



# The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern American Culture

*Scott Herring*

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The verb “declutter” has not yet made it into the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but its ever-increasing usage suggests that it’s only a matter of time. Articles containing tips and tricks on how to get organized cover magazine pages and pop up in TV programs and commercials, while clutter professionals and specialists referred to as “clutterologists” are just a phone call away. Everywhere the sentiment is the same: clutter is bad.

In *The Hoarders*, Scott Herring provides an in-depth examination of how modern hoarders came into being, from their onset in the late 1930s to the present day. He finds that both the idea of organization and the role of the clutterologist are deeply ingrained in our culture, and that there is a fine line between clutter and deviance in America. Herring introduces us to Jill, whose countertops are piled high with decaying food and whose cabinets are overrun with purchases, while the fly strips hanging from her ceiling are arguably more fly than strip. When Jill spots a decomposing pumpkin about to be jettisoned, she stops, seeing in the rotting, squalid vegetable a special treasure. “I’ve never seen one quite like this before,” she says, and looks to see if any seeds remain. It is from moments like these that Herring builds his questions: What counts as an acceptable material life—and who decides? Is hoarding some sort of inherent deviation of the mind, or a recent historical phenomenon grounded in changing material cultures? Herring opts for the latter, explaining that hoarders attract attention not because they are mentally ill but because they challenge normal modes of material relations. Piled high with detailed and, at times, disturbing descriptions of uncleanliness, *The Hoarders* delivers a sweeping and fascinating history of hoarding that will cause us all to reconsider how we view these accumulators of clutter.

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