

Private Circulation

The Bulletin for Proposals



All images courtesy the artist



EMPTY VESSELS

"The archive always works, and a priori, against itself."

—Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'Archive*

Even more than a receipt, the plastic bag signifies the conquest of a purchase. Plastic bags are rarely alone. They are made and distributed by the thousands. They are doubled up, one inside the other, at stores. And, if we keep them, they clog drawers, cupboards and bulge other plastic bags near to bursting. When they are finally thrown out, they reconvene at the landfill, or otherwise make their way to places like the North Pacific Gyre—a swirling vortex where four giant oceanic currents meet—also known as the Pacific Trash Vortex. Many of these bags will outlast even the youngest of us. Any effort to preserve them, therefore, seems absurd, but that is just what one artist has done.

Like many collections, Nick Normal's started unintentionally. While moving from London to New York the artist realized that he had amassed a large number of plastic bags he was unwilling to part with. He still has the slip of paper from the shipping form that declares a "collection of plastic bags." Since then his collection has more than doubled, as one can barely escape making a purchase in the U.S. without acquiring at least one bag.

For Normal, the actual physical objects are not as interesting as their reproduction and distribution as images. In June 2007, his collection numbered well over 300 and he was in the midst of

producing a full color book through a print-on-demand publisher. The artist scanned each bag using an 8.5-by-14-inch scanner and compiled the images into a book, with one scan per page. The result is a remarkable yet fractured and incomplete compendium of the ubiquitous plastic bag.

To be included in the collection, a bag must be unique, it must cover the bed of the scanner, and, of course, it must be plastic. The final images are as much about the scanner as they are about the bags: backwards text and semi-transparent layering of graphics and logos reveal flattened, once three-dimensional objects. Looking through these scans one is confronted with a certain myopia, as if your face were pressed right up against the glass. Yet the images, cropped at all edges, can also be seen from faraway as a landscape-in-perpetuity of crinkled plasticky ridges extending in every direction.

During the final stage of production on the book, shortly after Normal had completed two galley proofs, the hard drive storing all of the scans and design files randomly failed, locking the book's data indefinitely. Until the drive has officially been certified dead and the data deemed irretrievable, Normal does not plan to rescan all the bags. He has, however, agreed to rescan a small number of them for *Private Circulation*, which are reprinted here.

—The Editors

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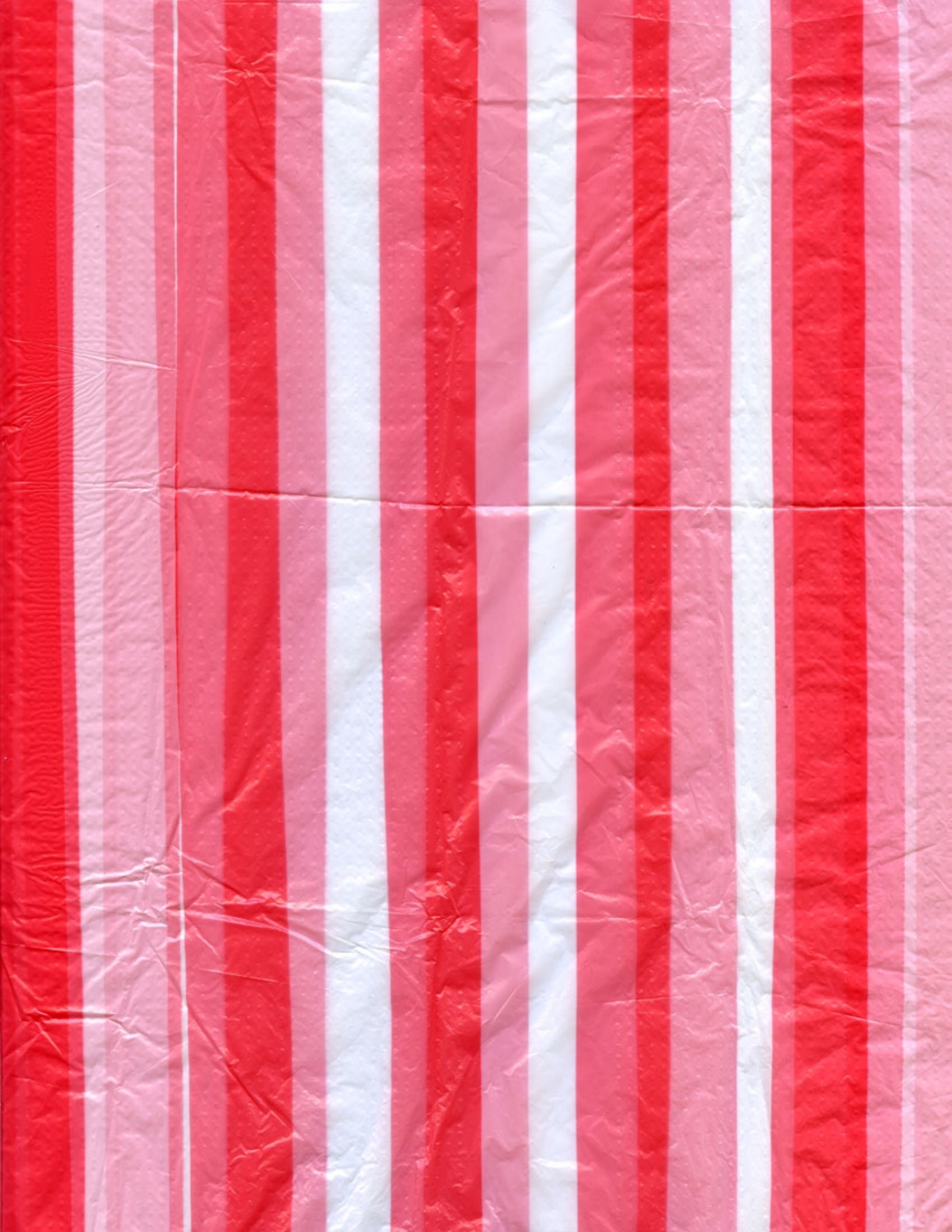
REDUCE

REUSE

RECYCLE

TO AVOID DANGER OF SUFFOCATION, KEEP THIS BAG AWAY FROM BABIES AND CHILDREN

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The background is a textured, warm orange color. Scattered across the surface are several oranges and orange slices. In the top left, a slice of an orange is visible. To its right, a whole orange is partially cut off by the edge. In the center, there is a full cross-section of an orange showing its internal segments. To the right of the center, another whole orange is shown, covered in fine water droplets. Below the center slice, there is another whole orange, also with water droplets. In the bottom left corner, another slice of an orange is visible. The overall composition is artistic and emphasizes the freshness and naturalness of the product.

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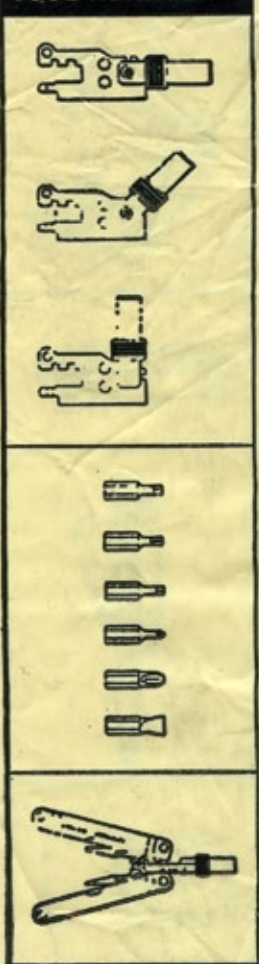
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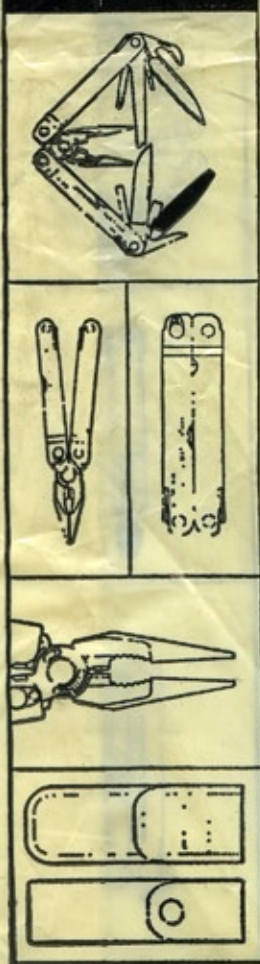
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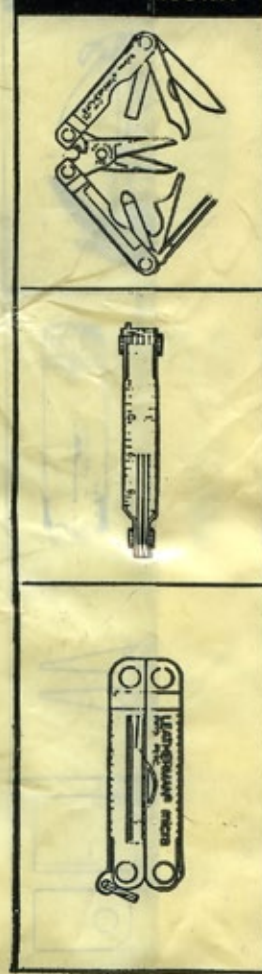
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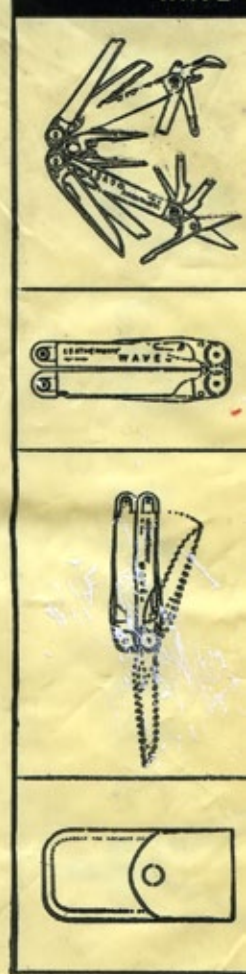
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THE ANIMATED GIF ISSUE ADDENDUM

The “Animated GIF Issue Addendum” is a six-issue addition to *Private Circulation* featuring the frames of notable animated GIFs. Due to the limitations of the portable document format (PDF), animated GIFs—and other moving images—cannot be properly displayed in this format. The GIF has proven the most tenable of time-based media to reproduce frame by frame—as it would be impossible to publish every frame of a short film, not to mention one of feature-length. Even so, the complexity of some animated GIFs (including the one featured here), has made significant cuts unavoidable: Only one of every three frames is reprinted here. It is the editors’ opinion, however, that the quality of the reproduction has been increased for readers of the printed page, and not the opposite.

The “Animated GIF Issue,” initially proposed as an issue of its own, was not considered substantial enough to constitute an entire monthly newsletter. Nevertheless, the idea persisted and was eventually given a parenthetical existence at the tail end of the bulletin.

Next month, the presidential elections will take the center stage of Russian politics. Apropos, this month’s featured GIF, by

mr.parker at idiot.ru and posted to nasty-nets.com by Olia Lialina, pictures the morphed transformation of one Russian leader to the next. Starting with Lenin, the GIF morphs to Stalin, through Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko, Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin before returning, like the Ouroboros, to Lenin. Come March 2008, this GIF may have to be updated with the image of Dmitry Medvedev if he wins the coming election, as is generally anticipated.

The seamless transitioning between leaders’ heads brings to mind the endless progression of presidents, prime ministers, and commanders. Like a new breed of Hydra, the political monster is four-dimensional: Its many heads are singular in space yet myriad in time. At this point in American politics it may be a particularly unpopular view to express the futility of elections and presidential turnover, because of the vast difference between the current administration and the (Democratic) candidates who seek office—but whatever, the empire marches on.

—The Editors

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