Why I Thrift Essay

"Thrifting" wasn't even in my vocabulary back in 2023, but after 3 years, it's shown me all the possibilies of expressing creativity through fashion. Back in 2023, it was a labor day weekend and my Mom and Grandma took me along with them to all the Goodwills in the area– just so they had an extra pair of hands to haul around their clothes. It was a tradition they'd started, where they would mass buy clothes that we'd end up sending back to the Philippines for any of my family or kids who needed them in our community. In the process, a tan peplum tank top caught my eye. It had a brown floral print to it, and it felt like the most unique top I'd seen. During this time, I was ignorant about how second-hand clothes could be useful and essential to others. I was fortunate enough to afford all the newest and trending clothes, and I dismissed second-hand clothing as way past saving. But those first few tank tops helped me see the potential of second-hand stores.

As a kid, I definitely didn't have a strong sense of my own identity despite how much I pretended that I did. I was the typical younger sister who would follow in my sister's footsteps of style experimentation. If she decided one day that she would rock a prominent side part and bangs with all black clothes, then I would too. It was so bad that at some point in elementary school she got really mad at me for always sucking up her originality; I needed to take experimenting into my own hands. Because of this, I shifted my focus to copying the styles of other people online. The most direct result of this was during 2020, when I fell in love with the "Indie Artist" aesthetic and was fiending to become an authentic artist through both my drawings and style.

During freshman year, there were many different styles that I passed through in order to find one that felt authentic to me. Of course the "Indie Artist" aesthetic was one of them, but so were "Acubi", "Star Girl", and "Downtown Girl." What they are, and what I wore, are totally irrelevant to me now. All I'm certain of is that I partook in a lot of consumerism when I would phase through these and buy new styles off of Shein every few months. It wasn't until sophomore year where I'd say I began thrifting prominently and actually experimenting out of my own imagination instead of basing it off of others. I would collect unique pieces of clothing, mostly consisting of weird statement blouses that old ladies would fancy. I would always pair them with pearls, thinking I was so cute and original. This is something which, always in retrospect, is referred to as "thrift blindness"; commonly known as seeing something which is adequate at best, but believing it's nice or you can pull it off in the spur of the moment due to the environment being diluted with clothing items that suck. Acknowledging it now, I wouldn't say that my horrendous style was a direct cause of thrifting, but I definitely got all of my old lady blouses from second-hand stores. That era was all the way back in my sophomore year, and in itself was just a phase of my self-expression which, thanks to thrifting, came at a very cheap cost.

That became my relationship with thrifting, where, if I wanted to express a new side of myself, I could very easily go down to a second-hand store and see if I had the fashion capabilities of pulling it off with limited resources. It not only tested my creativity, but it was also better for the environment as I was reusing instead of partaking in consumer culture. I was lucky that my family also found a lot of joy in thrifting with me, since they were adults and would often discover new places for us to go to, then drive me there with them to check it out. My cousin,

who lives in San Jose, took all of us girl cousins on a thrifting day where she showed us all of her own sacred thrift spots. That's how I found one of my favorite spots to this day, Classic Loot. They have the cutest clothes, jewelry, and bags, which are all my style; another plus side is that they also have super sweet employees who always compliment my outfits.

Weirdly enough, when thrifting became super popular in the last year or two, I don't even think I partook a lot in it like other people. Of course, I still occasionally went to Goodwill with my dad when he wanted to, but I never did that weird thing where people would scalp out all the cute y2k clothes in the area and then sell them on their *Depop* page. I purely just went thrifting because it was fun, and it was like gambling. First, it was a gamble on if you'd find anything you deemed acceptable, and secondly, it was a gamble on if you could pull off or style a piece of clothing you found. I don't think people who got into the idea of thrifting from social media saw it that way. I feel like people who gained interest from social media still retained the same attention span that they do on TikTok, as they do when they enter a second-hand store. They believe that they can go up to the first rack they find and strike gold like a vintage Coach bag or authentic 2000s Hollister, but that's completely unrealistic.

The reality is that it's all luck. Sure, someone probably has gone up to their first rack ever and found authentic 2000s Hollister, but that's not going to happen to you at your average Goodwill.

There are genuinely LEVELS to this.

If you're not the luckiest person on earth, you're never going to strike easy gold at any Goodwill. You have to have the capabilities of styling your clothes if you want anything from Goodwill to look cute. Although, if you don't want to work super hard for cute clothes, go to a curated store, a.k.a Classic Loot or Crossroads. They take donations from only specific people, hence the name curated stores, but there is no guarantee that they're going to have vintage Coach bags or real 90's clothes, so then I introduce you to vintage stores. Vintage stores are the most expensive of the bunch, because they know you're looking for it and that you might be desperate enough to pay a lot for it. They're the equivalent of the scalpers I mentioned earlier, who only go to Goodwill to make a profit off of what they find. That being said, I still find most of the joy in thrifting at normal outlet stores like Goodwill. I think it's really rewarding being able to find something you'll wear often for years just for $4.99, and that there was a person who owned it before who didn't see that for themselves anymore.

I've found that being in the type of environment which doesn't try to foster a specific image in your head, lets your own original creativity shine through. When you enter a commercial store, the experience is very different from a second-hand store because nothing in a second-hand store is specifically meant to look good with other items available. Being able to use thrifting as an expressive and creative outlet, is weirdly more refreshing than expressing myself through my drawings or designs because fashion as an art form is generally more accepted than if you draw "anime" art as I do. That being said, my passion for thrifting is also different from how I view my passion for drawing, and I wouldn't have it any other way as I can easily enjoy both of them in their own settings. This also means both of them have their own places in my heart, because they have set my own individual standards for my growth as a creative.

Reflection

I found writing this a lot of fun, especially since it took me a while to find a subject that I felt really fit this type of essay. It felt like I didn't have a hobby that I was passionate in just as much as Orwell or Butler. Sure, I could've just done "why I design" or "why I draw" but I felt like the stories behind them weren't that in depth and nothing was calling to me while I was trying to draft them in my notebook. So, when we began writing on our laptops, I was exploring all my other options of what I do and what I'm passionate about, I'm surprised thrifting slipped my mind for so long. I wasn't even the one to think of writing about thrifting, Giselle was, and I think that's something that happens a lot to me when I'm trying to figure out a part of myself. I definitely dumb down a lot of the things I do, so even when my hobbys seem like a big deal to others, they don't take up much space in my head and instead it's all muscle memory. That's what I had to take into account when I was writing my essay. I couldn't rely on that muscle memory, and instead had to actually think about how I got into thrifting and why I love it so much.

During my revision processes, I only got a few grammar notes on my first revision, but on my most recent revision I was enticed into telling more stories and reasons on how I became so passionate about thrifting. I tried using these comments to share more details that I know, that I skimmed over in the first few writings because I didn't realize how much of a story they told by themselves. When you look into my version history, you can easily see how much of a difference that second round of revisions made to my essay. My first revision felt like an awkward telling of how I happened to come across thrifting, and how I view it now. But, now when I read my essay I think it's turned into a fun story of my growth as a person alongside my increasing love for thrifting.

Ultimately, the purpose of my essay was simply to tell a story about myself. I wanted it to pose as a small look into my life, background, and thought processes now. Thrifting wasn't something which was there for all my life, but it was there during my most developmental period. I believe to tell a story about yourself to anyone who could be reading, you don't need to tell them everything from the moment you were born, just what made you the person you are now.