

These aren't my clothes, but I can wear them

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TEXT GARRETT NELSON

*Garrett Nelson stammt aus den USA und lebt heute in **ZÜRICH** in einem besetzten Haus – oder besser gesagt – einer Villa, die am Züriberg liegt, der edelsten Wohnadresse der Stadt. Hier denkt er über Besitz nach, über die Vergänglichkeit der Dinge und den Kreislauf des Lebens.*



☪☪ *Where I live is somewhere that isn't always a house. It isn't always a building. It isn't always a place. Sometimes just an idea. And it's never only mine. The attachment to place, as with other bonds, is a function of repetition and socialization. You see me in my house now. You see the structure. You notice the walls and wooden floors, the large spaces, windows and garden. You notice the things that fill the spaces. None of these things are forever. When I lived in America I would go to estate auctions and buy masses of things, treasures I would use for new works, to sell, or to use. I was constantly in the process of taking care of things. There was a turn over. A chair would come and stay a while, then leave for a new one. It was a process of consumer culture but on the level of re-use. Every auction was the sale of the entire contents of a dead person's home. It was their entire life represented by things. Things used everyday, things attached to memories, things given, things bought, things old and new. You could profile someone based on their collections. Then, in a single day of scavenging buyers and fervent selling, all the things dispersed to new owners. The collection no longer existed as attached to one per-*

son. It makes much more sense than the concept of the soul leaving the body and being added to new energy equations; the body buried becomes the earth that becomes the tree. More like the consumer soul given a tibetan funeral, the body exposed on a mountain cliff, eaten by the vultures and reincarnated; a toaster acquired by a skinny woman from New Orleans or a Japanese tea ceremony caddy bought by an eighteen year old boy wearing basketball shorts. With brisk arbitrary formality these things lost all former personal meaning as they embarked on new life. We know someone was alive based on their possessions, including their home. Not only in the context of the monumentalized Gracelands or memorialized Anne Frank's Houses, if you die and you have nothing, no one will notice. If you die and you have a big house on a hill someone is going to be interested. Once, on the eight o'clock news, I saw a report about a homeless man who had died. They said he had 100.000 dollars in a dirty pillowcase. „Who was he?“, they asked. The idea that power exchanges, wealth and possession are based on the chance given by death comes back to me again and again. It has to do with the fact that no one deserves anything.

There is very little earning and a lot of inheriting. Possession and ownership is one of the fundamental concepts that has allowed the Western Hemisphere to prosper. It is also something deeply engrained in the smallest interactions and emotions about things, rights and personal identity. Affording a house means doing work that is payed. It means taking part in an earning system. Much great work, important work, historically, wasn't recompensed by an employer. Early innovations in art and sciences came from the privileged classes, the aristocracy, who were free to explore and create without the burden of employment or servitude. This transferred to the educated class who took over creative and innovative freedom through employment in universities, institutions or from public research funding. In the end, we are left with self-serving bureaucracies that generate homogenized opinions that tend to ignore the individual. If someone chooses to move beyond these constraints they must defy the rules of economy, which are clearly also the rules of civil law. Then, there is space. Space wasn't always precious to me. In America, we had lots of space. America has a system of nomadic architecture. You build a building on a piece of land.

When the building is too small, or too old, you build a new one next to the old one. In England, the things were smaller. In Zürich, there is not enough space. The houses and land hold stable value making prime investments and are bought by corporations, wealthy private investors or individual architect developers. This means that even if you can afford an apartment you won't find one easily. In a highly competitive market the owner has a lot of choice to whom they rent. Everything becomes criteria in the decision. They ask for your income, employer, family status, nationality, sex and age. Not since before the Equal Housing Opportunity Act of 1968 could an owner or renter discriminate based on these criteria in the United States. Switzerland has a penchant for discrimination. It's a standard of life. A seldomly criticized custom. Navigating the ephemeral paths of modern nomadism in a climate where money, space, social-economic priority and discrimination are everyday pressures means creative and active resistance. It is a process that everyone affected must contribute to by being either actively involved or passively aware, or just living the way they want. These aren't my clothes, but I can wear them. 66







