

**YOU HAVE
TOO MUCH
SHIT**

A SELF-HELP BOOK BY CHRIS THOMAS

DEFINING SHIT

William Morris famously said “have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful”.

Well, the shit is pretty much everything else.

SHIT, MEET FAN

I'm going to make an assumption that, because you're reading this, you live in the Western world. As such, it's more than likely that you own a lot of shit. I think that much of this shit is bad for you, me, and everyone else on the planet.

This is a short book. Most self-help books like this would gently attempt to enlighten you towards a less materialistic existence; promising not to judge you and show you a cleaner, less cluttered way of life. Well, fuck that. I'm going to judge you. Your life is full of shit that you don't need or use. Let's go.

A LIST OF THINGS YOU PROBABLY DON'T NEED

Free pens, mouse mats and mugs; your hidden stash of takeaway menus; those glittery wine gift bags that you keep in case you ever give someone else some wine; your bag full of plastic bags; the office toy that forever sits idly on your desk; a pile of long since subscribed-to magazines that now more closely resemble the trunk of a tree; the remote control car someone bought you for Christmas to show that you still have a childish side; your plethora of novelty electronics; unwanted Christmas presents that have hung around too long; your CD collection (the CD is the no man's land of musical storage); boxes full of photographs that you, be honest, will never look at again; rolled up posters hidden from view; the musical instrument lying against the wall that you never play; crap paperbacks; any books you don't intend to read again; worn-out trainers; all the clothes you hardly ever wear; discarded broadband routers; obsolete gizmos you keep lying around in case they're ever worth something; chargers and cables for

obsolete gizmos you keep lying around in case they're ever worth something; the car sitting in a garage all day; DIY materials, bought for an unfinished project several years ago; pretty much anything being stored in a cardboard box or bin liner...

And so on.

WHY YOU?

On a personal level, having lots of shit is a problem when you have to spend a lot of time worrying about it all. This is not a desirable condition. For a second, imagine adding up a lifetime's worth of the hours spent cleaning your things, finding the best insurance for them, worrying that they might be damaged or stolen – that's a lot of your energy going into things that don't really matter. If something causes you more stress than it's worth, get rid of it.

When you have less things you create more space – and space is an increasingly valuable thing in this increasingly cluttered world. It is possible to enjoy the absence of things. Extra room to move, breathe, swing cats and all the rest of it. Space is a thing, you just need to see it.

You'll have noticed that I contrived a couple of paragraphs there about freeing up more time and space. Well, when it comes down to it, time and space is all you've got.

So what the hell do you do with it? Well, when you are less encumbered by your possessions, you can spend more of your life experiencing things: going to new places, educating yourself, exercising, meeting people, eating good food, drinking good drink, finding love. You will feel lighter and freer; it becomes easier to travel and move around without so many possessions in tow.

Without all this stuff to distract you, you are forced to search a little deeper to find out what the fuck it is you want to do with your life. Sometimes that leaves you staring into an abyss.

Your shit isn't going to fill the abyss, it will merely obscure it.

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

It is the nefarious tag-team of greed and envy that spurs on the material cock-measuring competition of life. We spend our lives comparing ourselves to others, coveting our neighbour's ox – and getting into loads of debt in order to buy a bigger, shinier ox than them. All in search of some impossible life where you have the biggest, shiniest collection of oxen, wives, manservants and donkeys and everything is perfect.

Much of the fuel for this comes from the world of marketing and advertising. Advertising impregnates objects with our dreams and gives them the appearance of life. These objects are not alive. They are things. Just things. Just inert lumps of matter with no blood or organs or thoughts or feelings.

Advertising preys on our fears. It is plastered on every available surface and it shouts and shouts and makes

it hard to think clearly. It exploits our deepest anxieties to convince us that we need to buy something in order to make ourselves happy, that this product or that is the magic solution to our problems.

There's no such thing as magic.

MOTHER NATURE, MEET YOUR MAKER

The archaeologists of the future will find themselves excavating heaps of our discarded junk, picking through mountains of DVDs and yoghurt pots and wondering: “who the fuck were these idiots?”

The amount of stuff we consume as a species is insane. It's overwhelming to think about the amount of energy going into the production of needless crap on a daily basis. The environmental case is worthy of a whole other book, but I'll put it simply: the earth's finite resources are, well, finite – and if we continue to consume at our current rate, it won't be long before they're gone.

Given this, it's easy to feel little or no hope for the future of mankind. That's normal. It's probably the correct response. But begin to think about the ways you can improve your own personal impact on the earth, and it becomes easier to imagine that others might too.

Think about the amount of stuff that goes into the manufacture and usage of one of your possessions over its lifetime. Compare it to some alternatives. A bicycle, made of 10-20 kilos of various light metals, rubbers and so on, is a far more materially efficient way of transporting a single human being than 1½ tonnes of steel, aluminium, glass, leather, and thousands of gallons of fuel.

Now, I'm the first to admit that your individual ecological efforts are going to do little to hold back the oncoming shitstorm of global warming. You can recycle Coke bottles or forgo plastic bags your whole life without putting anything other than the tiniest dent in its surface. But when those floods are a-coming, at least you'll have less stuff dragging you down into the murky brown water.

LIVING IN A MATERIAL WORLD

Don't get me wrong. I'm not proposing you sell every one of your possessions and leave, forever to wander the wilderness in nothing but a loin cloth. A lot of things are really very good. To find real value in material things, it's helpful to discover a deep appreciation of the things you use every day.

Everyday things are the things that you use the most, so they're the things truly worth investing in. Have hard-wearing shoes, comfortable chairs, knives and forks that won't bend or rust. Have a computer that won't crash or lose your work. Invest in your hobbies. Whatever it is you spend most of your time doing, have things that assist in making this better, all of the time.

Everyday things are easy to judge the quality of, in terms of how regularly you use them, how long they last, and how much they aid your enjoyment of life. The things that tick all

of these boxes are good things. Keep them and look after them.

Not all of our possessions can be judged by their utility: works of art, decorative objects, keepsakes and souvenirs... It's harder to objectively sift through these things because they have a far more fluffy, subjective means of judgement. We associate memories with them and attach sentimentality to them. We use them to spruce up our surroundings and communicate our individuality to others.

A box of photos that you dig out every couple of years – is it really worth having, at least in physical form? Or is it just an emotional crutch that you no longer need?

Don't feel bad about throwing out something ugly, broken or useless even if it has a certain amount of sentimental value attached to it. The grief won't last. Granny will forgive you. Of all the times you've ever thrown something away, how many times have you really come to regret it?

NOW YOU KNOW YOU HAVE TOO MUCH SHIT, HERE'S HOW TO GET RID OF IT

Hopefully I've given you the means to separate the wheat from the shit, and the impetus to go and send your more trivial possessions to a better place. There are a number of ways to part with something you don't need. Here they are.

1. Give your shit to people who need it more.

People with less than you. Charities who need the money. Schools. Libraries. People who need materials for experiments or making things. Do this on a regular basis – every few months or so. Embrace the process. Constantly review what you have around you. Does it really need to be there? Over time, it becomes more satisfying to get rid of things than it is to buy something new.

2. Sell your shit to people who need it more.

As above, with a touch less altruism.

3. Share your shit.

You might own some things (tools, vehicles or clothes for instance) that can be used by more than one person. The classic example is the power drill, which they say is only used for 10 minutes or so, on average, throughout its lifetime. Lend these things to friends, colleagues and neighbours to maximise their usefulness. Trust people to look after things, and they'll trust you to look after theirs in return.

4. Digitise your shit.

Collections of books, CDs or records, stacks of paperwork and magazines – there are lots of things that can now be stored immaterially. Scan and record them at the highest possible quality, then get rid.

5. Fix your shit.

If you feel forced to throw away something you actually need, see if it can be saved. It's a sad fact that most of the things we buy today are not built to last. It's made more economical to buy a replacement than to fix what you already have. This is a deeply destructive cycle. If it's worth

keeping, make it your mission to repair and hold onto it for as long as possible.

6. Destroy your shit, trying not to fuck up other bits of the universe in the process.

This is the hardest one. In trying this, you will become acutely aware of how poorly prepared your shit is for the afterlife. Most things you throw away are seemingly doomed to sit in landfill for thousands of years, gathering the Earth's dust. Of course, recycle where you can. You might be surprised at how many things you can recycle – batteries, printer ink cartridges, glass, certain plastics, loads of stuff. But the rest of the shit, the hunks of useless stuff that you inevitably end up with – you're better off with them out of your life.

7. And lastly, if you get anything from reading this, please put into practice the following in every day of your life from this point onwards until you die:

DON'T BUY THE SHIT IN THE FIRST PLACE.

THANK YOU

Thank you for reading this book. I hope you didn't think it was shit.

If you did, please refer to the previous section.

Thank you to Harriet, Nieve, Sean, Ben and Genis for your advice and support. Gems.

Written by Christopher Thomas

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www.youhavetoomuchshit.com