regarding his reaction, it makes me laugh more than anything else."

In short, feelings of shame fluctuate according to the situation. In the following extract, Bérangère expresses her concern about being seen while taking two chairs:

"The last time was on New Year's Eve. On 1 January, at 5 in the morning, I was with a friend and I saw two chairs, Robert Pantone, very well-known designer furniture, white as ghosts, next to each other. I started running down the street at 5 a.m. and took them. Obviously, maybe there was a hidden camera, I looked around to see if I was being watched, by whoever left these chairs at 5 in the morning." (Bérangère)



Figure 3. Gleaning on the other's territory.

If the circumstances – nighttime, New Year's, and a public street – accentuated her fears of other people's opinion, Bérangère managed to overcome them because of the exceptional nature of the items – designer chairs. Later in the interview, she also said:

“No problem if they were really good. Thing is, for my pals, I'm the reference point for decoration, I'm known for it. So they say, if she takes it, it's because it's good, and so I won't be ashamed.” (Bérangère)

In other words, in her own terms, Bérangère “doesn't do garbage,” since she perceives values and a “second-hand market aspect” in what she retrieves. This desire for distinction (Bourdieu 1984) means, conversely, that the fact of being interested in ordinary items that she could buy in a store heightens her shame as the following extract shows:

“The other day my husband saw some new books in a trash can, immaculate, not even opened. My husband loves books, he looked around to see if there were any hidden cameras, and he plunged his hand into the trash can – because it only had a small opening – and he looked . . . The shame! Right in the middle of Vincennes . . . We could have bought them. You put your hand in a trashcan; you don't know what you'll pull out. I don't like taking books from trashcans, it would bother me, hygiene-wise, but him, he'd do it. The trash can was a long way from where we live.”

Researcher: Shame?

Bérangère: “Rummaging in a trash can, yes. What's more, I said to him, ‘If they're in the trash, they're not interesting.’ He hasn't read them but . . . if they'd been the slightest bit dirty, I'd have said no.”

Contagion thus operates on two levels: physical and symbolic. Since the sidewalk is a contaminating place and the

hygienist norm has accustomed people to keeping refuse at a distance (de Coverly et al. 2008), gleaning creates tensions that some informants have to negotiate. Our findings show that purification rituals and classification systems – of situations, of objects and their value – are often necessary to overcome these tensions. But the hygienist norm also directly affects the proliferation of disposable goods. Indeed, as Strasser (2000) points out, ideas of freedom and cleanliness led to the development in the 20th century of individually wrapped goods. Yet this individualization brings with it a further tension that may be seen in gleaning practices: everyone in general has their own things, and a person's possessions help define their territory. Gleaning thus risks encroaching upon other people's territory, by taking their erstwhile possessions, which although thrown out, still constitute an extension of the self (Belk 1988). It is to this tension of a psychological nature that we now turn.

Gleaning as an Encroachment on Other's Territory: Negotiating the Disposer's Implicit or Explicit Agreement to the Retrieval of his/her Possessions

Gleaning involves taking objects in the territory of the other and infringing on conventions inherited from the hygienist norm (see Figure 3). The codes that govern life in society are intended not only to allow the movement of people in public space, but also to mark their territory (Goffman 1963). A marker is a sign indicating that an owner is defining his/her territory. Its function is to separate. “Boundary markers” fall into the category of devices separating two adjacent territories – as for example the front gate separating the house from the sidewalk. Despite these markers, territories are liable to be invaded. Our data show that gleaners may bring about territorial encroachments and transgressions, whether deliberately or not.



Figure 4. Amandine retrieving a clock without knowing the disposer's former relation to the Object.

A first type of territorial transgression involves taking items without having been explicitly invited to do so, as Patricia explains:

“There’s an element of theft, since it’s locally, physically in a public place, so you feel like you’re pinching something, even if someone has left it to be thrown out, the location, the proximity . . . it’s public, and you never know whether it’s been forgotten, there’s a doubt, there’s nothing saying ‘help yourself’, ‘if it’s of use, take it’, ‘I’m giving it away’ . . . you allow yourself to take something and you haven’t been invited to do so.” (Patricia)

Alain, who is not a gleaner and says he does not have “the temperament to retrieve things.” also wonders about the risk of depriving, not just an individual, but the public authority itself:

“On the sidewalk, someone’s giving something to the municipality, but it’s not up to me to take that item. It’s not intended for me. I suppose I could say, ‘Is it meant for recycling? Do I take something in the chain, for the materials?’” (Alain)

Unlike the context explored by Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier (2012), the sidewalk presents greater ambiguity than dumpsters, which one knows have owners who must give their consent for gleaners to legally access them.

A second type of territorial transgression involves not only encroaching on the physical space and taking an item from where it has been placed (the sidewalk being conceived as a possible extension of the home), but also negotiating being seen by the disposer, whose gaze constitutes an extension of the “territory of the self” (Goffman 1963). In fact, there comes into play not only the anonymous gaze of people passing social judgment on the practice of gleaning, but also that of a particular individual – the disposer – who may perhaps feel deprived of the item by the gleaner. This possibility is illustrated by Amandine in her encounter with a female disposer:

“She was a young woman . . . She gave me a hard stare, and apparently the clothes belonged to a guy, there was lots of men’s stuff. And at the time, it bothered me because I got the impression of not being welcome.”

Researcher: Did you speak to her?

Amandine: “No, because in fact all happened too quickly. I looked at her and said hello, but she turned away in the opposite direction.”

The need for negotiation, explanation and consideration when confronted with the disposer in the course of a practice that is not really coded led some informants, such as Amandine, to talk about how difficult it is for them to glean and the devices they use to reconcile their desire to take things with their discomfort regarding the disposer.

Researcher: And did you carry on?

Amandine: “Yes, I carried on, but it broke the mood, rather. Afterwards, it’s true that if I take someone’s item and they look at me, I’ll put it back. But if I really want it I’ll come back later if I really feel the other person is bothered.”

Objects carry and extend the self of their possessor (Belk 1988). Consequently, as Amandine says, gleaning an object without knowing the intention of the disposer may therefore lead to the invasion of his/her privacy:

“Well, the problem with the bulky item system is that there’s an enormous ambiguity. One doesn’t know if one has the same view of things. I do it, hoping that it’s valid in both directions. And it bothers me to violate this privacy if people work on the principle that their objects are part of their privacy, and that if you take them, it can be disturbing for them. In which case, it can bother me too.” (Amandine)

Gleaners can thus unwittingly violate the privacy of a disposer, by not knowing his/her relation to the object (see Figure 4). In this instance it is not their own self that gleaners fear will be contaminated, but the self of the disposer, part of which they steal by taking his/her previous possessions (Belk 1988).

In conclusion, the discourses of our informants show that gleaning is not a practice that is socially unambiguous. It comes into conflict with the hygienist norm and contagion issues related to the recovery of other people’s objects. Becoming involved with and continuing this practice requires the elaboration of specific justifications to overcome these tensions and allows gleaners to take items deposited on the sidewalk. Our research findings provide evidence of two justificatory regimes that shed light on informants’ replacement of the hygienist norm by the sustainability norm: condemnation of the throwaway society and the proliferation of waste and reinterpreting the disposer’s behavior as altruistic and oriented toward sustainability.

Turning to the Sustainability Norm as a Justification for Gleaning

The justificatory regime mobilized by gleaners is that of sustainable development, of which our data illustrates two facets.



Figure 5. Possibly reusable items deposited on the sidewalk.

The first shows that gleaners condemn all forms of environmental, economic, and cultural waste characteristic of the hyperconsumption and throwaway society (Prothero and Fitchett 2000). The second is based on a social reinterpretation of disposers' activity: rather than throwing their items away, they are seen to be "passing them on" and "sharing a common vision" of a sustainable consumption system (see Figure 5).

Condemning the throwaway society and the proliferation of waste. Governmental organizations are making great efforts to change people's beliefs and values within a perspective of limiting the waste of resources. One of the discourses is concerned with how to envisage consumption, not as a linear process that goes from production to the destruction of goods as in the dominant social paradigm (Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Prothero 1997), but within a logic of facilitating the circulation of products from one person to another (de Coverly et al. 2008; Prothero, McDonagh, and Dobscha 2010). In recent years, consumers have been more inclined to lend or share their possessions instead of buying them (Belk 2010; Botsman and Rogers 2010) and thinking about products' end-of-life has been changing (Mannetti, Pierro, and Livi 2004; Thøgersen and Ölander 2006). The discourses of our informants echo these developments through a series of criticisms with regard to three types of waste: waste of resources (environmental criticism), waste of money (economic criticism), and waste of the heritage of everyday objects (cultural criticism).

The first type of criticism, of an environmental nature, basically concerns the consumption system and its incentives to consume and/or replace products in disregard of a necessary reduction in consumption (de Coverly et al. 2008, p. 299). Conversely, the sidewalk emblemizes a new "sustainable" opportunity to acquire products while preserving resources, as Eddy suggests:

"For example, people have a TV. OK, so the aerial lead doesn't work so good, because like their cat eats it, or their dog. So, they

won't touch it. Me, I put on a luster terminal, the TV works, end of story. There are people, don't have this worry. So they go take the thing, it's brand new and they put it outside. And they want nothing to do with it. They say, 'Duh, I dunno how to fix it. I got a bank card, that's easier.' So they're not ecological. And in this sense, there are people who do bad things. So collecting the things, that's ecological. Because a TV is hard to recycle." (Eddy)

While such criticism is primarily of consumer society, it also includes, as Vincent makes clear with a certain degree of severity, consumers viewed as passive victims who are complicit with the system (Kozinets and Handelman 2004):

"It's crazy what people throw away. There are periods, like the end of the school vacations, when you get the impression they've thrown half their house into the trash. Which they'll completely replace. I think that's idiotic... It so obvious we're heading for disaster if we carry on consuming in any way whatsoever, to sustain this waste production process." (Vincent)

For Vincent, gleaning is an intelligent response to the kind of wasteful behavior that the consumer society induces among people. Hence, by overwhelmingly delegating to the market what previous generations used to do for themselves, consumers have now become extraordinarily wasteful.

Vincent: "My microwave oven. I found it on a sidewalk in Paris."

Researcher: It still works? Why do you think it was thrown out?

Vincent: "They must have thrown it out because it was too complicated to get it to work. But it was brand new."

Researcher: But it must be unusual, right, to find things thrown out that are in perfect working order?

Vincent: "No, it was the same for a vacuum cleaner I've just found. They'd clogged up the filter. It was full of mud. They must have sucked up water and dust at the same time, but once it was cleaned, it was perfect."

By retrieving and repairing discarded but re-usable objects, Vincent, like the eco-feminists described by Dobscha and Ozanne (2001), seeks to compensate for a development he deplores, whereby people throw products away rather than extend their lifetime.

Far from supposing that the phenomenon is limited to the affluent classes, Léa points out that even economically vulnerable populations engage in wasteful behavior. The fact that people in financially difficult circumstances replace products rather than prolonging their life seems absurd to her:

"What's more, at the time, I noticed that the poorer people are, the more they throw things out and buy frivolous stuff, the latest model, the latest fashion item. It's like in the building where my daughter's nanny lives. There was a woman who had six children and no husband. One day, she threw out her stroller. She was pregnant with her last child, too! We said to her: 'Why are you throwing it out? You'll need it.' She said: 'There's a screw missing. It's broken, I don't keep it any longer!' We were staggered, my husband and me. And because we'd just had our second child, we took it and it served us well." (Léa)



Figure 6. The sidewalk as “a great self-service store”.

The second type of criticism, of an economic nature, concerns financial wastage. For gleaners, retrieving objects has a twofold virtue – environmental and economic – and as such, conserving resources at a collective level and saving money at an individual level follows the same logic of sustainability, as illustrated by Amandine:

“It’s an ecological gesture, that’s for sure. But ultimately it’s a gesture, a financial thing, that’s for sure too, and it also gives me pleasure being smart like that . . . If they can afford to give away a new TV, frankly, that’s fine by me!” (Amandine)

Saving natural and financial resources, as Léa similarly stresses, requires detaching oneself from the priorities suggested by the market, and in particular giving more importance to the use value of products than to the sign value, from which they endeavor to take advantage:

“We retrieve everything. If people chuck stuff out, we take it . . . Why pay big bucks when the thing is the same? It’s done for a reason. Whether it’s new or some designer brand, we don’t give a damn.” (Léa)

By providing everyday objects that have been abandoned by their previous owner, the sidewalk becomes, for gleaners, an alternative to conventional supply systems (see Figure 6). Amandine puts it succinctly:

“It’s like the street is a great self-service store.” (Amandine)

Joël expresses a third, cultural type of criticism – the wanton destruction of the heritage of everyday objects. This informant, who is a painter, said that he gleanes to preserve the history of the objects that fashion sweeps away. An object is not inert; it incorporates the social (Appadurai 1988) and has a cultural biography (Arnould 2007; Kopytoff 1986). As such, it is a receptacle that crystallizes a set of relationships and memories (Belk, 1988), a personal or family history (Arnould and

Wallendorf 1994; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000), know-how, techniques (Leroi-Gourhan 1945), and materials – in short, a culture (Kopytoff 1986). Through gleaning, Joël makes connections with history and with stories. The fetishism of objects (in the sense that the object is endowed with a life, a power of relationship) leads him to condemn their relegation to industrial objects without memory:

“I feel that people throw things out easily, because they are objects without value, lots of things that are not very expensive that one tires of quickly. But people who are not aware can get rid of extremely interesting things. They throw them out because they’re old. I recall that my mother, at a time when things were changing in country life, when we began to be fed up with living in shared rooms, with beaten earth floors, and damp, she got rid of an authentic Louis XIII wardrobe. She wouldn’t discuss it; she wanted Formica; she wanted a table that could be easily cleaned and not be greasy. So lots of beautiful things were thrown out. They wanted clean, straightforward things. I saw everything disappear.” (Joël)

In short, although gleaning is a practice that is in conflict with the hygienist norm, some people nevertheless engage in it. To allow themselves to do so, they embrace a critique of the market system in the name of the sustainability norm. They mobilize different justificatory regimes – environmental, economic, and cultural. However, the value of some of their “finds” also leads them to reinterpret the meaning that disposers may give to the act of placing objects on the sidewalk on bulky item collection days. This interpretation shifts from criticism towards viewing the disposer’s act as altruistic and motivated by considerations of sustainability.

Reinterpreting the Disposer’s Behavior as Altruistic and Motivated by Sustainability

The preceding results have illustrated various forms of misunderstanding with regard to what is thrown out, highlighting the absurdity and lack of sustainability inherent in the waste produced by the different aspects of consumption. However, the reasoning gleaners engage in to make sense of disposers’ actions sometimes results, during the course of their experience, in a reinterpretation of such actions as more altruistic and oriented toward sustainability. Due to the tensions in relation to the hygienist norm, gleaners first need to make sure they have the right to take the objects placed on the sidewalk. They then look for indicators (or signs of relationship, Goffman 1963) that allow them to believe that it is “right to take” the objects.

The first set of indicators that gleaners draw on is the location of objects. For example, depositing a small item next to the trashcan (and not in it) seems to suggest that the disposer did not want it to completely disappear, at least from the viewpoint of a potential gleaner, as Anne explains:

“If she (the neighbor) did not put the shoes in the trashcan, it was because she wanted them to be retrieved by someone.” (Anne)

Indeed culturally, the trashcan is a container for collecting waste. Things placed in the trashcan allow no other interpretation than that they have been deliberately thrown away (Lucas 2002). Thus if objects are left next to the trashcan, gleaners interpret the disposer's intention as not wanting to hide or destroy them. Trashcans, moreover, result in things getting mixed together and, in Douglas's (1966) sense, become contaminated. Being placed next to the trashcan therefore reduces the associated fear of pollution, as Patricia explained in the following extract:

"It is a closed-off area, no, well, it's a corner intended for this. It is not dirty because it's a place meant for this."

Researcher: How would you define something dirty?

Patricia: "It's a place where things aren't all mixed up together, I mean it's a tidy place, where there's no food waste, it's not all crushed, a place where things aren't all mixed up, where they're not or broken or covered in grease."

A second set of indicators interpreted by gleaners concerns the careful presentation of objects. Some items are carefully packed to protect them and prevent them being vandalized or damaged by rain. Gleaners say that they have found toys, teddies, and clothing (sometimes neatly folded) placed in transparent bags so that people see their condition. In addition, some piles are carefully arranged so that the items are identifiable and easier to remove. And sometimes the items have notes attached inviting people to take them (e.g. "take me," "I work," "help yourself," "this is for you," "this is a gift").

A third set of indicators lies in the qualities of the object itself – its condition, interest or value – which Fernandez, Brittain, and Bennett (2011) have shown play a part in the sense of serendipity around gleaning. Finding objects that are unexpected due to their qualities leads to a profound questioning by gleaners of disposers' motives, as evidenced by Eddy in this extract:

"My father found a belt with two little pistols in it, just like that, and they're real guns that fire. Except there were no bullets inside. And he found it among the bulky collection stuff. But it's unusual to find that sort of thing there. I don't understand why the guy threw it out..." (Eddy)

Interestingly, in the attempts he makes to give meaning to such behavior that seems difficult to link to the sustainability norm, one possibility repeatedly arises: that the disposer wishes to "pass on" these items to other people rather than throw them away. As Eddy suggests:

"When my father found this belt with the little pistols in it, yes, it's a gift. Because the guy obviously said, 'Someone will find it.'" (Eddy)

This excerpt clearly highlights the fact that the value of the object acts as an indication of the altruistic rather than purely utilitarian intention attributed to the disposer.

The final set of indicators concerns, in an even more explicit way, the encounter with the disposer. When he/she exhibits an open and understanding attitude, this permanently removes any residual doubt on the part of the gleaner and authorizes him/her to take the object freely and without shame, as Amandine shows in the following example:

"Actually, I'm quite happy when I meet someone, I say hello and they respond and they're pretty happy to see someone. This happened to me three houses further on, the girl was putting stuff out, I said 'hi' to her and she replied in a very nice way, and she went on putting out stuff, but she didn't say anything else to me." (Amandine)

Even though it is unusual, meeting the disposer institutionalizes gleaning as a gift system, as if it were a gift to a relative. The encounter authorizes the transmission of the object and removes any ambiguity around the disposer's intention. The bulky item collection system thus gives rise de facto to a new channel for the circulation of objects between strangers. As a result, feeling that one is receiving a gift allows tensions to be overcome and strengthens the sense of sustainability of a system, in which, as Amandine phrases it:

"People give away what they no longer need, or isn't worth selling, or things that aren't sellable, or even just don't want to be bothered with selling them." (Amandine)

However, understanding the different forms that the relationship between gleaners and disposers can take requires that we explore, symmetrically, three points: first, how disposers account for their act of depositing their possessions for bulky object collection; second, how they handle possible tensions in relation to the hygienist norm; and third, how they overcome tensions experienced in relation to the sustainability norm, by using gleaners as an argument to justify their actions.

Exploring Disposers' Justifications for Throwing Things Away

Understanding disposers' point of view is one of the objectives and one of the contributions of this research. The analysis of our informants' discourses shows how consumer society has contributed to the distancing of our domestic interiors from transient objects transformed into rubbish (de Coverly et al. 2008; Thompson 1979) and the uncontentious nature of its system of disposal since the Refuse Revolution (Cooper 2008). The findings illustrate that bulky item collection provides a practical way of getting rid of unwanted possessions, thus giving people ways of salving their conscience.

Putting things on the sidewalk: a simple and practical way of getting rid of unwanted possessions. Public waste collection systems have largely relieved individuals of the complicated business of waste disposal (de Coverly et al. 2008). Paul, for example, acknowledges getting rid of his possession once he no longer

feels a need for them. Putting them on the sidewalk is a simple and practical solution:

“I put things out on the sidewalk because I need more space in a room, or because I no longer need them or simply because I replace one item by another . . . I leave my things outside when I need to get rid of them.” (Paul)

Léa also says:

“I dispose of “cast-offs, things that bother me, that take up too much space, that are no longer useful or that are too ugly . . . especially when I need space and when I feel I need to clear things out. It’s a bit like a kind of major crisis. You accumulate, you accumulate and then one day, it’s overflowing. And then it’s got to go. You’ve got to get rid of it.” (Léa)

Throwing things out enables one to disburden oneself and free up space, materially and psychologically, as Bérangère points out:

“And then I’m happy because I love space, I empty closets, it makes me feel good, it takes the pressure off my closets.” (Bérangère)

However, as Bérangère and Léa both note, throwing things out fuels an endless cycle of consumption and disposal.

“Clearing out, re-buying: it’s a bit like what we’re all condemned to.” (Léa)

“I’ve chucked out all my dresses, I’ll be able to buy another. Cool! I’ve got nothing left to wear, I’ve got to go shopping.” (Bérangère)

Compared to other solutions such as selling items in a secondhand market or on the Internet, putting them out for bulky item collection is a practical, simple, quick and time-saving option (Chu and Liao 2009; Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2009; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005). Paul, for example, explains:

“I put them on the sidewalk because I don’t have time to sell them and even if I did have the time to do that I wouldn’t get much money. So I prefer to leave these things on the sidewalk, it allows me to get rid of them quickly and without any complications.” (Paul)

It is often time-consuming to find solutions for selling certain objects. It is also complicated to give them away, either because of shortage of time when moving or because of not knowing who to give things to, as Bérangère says:

“When you move . . . especially books on the bench opposite the apartment, scooters because they had three wheels and now the children have two-wheelers, I don’t really know who to give them to, it could be a real hassle to sell a scooter for 15 euros, it’s not worth it, so, there you go, the sidewalk.” (Bérangère)

Sometimes the feeling that the item is not even good enough to give away and still less to sell makes the sidewalk an obvious solution, as Patricia illustrates:

“If it’s broken, I’ll put it out for collection, and if it’s not broken, I’ll try and pass it on to somebody who may find it of use. Bulky item collection for me is when something’s broken and is of no further use.” (Patricia)

Enhancing the municipal bulky object collection system. If depositing things on the sidewalk is a solution that seems satisfactory to many of the informants, it is also because such solution is based on the feeling that the municipality is there to remove them. Hence, recognizing the value of the municipal authorities for the collection and management of bulky waste is a way for disposers to naturalize the system.

The frequency of bulky items collection shows that people are relatively dependent on the service provided. Indeed some informants, such as Laurent and Muriel, regret that the collection is not more frequent:

“In my opinion, I think that yes, that the municipalities ought to develop this practice more, because it’s essential” (Laurent).

“Of course! I think it would be preferable to schedule more days for bulky item collection. But then I’m not the mayor, so in this respect even if I send an email, I doubt it will make any difference” (Muriel).

In other words, since the system exists, the need also exists, and since the need exists, the system is justified. As Axel says:

“I understand the importance of the procedure, which is that municipalities organize the collection of bulky objects or they set up places for the disposal of objects so that people don’t throw out their unwanted stuff all over the place. These are effective and environmentally friendly processes. From time immemorial people have needed to get rid of some things and it seems to me that this meets that need.” (Axel)

Public collection systems thus facilitate the disposal of everyday objects. Furthermore, Axel views this system as sustainable, since local municipalities recycle the objects they collect. Nevertheless, the apparent benefits of such system, which is very practical as a first choice for people, obscure what de Coverly et al. (2008, p. 299) point out as a central problem of consumer society: “‘Reduce, Re-use, Recycle’ are essential but only partial solutions to the growing waste mountain, since they tackle the symptoms, not the cause.” Clearly, the management of waste does not reduce its volume, nor does it diminish the race to consume. In fact, by taking responsibility for the collection of bulky items, the public actor at the same time also naturalizes the idea that recycling systems are acceptable correctives to the waste produced by consumer society. As a result, some informants, such as Paul, do not experience any real difficulty throwing things away and consider that doing so is perfectly obvious:



Figure 7. Items carefully presented and arranged to be readily taken.

“When I need to get rid of things, I take them out and put them in front of where I live. In general, I take them out at night around 7 or 9 o’clock, or when I’ve finally got together all the stuff I want to get rid of. But I don’t hide. I’m not all discomfeted, far from it!” (Paul)

When Paul describes how he proceeds, he appears not to feel any embarrassment or guilt. Looking at how he came to view his action as natural, we see that his family background played a part, as his parents had already previously embraced the system set up by the local authorities. It is thus not one generation, but at least two, that are accustomed to consider throwing things away as unproblematic:

“Yes, actually it was something my parents did when I lived with them. So I’m used to this practice. I don’t know if it would have come naturally otherwise. I don’t know whether I’d have dared.” (Paul)

But this “dared” introduces an interesting element into Paul’s discourse. The term shows that throwing out things for bulky item collection is not necessarily a practice free of discomfort or tension. Analysis of our findings shows that disposers experience tensions related to the hygienist norm and/or the sustainability norm, the reasons for which we now examine.

Disposers’ Tensions Around the Hygienist Norm

Our results show that placing objects on the sidewalk creates tensions in relation to the hygienist norm because it can be experienced as a form of pollution of the public space. As a consequence, some informants purely refrain from putting things out while others express an almost obsessive compliance with the rules. Another tension also stems from feelings of impropriety when exposing objects that are a part of oneself to other people’s gaze.

The fear of polluting public space. Although the collection system was designed to handle large, non-hazardous items that people

wish to be rid of, some informants, such as Sabine, feel so constrained by the hygienist norm, that it is almost impossible for them to place objects on the sidewalk:

“It creates a blot on the landscape. I would be ashamed to leave something, because it’s too dirty.” (Sabine)

Other informants will do so, but with an uneasy feeling of polluting public space. They feel they are polluting or creating clutter and disorder (“out of place”, Douglas 1966):

“Because I feel that they are still my possession . . . they’re creating a mess, polluting. No, I was brought up like that. My mother used to go to the dump, never left things downstairs. There are some people who leave their trash lying around rather than keep it until the truck comes by. I was raised with the idea that in a community, unless everyone makes an effort, everything quickly goes crazy. That marked me. No, frankly I wasn’t very comfortable. I felt I was making a mess. I wasn’t at all at ease.” (Héloïse)

Similarly Patricia, who is aware of gleaning, feels that depositing things on the sidewalk “is very unsociable and is not a civic gesture.” She says:

“I would not do it because it’s not aesthetically pleasing, it would bother me.” (Patricia)

Consequently, the maintenance of public order and community life requires, as suggested by those who rarely or never deposit items, that people too scrupulously respect the rules issued by the municipalities, in terms of places, times and the items deposited.

With regard to places for depositing, Alain suggests that it is important to organize things so as to minimize physical and visual pollution (see Figure 7), especially in the areas of multi-family dwellings:

“In front of my apartment building, it’s okay, but outside other apartment buildings, anything goes. And there’s no definite place, if there was a small container, it would be tidy.” (Alain)

With regard to time, the municipalities set the dates and time for putting out items. In Amandine’s view, this can create constraints when it involves matching the need to put something out with collection schedule:

“It requires quite a lot of organization, because it means storing things in the meantime, and not forgetting when the truck is due, so you have to be prepared for its arrival and not forget.” (Amandine)

With regard to the objects, a certain discipline is required to make sure that dangerous items are not put out. Thus Axel says:

“I wouldn’t put out my old case of knives, which are too old but can still cut, or things like that”, and Philippe, “I’ve told you I would never leave electronic objects in the street, for the safety of passers-by. Anything that has a screen can be dangerous.” (Axel)

Issues of hazardousness are a central argument even for those who, like Bernadette, never deposit things on the sidewalk and prefer to take them directly to refuse sites:

“At official refuse sites, they’re expected to deal with items like that. If I leave them on the sidewalk, the first person who comes will take a shot at it and break the screen, so the products will scatter, it’s dangerous, I’d take it [to the refuse site].” (Bernadette)

Ironically, local authorities establish a simple, practical waste collection system, but exclude certain categories. In fact, although the municipalities specify what may or may not be put out, our informants emphasize the difficulty they have in distinguishing objects accepted by the collection services from those that are excluded. This uncertainty stems from the fact that everything that is waste, that is of no further use, is immediately viewed as the responsibility of the bulky item collection system, whereas this is not necessarily the case, as Alain explains:

“You also see paint cans, and that’s the problem, because everything that’s waste becomes a bulky item. When someone’s doing up their apartment, this is the problem, it is not very nice, and you find just about anything, sometimes the paint cans are upside down, the sidewalk is filthy . . . It all gets picked by the bulky item truck and taken to the dump. Originally, it was for bulky items only and it’s quickly become a dumping ground.” (Alain)

Ultimately, the bulky item collection system seems to have failed to create effective sorting reflexes among the informants. It provides a convenient way of getting rid of specific objects that the municipalities take care of (bulky items only), but at the same time people’s de-cluttering needs lead them to throw away other things, such as clothing or pollutants, that are not suitable for these public recovery networks. But another tension also emerges from the disposer’s fear of exposing his/her self through the objects he/she deposits on the sidewalk.

Unwanted self-exposure through depositing items in the public space. Some informants feel they reveal part of themselves and suffer a loss of privacy through the objects they place on the sidewalk. This staging of the self (Goffman 1963) does indeed reveal the disposer’s personality, through what he/she was once interested (Belk 1988), the way he/she used these items, and what he/she is capable of throwing out. This risk leads, for example, to use different tricks to avoid self-exposure and avoid being noticed:

“I’ve noticed, where my parents live, there’s a junction with another street, and people often place things there because it’s neutral place . . . there’s the biggest pile because it’s not in front of the door of a building, in fact it’s at an angle, there’s a trashcan, and sometimes there’s a large pile, maybe because they think they won’t be identified as to which building it comes from and it’s near the trashcan.” (Héloïse)

Thus she refers to “neutral places” for depositing things. Placing them outside the usual or prescribed area enables disposers to remain anonymous and to avoid the tensions linked to the possible gaze of the other. Gleaners, whom they are aware of or have seen, also contribute to alleviate these tensions, since disposers feel they are passing on their items and prolonging their existence.

Disposers’ Tensions Regarding the Sustainability Norm: How Gleaners Help them Cope with Non-Sustainable Behavior

While the hygienist norm requires finding ways of alleviating the fear of contaminating public space, it frequently coexists with other tensions related to the sustainability norm. Indeed, conscious of throwing out objects that are not necessarily broken and could be reused, the informants feel they are contravening the prevailing discourses. For example, new social movements such as freeganism, in parallel with official discourses, actively aim to raise public awareness of waste. As Barnard (2011, p. 430) shows, dumpster divers use the “redistribution of waste” as “an excuse to introduce unfamiliar people to the wider message of freeganism.” The message of this new social movement is to educate by example – by getting passersby to share leftover food – as to the non-sustainability of contemporary society. They help to show that throwing things away, by not circulating what could benefit others, is not sustainable behavior. Food and other resources are in fact doubly wasted, both in the production of these goods and in their non-consumption.

Since sustainable practices have very much become the norm in post-consumption decision-making (de Coverly et al. 1998; Lacznik and Kennedy 2011), many disposer discourses highlight their desire to “pass on” items that are no longer of use to them. Gosia, for example, say:

“I’ve already started with clothes, because that’s what has struck me the most. I had a bag filled -with clothing, inside it there were shoes, a handbag and other wearable items and as I don’t like wasting things, I think that for the environment it’s bad. I had stuff that could be of use to other people, so I did my best to find an appropriate place. I looked for appropriate containers, there were containers everywhere for glass, paper, but not for clothing, and I had these things and didn’t know what to do with them. So, as a result, I deposited them in the street, in a bag, so that it was clearly visible, clothes that could be used, and I thought, ‘maybe someone will take them’.” (Gosia)

In fact, many informants spontaneously mention the fact that by depositing their things on the sidewalk, they have the implicit goal of “passing them on” to other people. Paul, for example, indicates:

“I deposit all sorts of objects, that is to say everything I no longer need, and I put them on the sidewalk because I don’t want to throw them away. I think that they may always be of use to someone who needs them.” (Paul)

By looking for charitable motives for their action, disposers mitigate the possible guilt they might have in throwing things away and, like Laurent, find a certain satisfaction in leaving items that could still be of use:

“For me, when I leave something in the street, it’s necessarily a gift for people who need it. So, for me, all the things I deposit on the sidewalk have a specific utility . . . I put them out straightforwardly, there’s no point hiding. I’m not ashamed of what I do. I’m rather proud of it.” (Laurent)

Even Héloïse, whose concern about leaving her items in public areas we have mentioned above, acknowledges in certain cases a desire to pass them on:

“I had some salad bowls, very cumbersome things, so I had to decide, and well, I didn’t know what to do with them. My mother said, ‘Put them out on the sidewalk.’ At the time, there was a squat,¹ and so, ‘Put them out’, she said, ‘there’ll be someone they’ll be useful for and who’ll be pleased to have them’.” (Héloïse)

Additionally, our results show that disposers are aware of gleaners, which alleviates their worries about depositing objects in a public area. Informants say they are aware of such practices especially because of the fact that objects disappear before the collection truck arrives:

“I couldn’t tell you why, but I know this is a very common practice in the neighborhood” (Philippe)

“It’s like the Bermuda Triangle, the next day, before they come by, half the stuff was gone” (Hélène)

Or, like Eddy, they are themselves gleaners:

“I know there are people who’ll retrieve them.”

Léa also happened to have exchanged a few words with a gleaner:

“One day I saw a man with his two children. They were staring at a pair of children’s plastic roller skates that belonged to my daughter and I had thrown out . . . I almost had to tell him to take them. And I even returned to the garage to get a pair of kneepads to go with them. He looked almost ashamed. The kids were thrilled. I found that touching.” (Léa)

In fact, unlike those who are reluctant to deposit things, several informants do not hesitate to infringe the rules as to the objects that are permissible and when to deposit them, and justify their doing so in terms of altruism. Thus Paul explains:

“I leave furniture I have no further use for, which is worn or isn’t worth much. But I also put out various items such as CDs, VHS cassettes, rugs, lamps. Well, lots of things I have no further use for and aren’t worth much. I leave objects of various categories; I’ve never really thought about it . . . I do it when I need to. I don’t worry about whether or not it’s the bulky item collection day. It

honestly doesn’t bother me to put things outside at ‘forbidden times.’ For me, it’s also a gift, since somebody will retrieve it. When I no longer have a use for an item which is in the way, and I put it in the street, I consider that I’m offering to anyone who sees it.” (Paul)

In this regard, Philippe openly criticizes the Paris collection system in that having to make appointments for things to be collected prevents gleaners from being able to retrieve them. He complains:

“I live in the 14th arrondissement in Paris. You have to contact the Paris garbage department, either on the Internet or by phone, to arrange for things to be collected and they’ll come and pick them up around 6 a.m. However, I’m against this system because the things collected by the municipalities are destroyed. Personally I aim to help other people by leaving things in the street. I don’t think they should be destroyed, and that’s why I’ve never called the bulky item collection service in my neighborhood.” (Philippe)

Ultimately, the intersecting discourses of disposers and gleaners show that a system for circulating items is established in the spatial and temporal interstices of the municipal bulky item collection service. As summarized by Eddy:

“There’s an exchange, I don’t know of what, I don’t know how to describe it, but yes, there’s an exchange. You know the object will endure. There are chances for it. Otherwise, the truck will come by and it will be taken. And hey, in the end, you wanted to get rid of it, but you basically prefer that it’ll be reusable and will continue to survive.” (Eddy)

The system thus created offers a doubly sustainable mechanism, both for the items, whose lifetime is extended and their destruction delayed, and for the people, who thereby find, depending on their needs, an alternative and free provisioning system.

Discussion

Waste management in France is historically framed by the hygienist norm. In the 19th century this norm resulted in previously sustainable practices (through scavengers who collected waste for recycling) being replaced by more hygienic practices (with the establishment of municipal waste collection). This shift in practices occurred naturally” through the advances of science and technology, but also because sustainability was not on the political agenda at the time. In the late 20th century, however, the norm of sustainable development increasingly was imposed and today it permeates the collective conscience (Assadourian 2010; Prothero, McDonagh, and Dobscha 2010). Yet the coexistence of two normative systems – hygiene and sustainability – creates tensions for people, particularly for post-consumption disposal activities (de Coverly et al. 2008). This article shows that these two norms, hygiene and sustainability, are superimposed and may come into conflict, thus sometimes impeding the reuse of discarded items.

To illustrate this tension between the norms and its macro-marketing consequences, we have examined the practice of the urban gleaning of bulky objects (Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier 2012; Fernandez, Brittain, and Bennett 2011). This ancient practice is re-emerging in urban areas, in France and elsewhere in the world, as a result of various economic crises, but also because of the rise and especially the public visibility of new social movements in which people glean objects and/or food, with a view to inducing a change in mentality (Barnard 2011; Donovan 2012). In this context, we have sought to understand how, despite their disconnected character, the practices of gleaners and disposers *de facto* create a circulation of objects from the public, bulky item collection system. The study of this circulation of objects is clearly germane for macromarketing since it involves understanding mechanisms that help reduce waste, as well as the frame of mind that sustains them (Dolan 2002, 173). Yet up until now, only the motivations of gleaners have been studied (Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier 2012; Fernandez, Brittain, and Bennett 2011), which does not allow the exchanges as a whole to be comprehended. Furthermore, research to date has focused on the motivations for gleaning food or objects (Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier 2012; Fernandez, Brittain, and Bennett 2011), without placing this practice within the perspective of a structure, that is, the norms governing behavior in relation to waste. Indeed, cultural norms play a key role in such a context (Cherrier and Gurrieri 2013). We show that gleaning and depositing objects in an urban area is not a practice that “goes without saying.” It is important to understand the tensions between these practices and the norms in which they are embedded – the way in which gleaners and disposers justify what they do – since the outcomes can influence public policy (Cox et al. 2012).

Throughout this paper, we have examined the role of various social conventions, norms, and mechanisms that can deter sustainable practices. Indeed, to authorize themselves to take or to throw out objects on the sidewalk, gleaners and disposers need to transgress norms in relation to hygiene and the risk of contagion (Douglas 1966). Gleaning is, in many respects, an “out of place” practice. It involves operating in a dirty and physically contaminated place and by symbolic contagion (Mauss 1972; Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2008) it can lead to its practitioners being “treated as waste.” Gleaners are stigmatized since the collective unconscious associates them with poverty and theft (Deutsch 2006; Varda 2000). In sum, in gleaning, people run a physical (being contaminated) and social risk (being regarded as dirty, thieving or destitute).

Furthermore, for some people to glean, others have to authorize themselves to deposit things on the sidewalk. The attraction of gleaning stems from the variety of objects deposited, which are not necessarily limited to the categories specified by municipalities, namely, heavy and bulky objects. Yet putting things out on the sidewalk comes into conflict with the hygienist norm, since it produces disorder and mess. Disposing of items by placing them on the sidewalk also conflicts with the sustainable development norm, because people are supposed to find ways of extending product lifetimes, particularly by giving

them away. Municipalities promote donation on their websites and encourage people to give away objects that are no longer of use before considering depositing them for bulky items collection. Yet municipalities seem to ignore the fact that people also anonymously “pass on” their possessions to others by placing them on the sidewalk. Shedding light on this circulation phenomenon is thus the major contribution of this research. Since the prevailing norms make it difficult both to glean and deposit items on the sidewalk despite the virtue in doing so, we have attached great importance to revealing the tensions experienced by individuals around these practices and how they overcome them.

Our study has important implications for macromarketing at both a social and a societal level. Socially, the public collection of bulky items allows objects to be recirculated among people who do not know each other and whose potential social differences would inhibit any encounter. Yet in some places (such as Paris, where people have to phone up the collection service for the removal of bulky items, or other towns or cities where they have to take them to waste recycling points), municipalities tend to suppress this movement without necessarily getting the measure of it. Hence we have the following paradox: municipalities certainly promote the donation of items prior to their recycling, but in developing their collection policies they tend to suppress the circulation of goods created *de facto* by gleaners and disposers. Yet compared to other forms of exchange, this circulation is more flexible than giving something to a stranger directly, which engenders reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) and entails encroachment on the territory of the other (one needs to approach the person or speak to him/her). So compared to other systems, it removes some difficulties. Donation via the Internet, for example, is not well known and involves having a stranger coming to one’s home to take delivery of the donated item. Giving to charities in France is subject to exacting requirements in terms of the quality of goods accepted (Guillard and Del Bucchia 2012). In contrast, the circulation of goods explored in this article enables objects to be anonymously passed on to strangers, a system that no other institution currently offers. Knowledge of this system of exchange should be of interest to the public authorities.

At a societal level, the emergence of a system for circulating objects among anonymous individuals can reduce waste. Indeed, by providing a channel for their continued use, practices delay their transformation into waste. However, anonymous areas for exchange among strangers are scarce or nonexistent in France, even though they would prolong the use of objects at a given time. Thus on the basis of their micro-practices around the public bulky item collection service, people are developing, in an invisible manner, a system for the circulation of second-hand goods. Since the temporal and physical spaces concerned were not originally intended for the circulation of goods, people may have difficulty taking and/or depositing things. Here, we have extensively illustrated the tensions around people’s self-authorization to glean and/or deposit. By revealing how they overcome these tensions, our findings may

help to foster reflection on the part of the public authorities. In particular, we show that there is a need for free-of-charge areas so that second-hand objects can circulate anonymously among strangers. Such areas would enable these practices to be standardized and institutionalized, thereby making such exchanges more accessible.

Our results also make three theoretical contributions. First, we have adopted an original approach by putting a practice – gleaning – into perspective through a historical account of waste management in France (Peterson 2006). This point of departure revealed a conflict between the superimposed norms of hygiene and sustainability governing waste policy. Our analysis thus offers a fresh angle for thinking about public policy around waste management: how should the discourse of sustainable development be integrated into a system of norms that pre-existed it (see Prothero, McDonagh, and Dobscha 2010)? Various lines of research arise naturally from this historical overview and if pursued would deepen the understanding of other sustainable behaviors by analyzing the different ways in which individuals/consumers negotiate dual regulatory systems. Such topics might include food wastage arising from use-by dates and other labeling on packaging or the restriction of products to individual consumption that could be shared or mutualized (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2009; Belk 2010; Botsman and Rogers 2010; Ozanne and Ozanne 2011; Philip, Ballantine, and Ozanne 2012).

Secondly, our research makes new contributions to the understanding of urban gleaning (Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier 2012; Donovan 2012; Fernandez, Brittain, and Bennett 2011). Studies have hitherto focused on gleaners' motivations (Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier 2012), but not on relationships among individuals (Dolan 2012, p. 171). Adopting a joint approach to the discourses and practices of both gleaners and disposers, we show how objects circulate as a result of a bond among anonymous individuals created solely by the representation of the other and an interpretation of his/her practice. This enriches existing work on gleaners (Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier 2012; Fernandez, Brittain, and Bennett 2011) by supplementing it with the study of disposers.

Previous studies have looked at consumer revolts against companies as the embodiment of capitalism, waste, and manipulation (Holt 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Roux 2007; Thompson and Arsel 2004). In our study, rather than the profit-seeking capitalist enterprise, the other is the disposer who dares to deposit things in the street, the gleaner's alter ego who evolves in a situation of environmental and economic crisis. Our findings allow us to shed light on differences with regard to sustainable development that are not micro-psychological and on an individual scale (Leigh, Murphy, and Enis 1988), but differences in values, practices and understanding between people who evolve in the same environment. The findings also document gleaners' temporal horizons. Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier (2012) have shown that the temporal horizon of gleaners is the future (concern for coming generations) and the present (for example, pleasure in possessing an object). We show, through the cultural criticism of waste voiced by certain

informants like Joël, that history and a concern for collective memory can also lead to sustainable practices involving the preservation the cultural heritage embodied in objects.

Our third and final contribution is to reveal the regimes of justification that in some cases allow social norms to be transgressed. These regimes draw on the ecological, the economic, the social and the cultural. In sum, they enable us to better understand people's frame of mind with regard to sustainability.

Conclusion: Research Limitations and Opportunities

This research has contributed to the study of sustainability by revealing a mismatch between public policies and individual practices. The present study nevertheless has limitations. For example, the sample is exclusively urban. It would be interested to extend the research to rural gleaning. Moreover, the cultural setting is limited to France. Even though gleaning occurs in many countries (Donovan 2012), the tensions felt by gleaners and disposers depend on the hygiene norm as applied in a given context. This norm is contingent upon the society in question, the emphasis it places on hygiene, and the rules in force (Douglas 1966). The applicability of our findings beyond France remains an empirical question.

A third limitation is the focus on the circulation of objects among individuals at the expense of concern over what becomes of the gleaned objects. Further research should address how and for how long gleaners make use of the items they retrieve and what appropriation rituals occur in the context of anonymous circulation. Symmetrically, in relation to disposers it would be theoretically rewarding to explore how they detach themselves from the things they leave on the sidewalk. Do they always react positively when they see them being used/worn by a stranger or a neighbor? Addressing these questions would enrich knowledge of the relationship to the objects passed on and of people's relationships with their possessions (Lucas 2002).

A further limitation is inattention to "underprivileged communities," the very poor groups in the developed country where the research was conducted. All the informants have an income, albeit sometimes low – and some have experienced or are experiencing financial difficulties – but none of them are really poor. An extension of the research would explore how and to what extent underprivileged communities practice gleaning and what representations they have of disposers. The findings of such a study would add to our understanding of these practices.

To advance macromarketing policy (Shultz 2007), we need to know how municipalities should communicate with gleaners and disposers in the use of terminology, tools, and level of abstraction (Prothero, McDonagh, and Dobscha 2010). We also need to determine whether the sidewalk competes with charities insofar as people may dispose things they no longer want rather than to give them to charities. If this is the case, then what educational programs might public policymakers introduce in support of charities? Deeper understanding of gleaning and disposing practices will improve public policies and pave the way for sustainable development.

Note

1. Héloïse uses the term “squat” to refer to a place that is illegally occupied, for instance by anarchists or other people who express dissent against unfair political decision, injustice, and other issues.

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