

crooked letter 9

Raggedy Broke Ass Shit: A curmudgeonly smudge

An attempt in four (or so) parts to shape detritus and found objects into a junk sculpture of words.

Part One: Junkies' Paraphernalia

My punk rock, bohemian and down and out friends love thrift stores, dumpsters brimming with junk and the heaps of might-as-well-be-brand-new consumer goods cast off by college students at the end of each semester. The thrill that runs up and down my spine in such places is not in anticipation.

Confronted by the overwhelming amount of crap produced by our society, my inner-the-end-is-nigh-placard-wearing wingnut fights to take control of my hands and rip my eyeballs out. I feel the same way in Walmart (unless it is 2:00 in the morning when wandering the aisles of Wally World can be a delightful trip without the annoying teeth grinding, stomach pains or the deep in the bones conviction that it never is going to end).

The fact that all the goods in question are second hand soothes my inner wingnut for a few fractions of a second. I can't help but remember that somebody got paid too little to stitch together those items of clothing or to watch the plastic mold assembly line or to glue together cheap wood frames or to do some other mind numbing job often in unsafe conditions; that these goods are shipped around the world to sit on the store shelves waiting to be purchased by some consumer who already has too much stuff; and that way too soon it will be donated or discarded, so said consumer can buy more stuff.

Many of the items found in land of the lost are almost new. Their faithless purchasers abandoned them for more exciting, even younger possessions. I am surprised that some enterprising sort has not written "Possessions are from Uranus: Consumers are from Hell" to help the discarded process their grief.

Granted some of the items in question are authentically used. Many of them destined to a happy second life with a brand new owner. But in the lifecycle of consumer items, there is the stage when all goods turn bad. They become crotchety, dirty and foulmouthed. They stink of mothballs, mildew and old age. They are stained, cracked and broken, way beyond the fashionably distressed. They are no longer of value to any owner. They properly are relegated to the trash heaps or recycling piles. Except some feel guilty throwing things away. So they "donate" broken or stained to the point of being unwearable items to places like the Salvation Army or Goodwill or even the Civic Media Center (which is a lefty library). The number of broken toasters people tried to unload at the CMC is unbelievable. They dump the "goods" and their guilt.

I find all this a bit depressing, thus my Oedipal response, though he technically gouged his eyes out.

On an emotional level, I do not understand the urge to purge; I like the familiar comfort of a

well-used object. I hate it when something breaks or rips, when damage is not fixable. I've had the same wallet for 22 years and might be in denial about the fact that it needs to be replaced. My wallet with its image of a wing over the word "HONDA" imprinted on its surface has earned its kitschy stylishness the hard way, by lasting despite being used every day since I was 11 years old. The stitching has fallen out. I need to have it repaired before I lose my ID or credit cards, but I am afraid that if I take it in, I will be told it is not "worth" fixing; that I should throw it away and buy a new one. (Besides, what will I do for the few days I am separated from it). I do not want a new wallet. I admit I have looked at other wallets. I briefly have contemplated buying a second one of the nauseatingly-cutesy-hello-kitty variety. But I can't do it. I am loyal.

My loyalty can be taken to extremes. I finally broke down and bought new socks yesterday. I think the last time I bought socks was six or seven years ago. I have had most of my socks since I was eighteen. You do the math. If you know anything about socks, you know that it was long past time for me to let them pass on to that sock heaven in the sky, otherwise known as the rag drawer. I got away with this because I live in Florida and don't need/want to wear socks as much as people in non-paradisiacal locales. And I love the bright orange, yellow and fuchsia socks that I cut down from tights (after the crotches ripped) I ordered from the J. Crew catalogue with one of my paychecks from my first "real" job. I love my weirdly colored argyles. These are not replaceable. Even if I found socks that looked exactly the same, their threads wouldn't be worn by my herstory.

I balance my retentive tendencies by not buying many things. Also, piles of things make me sick. Literally. I am asthmatic and when confronted by mold and mildew am prone to unpleasant sinus congestion, coughing and wheezing. Dust and cat hair are not as bad (I actually have a cat) unless the aforementioned mold and mildew have weakened my system. In Florida, mold and mildew are the bonus gifts you get with almost any street/dumpster/thrift store score. I spent all of my high school years dreadfully sick due in part to the huge piles of crap my father had everywhere (more about that in the next section).

(Look for Part Two: Daddy's Girl in a day or two).