

# **“DESPERATELY SEEKING SUSAN”: A SEARCH FOR HUMANITY THROUGH ANTIQUES AND SOUVENIRS**

**(AN ANALYSIS OF DATA COLLECTED IN MT. HOREB, WISCONSIN, 1989)**

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## **摘 要**

本文是作者據其在1989年，美國威斯康辛州(Wisconsin)的一處觀光旅遊小鎮 Mt.Horeb 為田野工作地點，所作現代人蒐集骨董與紀念品涵意的論文。作者藉一部電影「緊急尋找蘇珊」(Desperately Seeking Susan)，譬喻現代人渴望人文精神的安慰。在本文中，此種渴望則藉著蒐集骨董與紀念品表現出來。

作者指出，現代人安置自我的方式有兩種。一是如 MacCannell 所說，參與觀光旅遊，而與現代社會相連；另一則如本文所揭示，回到過去的世界，從骨董與紀念品中，喚起特殊經驗，證明自我，並因其中所蘊含的人文精神而得到安慰。類似後者，回顧過去的現象，常發生在急速變遷的社會中，可說是現代人無法全然認同現代的一種行為反應。骨董與紀念品都是過去生活經驗的表徵，同樣蘊含了人文精神。現代人蒐集骨董或紀念品，其實是厭倦單調枯燥的現代生活，追求人文精神的反應。

## **Abstract**

This paper is based on the analysis of a fieldwork conducted by the author in Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin, a tourist village, in 1989. The purpose is to study the significance of collecting antiques and souvenirs in modern times. The author uses a movie, "Desperately Seeking Susan", as a metaphor to depict the yearning of humanity in modern people. In the case of Mt. Horeb, the yearning was reflected by way of collecting antiques and souvenirs.

This paper points out two kinds of identities. One is to identify oneself with the present, as MacCannell suggests, to participate in sightseeing and establishing the relationship with modern society. Another is to identify with the past, as the fieldwork reveals, to return to the past world, and draw special experiences from antiques and souvenirs and to be soothed by the humanity they contain.

In a rapid changing society, looking back is a common phenomenon for modern people who do not fully identify themselves with the present. Antiques and souvenirs are representations of past experiences, which also contain humanity. The behavior of collecting antiques and souvenirs could be a search for humanity.

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## Introduction

A film, *Desperately Seeking Susan*\*, produced in 1985, depicted a suburban, middle-class, New Jersey housewife, Roberta (played by Rosanna Arquette), in search of adventure and identity. In this film, the housewife felt tired of her monotonous life. She read the “personals” as her pastime. One day, her attention was drawn by the headline, “Desperately Seeking Susan,” and she sought Susan herself at the ad’s designated meeting place. Roberta followed Susan (played by Madonna) into a second-hand shop, and watched Susan who exchanged her jacket for a pair of boots. Roberta exited the shop wearing Susan’s jacket. She later lost her memory by a bump on the head, and mistakenly assumed Susan’s identity. In the end, Roberta recovered her memory and her husband found her. However, after she had assumed Susan’s identity, she had also met a poor but artistic man and felt her new life had been very meaningful. Thus, she refused to go back to being a suburban, middle-class wife.

I would like to use this story as a metaphor to start my paper because I want to point out that there is a yearning in every modern man/woman for the kind of adventure and identity search like Roberta had. It seems that after the Industrial Revolution, human’s position in society, on the one hand, has been replaced by stronger, more powerful machines, and on the other, that individual endeavor has been replaced by groups — committees or assembly line workers for example. Individuality becomes an extinct species in the industrial jungle. The huge modern trust companies manipulate society, distort the old moral code, and rebuild a cold, uniform world. Take the landscape in the United States for instance. When we drive through downtown areas from the east to west coast, or north to south, we hardly find any character in the towns. There are repeated scenes: McDonald’s and Wendy’s fast food restaurants; Shell, Exxon, or Mobil gas stations; Sears or JCPenny shopping malls. These are convenient for mundane needs but as one wants to see different scenes for a change to break the monotonous, mechanical view for momentary spiritual liberation, there is little hope.

Modern people’s day may start with an electronic alarm clock. Then they might use an electronic toothbrush. They eat breakfast of the same brand milk or juice. They may very well have an instant breakfast. They follow the directions on the coffee or tea bag and use a microwave oven to make their drink. They then take an elevator down to the ground floor and drive an automatic

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\* *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Director: Susan Seidelman. Writer: Leora Barish. Casts: Rosanna Arquette (as Roberta) and Madonna (as Susan). Rated PG-13. 104 minutes. 1985

“Desperately Seeking Susan”: A Search for Humanity Through Antiques and Souvenirs

car to the office. After arriving at the office they probably cannot avoid dealing with computers, telephones, and xerox machines. They cannot help buying snacks from vending machines. All food is packed in styrofoam, cardboard, plastic, or aluminum and is covered with advertisements. All of these do not give the warmhearted feeling that face-to-face interaction between two persons does. Their recreation is quite possibly watching television where every station shows similar programs, and reading the newspapers which all provide similar, recurring social, political, and environmental crises. Acquaintances try not to make casual visits because everyone realizes that their private time is so rare and precious. As buildings are constructed taller and human relationships seems to become more and more distant. They have all sorts of credit cards in their pockets, but no identity in society.

Since the coming of modernity, human beings' direct contact with each other has been largely reduced. The site of a standard grocery store is an example. A consumer chooses goods pre-arranged on the shelves, where products are seemingly variant but are actually not very different at all. The merchandise cannot be judged good or bad from their outside. Between the time one enters and exits the grocery store, there is no deep exchange between real people. There is as little “humanity” in the grocery store as elsewhere. This phenomenon is particularly salient in urban areas, but is pervasive everywhere and shows no evidence of stopping. Hardison mentions in his book, *Entering the Maze*:

Technology has replaced the horse with the machine and linked the plowman with every skill and every source of materials, no matter how remote, needed to make the technology work. At the same time, . . . “technique” . . . has converted agriculture into an international enterprise in which individuals are functional only as they relate to the larger and mostly invisible group project (Hardison 1981:xi).

It is in the “invisible group project” that individuals disappear. The problem is that groups always ignore individuals and in the end individuals cannot see themselves — they lose their identities.

### **Two kinds of Identity**

In discussing the conflict between individualism and communal life, Rosen discloses:

The tension between the American commitment to individualism and the perennial search for a communal and collective life is at the heart of American social and cultural identity (Gitlin 1986:46).

Under this tension, there are perhaps two ways for individuals to deal with the conflict. The first possibility is involving oneself in popular culture to gain as much cultural experience as they can. In this way, they identify themselves as active members of some large group. The second is going back in one's past to prove one's unique existence. The two methods are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The first alternative is well described by Dean MacCannell in his book, *The Tourist*. He asserts that "real people are actually tourists (MacCannell 1976:1)" and

The act of sightseeing is uniquely well-suited among leisure alternatives to draw the tourist into a relationship with the modern social totality (MacCannell 1976:7).

Therefore he further claims:

Sightseeing is a kind of collective striving for a transcendence of the modern totality, a way of attempting to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience (MacCannell 1976:13).

To have a modern ritual like travel is of course striving for "incorporating its [the modern totality] fragments into unified experience," but I argue it should not be the only way to deal with the "social structural differentiation (MacCannell 1976:11)." MacCannell states that sightseeing is important for individual consciousness. The source of anxiety is that "our kind of society has the capacity to develop beyond the point where individuals can continue to have a meaningful place in it (MacCannell 1976:15)." Nevertheless, I suggest that "consciousness" may also be found when one acknowledges one's existence in the past. In the meanwhile, "a meaningful place" may be located in other world which is not necessarily the reality of the present time. This other world, I propose, is the world of antiques and souvenirs.

Identity is an important concept in my argument. Concerning the case of the tourist, sightseeing is a way of seeking identity. Identity for the tourist, suggested by MacCannell, is modern totality. In the case of antiques and souvenirs, I suggest, identity is a relatively concrete image of one's individual self in past events.

“Desperately Seeking Susan”: A Search for Humanity Through Antiques and Souvenirs

Hardison has differentiated “between the identity formed by tradition and identity demanded by the present” and says:

. . . Every equilibrium turns out to be an illusion, a momentary pause in an accelerating process of change. The result is a widening gap between the world as it exists in the mind and the world as it is experienced — between identity formed by tradition and identity demanded by the present.

. . . On the personal level, the disparity between problems and solutions generates anxiety about the future and an intense nostalgia for a past in which identity and reality were, or seem to have been, more perfect images of each other (Hardison 1981:xii).

Accordingly, “nostalgia” is a reaction to being unsuccessful in identifying oneself with the present. It goes the opposite way of sightseeing in that, with the latter one tries to identify oneself with the present. Nostalgia functions as a means for identifying with the past.

### **Identity in the Antique and Souvenir World**

In this paper I hope to illustrate that both the antiques and souvenirs work to inspire individual consciousness. When one does not follow modernity, one is apt to turn to another world — the antique and souvenir world, in which one searches for one’s identity not through a collective ritual such as sightseeing, but through imagination and awareness of a personal experience in a period in the past.

To begin with, a working definition of souvenirs and an emphasis on a special implication of antiques are necessary. I adopt the definition that souvenirs are something one possesses as the embodiment of a memory of a particular time or event. Therefore, in a broad sense, everything is a souvenir if it is associated with a certain memory. It may be a gift from somebody. It may be a program from a concert one attended. It may be a pebble picked up while mountain climbing. Despite the origin of the things, they are all souvenirs if they have a connection with a unique experience of oneself.

What do I want to emphasize about antiques? Different people define antiques differently. According to the data collected in Mt. Horeb, some people think

that things before the 1950s are antiques. Some use the 1930s as a line of demarcation to define something as an antique or not. Some think antiques should be pre-1920s. It is a matter of choice. What I am concerned with in this paper is not how to define antiques by time, but to emphasize that an antique is something which is not made in the present. Thus it is from the past whether the distant or not-too-distant past. So, both souvenirs and antiques belong to the past. If antiques represent personal experience they are personal souvenirs, too.

In the world of sightseeing or antiques and souvenirs, people who participate in either all have the same goal: to get "authentic experience (MacCannell 1976:94)." As MacCannell said: "Experience is the basic term in the rhetoric of modernity (MacCannell 1976:68)." In the case of sightseeing, "it is through his sightseeing that he enters into a relationship to society (MacCannell 1976:68)." But in the antique and souvenir world, one regains the consciousness that one is a person, a human being with certain real experience and not one of the modern machines. Therefore, they identify with the image of their past.

Why do antiques and souvenirs have such an effect? I would like to give examples from data I collected from Mt. Horeb, a town in southwestern Wisconsin, famous for its gift shops, antiques, and souvenirs.

### **Antique Furniture**

According to one of my informants (an antique shop owner who mainly sold furniture), people in different parts of the country relate to different local products and historical backgrounds. Take furniture for example, in the Midwest, oak is very popular. Thus, furniture is predominantly made out of oak. In eastern part of the United States, meanwhile, a piece of furniture would possibly be made out of wood like cherry, maple, or mahogany. The 18th century period furniture is more popular. Down South, people are interested in furniture that was made in pre-civil war times, which was almost without exception made out of mahogany. In the Southwest, there is an interest in pieces with a Spanish influence. So the interests depend on where you were/are in the country and when you were there. Part of the reason people purchase antique furniture is simply because they have some sentiment attached to the furniture due to a past experience.

According to many antique shop owners and clerks in Mt. Horeb, more and more younger people are collecting things from around 1950. I was told:

## “Desperately Seeking Susan”: A Search for Humanity Through Antiques and Souvenirs

They miss that time period in their lives. A lot of them remember that they once had articles that are now in the antique store. So they want to replace something they find unfamiliar with something with which they are more familiar.

The crucial word in this statement is “remember” — they “remember” that they once had articles that are now in the antique store. Obviously, the past means much to them.

With respect to furniture, there are other reasons for collecting it. One is that better furniture is made out of wood — real wood, and there is a lot of hand workmanship in it. Some antique shop owners provided information as follows:

Today, furniture is not even made out of wood. They have a lot of composition in it, not even solid wood. The finish is maybe vinyl. It isn't even real wood.

Nowadays the factories put things together very quickly. Years ago, they did things by hand. That takes a much longer time to do and there is workmanship in the furniture.

A lot of wood in earlier pieces is almost impossible to duplicate today. Those kind of things can not be purchased in a chain department store.

I synthesize that reasons for collecting antique furniture are: first, the quality — real woods; second, hand workmanship, and third, the uniqueness of it. These three characteristics put together mean individuality which matters significantly to modern people. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the three characteristics at length.

First, the quality. As mentioned above, there are many younger antique buyers nowadays. One antique shop owner told me that the vast majority of his sales are to people in their late 20s up to the late 40s. One antique clerk told me that they are furnishing their homes with what people call antiques. She said:

A lot of them are just from college. They just got a good job. Now they want something. Maybe in college they used not really good furniture. Now they want something a little bit better, older furniture.

Antique furniture not only serves as something familiar, but also as a good quality

product which conveys a certain implication that modern products do not. Things sold in chain stores like K Mart and Wal Mart exhibit that modern civilization makes things on only one model. They are just like TV programs in daily life, which copy each other, and, hence, are unoriginal and repetitive. Just the opposite of mass produced commodities, antique furniture implies better quality — sturdy and not disposable.

Second, the hand workmanship: The work of the human hand can be seen especially when compared with the “instant” furniture of other articles sold in chain stores. This feeling can be derived from the antique furniture which is a sort of consolation amidst the feelings produced by modern society where individuals are concealed by groups or machines. When one feels alienated and is confused and unhappy with the present, it is natural to feel intimate toward antique furniture from which one can see “the hand of man.”

The third characteristic of antique furniture is uniqueness. In fact, some antiques (especially those made after 1930s) were mass produced. A careful examination will find the uniqueness is a matter of degree with comparison to modern commodities. Much of the antique furniture gives an illusion of uniqueness for modern men/women. In talking about social criticism and popular culture today, Lowenthal maintains:

The decline of the individual in the mechanized working processes of modern civilization brings about the emergence of mass culture, which replaces folk art or “high” art. A product of popular culture has none of the features of genuine art, but in all its media popular culture proves to have its own genuine characteristics: standardization, stereotype, conservatism, mendacity, manipulated consumer goods (Lowenthal 1961:10-11).

Then, how can the uniqueness, maybe illusive, of antiques serve collectors in the world of popular culture? I assume the uniqueness of antiques symbolizes the individuality that their collectors try to project. This is obviously the anti-uniformity characteristic of modern men/women. People do not like to be seen as the same. They lose identity “in the mechanized working processes of modern civilization.” It is the feature of genuine (unique style or the aesthetic) that attracts the antique buyer.

All the characteristics of antiques (real, hand workmanship, and uniqueness) combine to offer the humanity men/women are after, which is lacking in the modern society. A souvenir serves the same function of reminding one of the human aspect



“Desperately Seeking Susan”: A Search for Humanity Through Antiques and Souvenirs

of life, except that in the souvenir this aspect is not revealed by the product itself like in the antique. Rather, its association to a personal memory which a person has is what reveals this humanity.

### Souvenirs

One universal experience for modern people is that they often forget where they were a few days ago or yesterday or even moments ago. In some sense, they do not exist when they have no consciousness. They do not exist when the experience is forgotten because of life's repetition and meaninglessness. They do not exist either when they are not aware of their existence as an individual.

As I defined earlier, every material thing kept from an experience is a souvenir. On the surface, the souvenir is tangible evidence of a trip. If we look deeper, the souvenir is not just evidence of the trip itself but it serves to recall a personal memory. So the souvenir is not so much a thing to show for a trip as a means to look into one's own history.

A souvenir is always associated with someone and/or something, thus it raises one's consciousness, which is associated with authentic experience. In this sense, I have said that a souvenir is a reminder of humanity. It always gives a people a chance, if they are not satisfied with the present, to associate with some real people, or real existence although it is only a memory.

Proudly talking about the souvenir hutch she owned, one of my informants told me:

I worked in the post office for 33 years. I went to conventions, to Hawaii and different places. In my hutch, I can see those souvenirs I got from Hawaii. Then on the top shelf, I have my 25th anniversary things. Another shelf in my hutch is my retirement materials from the post office. So they are all special. They mean so much to me.

From her joyful tone, I felt the specialness of the souvenirs in her hutch did not come from their material value but from the meaning attached to them. Those were her cherished experiences: the Hawaiian convention, her 25th anniversary, and retirement ceremony. When she opened the hutch, she remembered her work experience, her friends, and her contribution to the post office.

Furthermore, a souvenir is not a little thing that merely has the name of a

place on it, like those such as post cards and ashtrays sold in tourist attractions. Nor is it a plaque inscribed with the name and date of an occasion. It is rather something that stimulates the memory of an experience. For this reason, people do not necessarily buy a "souvenir" *per se*, but will collect something special from a place they have visited, like a mineral sample, or for a time they passed, like a musical program or a trophy. A gift from someone immediately becomes a souvenir and carries the function of a reminder of a certain human relationship, such as the anniversary gifts and graduation, birthday, and Mother's Day gifts.

One informant had a spoon collection. She told me that she started spoon collecting when she was a young girl. She said that when she was 13, her parents took her to Europe, and that she wanted to bring back something from every country she visited to signify that trip. She said:

In a way, it is my own effort to make some kind of stamp of my own personal experience. I was here and here and here. This is my memory, a kind of visional chronicle of the places that I have been and the stories that go with them.

My comment on her statement is that when she looked at her collection she was reviewing her life. She was reaffirming her identity.

### General Collections

Here I want to expand my discussion to collections in general not limited to souvenirs or antiques because some collected objects may not necessarily relate to one's particular meaningful experience. I used to have two housemates. One collected frogs; another collected teddy bears. Thus, everywhere they went, they tried to get frogs and teddy bears. I think they were the types of people who used their collections to show their individuality.

Collecting itself is a way of spiritual sustenance. It also shows a collector's personality. People like to imitate, but they also like to be unique. It is imitation that makes people collect, and it is uniqueness that makes people collect different items. The shop owners in Mt. Horeb seem to appreciate this aspect of human nature very much. When I was in Mt. Horeb, I found that all souvenir, antique and gift stores stressed their uniqueness. One gift shop owner expressed how he liked to have things that were a little different and a little bit unusual. He said:

“Desperately Seeking Susan”: A Search for Humanity Through Antiques and Souvenirs

If I see one of our companies selling the same thing to other stores in town, I will not reorder. . . . We want people to come in and say: “Gee, I haven’t seen that before.”

This same policy is agreed on by other stores. Another gift shop owner said:

None of us carry the same merchandise. We all try to compliment each other in each other’s business rather than compete with each other.

I asked an antique shop owner: “Since there are so many antique stores in town, is the competition intense?” His response was:

I wouldn’t consider it a really competitive business simply because the inventory is made of primarily unique things. People are looking around for different things to suit their tastes. . . .

The uniqueness is the reason for general collections. Personal preferences show personality. In the industrial society, one’s individuality is either covered by the so-called “spirit of the group” or sacrificed for “team work.” People who live in an apartment or work for a firm have contracts which detail many rules and restrictions. Maybe only in collecting things is one free, and is one’s individuality revealed. Uniqueness is a goal for modern people. For life’s minimum material needs one can go to K Mart, but for spiritual freedom one is willing to spend a little more money for a collection. The so-called “Chicago people” manifest a yearning for individuality and are an excellent example of modern people in this respect.

### **“Chicago People”**

Amongst those I visited was a shop that divides its display into three rooms. When I asked the owner to introduce the items in her store, she briefed me as follows:

We have three rooms here. Each room is designed for different types of customers. The room out there is general gifts. We try to attract local customers as well as visitors. This room is to attract the people who

want to spend just a few dollars. They are just cheap items. The back room is what we consider a gallery. And that room has more expensive, artistic, contemporary pieces which attract the Chicago people.

In the back room, where the pieces were set to attract the Chicago people, I saw pottery potpourri steamers, bead candles, lotion dispensers, and kerosene lamps. Also there were metal crafts such as cranes, coat racks, and karate figures. There were a lot of weavings with indigenous designs of different ethnic groups. According to the owner, some of them were made by UW (University of Wisconsin) and MATC (Madison Area Technical College) students trying to pay their way through school.

According to her description, the “Chicago people” seem to be a category associated with people with special taste. I got the impression from other stores that “Chicago people” comprise the biggest share of their business whether it be a gift, souvenir or antique shop. When I inquired into the reason for this, the store owner who has three display rooms told me:

I think it is because of their sophistication. In a small town like here people are less likely to do something extraordinary. The city buyers intend to do things differently.

In the cities like Chicago and New York [the store owner was born and raised in New York] buyers are of the mentality that to be the same is wrong, to be different is good.

The owner explained the unique “mentality” of those dwelling in the cities — Chicago and New York. It is not surprising to find the similarity between the dwellers of these two cities, namely that they both like to be different. My interpretation is that in a big city crowded with people, individuality is left behind. For some reason individuality is asked not to be shown so no one will be bothered by anyone and everyone can live on the same earth peacefully. However, this requirement — no individuality — goes against one of the common aspect of human nature to which attention be paid. In this circumstance, “being different” becomes one of the city dwellers’ personalities. Thus, they want to collect something unusual, and different from their neighbors. This personality is less obvious in the rural areas because in the city, compulsory common behavior is required to maintain order whereas rural areas require less of such an obligation. There is a greater identity

“Desperately Seeking Susan”: A Search for Humanity Through Antiques and Souvenirs

crisis in the urban-industrial center because there is a wider gap between what society requires and what one wants. Hardison talking about the sense of individuals and whole society, says:

. . . Because the mind and the world develop at different rates and in different ways, during periods of rapid change they cease to be complementary (Hardison 1981:xi).

I think collections help bridge the differences in a peaceful manner. By having a collection, collectors are able to grab rapid change and keep it in their hands symbolically.

Some shop owners explain that the reason they have many Chicago customers is because: “They have a good time coming to the country from the city.” A souvenir shop manager told me:

May to August is the busiest time. Then a lot of people come to this area to see the leaves change.

A lot of people, like people living in Chicago, they don’t see the spectacle of the land. . . . They have to drive away from the big city. They will be surrounded by it. I was born and raised in Chicago. I always thought that I had seen what I needed to see until I came to Mt. Horeb. And its an entirely different world.

Mt. Horeb is significant as a tourist attraction. In its downtown area where the famous antique and souvenir stores are located, tourists can find such store signs as “The village Store,” “Village Inn Motel,” “Country Crafts,” “Ryser’s Chalet,” and “The Homestead Restaurant” with a lot of country-looking facade. Thus it provides country flavor which arouse “many meanings,” as Raymond Williams states, “in feeling and activity, in region and in time (Williams 1973:3).”

Mt. Horeb was incorporated as a village in 1899 (Mount Horeb Area Historical Society 1986:60). It is very interesting to know that this place is still a “village” while other vicinal places became cities. Visitors are apt to feel a personal relationship with this village. This reaction is depicted in Raymond William’s *The Country and the City*. After pointing out the pressure of the urban and metropolitan experience, Williams states that a “country community, most typically a village, is an epitome of direct relationships.” He suggests: “people are more easily identified and

connected within it (Williams 1973:165-166).'' Perhaps this is part of the reason of this town having a lot of ''Chicago people.'' All my information about the Chicago people whether they collect unique things, drive to see ''the spectacle of the land'' or just to ''have a good time'' echoes the desire in my metaphor, ''Desperately Seeking Susan'' — a search for adventure and identity.

It is meaningful to mention Yi-Fu Tuan's theory about ''*Dominance and Affection* (1984)'' here. His argument is originally based on the research of psychological geography. But he points out a human nature of ''the making of pets'' (subtitle of his book) which is applicable to the mind of collection. Tuan suggests that many societies draw the distinction between a world of work and a world of play. He finds that in sophisticated industrial societies, this distinction is parallel in the distinction between an economic realm and an aesthetic or cultural realm (Tuan 1984:2-3). He argues that

Power and dominance pervade the world of work. People at work are people trying to master nature and life, and if they have sufficient power at their command they can significantly alter their part of the earth. The world of play, by contrast, has an air of innocence. Power is exercised in play, but playfully, with no lasting effect (Tuan 1984:3).

Tuan asserts that man has an impulse to order and control (Tuan 1984:3). For example, the picturesque gardens illustrates the dominance of man. Man feels happy to control whether it is a sports car, a symphony, a painting, or a poem (Tuan 1984:7). This is similar to children who ''learn to master a world'' through their play. Tuan uses a child analogy: ''In a world of play, fantasy easily becomes reality. A child gains confidence and a sense of power as he manipulates the things around him (Tuan 1984:163-164).'' Under this condition, ''sticks and stones, toy soldiers and teddy bears, kittens and pups are all his subjects, pliant to his imagination and obedient to his command (Tuan 1984:164).'' Tuan claims that adults' play is ''under restrained circumstances and with a sort of lid placed on the elan of imagination (Tuan 1984:164).'' They are ''in the position of children whose fantasies and whims are catered to by the wealth and power at their command (Tuan 1984:165).'' Furthermore, since ''attention is highly selective and bestows value'' and ''pets are a part of one's personal entourage, they are physically and emotionally close to their owners (Tuan 1984:162).''

This is how Tuan rationalizes the making of pets. Tuan feels that ''relationship to pets is intimate'' and ''intimacy has declined in modern times (Tuan

1984:162-163).” Here, I want to give a correlative example. A friend of mine indicated that his brother and friends had been collecting all their lives and they liked to display items for their friends to see. They spent years traveling through many states, searching for antiques or souvenirs to add to their collections. He noticed that they had pride of ownership. Is not the pride as the manipulating and displaying personal properties similar to the sentiment of “dominance and affection”?

Borrowing from Tuan’s theory, I find it so logical that modern people collect things because collections satisfy both the want of dominance and the need of affection in a modern society when a person feels both powerless and lonesome. This explains the mentality of “Chicago people” in their collecting behavior.

### Conclusion

I should make a statement before presenting the conclusion. In this article, the financial motivation is left out. Although people will agree that when one buys items from K Mart they have a decreasing item of value, whereas a person who buys an antique or souvenir gains in value as time passes. Indeed, many collectors place commercial value on their collections, seeing them as assets. However, it is basically merchants who treat them as pure commodities. This article concerns only nonfinancial value collectors. What I want to reveal is exactly why antiques and souvenirs become commodities.

It is generally accepted that the preservation of the past is a guarantee of stability, security, and continuity. This is especially profound in a time of rapid social transformations (Hobsbawm 1983:263). Lowenthal uses “nostalgia” as the catchword for looking back (Lowenthal 1985:4), and indicates that “the great changes of the times had made nostalgia pervasive (Lowenthal 1985:8).” I have said that “nostalgia” is a reaction to being unsuccessful in identifying oneself with the present. Now I want to conclude, agreeing with the relationship between nostalgia and the great social changes due to modernity, and contribute my explanation of the function that antiques and souvenirs serve in creating identity.

In this paper I have used both antiques and souvenirs to explain the search for identity. Antiques represent the past whether a distant past or a not-too-distant past. I have also suggested that everything might become a souvenir and that once the souvenir is owned, it immediately becomes an antique — something of the past. As society changes rapidly and continuously, one loses individuality and feels insecure. Antiques’ characteristics — real,

hand workmanship, and uniqueness — serve as a reminder of humanity. Souvenirs are tangible evidence of the meaningful past and will not disappear with time as long as they are retained. According to the data I collected from Mt. Horeb, I found that modern people, the city dwellers especially, are mostly like Roberta in the film, *Desperately Seeking Susan*. They crave for humanity like Roberta does when she reads “personals.” There are certain human characteristics in antiques and souvenirs, and they function to comfort people for their incomplete identity within modern society. Therefore, they become desirable things for modern people. For modern people, there is always a “gap between the world as it exists in the mind and the world as it is experienced,” and, hence, there will be persistence in desperately seeking antiques and souvenirs.

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