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Sharing Suits and Stories in Seoul: Sharing Economy and its Socialites at a Used Clothing Startup in South Korea

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Among the promises of the sharing economy—Internet-enabled peer-to-peer exchanges—have been new socialities among sharers, who were expected to develop meaningful communal ties that go beyond impersonal commercial transactions. According to the most ambitious visions, those ties were not only to generate economic value, but also transform the structure of society itself, promising nothing short of a post-capitalist future. While the behemoths of the sharing economy, such as Uber and AirBnB, have betrayed this promise, sharing enthusiasts hold out hope that this vision could be realized via small-scale, community-oriented sharing endeavors—such as South Korean nonprofit Open Closet, which cheaply rents formal clothing, primarily to young people for job interviews. While aiming to help the disadvantaged, Open Closet also encourages a creation of a personal connection between suit donors and renters when the former are asked to include a personal note for the latter, who, in turn, write a thank-you note. Relying on textual analysis and interviews, this paper investigates the social connections that the circulation of suits and stories generates, while exploring achievements and limits of nonprofit sharing as an attempt to disrupt the current economic system from within.

Bio: Olga Fedorenko is Associate Professor at the Anthropology Department of Seoul National University. She received her PhD from the East Asian Studies Department at the University of Toronto and taught at New York University before joining SNU. Fedorenko's research and teaching focus on media and its connection to social and political life in contemporary South Korea. Her engagement with these issues began as she analyzed how South Korean advertising as a social institution is defined in contests between private purposes and public circulations, and it continues into two new projects, one on materiality of paper-based media, and the second on the internet-enabled sharing economy. Fedorenko's work appeared in *Anthropological Quarterly*, *Acta Koreana*, *Feminist Media Studies*, *InterAsia Cultural Studies*, and *Development & Society*, and in two edited volumes, *The Korean Popular Culture Reader* (Duke UP) and *Explorations in Critical Studies of Advertising* (Routledge).

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Registration: https://washington.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJMsfuuopzsoGNHPbIJZrtQg9a94J_cZr6Q9

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