



MARKSCHEME

May 2001

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Standard Level

Paper 1

Notes on Individual Questions

Extract (pp. 910-25) from Gretchen M. Herrmann (1997), Gift or Commodity: What Changes Hands in the U.S. Garage Sale?, American Ethnologist 24:910-30.

1. Give *three* examples of the ways in which garage sale transactions conform to the exchange practices of a market economy. *[4 marks]*

At garage sales, customers and sellers exchange goods for money. Sellers specify the price of the goods in advance. They collect money from customers and keep it in cash boxes or even sometimes cash registers. The physical layout of garage sales resembles those of stores: the goods are arranged for display and the actual exchange of goods for money takes place in a specially designated checkout area. The social roles of participants fall into well-established categories: proprietors, customers, and perhaps miscellaneous helpers and secondary sellers. The motivations of participants are easily recognisable from mainstream market exchanges: maximise profit (measured in terms of money taken in) while minimising expense or loss. At first glance at least, the altruistic and affective motivations of, for example, the extended kinship networks of yesteryears are of little relevance to garage-sale transactions. All of these features characterise garage sales as market contexts.

Candidates may organise these examples in a variety of equally interesting ways. They should present them in their own words, a requirement of particular importance for this question since the answers are so straightforwardly obtainable from the passage. Successful answers will convey the fact that market exchanges, far from representing the ‘natural’ form of exchange in no need of analysis, can be subjected to analytic dissection. Answers that are partial, poorly organized, or too close to the text will receive lower marks.

2. Give *three* examples of the ways in which transactions in garage sales do *not* conform to the practices of a market economy. *[4 marks]*

Goods transacted in garage sales carry with them the memories and emotions that the seller attaches to them. When they sell particular objects, sellers like to feel as if they were passing on these memories and emotions to the buyer at the same time. Because of this, sellers are attentive to the relative worthiness and suitability of the new owners of the goods, which they measure in terms of the neediness of the new owners or the care with which they will treat the object. In some garage sale transactions, social solidarity figures more prominently than profit-making. The more extreme example of this is outright gift-giving.

Again, the organisation and presentation of these examples can vary. Markers will pay particular attention to the candidate’s ability to present the materials in their own words.

- 3. How does your knowledge of exchange relations help explain the characteristics of garage sales in the United States? [6 marks]**

This question requires candidates to reflect abstractly on the situation analysed in the passage. Candidates may approach this question in a variety of ways. They may usefully focus on one of the important tensions in the anthropological analysis of exchange relations (*e.g.*, gift vs. commodity, altruism vs. self-interest, redistribution vs. accumulation, inalienability vs. alienability, or affect vs. interest), and locate garage sales in terms of these tensions. Candidates will obviously draw on materials they have presented in answer to questions 1 and 2, but they must subject these materials to analysis and use them to draw generalisations or abstractions, rather than just describe them. Satisfactory answers will demonstrate, either overtly or implicitly, the candidate's familiarity with different types of exchange systems. In addition, they will show that the candidate understands that exchange is not just a way of getting objects to circulate from owner to owner, but that it has specific effects on social relations. The best answers will discuss the ambiguities and apparent contradictions of the garage sale. Such answers may speculate on the implications of these ambiguities for anthropological models of exchange, or may point out that most exchange activities are in fact of 'mixed' types.

- 4. Identify *one* exchange activity in a specific society that you have studied and compare the social and cultural characteristics of this activity to garage-sale practices in the United States. [6 marks]**

Candidates are free to focus on a wide range of exchange activities: food redistribution, the potlatch, the circulation of goods in the *kula*, gift-giving associated with life-cycle or seasonal rituals, religious or ritual offerings, gambling, auctioneering, religious and other ritualised offerings, and even marriage or adoption. Comparisons will focus on both the similarities and the differences between the U.S. garage-sale and the case of the candidate's choosing. In all instances, answers must at least allude to the tension between gift and commodity exchange that Herrmann focuses on in the analysis of U.S. garage sales. The more successful answers will capture the potential complexities and ambiguities of any exchange activity, and will distinguish between the overt, official, or explicitly stated version of what takes place with the less overt, more subtle, and perhaps more subversive aspects of the activity that an anthropologist can uncover. Candidates must situate the comparative case chosen in terms of group, place, author and ethnographic present.
