“THE MANIFESTO OF VALOR”

an examination and dissection of the value systems constructed within society

susi lu

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"Hence, it follows that if a thing is to be useful, it must be not only of an availing nature, but in availing hands. Or, in accurate terms, usefulness is value in the hands of the valiant; so that this science of wealth being, as we have just seen, when regarded as the science of Accumulation, accumulative of capacity as well as of material,—when regarded as the Science of Distribution, is distribution not absolute, but discriminate; not of every thing to every man, but of the right thing to the right man. A difficult science, dependent on more than arithmetic."

-John Ruskin, "Unto This Last"

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VAL·UE

NOUN

1. The regard that someting is held to deserve; the importance, worth, or usefulness of something.

2. A person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgement of what is important in life.

VERB

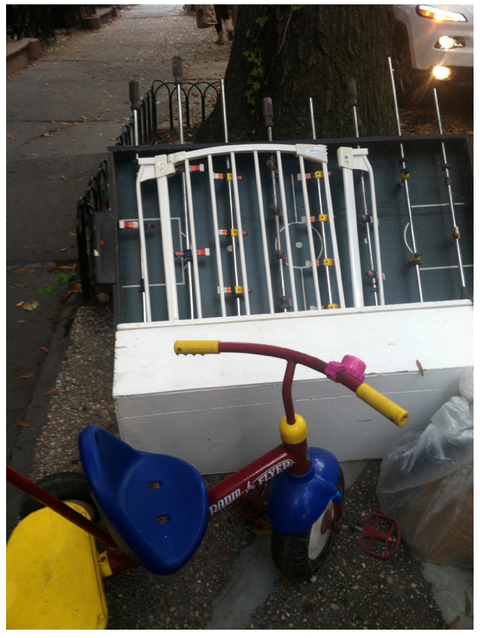
1. Estimate the monetary worth of (something).

2. Consider (someone or something) to be important or beneficial; have a high opinion of.

This manifesto compiles my exploration of VALUE, investigating and interrogating various writings, in particular, those by John Ruskin and Thorstein Veblen. Its application in the real world seeks to question the validity of value, in relation to other concepts such as use, honor, beauty, and waste. Do values remain absolute as contexts or situations shift? Are they inherent qualities or are they inherited, imposed upon us from birth? Are they fluid or fixed? Are they even real or true?

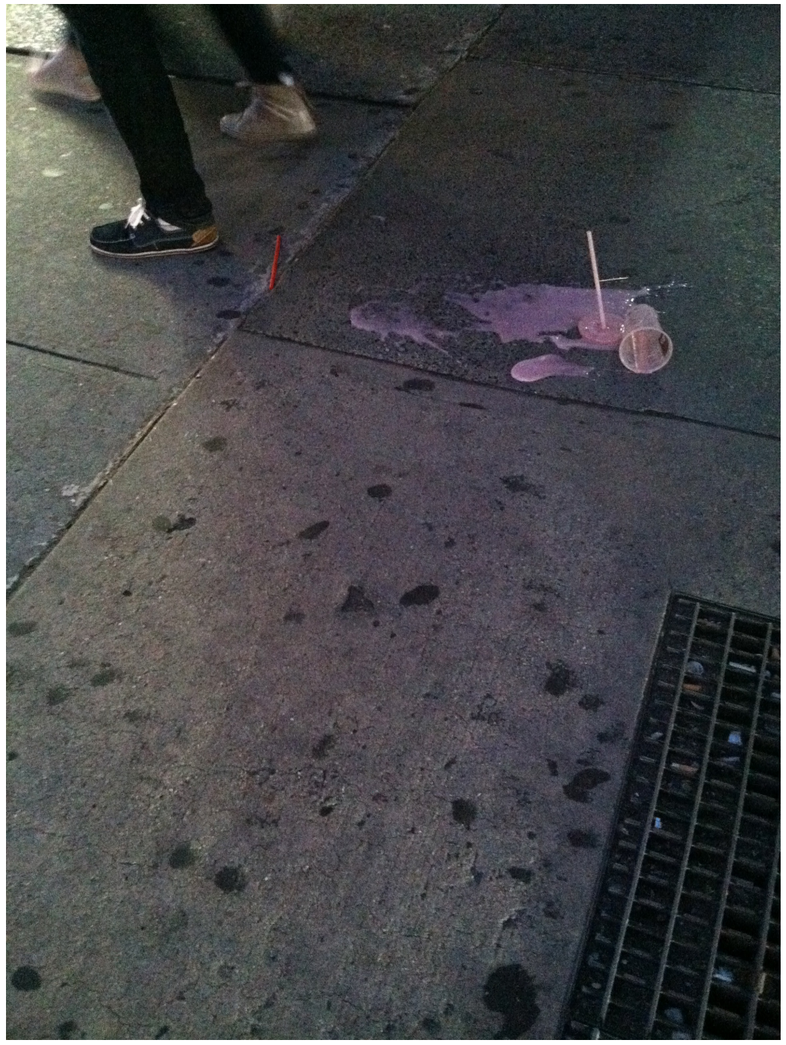
ALL VALUE IS RELATIVE.

FIELD RESEARCH



(clockwise from top left) 1. Foosball table, tricycle. 2. Metal contraption. 3. Fish tank.

(clockwise from top left) 4. Ikea furniture. 5. Coffee filters. 6. Single ride Metrocard.



The contents of the container have spilled and therefore cannot be consumed. They are contaminated by the filth of New York City streets. because the container no longer needs to serve its purpose—house the milkshake—it has become useless.

Containers have been emptied of their contents. They cannot be closed or resealed so they are essentially single-use objects.

Antiquated technology: VHS tapes have almost entirely been replaced by DVD, blue-ray, and other more advanced forms.
Content: it seems that people no longer wish to watch “Friends” or “Leon the Professional”

Old computers and calculators have been replaced by superior technology. They are no longer necessary, though some parts still retain value and have been removed before the unit was discarded.

CONTROL EXPERIMENTS

discarded umbrellas

1. UMBRELLA DISCARDED AFTER RAIN

"A horse is useless, and therefore unsaleable, if no one can ride—a sword, if no one can strike, and meat, if no one can eat."
-John Ruskin

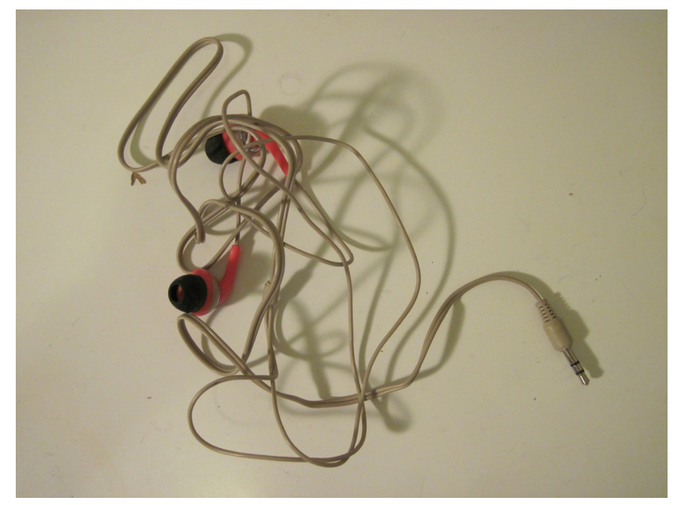
Technically, it still serves its intended purpose—shielding its owner from rainfall. however, because of small tears or a bent arm, it was discarded.

2. DAMAGED CABLES

The cable only performs occasionally, only charging a phone if held in a very precise position.

The cable does not operate reliably; the appearance is soiled and has been repaired by tape.

Sound quality has deteriorated.



Only one of the earbuds stll functions.

3. PLAIN WHITE T-SHIRT

This experimentation provided the basis for the proceeding interrogation of the objects collected. The shirt was presented and photographed in a variety of orientations in order to determine if these methods altered its apparent value. A plain white t-shirt was used because of its lack of symbolism, so that the methods of display could be examined as the sole influence of changes in value.

Straight on, the shirt appears as it is; an ordinary object. From below, it becomes abstracted, and movement is taken into consideration.

Above: seen without a context.
Below: seen with a context.
Conclusion: isolation from context can be used to examine an object's true worth.

Presented in such a manner, the identity of the object becomes ambiguous.

On a human body, the shirt is seen fulfilling its intended purpose.

THE EXPERIMENT

Find objects of the least measureable worth and re-enter them into the pre-existing value system.

OBJECTIVES

Can value can be estimated or attained visually?

Can a worthless object be re-entered into the pre-existing value system?

Is the pre-existing value system valid?

Is fashion valid?

THE PROCESS

1. Objects of the lowest value—namely, clothing discarded in the street—are collected.

2. Pieces are photographed in a variety of presentations—in their initial state of discovery, on a white seamless background, etc.—in an assortment of different states, such as unfolded, folded, clean, dirty, etc.

3. Pieces are washed, mended, and/or altered in order to add value.

4. Pieces are re-photographed and presented both with and without context, in places that they both do and do not “be-long”.

5. Pieces are re-packaged and returned to a state of the highest attainable value.

THE EXPERIMENT

1. NYC BUCKET HAT

Found on the street, a few feet from the curb. It was upside down, covered by a thin layer of fallen leaves. Its positioning suggested that it had been lying underneath a car for some time.

After a wash, satin stitch embroidery was done on its surface, to mirror its “humble beginnings”.

NYC
New York City

NYC
New York City

NYC
New York City

NYC

NYC
New York City

NYC
New York City

NYC
New York City

2. ASSORTED HAIR CLIPS

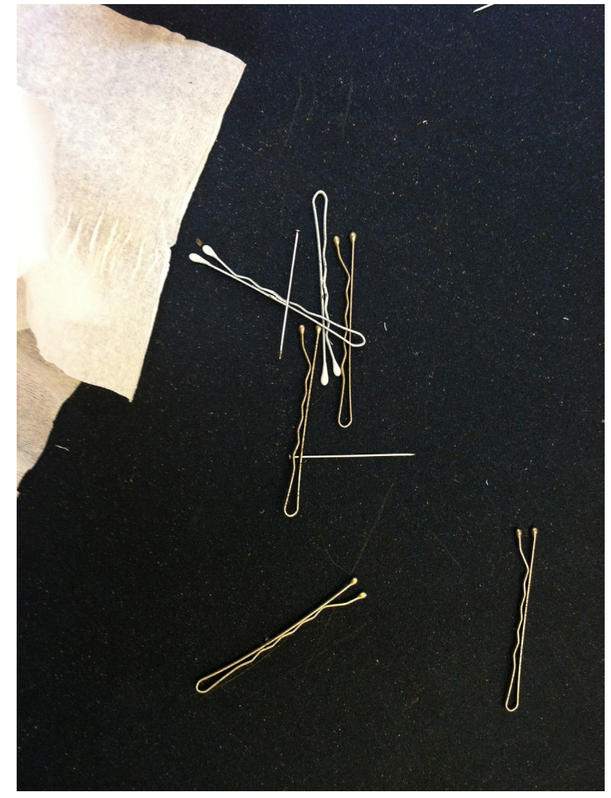
Three different types, each found under different circumstances.

2a. The first was found on a sidewalk in Brooklyn, appearing to have been there for at least a few hours. The clip was not in perfect condition, evidenced by the wear of its white coloring.

2b. The second was collected mere minutes after it fell from a passing woman's bag on the Washington Clinton subway platform. She acknowledged that the object had fallen, but after a second's deliberation, she decided to leave it where it had landed. The clip, which was in perfect condition, had its value stripped from it instantanously at the moment it touched the ground of the platform. While the ground is inarguably filthy, it is questionable whether contact with it immediately depreciates the worth or use of an object. The clip still fulfilled its function, in addition to its aesthetic purpose even after it had been dropped.

Perhaps it depends on the degree at which the object comes in contact with the human body. A food item, which is to be put inside the user—to be consumed—would be instantaneously deemed valuenless unpon falling on the ground. Similarly, a hair clip is a very intimate product, coming in direct contact with the wearer's hair. Perhaps to return a fallen hair clip to its intended position facilitiates a similar closeness between the wearer and the "aura" of the subway platform.

On the other hand, other objects can fall on the ground, and still be "valuable". If the woman had dropped her credit card, or her keys, it is undeniable that she would pick them off the ground and continue to use them as intended.



2c. Bobby pins discarded after the culmination of a class on October 29. These are an interesting case, simply because the identity of the owner is known. Even more interesting is the fact that the owner was not using them for their intended purpose of holding and styling hair. Instead, the user was subverting their function to be applicable to another medium—fabric. While I cannot comment on the successfulness of this application, it is without a doubt that these pins still retain their intended function, and possibly this unique unintended function as well.

It is important to note their coloring—gold—as this almost blasé abandonment is not typical for any object of that materiality.

AD VAL ORUM
FOUND IN NYC.

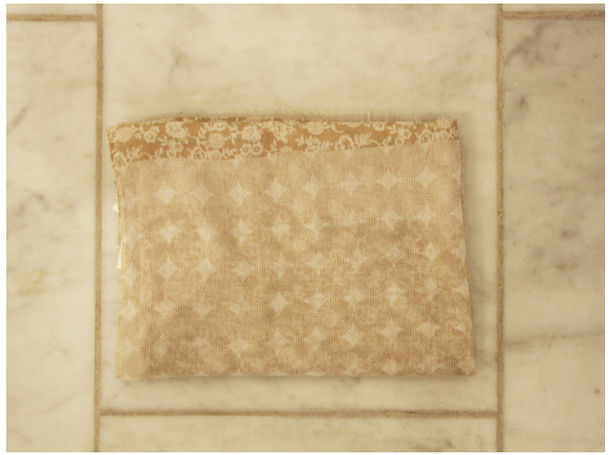
AD VAL ORUM
FOUND IN NYC.

3. SCARF

Found tucked among some foliage underlying a fence. The light and positioning made it hard to see, but also gave the object and its moment an ethereal quality.

The scarf seemed to be in pretty good condition, as it still retained all of its care labels. It was slightly damp from the previous night's rain.

ZARA



AD VALORUM

4. WHITE TANK

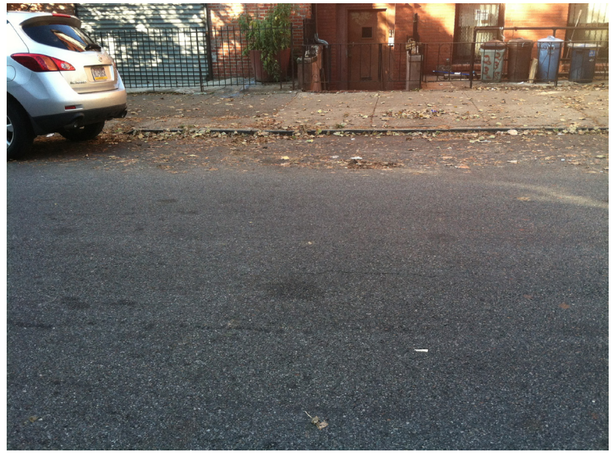
Found rolled up and cast aside on a tree bed by a playground. It was damp and soiled.

Upon recovery, it was washed and bleached, upon which a few hole were discovered. The tank was repaired by hand then embellished with hand embroidery that accentuated the stains that were not removed by the cleaning process.

5. BLACK TEE

Found on the street, almost completely obscured by fallen leaves. After it was washed, it became evident that the shirt was in pretty good quality, as it did not require any repairs.

A slogan was spraypainted onto the front to grant the piece additional individuality and value.



Therefore, though they should fail immediately, they had better aim at something high.

All men want, not something to do with, but something to do, or rather something to be. Perhaps we should never procure a new suit, however ragged or dirty the old, until we have so conducted, so enterprised or sailed in some way, that we feel like new men in the old, and that to retain it would be like keeping new wine in old bottles.

6. RUST TEE

Black men's tee found lying on the street, not too far from the curb, on Fifth Avenue. Wear and use were minimal, and no repairs were necessary. Bleach treatment was applied to the entirety of the shirt, giving it a distinct rust coloring.

BASIC
FINE COTTON
STRETCH
100% COTTON
MADE IN MALAYSIA
CUT M
SEW M
COLOR M
MATERIAL M
CARE M
by H&M

BASIC
FINE COTTON
STRETCH
100% COTTON
MADE IN MALAYSIA
CUT M
SEW M
COLOR M
MATERIAL M
CARE M
by H&M

BASIC
FINE COTTON
STRETCH
MADE IN
INDONESIA
EUR M
US M
CA M
CN 175/100A
MX M
by H&M

BASIC
FINE COTTON
ZOUSTCH
CONSOR IN
LOS ANGELES
CA M
CO M
CN T/S/100A
MX M
by H&M

hustle
trees

Iron is in some sort, therefore, the sunshine and light of landscape, so far as that light depends on the ground; but it is a source of another kind of sunshine, quite as important to us in the way we live at present—sunshine, not of land-scape, but of dwelling-place.

-John Ruskin

7. MARBLE SHIRT

Found discarded under a van, compleely encrusted in what appeared to be cement or dirt. It was washed and bleached, but many of the markings left a permanent impression upon the fabric. This effect created was a sort of marbling pattern, which was only emphasized by an additional layer of dye just to add a little more contrast.

Gold, for instance, has a high degree of sensuous beauty very many if not most of the highly prized works of art are intrinsically beautiful, though often with material qualification; the like is true of some stuffs used for clothing, of some landscapes, and of many other things in less degree. Except for this intrinsic beauty which they possess, these objects would scarcely have been coveted as they are, or have become monopolized objects of pride to their possessors and users. But the utility of these things to the possessor is commonly due less to their intrinsic beauty than to the honor which their possession and consumption confers, or to the obloquy which it wards off.

8. FLANNEL SHIRT

Damp, soiled, buried beneath an accumulation of fallen leaves. Its color and texture made it appear as if it was actually part of its surroundings and allowed it to blend into the foliage.

It was so dirty, yet a single wash restored its brightness and vitality. A wax treatment and simple embroidery was added to its surface.

9. BLACK SWEATER

Mimicking the oil stains on the street, the sweater camouflaged into its surroundings. It was damp, flattened into a liquid shape due to both water and time. All of its buttons had been removed, lowering its functionality greatly.

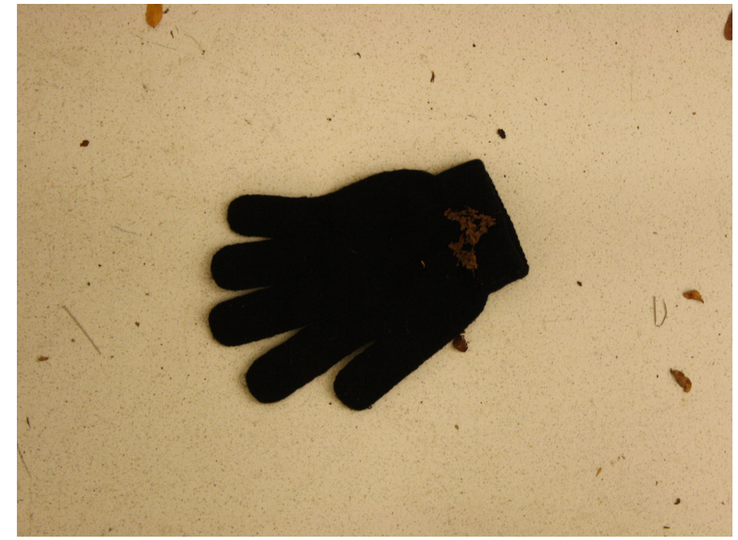
The piece was washed, pressed, and had new buttons sewn onto it.

10. ASSORTED GLOVES

A collection of gloves were acquired, each of them found in their singularity. This separation from their other half definitely leads to an instant depreciation, as their intended function is to cover both hands. However, one can question how "necessary" it is that both parts of a pair must match. Two of the gloves--a black and a purple one--appear to be very similar silhouettes, but because they are not the same color, they are not considered a pair. However, combined, they are twice as functional even though they may be aesthetically less pleasing.

10a. A single purple glove was found lying by a planter on a cobblestone path. It seemed to be in fairly good quality and looked to have only been slightly used. However, its value drops significantly as it was discovered by its lonesome. After a quick wash it appeared almost brand new.

10b. A single black glove was found behind a box full of assorted objects. The glove itself seemed almost new, displaying almost no wear or use. It was only assumed “uselss” due to its position relative to the box of donations.



10c. Single purple glove discovered on the sidewalk.

While men may have set out with disapproving an inexpensive manner of living because it indicated inability to spend much, and so indicated a lack of pecuniary success, they end by falling into the habit of disapproving cheap things as being intrinsically dishonorable or unworthy because they are cheap. As time has gone on, each succeeding generation has received this tradition of meritorious expenditure from the generation before it, and has in its turn further elaborated and fortified the traditional canon of pecuniary reputability in goods consumed; until we have finally reached such a degree of conviction as to the unworthiness of all inexpensive things, that we have no longer any misgivings in formulating the maxim, “Cheap and nasty.”

11. PALM WORKING GLOVES

Three individual work gloves were found lying about Brooklyn. They are composed of a thicker knit material and coated with latex for increased grip and durability. The latex on each of them seems almost entirely compromised, but the knit material displays wear and discoloration.

Surprisingly, two of the exact same glove were discovered, though unfortunately, they do not compose a matching pair as they are both for the right hand.

Their association with work immediately deteriorates their apparent value.

Boo • Boo • Boo • Boo • Boo
MARTHA STEWART CRAFTS
Treat Boxes

13. SOCKS

Upon discovery, their identity was essentially unknown. They were rolled up into a strange configuration and damp with the rain of the previous night. Initially, they appeared as the severed cuffs of a sweatshirt, but after further examination, they were revealed to be a pair of men's socks.

A quick wash restored their former glory, but their texture left something to be desired. Steps were taken to improve the softness of the pair.

13. BOOT

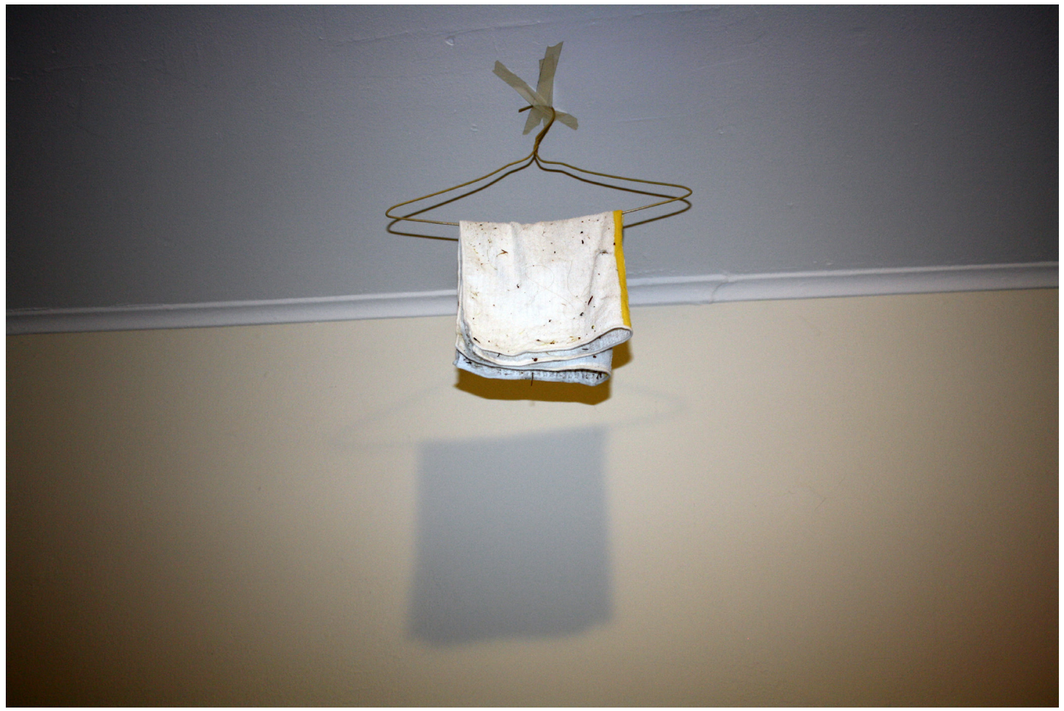
Single boot found discarded by a tree. It was covered in a light coating of sand and debris. Wear and use were quite evident, demonstrated by small tears and scuffs all over. Some of the larger tears were repaired by hand to prevent further degredation.

Why paint shoes! Shoes are low! They touch the ground and everything on the ground. They portray humans as mortal beings, not ethereal beings! They are for walking. They are merely practical and instrumental.

14. TOWEL

Found off of Bleeker Street, not long after it had rained.
It was found in a state of complete disarray, completely drenched, with small twigs and leaves entangled in its fibers.
It was washed and bleached, and thoroughly combed through as to remove as many small particles as possible.
Surprisingly, after washed, it still retained a very soft texture.

Small holes were also repaired.



15. PINK OBJECT

Found on a cobblestone sidewalk in Brooklyn. Washed and repaired.

CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

Through the repetition of this experiment, it became quite evident that apparent value is not always the equivilent to actual value. Many of these piecese of the lowest perceived value actually retained a large portion of worth, as they still accomplished their intended function, even after being discarded. It was astonishing to see the great difference that could be made by a simple wash or hand repair.

If one has the intent to use an object valiently, it is impossible for an object to be worthless. The work and soul transmitted from the user to the object preserves and amplifies the value of both man and object alike.

THE MANIFESTO OF VALOR

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