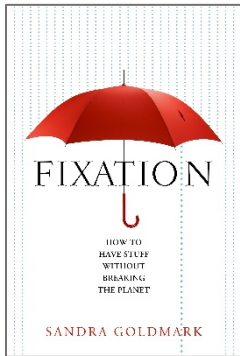




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PRESS RELEASE

Fixation

How to Have Stuff without Breaking the Planet

By Sandra Goldmark

Our global system of consumption is broken. Our individual relationship with our stuff is broken. In each of our homes, some stuff is broken. And this pattern of rampant consumerism and manufacturing is breaking our planet. Fixing our cycle of buying and trashing stuff will require big, systemic changes and the power of individual actions. We can start right now.

In ***Fixation: How to Have Stuff without Breaking the Planet*** (Publication Date: September 22, 2020), entrepreneur and professor Sandra Goldmark calls on us all to move beyond our throwaway culture by rethinking how we shop and what we value, and to incentivize companies to produce better, easily repairable goods. Goldmark adapts a simple motto from the food movement that has profound implications: Have good stuff, not too much (mostly reclaimed). Care for it. Pass it on.

Since founding Fixup, a pop-up repair shop that brought her coverage in *The New York Times*, *Salon*, *Wall Street Journal*, and more, Goldmark has become a leader in the movement to demand better stuff. In ***Fixation***, Goldmark introduces us to items brought to her repair shop, using these objects as a lens to explore why our relationship with stuff has gone so awry and chart a new path forward using actionable steps that anyone can take.

Goldmark uses the example of a shattered iPad screen to examine the environmental destruction and human suffering caused by designing stuff for obsolescence. She shows how a broken IKEA lamp opens the door to imagining a new growth model where companies build reuse and repair into their revenue streams rather than producing low-quality merchandise with limited lifespans. Alongside these objects' place in our system of consumption, Goldmark explores what they reveal about our often-complicated relationship with owning stuff.

To break free from our broken cycle of consumption, Goldmark inspires us to choose goods built for a long life, repair broken items, and shift our attitude on “preowned” stuff. Together, we can drive global change by advocating for international labor standards and demanding that companies

transition from a linear to a circular economy. Goldmark highlights companies already embracing the circular model, from long-time leaders like Patagonia to creative startups like AptDeco and Yerdle. She also addresses the challenges of shifting to a circular model, from the low cost of new goods to the logistical difficulties of buying and selling pre-owned items.

Fixing your broken toaster won't save the world. But confronting the rampant damage caused by our consumerist culture means that we need to face our toasters, too. Passionate, wise, and practical, ***Fixation*** offers us a new understanding of stuff where good design, reuse, and repair are the status quo.

Sandra Goldmark is the founder of Fixup (formerly Pop Up Repair), an innovative social enterprise in New York City. She is also a theater set/costume designer, a leader in the field of sustainable theatrical design, and director of the Sustainability and Climate Action program and associate professor of professional practice at Barnard College. She has an AB in American literature from Harvard College and an MFA in theatrical design from Yale University.

Fixation: How to Have Stuff without Breaking the Planet

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QUESTION AND ANSWER

Fixation: How to Have Stuff without Breaking the Planet

By Sandra Goldmark

Q In *Fixation*, you present the motto: Have good stuff, not too much (mostly reclaimed). Care for it. Pass it on. How does this motto encapsulate key themes in your book?

A In thinking about a healthier, more sustainable way to have stuff, I was inspired by Michael Pollan’s simple advice on eating. Like eating food, having stuff should not be as fraught as it has become today. Stuff is a basic human need: to have shelter, to make things with tools. We need stuff, but we don’t need as much of it as we have, and we certainly don’t need it to be as toxic and wasteful as it currently is. This motto translates the basic tenets of a “circular economy,” a term which can sound jargon-y and complicated, into simple steps for a healthier, more sustainable relationship with stuff.

Q Do you think the Covid-19 pandemic will influence how we view our over-consumption of stuff and impact on the planet?

A We’re all wondering about the long-term impacts of the pandemic on so much of our lives! Certainly, shopping and spending habits have changed. There has been a realization that our supply chains are fragile. And, stuck at home, it becomes even more apparent that we may need less, but better-quality stuff. Some people, in quarantine, were able to spend more time making and mending. But whether we’ll see long-term changes for the better as a result of the pandemic – that’s an open question in so many areas, stuff included. But it’s clear that, even in this massive reset, there is an opportunity to make some much needed changes at every level.

Q You’re the founder of Fixup, a pop-up repair shop in New York City, and have fixed everything from family heirlooms to IKEA lamps. Why do people want to repair seemingly unimportant, easily replaceable things?

A We found in our repair shops that many people have seemingly “irrational” attachments to many of the things in their home – and not just heirlooms or obviously sentimental items. People like *that* black plastic window fan or *this* particular toaster and they want it to work. Partly because of my background as a theatrical designer, I realized that our feelings about our stuff are about much more than monetary value; we create our identities, in part, with the worlds we build around ourselves, the stories we tell about ourselves – and the “props” that help us do so. This emotional attachment is important as we’re thinking about more sustainable models of consumption, because it opens up the possibility of businesses developing revenue streams that are not only about making and selling more, but about caring for what we already have. And that mentality – of stewardship and maintenance being just as valuable as new shiny things – is something that we need to adopt, from black plastic window fans to our infrastructure right on up to our shared natural resources.

Q **What are three concrete steps that we, as individuals, can take to reduce the amount of stuff we buy and throw away?**

A It’s all in the little motto. If you like buying stuff, fine – just buy used goods instead of new, take care of your stuff while you have it, and make sure you pass it on to someone else when you are done with it. One easy way to start is to set a target: buying 25% or 50% (or 90%!) of your clothes used, for example. Make a commitment each time you need to dispose of a piece of furniture that you will at least try once to rehome it: post it on Facebook marketplace or take it to a thrift shop. And finally, make a space in your apartment or house for items in need of repair and once a month try to deal with at least one of those items! There’s nothing wrong with needing or wanting stuff, just as there is nothing wrong with enjoying food. We just have to do it in a way that works.

Q **How do you address the critique that small changes, like fixing a toaster, are too small to make a difference in the face of a global climate and biodiversity crisis?**

A Certainly, fixing your toaster is not going to solve everything. But just as certainly, I reject the line of thinking that would negate the work of individuals, no matter how small, or worse, embrace individual hypocrisy while waiting for a big policy shift or corporate miracle. We must create system change *while* taking individual action ourselves, because, in fact, we are the system. Jonathan Safran Foer has a beautiful image of a wave – made up of billions of small particles, none of which on their own would change anything. Sure, you can’t fix your toaster and then think that you are done fighting climate change. You have to understand that your actions need to feed and flow into a larger wave – and fixing that toaster can indeed help influence the direction of that wave.

Q In *Fixation*, you write about the importance of transitioning from a linear to a circular economy. What would a major company like IKEA transitioning to a circular economic model look like?

A Very simply, in a circular economy, IKEA and many other manufacturers and retailers would make money from a blend of making much less new stuff (but higher quality), selling used or refurbished goods, and offering service, repair, and upgrades. Right now, new goods dominate our marketplace and our shopping carts. We've got to shift that balance. Many companies, including IKEA, are making moves in that direction. But as with all things related to climate change, it's got to happen much, much faster.

Q What gives you hope that we can shift from our consumerist, throwaway culture to a new understanding of stuff, where good design, reuse, and repair are the status quo?

A It seems to me that we have no choice but to make the shift. Perhaps having no choice is not the same as being hopeful, but it's where I am right now. We are not going to be able to live and do business the way we do today: within the next ten years we *will* change, one way or another. My goal is to point out that, for stuff at least, there are some simple steps we can take right now that will actually work. And, as with all things related to climate change, the key is to try to make the changes *now*, so that they are less painful and more equitable.