

# For love and money: Navigating values at the antiques roadshow event

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## Abstract

*Antiques Roadshow Events* are held in historic locations across the United Kingdom. On site, experts evaluate objects brought in by attendees, who are often cast as passive recipients, while edited highlights make up the long-running BBC TV program. Through Collaborative Event Ethnography at one Roadshow Event we show how object stories are navigated through “value talk” between attendees and experts in front of live audiences. Value is not a measurement but a dimension of the thing and its context. Stories and money are both integral in understanding worth, and final valuations are only partially shaped by given expertise.

## INTRODUCTION

The starting point for each episode of the long-running BBC production *Antiques Roadshow* is a Roadshow Event, where members of the public bring personal objects to be evaluated by antiques and collectibles experts. Most objects are not antiques and rarely have high monetary value, while many mass-produced objects resonate across popular culture. An estimated 35,000 people attended *Antique Roadshow* Events throughout 2015 (National Trust, 2016). The roadshow events highlight peoples' emotional relationships to material objects and they function as spectacles of expectation and revelations (Weston et al., 2022). The juxtaposition of contrasting registers of value (Graeber, 2013; Tsing, 2013), monetary, and emotional, creates dramatic tensions. Owners try to hide their disappointment over low valuations by sharing their sentimental attachment to an object or disguise their shock over an unexpectedly high valuation by insisting the item will never be sold. In this theater of expectations, appraisal experts have become minor celebrities, and visitors are as keen to see their favorites “perform” as they are to find out the worth of their objects.

The TV program *Antiques Roadshow* knowingly dramatizes the highs and lows of valuations into spectacles for consumption. Each 60-min episode is filmed at Roadshow events,

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which are commonly held at stately homes or historic locations. The series started airing in 1979 is in its 43rd season (Internet Movie Database, 2022), and, with over 700 episodes, it is undoubtedly a cultural institution that has been replicated around the world. The UK *Antiques Roadshow*'s audience peaked in the 1990s with 15 million viewers; however, today, 8 million viewers still watch the series (Garron, 2018). Only a select few scenes from the live event make the final cut of each episode. The segments are chosen for their social “stories,” tensions in differing notions of value, and the owners' reactions when the appraisers finally reveal the monetary estimates (Wagner, 2019). These often play on the element of surprise (Coopmans & Rappert, 2020). As Muniesa and Helegesson surmise: “...the attraction of watching valuation spectacles [is] not in the learning about the outcomes of valuations first-hand, but rather in the witnessing of the performance of the valuation and the observing of what values are articulated in this process” (Muniesa & Helgesson, 2013, 121). *Antiques Roadshow* makes processes that otherwise occur behind closed doors available for public consumption, which makes it performance-driven “value-oriented” TV (Bishop, 1999). The crowd's presence contributes to the spectacle that is later edited to highlight popular stories and build tension, drama, and sometimes comedy. However, here, the Goldsmiths Ethnography of the Antiques Road Show (GEARS) collective pays attention to value navigations between the experts, object owners, and crowd participants during the Roadshow Event.

By conducting research at a Roadshow Event, our focus is somewhat different from the scholarly debates around *Antiques Roadshow* as a TV program, which examine specific edited episodes (Bishop, 1999; Clouse, 2008; Hall, 1999; Wagner, 2019), although Bishop later analyzed “taping” the show as a “spectacle” (Bishop, 2001). Like other analyses of the series, the GEARS collective approached the Event as performance, but arrived at conclusions from the various “performers” themselves—valuation seekers, watching queuers, and professionals. It offered a unique vantage point to view how lay people and experts negotiate shared social narratives. GEARS's focus on attendees' qualitative experiences shows how object stories are actively shaped. Value is generated from participation, even when monetary outcomes are disappointing, and demonstrate highly developed lay-expertise in regimes of value (Appadurai, 1988; Jamieson, 1999) that allow attendees to play with subtle complexities of value beyond simple economic understandings. This shared nuanced understanding of value regimes works as entertainment—people know what to expect—and enables the public to play improvised “roles” in the *Antiques Roadshow*. Attendees' familiarity with the TV program and the format lead to highly attuned appreciations of nuanced and varied regimes of value that play out theatrically upon broadcast.

This article begins by theorizing object value and outlines how scholarly debates have framed *Antiques Roadshow* as a TV program, rather than a live Event. We describe our distinct collaborative methodology and show how object value is a performative process produced between experts, attendees, and audiences together. Contrary to expectations, expert valuations are not only monetary, and do not entirely “fix” the object's “worth” as owners evaluate the appraisal offered through their experiences.

## UNDERSTANDING VALUE PRACTICES

This analysis is located in an anthropology of value that considers how it shapes and informs value practices, and that it is neither fixed nor stable. It might appear obvious that value is an ambiguous concept, drawing on monetary and emotional dimensions, even simultaneously, but it has taken some time to be recognized in social science and economic theories. By bringing conversations and negotiations at the Roadshow Event into the center, the GEARS collective shows how ambiguities around registers of value play out.

Social scientists and economists have long mused on the way people attribute value. Early economic theories tended to address alienated and abstracted principles of capitalist exchange based on supply and demand (Carrier, 1995). As anthropological theories brought the *social practice* of value to the fore, scholars' emphases shifted to consider how relationships are formed and identities constructed through the exchange or consumption of objects (Appadurai, 1988; Carrier, 1995). Famously, early twentieth-century theorists Malinowski (1921) and Mauss (1922) developed influential arguments about the social power of exchange, reciprocity, and value. While ground-breaking, these theories still reinforced the separation of different kinds of value—social and economic.

More recently, scholars have challenged assumed distinctions between social and economic spheres (Carrier, 1995; Graeber, 2013; Harvey & Krohn-Hansen, 2018). Rather than viewing households as outside of economic value, they are intertwined through overlapping registers of values (Graeber, 2013). Examples include unpaid labor in family businesses (Harvey & Krohn-Hansen, 2018), or preferential treatment between buyers and sellers based on loyalty, friendships, or familial obligations. For Carrier, conventional distinctions between economic and social spheres are too neat, commodity exchanges involve trust and obligation, while lived experiences of family and economics are rarely mutually exclusive (Carrier, 1995).

Miller argues that there are multiple “uses of values” rather than one single, defining theory which works as a “bridge between value as price and values as inalienable” (Miller, 2008, 14). He calls for greater ethnographic attention to the *processes* of evaluation to demonstrate how social and moral parts of evaluation are inseparable from material objects: a “constitutive part of that which is being evaluated” (7). It is precisely these *processes* that GEARS seek to uncover in the Antiques Roadshow Event, which influence how people consider value and value practices.

In their analysis of intersecting systems in illegal transactions, Panella and Thomas (2015, 5) describe tensions between value and values as a “double semantic register.” They show how components of value around modernity, morality, or security are actively produced *at the same time* as maintaining the kinds of economic value integral to functioning markets. Jamieson's work on bootleg, pirate, and counterfeit records as separate regimes of value also demonstrates that economic categories of supply and demand do not function in isolation from meaningful social categories. In this case, what becomes economically valuable is determined by the content and form of production: originals, prestige copies, and pirates are valuable, while copies, reproductions, and counterfeits are not, even though they might be versions or re-recordings of the same songs. The relations between historical worth, market price, and sentiment are always contingent, and value is unfixed.

Anna Tsing's work also guides this study. Her emphasis on “assessment practices” in matsutake mushroom commodity chains illustrates how people negotiate multiple registers of value. Sorting and regrading processes by mushroom dealers “make value by purifying the mushrooms as a commodity” (23). However, they can still be exchanged as gifts, which serve social and economic functions simultaneously: they demonstrate friendship or foster informal bonds with clients. While valuation might operate as a utilitarian classification of monetary value, the processes of evaluation factor in social and moral facets of the objects' worth. This article shows how these elements are entangled in conversations between experts and attendees at the live Roadshow Event.

Objects are always understood in context, and always contingent. The concept of an antique, an old object with a high monetary value, viewed as a commodity, is a relatively recent twentieth-century phenomenon (Greenfield, 2009), which creates a counterpoint against which modern, mass-produced objects are imagined to be measured. In turn, an expert language of value judgments, such as rare, common, decorative, and exquisite, work as criteria for market values and reliability (Coopmans & Rappert, 2020). Monetary evaluations are not static,

market values go up and down, and artifacts move in and out of fashion over time. Attendees' interests and expert comments at Antique Roadshow events reflect shifting concerns, from questions in the 1970s about home insurance to more recent attention to estimates of likely yields at auctions. While Goodey considered insurance estimates subterfuge for socially inappropriate questions about auction sales (Goodey, 1998, 201), Smith and Higgins (2016) suggest they reveal a generational shift, influenced by more profit-focused TV programs such as *Bargain Hunt* (2000–present) or *Cash in the Attic* (2002–2012).

For audiences of the edited TV program, Muniesa and Helgesson note that part of the viewing pleasure is in creating “social knowledge about valuations” (121). At the Roadshow Event, awareness of shared valuation regimes is particularly visible and reveals how attendees prepare for and interact with expert valuation processes. This research demonstrates how the final “worth” of objects is only partially shaped by the given expertise. For some, valuation processes (sorting, classifying, history) add value to the object biography, while for others a monetary valuation can be what is needed to uncouple social relationships. The GEARS collective explored these patterns of play and complexity as attendees navigated personal entanglements with friends, family, and family histories alongside the market valuation given by experts at the *Antiques Roadshow* Event.

## METHODOLOGY: COLLABORATIVE EVENT ETHNOGRAPHY

This article is based on fieldwork carried out at Ightham Mote Antiques Roadshow Event in July 2016. Given the vast size of the event, doing qualitative research that could meaningfully capture the experience in a single day required a new approach. Collaborative Event Ethnography, pioneered by Brosius and Campbell (2010), allows a team of ethnographers to conduct detailed research of a large event in a short period of time. Our team, the GEARS Collective, was comprised of 21 lecturers, PhD students, MA students, and undergraduates from the Anthropology Department at Goldsmiths, University of London (for a detailed account see Weston & Djohari, 2018). Shared research ideas were developed at a workshop prior to the event, which allowed researchers to freely pursue their methodological preferences and follow tangential links. Over the course of the day, some followed an expert or object, others monitored a table, or joined a queue. Some worked in pairs or small teams. A lunchtime meeting identified emerging themes and areas of interest. Interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed in a standardized format before being transferred to NVIVO for analysis. Initial broad thematic coding provided a foundation for further analysis on the whole data set by teams working on thematic papers following their own interests (Figure 1).

The flexible approach allowed us to continually share information. GEARS followed the whole process from first appraisal to final valuation as experienced by attendees. Researchers stationed at particular valuation tables could capture the rotation of experts and the range of objects that passed through, some queued to have their own object valued. Data was collected through interviews, thick descriptions, and participant observation, and organized by data type and case studies in NVIVO (Figures 2 and 3).

Collectively, in one day, GEARS amassed dense and rich data beyond the scope of a single ethnographer (Weston & Djohari, 2018). Through a collaborative approach and the use of NVIVO, the possibilities for analysis were expanded.

This article teases out some of the more salient experiences that show how attendees and experts navigate their roles in the performance of value. It illustrates how people deftly play with messy, fluid registers of object valuation, demonstrating their social knowledge of value as they fix, stretch, or reweave the social, historical, and economic entanglements that generate object “worth.”

**Table 2: Thematic Codes and number of coding references in NVIVO**

Thematic codes:		
loss	2	5 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
concerned with throwing away sorr	5	7 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
Anomolous Objects	5	5 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
Banter	14	20 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
Conflicts	5	6 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
Conversational asides	9	12 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
Event	2	2 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
Exclusions	3	3 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
Identity	1	2 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
Knowledge	1	2 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
Queue	5	7 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
Researchers	23	47 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
Value	7	8 Codes\\Thematic Nodes
Benefits	2	2 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Event
Chat and small talk	26	94 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Event
Emergent Nodes	0	0 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Event
Filming	23	80 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Event
Football	5	8 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Event
Getting on TV	16	30 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Event
Herritage Site	1	1 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Event
Organisation of Event	26	58 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Event
Performance	14	17 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Event
Queue as Performance	14	26 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Event
Queue as ritual	22	47 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Event
Silences	2	3 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Event
Clutter	8	13 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Value
Family	23	54 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Value
Financial Value	18	34 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Value
Heirlooms	11	23 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Value
Post evaluation value	6	13 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Value
Social	6	11 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Value
Use value	7	8 Codes\\Thematic Nodes\\Value

FIGURE 1 NVIVO thematic codes sample © GEARS Collective.

**Table 1: Data type by file and number of NVIVO coding references**

Data File Type	Number of files	Number of Coding References
Thick description files	3	179
Interview files	13	590
Field notes files	32	908
Photos	44	60

FIGURE 2 NVIVO data type © GEARS Collective.

## OUTLINE OF THE ANTIQUES ROADSHOW EVENT

The Roadshow Event formula is well established and follows the experiences of people who bring objects for valuation at one of the highly organized free events (BBC, 2017). The production team estimate that 15–20,000 objects are viewed during the day, with around 50 making it into two TV programs. The event at Ightham Mote was typical, doors opened at 9.30 am and closed at 4.30 pm, with an estimated attendance of around 3000 people. Most attendees arrived early, many carrying multiple items, some struggling with entire dining table sets or substantial sculptures. Indeed, part of the spectacle is observing outlandishly large or unusual objects brought for evaluation.

**Table 3: Case nodes and number of coding references in NVIVO**

Case Node Names	Number of Files Coded	Number of Coding References	Parent Name
Objects	2	2	Codes\\Case Nodes
Visitors	10	11	Codes\\Case Nodes
Clocks	8	9	Codes\\Case Nodes\\Objects
Collectables	7	10	Codes\\Case Nodes\\Objects
Furniture	6	15	Codes\\Case Nodes\\Objects
Glass	3	3	Codes\\Case Nodes\\Objects
Jewellery	12	20	Codes\\Case Nodes\\Objects
Miscellaneous	28	74	Codes\\Case Nodes\\Objects
Pictures	5	6	Codes\\Case Nodes\\Objects
Silver	4	5	Codes\\Case Nodes\\Objects
Arms & Militaria	4	7	Codes\\Case Nodes\\Objects
Books	3	3	Codes\\Case Nodes\\Objects
Ceramics	4	5	Codes\\Case Nodes\\Objects
Crew	7	8	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People
Other	1	1	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People
Ambulance	2	5	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Crew
Camera Crew	15	17	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Crew
Experts	22	64	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Crew
Fiona Bruce	13	23	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Crew
Producers	17	27	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Crew
Security	2	2	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Crew
Simon Shaw (executive producer - I	7	21	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Crew
Sound Crew	1	1	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Crew
Weapons Checker	3	8	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Crew
Catering	1	1	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Other
Police	1	1	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Other
Researchers	1	1	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Other
Stewards and Ightham Mote Staff	3	3	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Other
West Kent College Caterers	2	2	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Other\\Catering
Women's Institute	3	4	Codes\\Case Nodes\\People\\Other\\Catering

**FIGURE 3** NVIVO case nodes sample © GEARS Collective.

Once through the gates, visitors join the long queue for the preliminary object decision area (PODA), where a small team initially assesses their object. A weapons expert is on hand to ensure items are safe and legal. The PODA team allocates color-coded cards that direct attendees to specific zones, where experts are seated at individual “discipline” tables, such as furniture, jewelry, or artwork. Those bringing multiple objects might be directed to several zones or, for ambiguous classifications, towards the queue for miscellaneous items. The PODA team keeps alert for items with TV potential, either strong storytelling or monetary worth. Once through the PODA, attendees queue for their consultation. This can be slow, although the valuation process itself can be quite quick. Attendees are usually invited to tell their stories before a monetary value is provided. Experts have different engagement styles; some encourage crowd interactions, engaging in banter and revealing tidbits of historical facts or gossip. For most people, this untelevised evaluation is the final step of their journey at the Roadshow Event. But where an object may be worth filming, the attendee has to wait for the monetary valuation to be revealed in front of the camera, as in this instance the future program takes precedence.

Bonner (2003, 188) describes *Antiques Roadshow* as “romanticized Englishness (even more than Britishness)” where the intersection of queuing, deck chairs, Women's Institute cake stalls, stately homes, objects of diverse historical relevance, stewards in boater hats, and eccentric collections, all come together into an “event,” only a small slice of which is packaged for the TV broadcast. The day is full of slow-moving queues, and visitors form snaking lines around key features so they can view filming, valuation tables or take part in a mystery object guessing game along the way (Weston et al., 2022). For most there is palpable excitement in looking out for “celebrities,” including the program presenter Fiona Bruce; in the potential to appear on TV in a crowd shot; in the wishful anticipation that their item might be revealed to be worth a fortune; or even in telling the story of an

object or its association with a special person. For some, the event provides the opportunity to discuss a lifetime's collection with an appreciative expert who can share their enthusiasm.

## FINDINGS: THE PERFORMANCE AND MEANING OF VALUE

At the *Antiques Roadshow* Event, distinct registers of value overlap, and entangled accounts show how economics and social life are intertwined in valuations (see Carrier, 1995). The GEARS collective's ethnographic work shows such distinctions are not easily separated. Indicators of authenticity and market value are often measured by age or provenance, although evidence may be provided by family stories as well as labels, signatures, or certificates. Evaluations are performative, emerging in interactions between experts, participants, and audiences *together*, in improvised collaborations of stooges and storytellers. While organized around market prices, the value provided by the “expert” is not solely monetary, nor does it “fix” the object's “worth,” and owners later evaluate expert opinions as they reflect on their experience.

### Attendees as audience and improvised stooges

Viewing appraisals at the Roadshow Event is sociable and collective. Attendees become part of the show, recognizing their role in the filmed background as an appreciative and visible “audience.” Reframed as a potential stage, it becomes unusually acceptable to “join in” conversations as audiences publicly examine differing registers of value crowd. Interaction is encouraged as part of the performance of *value talk* around an object.

Conversations between attendees reveal how taste, usually considered subjective, can be negotiated collectively and contribute to object value. While waiting in a queue, one of the GEARS ethnographers shared admiring comments with the owner of an exquisitely detailed, shimmering tray. He remarked that it was “made out of butterfly wings” and had belonged to his grandmother. While they appreciated the fine craftwork, it caught the attention of a passing woman. She found it displeasing, and as she walked away her companion said, “poor butterflies.” The woman's moral condemnation warned of changing social tastes, and the owner sounded apologetic as he repeated the tray was his grandmother's. The expert confirmed that the Edwardian tray would be difficult to sell now, like ivory “people don't want to see it anymore.” The owner's rueful reflection emphasized familial value rather than his earlier pleasure in the glistening object. Certainly, while he did not believe it was worthless, he no longer expressed any opinions on its beauty or craftsmanship.

As performances, valuation encounters between expert and attendee were enriched by the audiences. Members of the crowd often acted spontaneously as stooges, working as collaborators with the performer. Experts demonstrated specialist knowledge as they “correctly” determined, categorized, and sorted objects out of the freely shared spectacle of “value talk.” Andy McConnell, the expert on the glassware table that day, frequently reinforced this point. Unlike other tables with orderly queues, McConnell gathers a large crowd and encourages people to place their glassware on any available space on his table. He calls out, “what do you want to see next?” and the crowd responds by shouting and pointing, as he picks up the next object and urges people to join the conversations.

Responses to evaluations were also shared and often collaborative. During the filmed evaluation of an ornate piece of silver pottery, the audience speculated that it should be worth a fortune. However, while the expert described the sophisticated artistry skills of the makers,

mid-twentieth century North American potters, he explained: “this may look pure silver from the surface, however it is not real silver inside...but because it came in here in its best condition, it could go for about £40.” The owner swallowed his disappointment, and the watching crowd offered sympathy. One asked: “But why would such a fine object get that low value? It is about the finest thing I have seen at the Antiques Roadshow today”; another said, “I didn't expect this little money placed on that object...I would have sworn it is very expensive.” The expert responded by explaining that “most times, objects that are fake really outshine the real things. It was just a mere coating, and an expert would know more than others who just judge it only by its surface.” As the crowd dispersed, a man summed it up: “you don't judge a book by its cover.” In this exchange, the expert's privileged access to knowledge is reaffirmed over that of the lay person, but the public shares the owner's disappointment.

### **Auditioning objects – attendees as storytellers**

Producers and audiences alike have tended to assume that dramatic tensions in antique and collectibles TV programs will emerge between attendees' ignorance and experts' connoisseurship (Clouse, 2008). The production team imagines the attendees will bring entertainment value in objects' “stories” that will be balanced by experts' specialist knowledge. There are reminders of this across the event site: the side of a storage container near the entrance asks, “what story will you bring?” and the zone ticket cards read... “All will be revealed.” However, the Roadshow Event reflects a general trend toward democratization of expertise about antiques, artwork, and collecting, while some attendees are highly knowledgeable amateurs.

Stories are valuable threads in the presentation of objects. Clouse, writing on the multiplicity of stories found on American antiques programs, challenges assumptions that monetary estimates always override other forms of value and suggests more nuanced approaches. While acknowledging that tensions between sentiment and market values are most appealing to TV viewers, she argues that all forms of value are intricately and implicitly implicated in the monetary valuation, and not distinct from historical, artistic, or sentimental value. As noted earlier, the search for stories begins during the PODA sorting, but it was also observable during filming. Film crews asked direct questions to encourage more details on a person's life or character to make stories more “vivid.” As a member of the production team explained: “[The film crew] record as much as possible ...They need a lot as not everyone is a good TV subject. Some “can't tell the right story.” Some “know too much” about the object already and make the expert “look bad” or make the valuation “pointless.” It goes without saying that objects always have stories, but Clouse notes that the program values stories that are entertaining or can make “history lessons live” (10). GEARS noted it was important to tell a “good story,” but that there were diverse ideas about what this looked like.

Many attendees are familiar with the show and are acutely aware of the need for stories. In this respect, they arrive knowledgeable, as Muniesa and Helgesson describe, with shared senses of valuation and the different ways it can be determined. They sort and regrade their stories as they queue, rehearsing object biographies repeatedly as they consider the potential for filming (Weston et al., 2022). As one GEARS ethnographer noted: “By the time we had reached the end of the queue together we had started to hear each other's stories a few times. Keith had told the story about his dad and the unglazed porcelain plate at least three times. So this was a rehearsal for the assessment, and possibly for being on the telly!” This brings to mind Tsing's account of sorting and resorting mushrooms between categories, sometimes commodities, other times gifts. Prior to the Roadshow Event, attendees must evaluate what object to take, as well as its market price. They consider object acquisition and possible appeal to experts or TV producers. Attendees arrived with different expectations of what the experts would find interesting and valuable. Primarily, these pivoted on whether the object had been

handed down (however formally or informally) between generations, whether it had a known biography, or if it had been gleaned from inauspicious circumstances, like a thrift shop or a car-boot sale.

The possible registers of value meant that very different expectations were expressed. Attendees speculated on what the experts might find interesting. The owner of a cricket bat believed their object had a chance of being filmed because of connections between Igtam Mote and the local cricket club, tying social threads they hoped might appeal to the producers of this particular episode. In the Crockery queue, one middle-aged woman and her friend carried heavy platters and bowls, vivid art deco Clarice Clift pottery. She explained that it was not to her personal taste and was stored in the attic, but it was a family treasure, as her grandfather had been employed by the pottery. She described getting the set out of storage, cleaning and selecting examples, happy to rehearse her account, emphasizing their age and status as heirlooms. She anticipated the expert would find these personal histories and family objects interesting. There would be no point, she said, in bringing something you'd found in a thrift shop, you'd have nothing to offer the expert in exchange for the evaluation. She believed the experts, and indeed the TV producers, were looking for emotional connections.

In contrast, a man in his forties queuing for a consultation at the “miscellaneous” table was eager to share his thrift shop finds with the expert. He explained that he had acquired reasonable knowledge after many of years of “poking about” for valuable curiosities in “junk shops.” He hoped the expert would confirm his assessments of the object's value. His perspective was quite different from the woman with the Clarice Clift pottery. He reflected that most people don't have attics full of heirlooms, family histories were unverifiable and rarely interesting to outsiders, while public confirmation of amateur expertise showed that everyone had the chance to join in the antiques market these days. He anticipated that he had found a bargain and had paid under the market value. This, he considered, was what experts and audiences found interesting.

In teasing out these tangents, experts connect objects to interesting periods of history or changing social sentiments or movements, as personal biographies of objects are embedded in wider social associations. Attendees familiar with the shows are hyper aware of how stories can enhance their relationship to objects. But these social histories can have personal resonances too, and the experts can fill gaps in knowledge. One woman, holding a Chinese carved elephant that had belonged to her family, commented, “Well, like all people, you don't think to ask when it's sensible, do you.” She added that her mother had dementia and she had missed the opportunity to ask how the family had acquired it. Another woman, carrying an old sword gifted by her late mother-in-law, considered, “I think history and the story behind it matters, but in my case when you don't know the story behind it, the expert could tell a very impressive story for you that makes items stand out.” Stories painted by the expert took the place of personal narratives and demonstrate how attendees follow subtle nuances involved in different registers of value.

## **Making expert evaluations – redefining the monetary and story value of objects**

Relations of exchange and reciprocity are imbued through the interactions between experts and visitors at the Antiques Roadshow Event. Monetary evaluations offered by experts are sometimes seen as fair exchange for an owner's interesting and well-told story. Experts also contribute with historical information, functional explanations, and knowledge of fluctuating market scales. These details expand object stories and contextualize personal accounts within flows of popular culture and mass production. In this way, as the following examples demonstrate, they deftly weave social significance into objects in their valuations.

Exchanges between experts and attendees are not merely functional, but add to the shared processes of evaluation that go on over the duration of the day. Experts know the experience of the attendees, and the appeal of the TV program relies on stories as well as monetary worth as different registers of value are navigated. At times over the day, attendees are reminded of the sentiments their inexpensive items offer and their place in social histories. As one expert evaluated the worth of a George Frampton sculpture he drew attention to more familiar social connections between objects by “reminding” the audience that the same artist carved the Peter Pan statue in London’s Kensington Gardens. A painting by Charles Hunt provided the opportunity to learn about the Worshipful Company of Playing Cards, one of the City of London Guilds. Some USSR New Year decorations generated a discussion of Soviet propaganda. An early twentieth-century example of Chinese jewelry made for tourist markets triggered an explanation of global economic markets and colonial networks.

McConnell, the glass expert, provided long accounts of manufacturing histories, explaining, for example, the significance of Venice not only as a place of production but also as a node in international commercial transactions. Later, he held a glass fish to his chest and exclaimed, “it’s not worth anything, next to nothing, but it’s Italian made. They’re still being made today but represents (sic) the aspirations of the working class moving into the middle classes in the 1960s/1970s.” He explained that an elaborate decanter and glasses would have been expensive if they had been made in the late nineteenth century: “Great industrialists would have drunk from this sort of thing in New York – balls would have been given with maybe tens of these things being used to decant and pour champagne whilst the poor and everyday drank out of these sorts of things [holding up a pressed glass cup]. He noted that its monetary value had dropped, as mass-produced machine-made crystal devalued skilled glass craft. But then he shifted to its use value: “Stick any bottle of wine in here and leave it to decant and it will taste better. It will make a £5 bottle taste like a £10 or bottle. It will make a £10 bottle taste like a £20 bottle.” He concluded that the value of the bottle lied in the pleasure it could give. McConnell deliberately conflated monetary and social values in his approach to object value.

Another example at the ceramics table highlighted how the experts sometimes emphasized use value over market prices and demonstrated sensitivity for maintaining meaningful attachment. An elderly woman carefully removed multiple cups and saucers from a plastic bag, while the expert asked if she uses them. She replied “no” and explained that her grandmother had won it, to which he said, “so it’s a family thing then” while looking it over thoroughly. He pointed out the makers’ mark “Foley” and said it was from the 1900s. He explained about the maker, where it was made, weaving a story about its history. Despite the waiting queues, he took his time and reflected that “the potter who made this 100 years ago would be horrified to think no one would be drinking out of his cup.” It was not valuable, he concluded, but suggested, “once in a while, get it out and use it. It’s so nice to drink out of an elegant cup.” Finally, he considered the whole set was worth about £35. She was happy with this. The GEARS watching ethnographer said it was clear that the expert immediately knew the set was worth little, yet took care to establish its use value as something to be savored. His unhurried attention is notable for the care afforded to the owner. In telling different types of stories themselves (i.e. an object’s relevance in relation to a collection, a particular print run, a maker, socio-political history, or public figures) they re-inscribe worth, overprinting one story with another.

By the end of the day, as both experts and attendees were becoming tired, we saw an attendee present some earrings at the jewelry table. The attendee offered no story, just asked if it was paste. The expert’s simple “yes” and “next please” meant the attendee felt doubly disappointed. She had waited a long time to learn that her item had no monetary value nor had an opportunity to share a story. In contrast, one of our ethnographers, who was following in

the same queue, was able to draw out a more detailed exchange with the expert, having “rehearsed” their story and prepared follow-up questions. Rehearsal and participation can shape how fulfilling the valuation experience might be and can demonstrate collaborative dynamics in the exchanges between experts and attendees.

### Post evaluation: reinscribing value

The power of expertise in defining the value of an object is not as fixed as one might imagine. Even following a disappointing valuation, attendees might disregard the findings or advice of the expert to “use” an item. Many, at least publicly, considered monetary valuation as secondary to the significance of their object. One commented that the opportunity to tell their story was more important than the price, that the objects helped “remember things,” even if they were “only gathering dust in the attic,” ultimately reflecting that “I’m not going to get rid of them because of the person who gave them to me... the valuation’s just secondary, isn’t it.” Another, on learning her mother’s silver spoons were “only” plate, considered the family relationship more valuable. These reflections on remembrance and ownership help consider reactions to object value and meaning post evaluation. As one woman summarized, the story and the object had combined values: “I will still not like to sell it, I will keep it well as a family possession and maybe give it to my daughter someday so she could also pass it within the family with the story behind it.” The passing of objects as gifts or inheritances from passing relatives entangles them with familial obligations, sentimental meanings, and memories.

Some owners were primarily interested in monetary value, often wanting valuations for gifts or inherited items “just in case.” Sometimes this was expressed as finding accurate information, but more often it was part of difficult decision-making processes about items that carried familial obligations or sentimental connections. The limited space in modern houses means inherited and gifted items can feel a burden. One attendee wanted to know the value of a doll that had been passed down through the oldest girls in the family, but it had been in the attic for 15 years. She felt that her daughter did not want it and ... “Having cleared out my mother-in-law’s house I realize that in the end someone will get that and throw it away. So, if I find out that she’s worth some money, I will sell that.” Trying to relinquish these objects can be difficult. Djohari has shown that when women sell baby wraps, highly sentimental items, the acquired money is often repurposed toward an equivalent emotional meaning, such as paying for a “special” family event (Djohari, 2016). While few attendees revealed any plans for spending money gained from future sales, economic valuations have the potential to transfer sentimental meaning into new objects or memories. In this context, monetary valuations at the Roadshow create opportunities to decouple the obligations associated with objects, allowing them to be sold, and/or converted without feelings of guilt.

## CONCLUSION: PERFORMING VALUES

While attendees offer stories and experts provide evaluations throughout the Roadshow event, few are considered “good” for TV. By focusing on the Event, rather than broadcast episodes, the GEARS collective explored broader encounters that make up the theater of values captured. When we witnessed stories that did not make the final TV cut, we saw how attendees and experts shape and negotiate object “value” through conversation.

By attending the Event, it became clear that attendees have a sophisticated understanding of complex value regimes. They are well versed in recognizing the need for “stories” and how these emerge through the personal, social, and historical entanglements of objects and their

place in popular culture. Some attendees view their tales as fair exchange for the expert's valuation. As such, many rehearse their stories, refining or expanding as they recount them while queuing. They tie in local associations or moving histories and audition their object stories at the appraisal table in the hope of inclusion in the final broadcast. The attending public's prior knowledge of the TV program informs a lay appreciation of the multiples registers and regimes of value and their engagement with the event and filming. Together, these elements show how the long-running program has shaped a nuanced appreciation of value that extends beyond straightforward financial and sentimental concerns (although both are almost always present).

Encounters with experts also shape object stories through value talk. These conversations are not solely economic valuations. Expert accounts are also social, adding layers to object biographies as they make links to wider social histories or historical figures. For some attendees, these stories fill gaps in object biographies. Rather than expert evaluations dominating or usurping object valuation, the Roadshow Event reveals a more organic, and often collaborative encounter. Experts are sensitive to how their economic valuations may disrupt people's emotional connections to their possessions and make efforts to balance use value or sentimental value, playing down economic worth when necessary. Owners end up taking what they need from these encounters, whether expanded stories to tell, rejections of calls to use items, or even help in finding a reason to let objects go. Together these experiences demonstrate how value is not a measurement, but a dimension of the thing and its context.

As an enduring TV program and participatory event, it is clear that Antiques Roadshow captures and celebrates the way objects become valuable as nodes through which personal, social, and historical relationships can be told. The program also directly shapes people's lay knowledge and understanding about markets and monetary valuations. As a consequence, attendees arrive at Roadshow Events with sophisticated senses of valuation regimes and are able to play their improvised parts to reify the point: stories and money are both integral factors in understanding worth.

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