The Vintagescape As Embodied and Practiced Space

Katherine Duffy, University of Strathclyde, UK
Paul Hewer, University of Strathclyde, UK

This paper explores the practices between consumers, spaces and objects in the enactment of the vintagescape. Unpacked through ethnographic methods over a two-year period at ‘pop-up’ vintage markets in Glasgow, UK, our findings reveal the vintagescape as an ensemble of practices orchestrated and oriented around notions of time and space.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1015049/volumes/v41/NA-41

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
The Vintagescape as Embodied and Practiced Space
Katherine Duffy, University of Strathclyde, UK
Paul Hewer, University of Strathclyde, UK

ABSTRACT

Vintage is not a new concept. Second-hand markets and the selling and trading of clothing, bric-a-brac and unwanted goods have been a constant presence throughout consumer history. Previous research around this concept has been explored in the CCT literature from flea markets (Belk et al., 1988; Sherry, 1990), to the notion of thrift shopping (Bardhi 2003; Bardhi and Arnould 2003), and alternative spaces of consumption (Belk et al. 1991; Roux and Korchia 2006; McGrath et al. 1993). For CCT researchers, markets are seen as social and cultural constructs, with the marketplace unpacked in terms of the collective efforts to sustain and perform such marketplaces (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Geiger et al. 2012). To contribute to such previous work we theorise the vintagescape as a form of cultural politics in action and movement. Considering vintage as a socially and culturally malleable frame, it is useful to theorise vintage and its associated practices in terms of their potential for movement, that is, enacted strategically by both buyers and sellers to bring forth a marketspace which fuses a mythical idealised past with a fast paced consumer present.

Theorising Vintage Practices and Performances

To suggest that vintage practices bring forth movement may strike the reader as a truism or too marginal a contribution for an advance in consumer research. However, such an approach takes us to the central theme of our paper, the contemporary character of what Bourdieu in Outline to a Theory of Practice (2010, orig. 1977: 7) refers to as the ‘dialectics of strategies’ whereby the urgencies of time must be included as a central constituent of everyday practices. Such a sense of time takes a number of forms but makes explicit the ways that practices are structured temporally. Notions of tempo and rhythm take us closer to this sense of being-in-the-world, where practices must be understood as unfolding within particular parcels of temporal invigoration. Such an assertion on the time-like qualities of everyday practices bring us closer to the notion of the vintagescape as an ensemble of practices orchestrated and oriented around notions of time. Our turn to movement makes explicit the routines and conventions, which are revealed by taking on, board this aspect of practices. We are not alone in this sensibility to contexts. For example, Nash (2000) calls attention to the notion that “dance is taught, scripted, performed and watched” and that performativity is not just a singular act, but also a repetition of assumed norms. It is through this constructed space that an understanding of vintage practices as a “structured movement system” (Kaeppler, 1985) begins to emerge; what Williams would prefer to visualise as a ‘structure of feeling’.

To theorise time as significant to the constitution of practices forces us to also consider the value of particular consumption spaces. For Warde (2005) and Appadurai (1986), the link between spaces, objects and practices is of central importance. In a similar fashion, De Certeau (1995) considers space as “an intersection of moving bodies” and of it being a practiced settlement. Hereby understanding of everyday practices is enriched through understanding consumers as moving entities in time and space, through which notions of fixed structures are questioned, and a more nuanced appreciation of agency begins to emerge, perhaps best thought of in terms of the ability to “negotiate movements within those structures” (McDonald 2004: 200). In focusing on this performative enactment of vintage, it can be seen to be a social entity grounded in the temporalities and spatialities of commodity journeys, with vintage as the outcome of this embodiment and consumer action (Gregson and Crewe, 2002).

Our final ingredient for an appreciation of everyday practices is that of objects and artefacts, how they are used in practice and “the intermediation work they perform” (Nicolini, 2013: 220). For as Nicolini makes explicit: “Practices only exist to the extent that they are enacted and re-enacted. Focusing on practices is thus taking the social and material doing (of something: [where] doing is never objectless.” (Ibid: 221). Unlike the ‘Diderot effect’ (McCracken 1988) in which a change in one object leads to multiple transformations with the whole set, Hui (2012) argues in her study of mobile practice networks that previously discarded things are reclaimed easily when mobilities change. Focusing on these moments of travel, consumption therefore can be suggested to occur during performances in relation to objects of practice that are used thus forming ‘symbiotic chains’ (Lury, 1997: 77). When consumption is understood as part of social practices the movement of the objects and how this movement shapes the moments of consumption, sensitivity to time and space become critical. As with all recipes other ingredients can be added, but ours is forged on the notion of considering practices within time and space, through a turn to objects.

METHOD

This paper draws insights from the context of the Glasgow, UK vintage marketplace. This ethnographic research explores the practices between consumers, spaces and objects in the enactment of the vintagescape. With a particular focus on the transient, ‘pop-up’ markets that unfold across the city, the findings reflect two years absorbed in the vintage scene. With the researcher performing as ‘bricoleur’ and taking inspiration from Schroeder’s (2004) ‘image economy’, the photographs allowed a focus on the modes of visual enactment of vintage. A researcher diary complemented and enhanced our appreciation of this context through sensitizing us to the reflexive aspects of the lived experience of meaning in motion in the marketplace. The researcher in this way gained access to the market through attending regularly and building relationships with key characters of the scene. Twenty-five ethnographic interviews (McCracken, 1988 b) were used to gain an emic perspective of vintage practices. The interview data supplemented the observational data and provided practitioner perspectives on the actions and practices of ‘performing vintage’ in the marketplace. Our findings are organized around two themes: The Vintage Marketspace in Action and Organization; and ‘Looks’ and the Performance of Inclusion.

The Vintage Marketspace in Action and Organization

The first motif we explore is that of marketspace as revealed through action and organization. The afternoon of the market can be seen as a continual shift between time, space and actors, with a changing rhythm and tempo that marks the passage of the day. This time-space dynamic nods to Giddens (1979: 3) in that the dichotomy is inscribed in all social interactions. To start with there is an air of urgency as vendors arrive. The most pressing demands at this time are the practices of setting up the table, unloading stock and securing the transport of such stock to the venue. Having moved such stuff, vendors busy themselves in dealing with the urgencies of time and their calculations over spatial display:
“Vendors arrive to be shown to a rectangular wooden table, a lamp and a chair. From these objects they have to create their own area that showcases their wares and establishes themselves as different from their close neighbours. The unpacking and setting up process seems to be crucial in the cultivation of a vintage look. The more seasoned vendors arrive early and with a careful system unpack daintily embroidered table clothes dressing the wooden table as they go, cake stands, hat boxes, weathered suitcases all revealed to store treasures and present them to the awaiting crowd.” (Fieldnote, February 12th 2012).

The setting up one’s table to best display stock is itself an art of practising, an exercise in staging and performance through objects. Vendors place objects to best display their items, sometimes constructing a front and back stage through the layering of the table to best attract the attention of mobile customers, and thereby encourage them to linger (see figure 1):

“You start to learn what makes your stall attractive, sometimes it is through trial and error or being inspired by seeing how someone has put their stall together. We try really hard to make it easy to see the stock but also to get across some of our personality, so it is never going to be too ‘done’ it will always be a bit like a dressing up box…” (Charlie)

For this seller, the table provides a ‘showcase’ but also creates an opportunity to present the consumer (and themselves) with a space for play and experimentation. With an almost child-like reverence of ‘the dressing up box’ the objects of the stall are used strategically to produce forms of invitation to explore and stage a personality for the interaction beyond the confines of what may be understood as mainstream selling. Building on Holt’s (1995) consumption as play typology, within the vintagescape play and the unveiling of difference are bound by the financial rewards to be gained by the seller for creating such an immersive space. This communicative staging in the ‘look’ of the table and ones’ self is rehearsed and refined by the seller in the course of their career in the marketspace through the practice of organising their stall and ‘prepping’ for the event. In the subtle and unspoken cycle of production and destruction, this active process is critical in creating acceptance in the market. This links to Entwistle’s (2000) work, as the staging of the space allows for the enactment of fashion capital in the marketscape (Bourdieu 1984, 1985). Vintage here should not be understood as an end result or fixed vantage point but as a continual and ongoing process of improvisation in which competences are developed through play and performance. The market offers a space for engaging with objects, a stage for play with the material and exploring the boundaries of the marketscape to trial more “episodic selves” (Stafford 2007).

Once the vintage sale commences an air of expectation and anticipation can be felt. To start with there is an air of urgency as vendors arrive and final preparations are made to ‘look’ and ‘feel’ of the organization of items. The market day itself is punctuated by moments of action and inaction:

“The day ebbs and flows as consumers enter and move through the space. Throughout the day this rhythm changes as the audience alters: inner members of the collective arrive early and eagerly anticipate rummaging for “treasures”, with the Sunday strollers of mid-afternoon creating a more relaxed and less exclusive scene, with newspapers tucked under arms and hushed tones of ‘don’t touch’ to children. The crescendo of the day falls mid-afternoon as the sounds of consumers’ chat hums in the air, the beats of the 1960s pop music

Figure 1
sets the tempo, with long conversations between stall holders and consumers ensuing in which the past is continually invoked as a reference point for understanding and interaction to hurried exchanges in which objects are inspected and paid for. As the end of the day approaches the pace slows, stallholders chat to one another about their ‘take’ for the afternoon and attentions turn to carefully packing and organising and the act of deconstructing the stall” (Fieldnote, 15th April 2012).

As a transient marketplace the ‘vintage look’ has to be created and staged on every occasion. Market routines and conventions produce a creative environment in which values of independence and othering from conventional market selling are emphasized:

“We are quite laid back about it, people want to tailor the space to their own needs and to highlight their own stuff that they are selling, it isn’t really something we dictate. I would say we are pretty flexible and are really here to oversee and help if anything comes up.” (Elena)

The material conditions and aesthetics along with the presentation of the objects, establish an atmosphere of something organic and without strict boundaries that is often contrasted with market norms. Elena’s quote encapsulates the idea that the physical environment of the market is haphazard and is a product of its temporal nature. By achieving ‘the look’ and through calculations over objects to bring and discuss, the market becomes a showcase for oneself. The construction of this market ‘look’ adds credibility to both seller and consumer and this co-creation has implications for the construction of value. This transformation was achieved through the management and organization of objects for producing a feeling of acceptance and belonging. The focus on stylisation of the space highlights the fluidity of value, that far from being fixed, it is constructed anew within the market space.

This notion of the staging of the marketplace has been developed in consumption literature around the language of Sherry’s “brandscape” (1998), Ger and Bellk’s (1996) “consumptionscape” and Arsel and Thompson’s (2004) “hegemonic brandscape”. These accounts explore the relationship between consumers and the environment but often underplay the active role of objects in such marketscapes. In applying a material culture focus to the vintagescape, the networks of materiality are instead highlighted (Arsel and Bean 2013; Borgerson 2005: Miller 2005) which allow us to unpack the particular aesthetics of the vintage scene, but also the modes of presentation, illumination and action made material through such a frame of interaction.

**Vintage Marketspace ‘Looks’ and the Performance of Inclusion**

The second motif we explore is that of ‘Vintage Marketspace ‘Looks’ and the Performance of Inclusion’. The shared social space of the market creates the backdrop to the exchange and shapes consumer’s encounters allowing them to interact with others of a similar taste and mindset. The marketspace is a communal setting, which is enlivened by the social bonds of the collective. When asked why the markets were important Lisa explains:

“What I think about is selling that object, discussing with the customer about the item, building a relationship with them and thinking about what new lease of life they will give it… I love those interactions…I have made so many friends in this line of work and

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motif</th>
<th>Overview</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Marketspace revealed through action and organisation | Highlights the network of materiality of the marketspace, which is bound in time and space and is enacted by practitioners. | 1. “Vendors arrive to be shown to a rectangular wooden table, a lamp and a chair. From these objects they have to create their own area that showcases their wares and establishes themselves as different from their close neighbours. The unpacking and setting up process seems to be crucial in the cultivation of a vintage look. The more seasoned vendors arrive early and with a careful system unpack daintily embroidered table clothes dressing the wooden table as they go, cake stands, hat boxes, weathered suitcases all revealed to store treasures and present them to the awaiting crowd.” (Fieldnote, February 12th 2012).  
2. “You start to learn what makes your stall attractive, sometimes it is through trial and error or being inspired by seeing how someone has put their stall together. We try really hard to make it easy to see the stock but also to get across some of our personality, so it is never going to be too ‘done’ it will always be a bit like a dressing up box…” (Charlie, August 4th 2012).  
3. “We are quite laid back about it, people want to tailor the space to their own needs and to highlight their own stuff that they are selling, it isn’t really something we dictate. I would say we are pretty flexible and are really here to oversee and help if anything comes up” (Elena, one of the Granny Would be Proud organisers). |
| Vintage ‘looks’ and a performance of inclusion | A communicative staging of the vintage ‘look,’ which is a practiced performance, through which the social role of the marketspace is illuminated. | 1. “What I think about is selling that object, discussing with the customer about the item, building a relationship with them and thinking about what new lease of life they will give it… I love those interactions…I have made so many friends in this line of work and I always thought that I was alone in how I valued vintage stuff over new things…” (Lisa, August 26th 2012).  
2. “I expect someone to acknowledge that I have entered their space, it almost feels like quite a private space, whether that’s with a nod or a smile or starting to make chat, but it almost feels like you need their permission to touch things and through saying hello it feels like you get the go-ahead.” |
I always thought that I was alone in how I valued vintage stuff over new things....”

When asked about the vintage scene she comments that the markets allow for a marketplace to be created that isn’t just about profit but is about the people. This social role of the market and the physical proximity of the marketspace enforce the relational nature of the exchange and in turn enlivened a stronger feeling of community. For the sellers, the undertaking of their business involves this ‘hanging out’ and absorption of the scene. Much of the knowledge distribution in the collective was dependent on ‘being there’; within the face-to-face interactions of the marketplace. Such knowledge was in turn integrated as second nature into their practices and performances.

As Hanna (1979) draws distinctions between competence (internalized rules for dancing) and performance (what someone does on the basis of knowing such rules) and creator (choreographer) and imitator (Hanna et al., 1979; 315), rules of etiquette in the marketplace were brought to the foreground. As Jess spoke of the etiquette of the vintage scene: that it should be “work”, “a little bit scary” and “not overly accessible to outsiders.” This language of exclusivity and drawing boundaries between insiders and outsiders in the collective conveyed the knowledge needed to adequately partake in the vintagescape. The stall table again acted as a main focal point for consumers: the interaction, accepted behaviour and vendor reaction, as Jess explains:

“I expect someone to acknowledge that I have entered their space, it almost feels like quite a private space, whether that’s with a nod or a smile or starting to make chat, but it almost feels like you need their permission to touch things and through saying hello it feels like you get the go-ahead.”

This excerpt portrays the created space around the table as a private area, almost as a homely sphere that has established practices that must be acknowledged before progression can be made. The consumer acts as willing participant to be led through the process by a knowledgeable tutor, they seek acceptance to continue onto the next step of being able to interact with both the objects and the possible exchange.

CONCLUSION

For L.P. Hartley in his 1950s classic The Go-Between, ‘the past is a foreign country’; such nostalgic resonances abound in troubled times, but the notion of a go-between is useful to theorise the value of practices for bringing a sense of rhythm and tempo to the everyday. Practices as we have sought to reveal are an invaluable perspective for capturing the sense that actions unfold in space and time; and it is through such a practice that we capture a sensitivity to the vintagescape, as Lury and Lash suggest, as a “space of intensities” (2007: 15). As marketspace, the vintage frame works through a logic of difference; such difference is not merely understood as a form of badging or representation but as an embodied urge for difference, which most reveals itself through the temporal and spatial character of consumption. Not simply a place of signs, but of embodied actors working to produce a form of worlding which desires a particular parcel of time and space, which sometimes dances to a different beat than might be found on the perhaps your average high street, shopping mall or the movement of virtual worlds.

The Vintagescape as we have sought to reveal is marked out by an ensemble of practices, which speak of a form of longing for alternative worlds. But such realms do not simply happen by accident rather they must be practiced into being. Here markets are best understood as practical outcomes (Araujo et al., 2010: 5), as accomplishments through which vendors and consumers make material their values, ethics and politics. Objects and spaces are thus crucial for an adequate understanding of the practice, etiquette of performance and boundaries of the marketplace in this constantly shifting marketspace. The shared collective acknowledgement of the parameters and accepted understandings of vintage elevates goods from simply second-hand to revered objects. Through practices vendors and consumers adopt carefully played roles in re-enchanting objects with new lives (Parsons, 2006: 189).

Adopting the practice perspective thus reorientates our disciplinary field of vision as researchers foregrounding vintage consumption as a communal form of togetherness whereby the reclamation of collective moments of interaction and sociality are made possible. Extending the theoretical perspective of marketspace practices and central to the Vintagescape is its ability to reposition our understanding of the unfolding character of practices in time and space. Notions of tempo and rhythm as expressed through Vintage and its associated motifs take us closer to this sense of being-in-the-world, where practices must be understood as unfolding within particular parcels of temporal invigoration. Such an assertion on the time-like qualities of everyday practices bring us closer to the notion of the vintagescape as an ensemble of practices orchestrated and oriented around notions of time and space through which making difference reveals itself as practice-based.

REFERENCES


Williams, Raymond (1977), Marxism and Literature, Oxford: Oxford University Press.