

EMERGENT VALUE(S) OF GIVING THROUGH OBJECT MATTER

By

Penny Leong

BFA, Visual Arts, Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design, 2008

BA, Social Geography, University of British Columbia, 1991

A THESIS ESSAY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF APPLIED ART

in

Media

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

2010

© Penny Leong, 2010

Abstract

As an artist and writer, I am interested in “object matter,” a term I use to signify how objects are mediated through visual and textual languages. In my thesis, I explore used, everyday objects, things no longer wanted or needed by their owners, by examining ways people give them away to strangers. In particular, I have chosen to study the use of everyday language by people who give away their used goods through the online network Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff.” The three central questions of my exploration are: How do people give to strangers? What kinds of value(s), if not monetary value, could these objects have in their being given away? What is at stake in these free offerings?

I approach these questions through language, suggesting that what is offered is not only the objects themselves but their “object matter,” articulated through the written and spoken gestures of giving towards the other. I study how people describe their used goods and how they position their offerings both online and offline. These gestures reveal emergent values that may imply an obligation to use or receive these objects in certain ways, forming temporary yet sustaining bonds between strangers.

Various visual components produced out of the research will be discussed along with an exploration of the central ideas of tactics, emergent value(s) and object matter. The collected objects and some of the components of the visual documentation culminate into a two-part installation that is part documentation and part participatory event.

Methodologically, the research borrows from sociological examinations of the gift economy and Michel de Certeau's ideas of "tactics" as everyday practices of singular forms of production. The conceptual poetics of Marcel Duchamp who significantly introduced language into the visual arts through the readymade is discussed. Furthermore, language as "indirect discourse" informs how I interpret the ways of speaking and writing that poignantly illustrate how people in Craigslist "Free Stuff" value and give away their used things.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
QUOTATIONS.....	viii
CHAPTER 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Visual Research.....	11
1.11 Material Exploration of Emergent Values of Cardboard Boxes.....	12
1.12 Mappings.....	21
1.13 Photographs and Caption Titling of Other Objects.....	28
1.14 Categories of Giving.....	31
1.15 Project Blog.....	37
1.16 Digital Collage Project.....	39
1.2 The Project.....	42
1.3 Project Components.....	45
CHAPTER 2: Findings.....	50
2.1 Valuable Sheddings of Excess.....	50
2.2 Stranger Gifts.....	53
2.3 Emergent Value(s).....	54
2.31 Value(s) through Giving.....	55
2.32 Value(s) through Artistic Process and Representation.....	56

2.33	Mutability of Value(s).....	57
2.4	Tactics.....	62
2.41	Tactics of Consumption.....	62
2.42	Tactical Ways of Speaking and Reading.....	64
2.43	Tactical Operations through Art.....	66
CHAPTER 3: Object Matter.....		67
3.1	Conceptual Poetics.....	71
3.2	Indirect Discourse.....	76
CHAPTER 4: Artistic Context.....		83
4.1	Text and Mapping.....	85
4.2	Art as Documentation.....	88
4.21	One of Each, (1993), Karsten Bott.....	90
4.22	Capital (2001) and Other Projects, Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska.....	91
4.23	The North End, (2006 - 2007), Cathy Busby.....	94
4.3	Participatory Practices.....	95
4.4	Internet Art Influences.....	98
4.41	Blackness for Sale (2001), Keith Obadike.....	98
4.42	King's Cross Phone In (1994), Heath Bunting.....	99
CHAPTER 5: Conclusion.....		101
WORKS CITED.....		108
WORKS CONSULTED.....		111

List of Figures

1. Screenshot of Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff” January 1 2010 Listings.....	2
2. Front door (at pick-up location for glass vases).....	7
3. Screenshot of sample Craigslist “Free Stuff” posting page.....	8
4. 227 Boxes in original location at pick-up location.....	12
5. “Relieve, Relax, Revive” text on boxes.....	13
6. Twelve Damaged Boxes.....	14
7. Moldy Box (1/ 12) damaged boxes “revived”.....	14
8. Box with “Men’s Dress Clothing” text “revived”.....	14
9. Spiral formation.....	15
10. Maze Pattern.....	15
11. Rotunda.....	16
12. Room.....	17
13. “Forsaking keeps” text label on box in ‘Archive room’.....	17
14. Archive room.....	18
15. Open Box displaying Wellgo pedals, mappings and transfers.....	19
16. Stack of white boxes as "plinths".....	20
17. Mapping of Wellgo pedals' transaction inscribed onto cardboard surface.....	21
18. Textual Mapping - Manual Juicer.....	23
19. Diagrammatic Contour Mapping – Flashlight.....	24
20. “Wonder/fully On” (Fixings > Flashlight).....	29
21. “Meet Sunny” (Forsaking keeps > Wedding Souvenir).....	29
22. “Perfectly stained by lemons” (Homely Goods > Manual Juicer).....	30
23. Project blog <www.insidefree.org> showing archive of collected objects.....	38
24. Digital collage “Forsaking keeps”.....	40
25. Digital collage “Waste nots”.....	41
26. Eight stacks and eight boxes of objects along with text archive on wall.....	42
27. Photo transfer of electrical plates and switches onto box.....	44
28. Signed card by receiver of IBM Selectric typewriter.....	45

29.	Transfer of a "tactile image" of manual juicer onto a cardboard surface.....	48
30.	Text Archive on wall.....	50
31.	Fresh Widow (1920), Marcel Duchamp.....	72
32.	<i>"Must pick-up today"</i> – bagged vases.....	73
33.	"Pickings" Category (project blog).....	76
34.	Amy (Giver of Wedding Souvenir).....	80
35.	Language is Not Transparent (1969), Mel Bochner.....	86
36.	Jack-o-lantern map, (2008) Denis Wood.....	89
37.	One of Each, (1993), Karsten Bott.....	89
38.	Lost Property, (1996), Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska.....	93
39.	The North End, (2006 - 2007), Cathy Busby.....	95
40.	Blackness for Sale, (2001), Keith Obadike.....	99

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Dr. Maria Lantin, my thesis advisor, whose commitment and steady encouragement I could not have done without, Rita Wong for her graciousness and insight into my work and Karolle Wall for her generous support through the writing process.

Quotation

Unrecognized producers, poets of their own affairs, trailblazers in the jungle of functionalist rationality, consumers produce something resembling the “*lignes d’erre*”... . The trace ‘indeterminate trajectories’ that are apparently meaningless, since they do not cohere with the constructed, written, and prefabricated space through which they move. They are sentences that remain unpredictable within the space ordered by the organizing techniques of systems. Although they use as their *materials* the vocabularies of established languages (those of television, newspapers, the supermarket or city planning), although they remain within the framework of prescribed *syntaxes* (the temporal modes of schedules, paradigmatic organization of places, etc.) these ‘traverses’ remain heterogeneous to the systems they infiltrate and in which they sketch out the guileful ruses of *different* interests and desires. They circulate, come and go, overflow and drift over an imposed terrain, like the snowy waves of the sea slipping in among the rocks and defiles of an established order.

(Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* 34)

Quotation

Objects, while acting as tools, products, works of art or commodities - are essentially vehicles for relationships between people, it is primarily the objects' *differences* that are gauged. These differences are expressed as a value; usually as the price one is prepared to pay. However, the value of an object as a gift is not invested in its material property or its financial price, but in the mode of its giving or reception. 'It's the thought that counts'.

(Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowski, Capital)

Chapter 1 Introduction

Free flag pole, 4 plus size shirts and one dress, egg cartons, skid of expired cherry pie filling, bin full of Christmas lights, everything for a cat, drain cleaner and bug extermination spray, nursing pillow, rca speakers, free clothes for a good cause, gas grill stove, GE cordless phone, weights, bedpad, artificial Christmas tree, 10 glass coke bottles, Big Bag of Popcorn curls, cat tower scratching post, bag of stuffed animals, box of assorted toys. The list keeps getting added to, live, moment by moment, hour by hour into days, there's more stuff that comes online. Click the refresh button on my screen and the list updates with more items added to the top of the list.

As I peruse the listings of Craigslist Vancouver's "Free Stuff" section where people offer their used, unwanted things for free to strangers, I am both fascinated but also slightly horrified by the sheer excess of stuff that seems to be burgeoning out of our homes and our lives (Fig. 1). I am curious as to how these things were used by an/other. For instance, I wonder what things were packed up by the bag of popcorn curls now being offered for free, or what the antique saw now missing its blade, was once used for. But this uniqueness of use by individuals is overwhelmed by the repetition of mass commodities that comes through as an endless inventory of people's used goods. Just three listings down, another washer and dryer is being offered, the same yet different washer and dryer, distinguished by the owner's use of it, hooked up into a particular home, a singular situation, made into another offer. The more I visit the listings, the more absurd but also more delightful the experience, igniting my curiosity to click onto a posting title and to find out more about the

offer.

[vancouver, BC craigslist](#) > [for sale / wanted](#) > [free stuff](#) [\[help \]](#) [\[post \]](#)

all **vancouver, BC** [vancouver](#) [north shore](#) [burnaby/newwest](#) [delta/surrey/langley](#) [tricity/pitt/maple](#) [richmond](#)

search for:

in: **free stuff**

price: **min**

max

[Sat, 30 Jan 21:00:20] | [\[avoid recalled items \]](#) | [\[partial list of prohibited items \]](#) | [\[success story? \]](#) | [\[AVOIDING SCAMS & FRAUD \]](#) | [\[PERSONAL SAFETY TIPS \]](#)

Fri 01 Jan

[two teak kitchen chairs - \(Langley\)](#)

[***MAYTAG WASHER & DRYER*** - \(Vancouver\(41st & Dunbar\)\)](#) pic

[FREE plastic yogurt/sourcream containers - \(south vancouver\)](#)

[Free Tonneau Cover for 1992 4-runner - \(Coquitlam\)](#)

[Extra phone books - North Delta/Surrey/White Rock/Langley - \(North Delta\)](#)

[Apartment Size Sofa Bed and Chair - \(North Delta\)](#)

[Ashley microsuede couch - \(Maple Ridge\)](#) pic

[gone pending pick up - Wallace and Gromit action figure - Free - \(Commercial Drive\)](#) pic

[GE® 19.5 Cu. Ft. Bottom-Freezer Drawer Refrigerator - \(Surrey\)](#) pic

[FREE DESK - \(SURREY\)](#) pic

[Avocado green bidet, toilet, sink - \(Deep Cove, North Vancouver\)](#)

[storage - \(surrey\)](#) pic

[DVD Player - does not work - \(Coquitlam \(Brunette and Lougheed\)\)](#)

[two oak desks - \(schoolhouse\)](#) pic

[Free tv's for parts. Have a 32 inch and two 20 inch - \(Surrey, \)](#)

Fig. 1 Screenshot of Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff” listings on January 1, 2010.

Craigslist. 2010. January 30, 2010.

<<http://vancouver.en.craigslist.ca/zip/>>

Often, the postings reveal why someone no longer wants something or how they value what they are giving away. People are often candid through Craigslist: *I am giving*

away this camera because I got a new one for Christmas; or We just moved and we couldn't get this couch into our living room. Practical reasons on the surface, indeed. But when understood through Michel de Certeau's concept of everyday practice as ways of reappropriating cultural values, something innately personal and individual, reveals itself in the postings. These are divulgements often unwittingly shared with a stranger that are woven into the free offer. Perhaps a person who shares his reason for giving is attempting to make the object more desirable to an/other? Or can it be that including a personal message with the free, used good produces an aura of specificity, authenticity around an used object? These questions intrigue me and subsequently draw me into this online community of givers and receivers or what Michel de Certeau would identify as "unrecognized producers".

I wonder what is it about these decrepit supposedly worthless objects that make them worthy to be passed on to an/other, a stranger. What is exactly being offered? How free is the exchange, really? Why do we bother giving away our dis-used goods to strangers? What is the point? These goods are damaged, broken, out-of-date and have quirks in them - like the copier that produces black streaks after about 50 copies or a flashlight that doesn't turn off. The more I ask these questions, the more curious I am as to why people are giving away these goods that are on the verge of obsolescence? What possesses them to take the time to create a Craigslist account, log on, spend time to write a description, even take a photograph of their unwanted item, for the purposes of giving it away to a stranger. After making initial contact by email or telephone, they may invite this person, a stranger into their garage, backyard, or even into their kitchens or living rooms. Judging by how

mundane and often damaged things are on Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff”, it is easy to think of these used objects as nothing more than “junk” that one person wishes to unload onto an/other. Still, I wonder, there has to be something to be valued, if not in the thing being given away, then in the way they are given, and ultimately received. I am not so interested in what they are as static objects, or that they are broken or unwanted, but more importantly, that they are breaking. In other words, I propose that value does not reside in these unwanted objects, but in the way they are being used and valued by their owners, which together, ultimately leads to how they are given.

The language of people’s postings often reveals the conditions of their offering. These conditions, blatantly stated or implied, are embedded with the values of privacy, congeniality, time, trust or social equality. Together with the conditions of use around an object they reveal the many different ways of giving: *Sitting beside dumpster in front of apartment. There is nothing wrong with it we just don’t need it anymore. This is a 3 years old tree we bought and have recently upgraded to a bigger tree. Outside under carport at 1331 - 71B, Suncreek in Newton/Surrey, help yourself. We’ve been using them under these conditions for awhile. You might be able to get someone to fix them if desired. I am actually feeling sad to part with it, but need to make room for some new furniture. Willing to give it to a good home! You remove. Must bring own tools and help. Used to be my parents. I am going to be nice and will hold it for someone that really wants it and can pick up soon. Trying to keep them out of the landfill.*

Given circumstances, re/given. I think of these given circumstances as ways people

share with strangers through Craigslist “Free Stuff”, manifesting values of thrift or generosity through recirculating excess that may be considered a by-product of consumption. Running through the free offers of Craigslist is also a strong motivation of self-interest. The used objects in all their raw brokenness and depleted qualities are often described matter-of-factly by their owners. They are offered in their “as-is” qualities. What ultimately matters, is the condition of trust in a stranger that he or she will come when promised, and alleviate the giver’s burden of keeping something he or she no longer wants or needs. Our reliance on a stranger is an integral part of this kind of giving. As Marcel Mauss reflects, “it is always with strangers that one ‘deals’, even if allied to them” (82). There are social connections made through the ways people give that are revealed in what they share with one another – everything from the circumstances of dis-use (“my father is in the hospital”) to the quirks of an object; for example, the flashlight’s broken switch or a tear in the arm of an old chair. I believe these ways of giving by offering something personal about the object, intentional or not, impart a certain degree of trust in another and require that we enter these spaces of indeterminacy.

So, I enter at my own risk - past a gate, a fence or confronting a closed door (Fig. 2). These places of exchange are not comfortable spaces. These are private or semi-private spaces of other people’s homes. Part of the receiving is this discomfort that comes with the risk of entering unfamiliar enclosures. The feeling of trespassing someone’s backyard is not mitigated by the given permission of owners to *Come and get it or to help yourself*.

In other words, thresholds of trust are not easily crossed, nor are they meant to be.

Doors remain shut or are opened, without hesitation depending on who is doing the offering. Encrypted and anonymous email addresses like sale-jtcjm-1639301629@craigslist.org are standard contact information in Craigslist serving as the front lines of contact. But sometimes, through an offering, a telephone number or even a first name of the giver may be provided so that a potential receiver can address the owner personally.

Contact initiated. Arrangements for pick-up made. How trustworthy is the situation? Who will I be meeting?

My interest in the online community, Craigslist Vancouver's "Free Stuff", lies then in the circulation of these everyday things that once served a purpose in a person's life, be it utilitarian or whimsical, needed or desired. I was particularly struck with used objects that were given rather than sold due to their apparently having lost so much worth that they no longer presented monetary value. Related to my central question of what is at stake in these free offers is: What kinds of value(s), if not monetary value, could these objects have in their being given away?



Fig. 2 Front door (at pick-up location for glass vases). 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

These are low-brow things. To explore them through art, and to think of them as possibly gifts, make them all the more interesting to me in all their banality or brokenness. At first, the monetary devaluation seemed to point to the devaluation of personal value of these used, everyday objects. These objects were no longer cared for, or were they? What remains of these expired objects in this state of limbo of un/wanting? Why not just throw them into the rubbish heap? If there is a residue of personal value remaining, what forms do they take? What compels one to care about how and where to redistribute one's unwanted possessions?

A significant part of the thesis research is taking part in free exchanges with people who post their used, unwanted objects on Craigslist "Free Stuff". My experiences of making contact with the giver (email, telephone, face to face meetings) and going to pick-up the free object from the person's house are recorded in the forms of photographs, text

and mappings that are in turn, documented through the project blog, www.insidefree.org.



Fig. 3 Screenshot of sample Craigslist “Free Stuff” posting page. Craigslist. 2010. April 23, 2010.

<<http://vancouver.en.craigslist.ca/zip/>>

To explore how emergent values arise through a tactics of use as singular forms of individual consumption, the central idea of the thesis, I’ve embarked on an extensive material investigation involving one of my first gatherings from Craigslist Vancouver’s “Free Stuff”: 227 identical cardboard boxes. The thesis research, comprised of in-field investigations, online research of Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff” network and a material exploration of the collected objects, culminates into what I consider “visual research”. Some of the visual components of the research are integrated into the final project.

The final project titled, Relieve, Relax, Revive (*re/given*) is a participatory installation comprised of two parts: the first part presents selected visual components of the research including open cardboard boxes inscribed with mappings, images and text and containing the collected objects. Contextualizing the objects is also a text archive of

posting fragments gathered from Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff”. The second part of the installation is a scheduled participatory event during which time the exhibited objects collected from Craigslist Vancouver’s “Free Stuff” are offered to the public for free. There is a take-away card listing the associated Craigslist posting of the objects along with the project blog, www.insidefree.org, that serves as a photo text archive of the objects being given away.

It is my aim, therefore, in the thesis and final project, to explore the ways people give away their used goods to strangers. Emerging through these exchanges, are often contradictory values towards consumption and its wayward cousins, thrift and excess. I intend on showing how these ways of giving carve out spaces for individual agency and possibly bonds between strangers, however, ephemeral and weak they may be. In other words, it is not so much the objects that are important and therefore valued but it is through their giving, from one person to another, that the object can be revaluated. A person who offers her used candles for free describing them as “bits and pieces of wax to make your own“ exemplifies a kind of giving from the personal within the social (Fig. 3). The free offer and the social economy that these gestures of giving operate through can be well understood through Michel de Certeau’s ideas of individual tactics. In his book, The Practice of Everyday Life, De Certeau illustrates his concepts of tactics of use and everyday operations that individuals produce through their own repurposing of consumption. These are operations of daily habits and activities of life that can easily be applied to those who choose to participate in a gift-like economy.

One of the things that is valuable about understanding economic networks that operate under the radar within a dominant capitalist economy is that they provide reminders that monetary transactions and anonymity have not always been the case. These free offers are arguably traces of traditional gift economies that serve to reinforce social bonds. Could it be that what is at stake in these free transactions are the social bonds that we may form through them? And if so, may we think of these offerings of used, often dilapidated objects from one person to another, as gestures of giving, if not actually gifts? What does the offering of one's unwanted goods have to say about the way we value another - those of whom we do not know but nevertheless share in the public resources and spaces of our city?

Part of my fascination with digital social worlds is how ephemeral they can be but also how socially engaging and substantial they can be. I think that giving physical presence to online worlds such as Craigslist Vancouver "Free Stuff" is worthwhile not only to register effects of online phenomena into the physical but also to slow down media to take notice of its influences and substance.

Historically, I contextualize my artistic practice within Conceptualism, and identify artists working within participatory practices and social sculpture in the form of the take-away object. Historically, I locate my practice with the art and democracy movement of the 1970's during which time artists produced performance-exchanges and produced give-away items such as free mail art and artist books to distribute among the public. In terms of material practice, my works fall under the categories of social sculpture and archive in

which everyday objects as ready-mades are often given away to participants / gallery guests. The way I use boxes and the other collected objects from Craigslist to construct a material index or document of the online social world aligns my work with artists who utilize the archive form to produce works that often blur the lines between documentation and art and language and visual representation.

1.1 Visual Research

The visual research involves gathering, documenting and archiving and recontextualizing used objects and posting text from the online network of Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff” <http://vancouver.en.craigslist.ca/zip/>. These include an extensive material exploration of multiple, identical cardboard boxes, one of my earliest acquisitions from Craigslist “Free Stuff”; photographs taken in the studio of the collected objects along with caption titles composed to reflect the emergent values around the object and its exchange; textual and diagrammatic mappings detailing the use of the objects and their singular events of exchange; digital collage project that explores the relationship between the representation of the objects through the owners’ posted images and the images of objects that I took in situ; creation of eight categories and their dictionary definitions each representing a way of giving identified within Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff”; and the project blog, www.insidefree.org.

The process of each of the various visual components, conceptually and materially, is described in detail in this section. Following this, I will discuss how the development of the

visual components selected for the final project are integrated together and how they serve the central aims of the work.

1.11 Material Exploration of Emergent Values of Cardboard Boxes

One of my first acquisitions from Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff” was a total of 227 identical cardboard boxes (Fig. 4). When I asked the owner why he was giving away the boxes he replied: “I ran out of things to put in/side”. I willfully interpreted his reason for giving as a condition of use to preserve the potential of the boxes to be used for storage. I adopted this condition of use as a constraint in my material investigation of them. I felt that this constraint allowed me to fully explore the aesthetic and metaphoric value(s) of the boxes.



Fig. 4 Boxes in original location at pick-up location. 227 Boxes. 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.



Fig. 5 Text “Relieve, Relax, Revive” on boxes. 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

The text printed on all the boxes, was obvious and could not be put aside (Fig. 5). In my conceptual and material exploration of them, I re-purposed the text printed on the boxes, “Relieve, Relax, Revive”, as a way to explore the representational value of the boxes from obsolescence to use value. The earliest iteration of the boxes comprised of inventorying the boxes and separating them according to the values of use – new, slightly damaged, very damaged. Through my material investigation, I documented the boxes through their stages of value from “relieved” state (as flat stacked cardboard or unconstructed boxes), to “relaxed” state (in the form of circular assemblages) and finally to the “revived” state of the boxes (as open forms).

This lengthy studio investigation of the boxes applied value(s) as a tactics of use alongside a framing through language. What resulted were a multitude of iterations ranging from assemblage sculptures to architectural forms constructed out of the boxes. I think of these iterations as process works.



Fig. 6 Twelve Damaged Boxes.
2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

The revived boxes included twelve damaged boxes that included boxes that were water-damaged boxes with dry mold (Fig. 7), affixed with shipping labels, marred by track marks and writing (one such box had the words “men’s dress clothing” scribbled in black marker pen) (Fig. 8). These boxes were “revived” and constructed into a lopsided pile of untaped boxes (Fig. 6).



Fig. 7 1/ 12 damaged boxes “revived”. Moldy Box. 2010.
© Penny Leong, 2010.



Fig. 8 Text on box “revived”. Men’s Dress Clothing Box. 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

In each of the iterations - the boxes in unconstructed state, open and standing as hexagon shapes, in the form of assemblages shaped into spiral and star-like forms (Fig. 9), in the form of maze patterns (Fig. 10), as monumental towers, or as architectural structures resembling a bunker and a rotunda space (Fig. 11) – I explored their form and materiality while retaining their utility value as boxes.

Fig. 9 Spiral Formation. 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.



Fig. 10 Maze Pattern. 2010.
© Penny Leong, 2010.

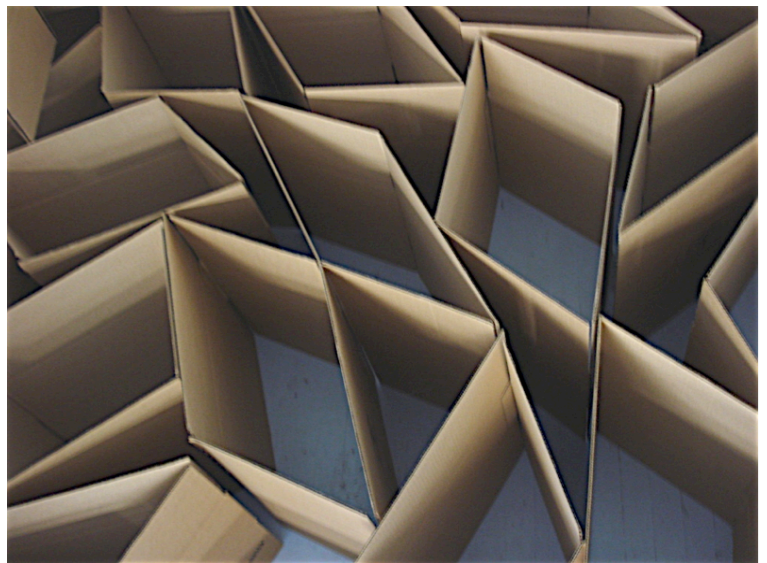




Fig. 11 Rotunda. 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

What I am describing here, is a form of methodical experimentation with the object matter of the boxes or how the boxes become activated within the social space of its reception. I purposely used this method of applying constraints to produce an opportunity to investigate the value(s) of “boxness”. With each iteration, a different form of representational value of boxes emerged. For instance, the architectural forms into rooms and walls were interpreted as representing the modernist values of repetition and modularity.



Fig. 12 Room. 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

At this time, I also started to think of ways I could use a “room” formation as a text installation to “store” posting fragments from Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff” (Fig. 12). I printed excerpts of Craigslist postings that I had started to archive and also categorize according to social values emerging out of ways of giving onto white shipping labels (Fig. 13). These were affixed onto the sides of the boxes that made up the walls of the room. The archiving was part my research into ways of giving. What resulted was the iteration, Archive Room (Fig. 14).

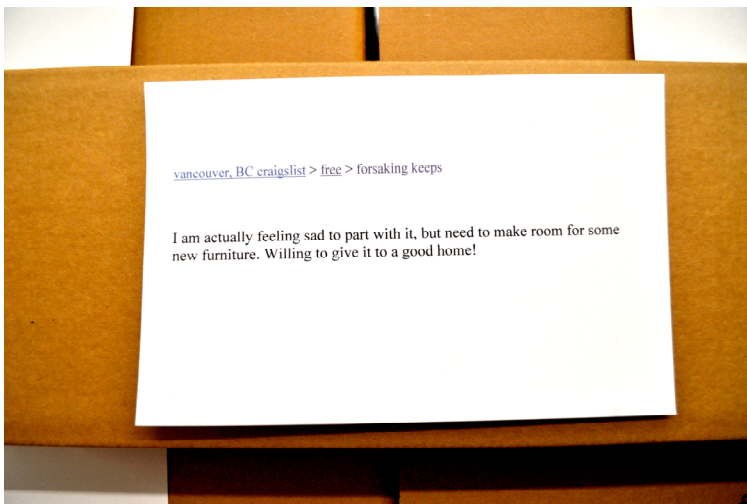


Fig. 13 “Forsaking keeps” text label on box. Archive Room 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.



Fig. 14 Archive Room. 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

What surprised me during one viewing of the work was that the text labels were largely overlooked and instead, viewers focused on the Modernist qualities of the room. This made me realize that the Modernist value of the architectural form was overwhelming the text that I had selected to reveal the ways of giving. In order to break free from what was becoming a restricted use of the boxes, I disassembled the “room.”

I was somewhat disappointed that the “room” did not activate the text the way I thought it would. I still wanted to find a way to present the text on a material surface that could be experienced both spatially and bodily. This is when the idea to transfer the excerpted text of the postings directly onto the interior surfaces of the boxes came to fore. The decision to move away from forming structures by breaking up of the formal formations of the boxes had opened up the possibility to think of the boxes as individual containers. As open forms, the boxes could be opened up and “revived” not only used as display containers for the other objects I was acquiring and planning to offer for free but

also as inscription surfaces for the transfer of text and images that described the individual transactions of receiving the objects (Fig. 15). These developments in the studio pleased me as I was able to arrive at my own tactical use of the boxes within the constraint I had set forth to preserve the use value of the boxes as containers, be it metaphorical (as containing experiences of the transactions) or literal, physically containing the objects. It seemed fitting that I could “revive” the boxes. I thought of it as redeeming these abject objects that were otherwise deemed “worthless” by the original owner.

For the boxes I used to house the objects, I wanted to preserve the plain cardboard matter of the boxes along with their original text, “Relieve, Relax, Revive.” I was delighted to realize that the language of the boxes was aptly suited to represent the transformation of values of the objects, from being nearly discarded to being “revived” by giving way to another re-use.



Fig. 15 Box displaying Wellgo pedals, mappings and transfer. Relieve, Relax, Revive (re/given). 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010

Departing from the formal structures, I also started to assemble the boxes into looser stacks. I also decided to wrap some of the other boxes in white paper to be used as plinths to support the other objects. I consider the empty cardboard boxes wrapped in white paper and used as plinths as a playful solution to the factory-like repetition of the boxes that seemed to contradict the singular and individual consumption of the free transactions. The plan for the final thesis project is to place open cardboard boxes, each containing an object on top of the “plinths” or white stacks (Fig. 16) and the inscribed mappings and transferred text and images.

The other objects that I have collected from Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff” are small to medium in size. I have chosen a few of these objects - a metal manual juicer, glass vases and a wedding souvenir – to illustrate how I continued to explore language and representation in the context of value(s). However, instead of manipulating the materiality



Fig. 16 Stack of white boxes as “plinths”. Relieve, Relax, Revive (re/given). 2010.

© Penny Leong, 2010.

of the other objects (as I had done with the cardboard boxes), I explore various modes of their representation. What resulted from this process were photographs and text captions of the objects themselves that were transferred directly onto the interior surfaces of the cardboard boxes used to display the objects.

1.12 Mappings

The mappings serve to document both the free transactions that I entered into through Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff” along with the objects that I ended up collecting. The textual mappings record my experience that may start from the initial enquiry of a posting to meeting the giver at her place of residence to pick-up the free item. Details in these mappings describe the circumstances of the pick-up location and conversations with the giver.

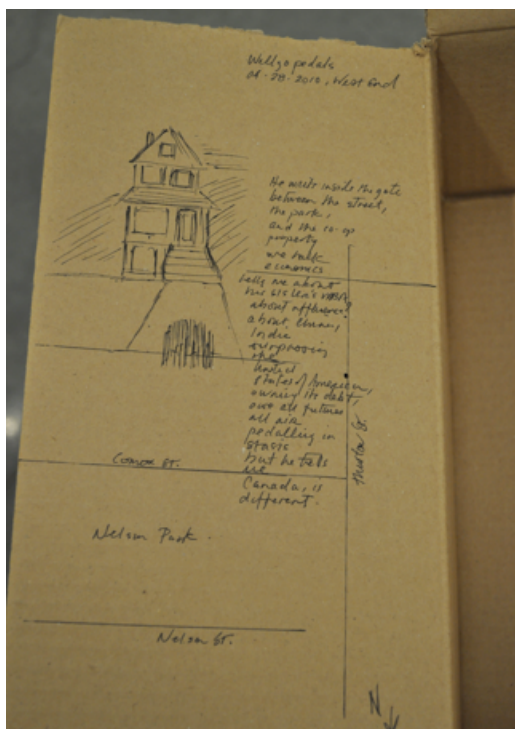


Fig. 17 Mapping of Wellgo pedals' transaction inscribed onto interior of box. Relieve, Relax, Revive (*re/given*). 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

I usually start with a written description, which I then incorporate into mappings that combine text and visual rendering of architectural and geographical features of the pick-up location. These visual representations include routes taken to a pick-up location, sketches of a house or gate or spatial layout of the transaction that often blurs private from public space (Fig. 17).

The following is a sample text that I used to compose a mapping around the receiving of a manual juicer. The lack of punctuation and fragmentary run-on sentence structure is meant to keep the drift flowing as close as possible to the chronology of the experience and a record of what is spoken by the giver:

I arrive at the side lane, knock on the lower windows, there is no light above the door, it is dark, there is no number there are lower windows, knock three times, a cat meows on the ledge, the cat is black, there is a green door, it opens, a man who looks like Tommy Lee Jones says "oh you must be looking for Joy" and then I enter the kitchen and through a dark corridor she appears out of somewhere, she shakes my hand, she disappears again brings out the manual juicer lays it on the table, shows me how to use it, "here is where you place the fruit in, works perfectly for lemons ... rent is cheap here, the walls are thin, by the way, I think the juicer is made in Taiwan "

Incorporated into the mappings are special instructions given by the owner on how to find the location as well as text that represents the spoken dialogue or speech acts of the owner (giver) that may include a sharing of miscellany of facts, opinions or feelings that

may or may not relate to the exchange of the object (Fig. 18). These mappings are initially made in a notebook in the form of working drawings. These eventually become sources for the mappings that I directly transcribe onto the interior surfaces of the cardboard boxes that contain the collected objects.

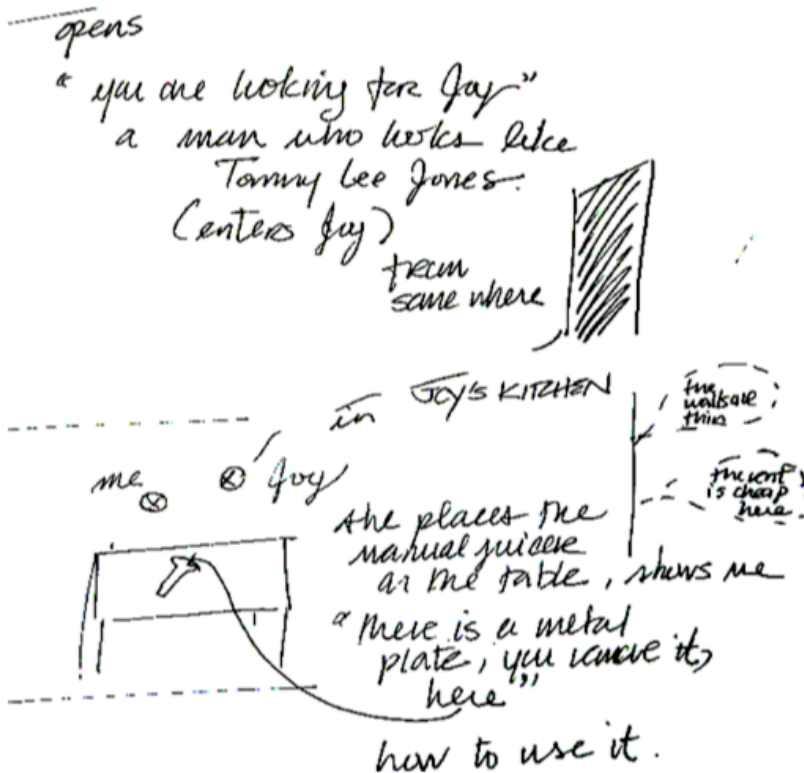


Fig. 18 Textual mapping of manual juicer. 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

I also explored the singular conditions of use of each of the collected objects through diagrammatic drawings composed by tracing outlines of the actual objects and incorporating text that details their operations of use and idiosyncratic qualities offered by the original owner (e.g. where the broken switch is located or a tip on how to get around a certain quirk that compensates for a deficient aspect of an object) (Fig. 19).

The language of the textual mappings is chosen to elicit inter-subjective experiences of a transaction. It is a riffing of details gathered, a reportage of facts that uses momentum and juxtaposition to gather the energy of a particular transaction. I always try to locate a

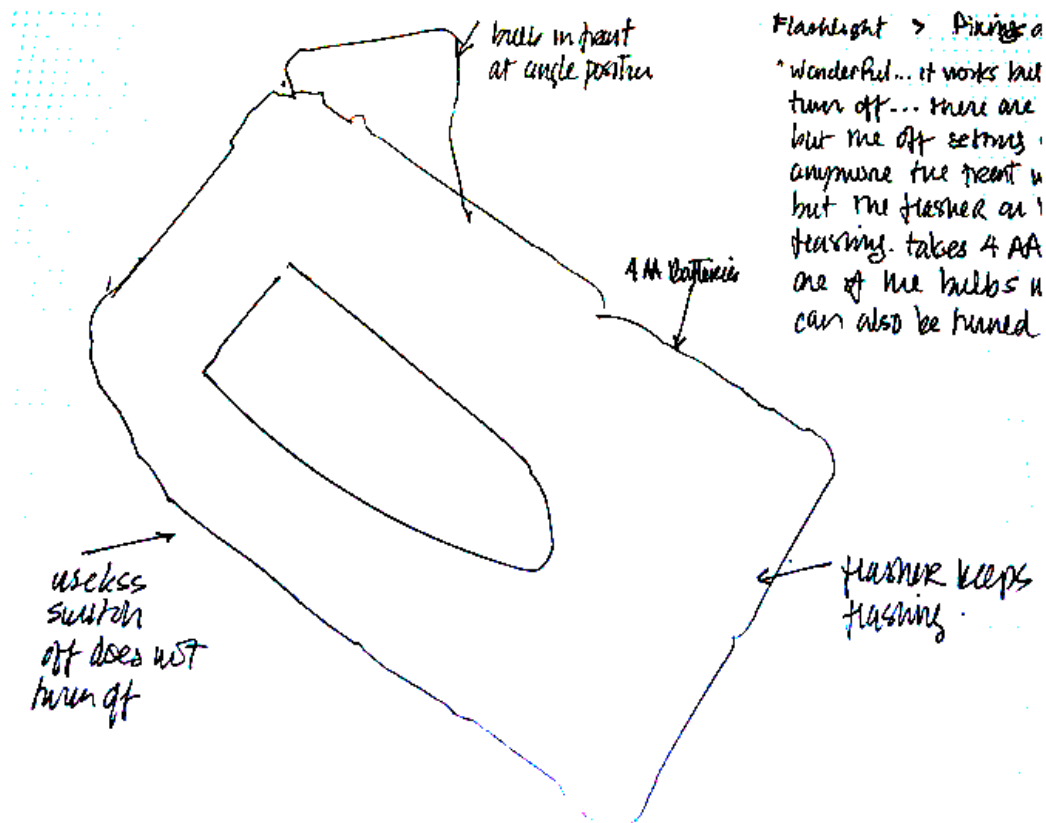


Fig. 19 Diagrammatic contour mapping of flashlight. 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

tension and play between words. When I compose these textual mappings, I imagine how they may be experienced through the familiarity of everyday experience or somebody's personal memory. For example, the partial tracings of these everyday objects that make up some of these textual mappings, may trigger a memory recognition of a similar object; or a familiar experience like seeing a cat on a threshold or a green wooden

door may recall similar experiences in others.

I also incorporate the chance findings of the experience. Lewis Hyde quotes Victor Turner's description of liminality to explain the qualities that emerge out of the process of chance findings as "generative" and "speculative" in which "new structures new symbols, new metaphors ... " emerge (130). I play with the idea of chance findings through the punning of fact in the mappings. Like the accidental details around an object that a giver shares with an/other. For example, as I was leaving, the person who gave me the manual juicer, told me as an a/side that she thinks the juicer is "made in Taiwan". This bit of information shared by the owner became incorporated into the mapping of that object; perhaps revealing the excess or discards of the globalized capitalistic reaches of local experience. The factual details from the postings and physical details of the object juxtaposed with chance occurrences such as these are woven together to create a textual mapping of experiences that are simultaneously private and public, singular and homologous, personal and social and global and local. By crossing into what de Certeau identifies as "in-between" zones, these free transactions transverse and produces slippages or perforations into spaces that are otherwise demarcated by predominant capitalist systems.

Spontaneous findings may be thought of as these "slippages" that defamiliarize the everyday. These are thoughts and/or opinions that people may divulge through face-to-face encounters, email, or telephone conversations that may or may not relate to the objects they are giving away. What I find most interesting out of these transactions are these

miscellaneous bits and pieces of a life given by accident. Take the story around the woman who gave me the manual juicer: I am standing in her kitchen and she tells me that the rent is cheap due to the thin walls. Why she told me this or how this bit of information came about I cannot pinpoint. The juicer and the cat on the ledge meowing and the thin walls are fragments that when woven together becomes what becomes an exchange between strangers that is not anonymous, or devoid of the personal. Rather I find most of the exchanges I enter into can become quite personal with the owners of the objects freely revealing details of their personal lives in a span of a few minutes. The objects and their exchange in this sense become conduits for these personal exchanges to occur. The objects both activate and inhabit the matter of values represented by the language or text that is exchanged. The manual juicer together with the owner's written or verbal enunciations "made in Taiwan" or "ugly stains" become the object matter transacted. Both object (manual juicer) and its matter (language) are a material necessity for this connection.

The mappings are a visual means to document my field experiences that sometimes include details of the exchange that reach beyond the object and the pragmatic elements of its transaction. I also think of the mappings as a means to capture the dynamic processes involved in the free transactions of these objects, transforming inanimate matter into social matter. The objects through their giving are transformed into social objects replete with the values that owners impart on them. These values in turn may even lend the objects a resonance of affect that is shared with the other. How givers impart their values to the other or stranger are articulated in the visual and textual languages that are incorporated into the mappings. The mappings attempt to demarcate or locate the often non-contiguous spaces of

the transactions.

These are spaces that are networked yet transient. De Certeau speaks of these spaces that are navigated through language through the acts of writing and as “ways of operating”:

“The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other”. He further explains: “Escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday has a certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible. Within this ensemble, I shall try to locate the practices that are foreign to the ‘geometrical’ or ‘geographical’ space of visual, panoptic, or theoretical constructions. These practices of space refer to a specific form of *operations* (‘ways of operating’) to ‘another spatiality (an ‘anthropological,’ poetic and mythic experience of space)” (93).

Following de Certeau’s idea of operations as “trajectories and alterations” that reveal obscure spatialities, what I hope to reveal in these mappings are the everyday operations and productions of language by individuals who through the giving away of their possessions, inscribe spaces of consumption that are not readily visible, remaining as they are within the dominant capitalist mode of production. These operations are identified here as individualized acts of giving to the other in which standardized monetary exchange is

replaced by singular forms of exchange. These singular forms of exchange are identified here as emergent values that are both cultural and personal, representing different ways of giving to the other. With the textual mappings, what I aim to show is how these emergent values are shared through the flows of language carried by speech and writing acts of the givers that may be thought of as “ways of operating”. The excerpts of what people write in their postings and what is spoken by givers during the transactions become source material for the mappings that may be read as a text that navigates the space of these operations.

1.13 Photographs and Caption Titling of Other Objects

The collected objects are studied and photographed in the studio. Alongside the photographs, I created caption titles composed by creating one-line phrases from the written text of the associated postings or from words spoken by the original owners during a transaction. The words excerpted are those that refer to owners’ descriptions of their objects (often about how an object is not working properly or suggesting ways of re-use) and the kinds of conditions they place on their free offers. The following are a sampling of some of the objects collected and the associated caption titles: Perfectly stained by lemons (Homely Goods > Manual Juicer); Wonder/fully On (Fixings > Flashlight) and Meet Sunny (Forsaking keeps > Wedding Souvenirs). The photographs and their captions are transferred directly onto the interior surfaces of the boxes used to display the objects themselves.



Fig. 20 Wonder/fully On (Fixings > Flashlight). 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

For instance, the caption text for the photograph of the flashlight, “Wonder/fully On” is created from both the word, “Wonderful,” that the owner used to describe the flashlight and my own tactics of mis-spelling of it, by adding a “l” and a slash to it (Fig. 20). This is an example of how I re-purpose the language around the brokenness of an object by joining it with the owner’s description of it in her free offer. The intention is to overspill the word to connect with the idea of its defected quality of not being able to turn off.



Fig. 21 Meet Sunny (Forsaking keeps > Wedding Souvenir). 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

With the wedding souvenirs, I constructed the title Meet Sunny from both the

woman's dialogue, "This is my husband, Sunny" and how the language mediated through the wedding figurines that are representative of the married couple (Fig. 21). The woman who gave me these wedding souvenirs was so gracious that when I arrived at her door she invited me in and introduced me to her husband, Sunny. Meet Sunny becomes a social object in the form of text, revealing how gracious some free offerings are.



Fig. 22 Perfectly stained by lemons (Homely Goods > Manual Juicer). 2010.

© Penny Leong, 2010

The posting for the manual juicer describes the object as "Manual juicer (for lemons, etc.) - metal, works. The metal inside looks stained and ugly but its useable, we've used it for a long time". In her kitchen, Joy showed me how to operate the manual juicer by lifting out the metal strainer and told me that it works perfectly for squeezing lemons. The caption for the juicer, "Perfectly stained by lemons", weaves together the language of the posting and the words that the giver used to describe the juicer's operations (Fig. 22). A punning of the words "strainer" and "stained" alludes to how it's the straining of lemons

over “a long time” that produces these “ugly” yet perfect stains. In the Craigslist posting Joy shares her extended use of the manual juicer in particular for the task of squeezing lemons. By offering the object despite its “ugly stains” for another person’s use, there is a redemption and forgiveness of the object. The way she words her offering reveals that she values the object enough to set aside the stains and to give it away to another person. She may even hope that another person may extend a similar sentiment towards it. During the transaction, we stood in her kitchen while she demonstrated how to use the juicer, mentioning the “ugly stains” that while it could be taken as an aside seemed more akin to her seeking my acceptance of the object’s defective quality. In this way, her divulgence of the “ugly stains” could be understood as a disclaimer of the offer in which my acknowledging of the object’s stains was de facto accepting the manual juicer in this “as is” condition.

1.14 Categories of Giving

I created eight categories that are meant to represent the different ways of giving and the emergent value(s) that are enacted through the free transactions that I’ve identified are most prevalent in Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff”. The poaching of proverbs through punning are strategies that I use to create the category titles intended to frame language in a way that reflects the often contradictory nature of how people give. For instance, the category, “Forsaking Keeps” are offers in which people give away things they still have affection for but also no longer need. Here, the tension of word play that I aim to create is between values of wanting and needs. It is about forsaking something that is still valued by

the giver that leaves an open question as to what one really forsakes or gives up to an/other in the offering. The re-purposed dictionary definitions of the words that make up the category headings, while intended to provide a clear sense of the possible meanings of the categories, are structured in such a way as to allow for a certain degree of mutability or shifting in meaning. The following is a summary description of each of the eight categories of giving accompanied with its re-purposed dictionary definition(s) along with excerpts of sample postings that illustrate how the definitions interact with the text to generate their meaning:

Forsaking keeps

These are things that people give away despite having personal affection for.

n.

1. To give up possession (something formerly held dear); renounce.
2. To abandon use or service of one's material things: *I love this couch but I no longer have room for it, if you can use it you can have it.*
3. To alleviate obligation of keeping something that one no longer wants or needs: *This belonged to my grandfather, but I don't play, he would love it if this could go to someone who appreciates it.*
4. To shift the state, condition of possession: *I've kept this for a long time but never used it, better if it can go to someone who can.*
5. To forgo saving or reserving for the future.

Bygone needs

These are personal possessions that one no longer needs, but often possess a nostalgic value to them. Accompanied with the act of giving away these once treasured objects, these may be thought of as gestures of mourning, signifying a past, a “bygone” time in which the object may have been once coveted, but is now discarded, becoming merely a witness of the passage of time. For instance, a collected object categorized as “bygone needs” is a stuffed toy bear titled “Stuffie” that originated from a larger collection of soft toy animals that once belonged to a family with young children.

by·gone :

adj.

Gone by; past: bygone days. Bygone wants and needs: *I need this gone by tomorrow.*

n.

A grievance that is past: Let bygones be bygones.

need(s):

n.

1. A condition or situation in which something is required or wanted: A need for space.
2. Something required or wanted; a requisite.
3. Necessity; obligation: *You need to pass it on and not to throw it in the landfill.*
4. A condition of poverty or misfortune: *Only for those in need.*

First servitudes

Conditions of an offer that are often described as *first come, first served* that reflect values of egalitarianism, or at least, fairness.

first:

n.

1. The ordinal number matching the number one in a series.
2. The one coming, occurring, or ranking before or above all others: *First one here, gets it.*

ser·vi·tude:

n.

1. A state of subjection to an owner or master: *First come, first served.*
2. Law as in a right that grants use of another's property.

Waste not, Want naught

Referring to the common proverb, “waste not, want not,” these are things that are described as having life left in them and that the owner prefers not to throw out or recycle.

waste not; not to be waste·ful; waste full; not to waste.

1. Not to use, consume, spend, or expend thoughtlessly or carelessly: *Don't want this to go to waste.*
2. Not to lose energy, strength, or vigor: *Not to be wasteful, I'm giving my stuff away.*
3. To pass onwards for further use: *Feels immoral to throw it out as there's still alot of life left in this.*

want naught:

1. Nonexistence; nothingness in wanting: *I want nothing but for this to go.*
2. The figure 0; a cipher; a zero: *You get this for zero money, seriously, you want it, just take it.*

Must

A condition of an offer to *must take all* may reflect a desperation of needing to get rid of the accumulation of excess.

v.aux.

1. To be obliged or required by morality, law, or custom: *You must take all in order to be grateful.*
2. To be compelled, as by a physical necessity or requirement.
3. Used to express a command or admonition: *You must pick-up. You must take all.*
4. To be determined to; have as a fixed resolve: *If you must come at night, do it quietly.*

n.

Something that is absolutely required or indispensable: *Pick-up by this afternoon is a must. Extra hands are a must to carry this.*

Homely goods

This indicates conditions of an offer that are offered *free to a good home*. It also puns on home and “homely” to mean ugly goods that are also morally “good” being plain and utilitarian.

home·ly:

adj. home·li·er, home·li·est

1. Not attractive or good-looking: *This is ugly but still works.*
2. Lacking elegance or refinement.
3. Of a simple nature; plain: homely truths: *From a non-smoking and pet-free home.*
4. Characteristic of the home: homely skills: *Blanket good to cover an ironing board;*

Does anyone iron anymore?

good(s):

n.

1. a. Something that is good.
 b. A valuable or useful part or aspect.
2. Welfare; benefit: for the common good: *Free for all.*
3. Goodness; virtue: *Free to a good home.*
4. Goods: Transient personal property: *I no longer need it, free to someone who can use it.*

Fixings

A kind of offering that suggests ways of operating or using a broken or used object.

fix, fixing

trans. v.

fixings:

n.

1. Apparatus or equipment, often broken or in a state of disrepair: *If you can fix it, it's yours.*
2. The accessories that normally accompany (something or some activity): *Free Doorknobs with all the fixings and screws; A Christmas tree and trimmings to decorate it, Free!*
3. An add-on, appurtenance, supplement - a supplementary component that improves capability: *Just add a cushion and it's good as new.*

Pickings

Used objects that are no longer intact and are offered in pieces or fragments and often left in alleyways or on the edge of private property for receivers to help themselves.

n.

v. intr.

1. The act of one that picks.
2. Conditional pickings: *Pick up in alley before it rains. Pick-up only.*
3. Parts of things or collections; fragments of wholes, sometimes of unknown origin or use: *You're welcome to pick through the stuff but don't know what it's all for.*
4.
 - a. Leftovers. Left over from previous use; often used in the plural: *Party favors!*
I have a lot of leftovers from our New Year's party, come and get it!
 - b. A share of spoils: spoiled goods: *I have all these extra tickets that I won but can't use; come and pick up tonight!*

1.15 Project Blog

The project blog, www.insidefree.org, functions as a photo and text archive of the objects collected and as an artist catalogue for the final project (Fig. 23). The photographs along with the captions and text associated with each object are archived according to the eight categories of giving. The re-purposed dictionary definitions of the eight categories may also be accessed through the blog. The blog is also designed to extend the final project beyond the physical and durational framework of the exhibition and may be added to as more objects are collected for future projects.

wax and tealight holders

"Wax to make your own."



LABELS: FIXINGS 0 COMMENTS

electric receptacles and switches

"Switch gate."



LABELS: PICKINGS 0 COMMENTS

Well go pedals

"China
and
eventually
India,
above
United States;
Canada is different.."



LABELS: FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED 0 COMMENTS

Fig. 23 Screenshot of project blog, Inside Free, on May 16, 2010 showing archive of collected objects. Inside Free. 2010. May 16, 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010. www.insidefree.org

1.16 Digital Collage Project

Polyvore, www.polyvore.com, is a social networking community where people upload web images to create virtual collections of fashionable commodities such as clothing and furniture which they can then use to create digital collages to share with others online. In some sense, the gathering of images may be thought of as a form of shopping but instead of actual products, people are “shopping” for their representations as digital images.

Part of the thesis research is using this platform to visually explore the used objects that I’ve collected by creating digital collages out of their images, both those taken by their original owners and those taken by myself in the studio or in-situ at their pick-up site. In “Stuffed animals” the image is composed by combining an in-situ photo of a garbage bag of stuffed animals sitting on a porch (from which I took one bear as one of the collected objects) and the owner’s own photo of the soft toys on his living room carpet that he had posted (Fig. 24).

I also composed digital collages as a way to visually explore the categories of giving of Craigslist “Free Stuff”. For instance, in Waste Notes, I collaged images selected from other people’s Craigslist photos based on one of the categories of giving, “Waste not, Want Naught” (Fig. 25).

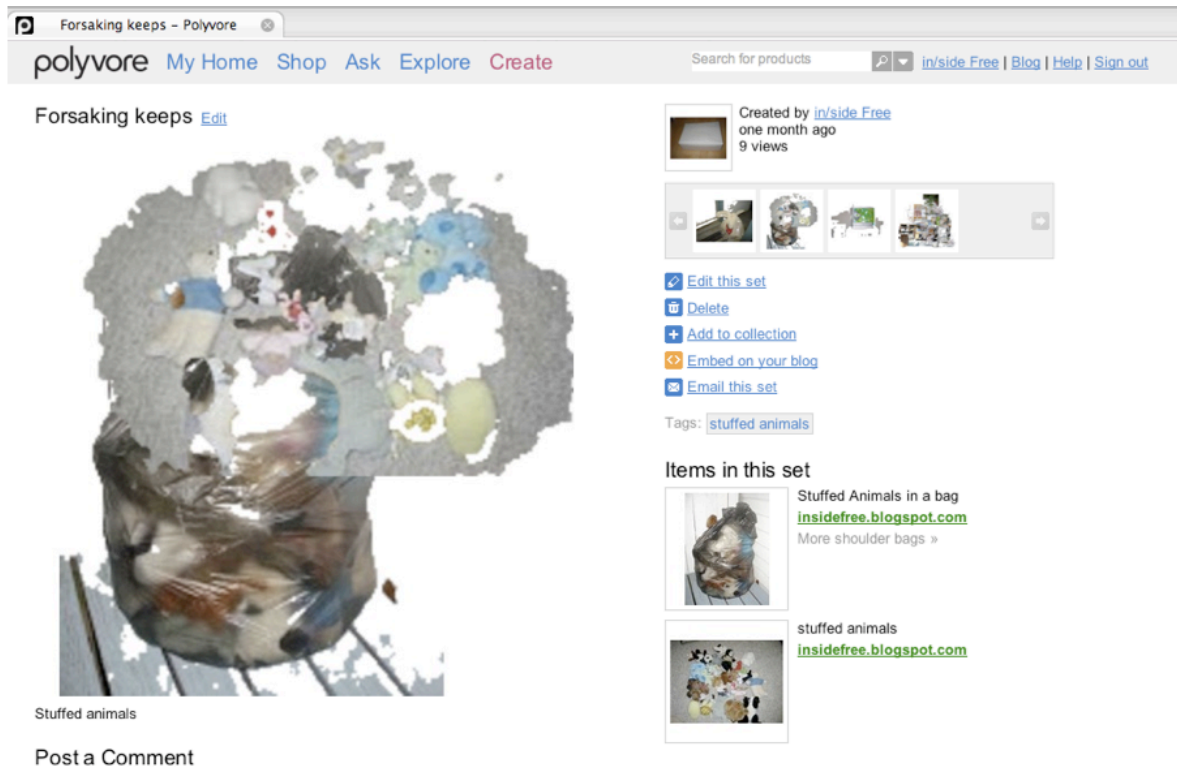


Fig. 24 Screenshot of digital collage. Forsaking Keeps of in/side Free (created in Polyvore). Polyvore. 2010. March 14, 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.
<http://www.polyvore.com/forsaking_keeps/set?id=16012133>

Currently, I have set-up in/side Free a member's group in Polyvore. There are future plans beyond the thesis project to invite people to join the group and to collaborate in composing digital collages from the objects that I've gathered from Craigslist "Free Stuff" which can then be shared with others. By participating in a social community that is aimed at fulfilling consumer desire with new commodities, I am curious to explore how the abject may be revaluated within popular trendsetting cultures. So far, the digital collages that are produced are non-collaborative but serve solely as visual research into the things that I am gathering from Craigslist.

February 7, 2010



Fig. 25 Screenshot of digital collage. Waste Notes of in/side Free created in Polyvore. Polyvore. 2010. February 7, 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.
<http://www.polyvore.com/waste_notes/set?id=15842797>



Fig. 26 Eight stacks and eight boxes of objects along with text archive on wall. Leong, Penny. *Relieve, Relax, Revive (re/given)*. Charles H. Scott Gallery, May 8, 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

1.2 The Project

Framed within different ways of giving between strangers, *Relieve, Relax, Revive (re/given)*, materializes the online space of Craigslist Vancouver’s “Free Stuff” by presenting used, everyday items collected for free from the network. These include a total of eight objects presented in multiple and identical cardboard boxes with the original text “Relieve, Relax, Revive” from which the title of the work takes from (Fig. 26). Also presented is a text archive of posting fragments from Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff” listings taken from the first week of April 2010 during which some of the objects were

collected.

The part archive and part participatory installation functions as both a physical index of this online social world as well as an event through the re-giving of these objects. Each of the eight objects and text document is archived under one of the eight categories that are meant to represent a different way of giving on Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff”: Forsaking Keeps, First Servitudes, Bygone Needs, Waste not Want Naught, Must, Homely Goods, Pickings and Fixings. Re-purposed text of dictionary definitions of the category titles are transferred onto the boxes along with mappings and drawings that document the spatial narratives of receiving these objects. Photographic images of the objects themselves are also transferred onto the interior surfaces of the cardboard boxes (Fig. 27). Each image represents one object and comes with caption titles created out of a combination of excerpted text from the associated Craigslist posting that are owner’s descriptions of their used things or stated or implied conditions of giving and verbal conversations with the original owner during the exchange. The text, employing a poetic play of words, aims to reveal the social values emerging through the giving and receiving of these objects.

The project materializes the online space of Craigslist Vancouver’s “Free Stuff” and is meant to serve as a physical index of this social world. I am fascinated how the ephemeral gestures of giving materialize as physical traces in these objects that also simultaneously serve to document this online social world. One of the things I also find intriguing about this project is the relationship between the physical objects and their visual representation by way of the photograph transfers onto the cardboard surfaces.

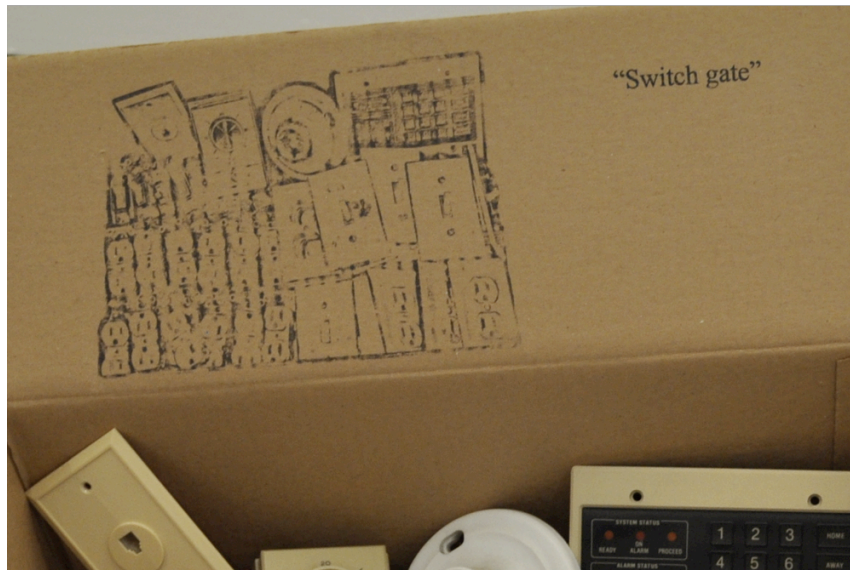


Fig. 27 Photo transfer of electrical plates and switches onto box. Leong, Penny. Relieve, Relax, Revive (*re/given*). Charles H. Scott Gallery, May 8, 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

The participatory component of the installation, (*re/given*), involves re-giving some of the objects to the public. Integral to the event is a re-posting of the objects back into the online space of Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff,” that is intended to extend the discursive space of the gallery from exhibition of ready-made objects to a social space of dialogue and interaction in which art and everyday life blur, becoming chance meetings with strangers framed within a context of giving. The gesture of receiving an object is recorded in the form of the receiver’s signature on a small card that is left in the box that contained the item (Fig. 28).



Fig. 28 Signed card by receiver of IBM Selectric typewriter, Leong, Penny. Relieve, Relax, Revive (re/given). Charles H. Scott Gallery, May 8, 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

By re-contextualizing everyday things such as cardboard boxes and other used objects collected from Craigslist “Free Stuff” into a gallery context and facilitating their re-giving to the public, the object, in this case, used, everyday objects that people no longer need or want, I am hopeful that they may be “revived” through their re-giving, as stranger gifts, forming connections, however ephemeral, between myself (as re/giver) and the participants (as receivers). Furthermore, by re-staging everyday, mundane matter into the reified space of a gallery, I am curious to know if these objects may gain value.

1.3 Project Components

Emerging out of the visual research, the visual components for the final project described below were selected based on how they could best work together synergistically

to fulfill the aims of the thesis project: to present the different ways of giving both as an archival document and as a participatory installation meant to activate the archive into a social space in which the objects are offered for free to the public in a prescheduled event. The various components of the project and how they relate and work together, materially and conceptually, are discussed in this section.

1. Cardboard stacks and Boxes of Objects
2. Mappings onto Boxes
3. Photographs and Caption Transfers onto Boxes
4. Text transfers of Posting titles and fragments
5. Categories of Giving
6. Text Archive
7. Project Blog www.insidefree.org
8. Take away cards
9. The Participatory event, (*re/given*)

Distributed on the gallery floor were eight stacks of identical cardboard boxes wrapped in white paper that formed “plinths” onto which open boxes were displayed, each containing the following: one of the eight collected used objects, mapping inscriptions detailing its exchange, and transfers of photographs of the objects and the associated caption titles and text from the original postings. The text is composed of the Craigslist header with posting title, number and archive category (e.g. Craigslist Vancouver > Homely Goods > Posting ID#1678539362 > Manual Juicer) along with an excerpt of the

offer made by the original owner. Also transferred onto the interior surfaces of the boxes was the text of the re-purposed dictionary definitions of the category of giving associated with the contained object.

The material exploration of the cardboard boxes within the studio and the constraint imposed on them to remain as containers resulted in a tactics of use that utilized the boxes not only as playful repurposing into “plinths” but also as display containers and surfaces for the inscriptions and mappings. The boxes serve conceptually and physically as the supports for the installation. As stacks or “plinths” they stage the objects and the boxes as sculpture. As open containers that serve as display boxes for the objects themselves and surfaces for the inscriptions and transfers, they become a three-dimensional document of the transactions.

The transferred images not only serve as a form of re-presentation of the objects but, through the interaction of the transfer ink’s contact with the surface of the cardboard, become a tactile image, incorporating both the material of the cardboard and the image of the contained object (Fig. 29). I am intrigued by how the box becomes a container, both metaphorically as representational surface for the inscription and transfers of text and images and also materially, by physically containing the object.

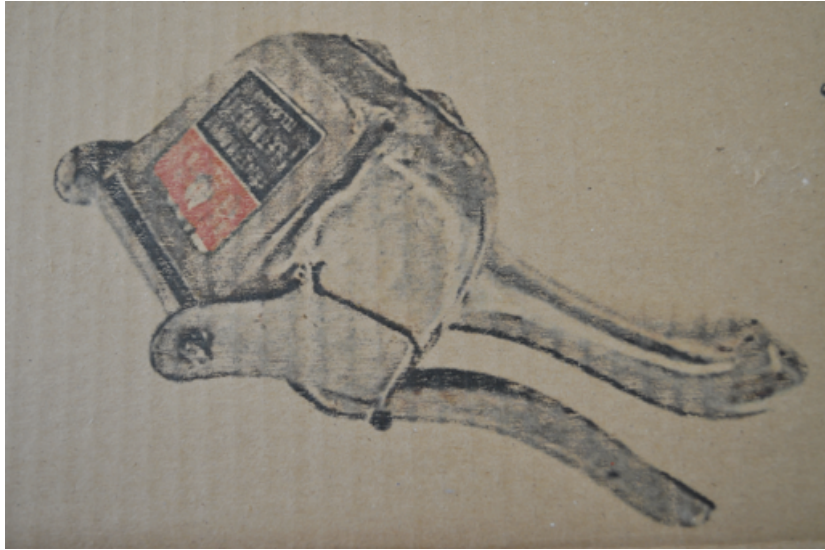


Fig. 29 Transfer of a "tactile image" of manual juicer onto a cardboard surface. Leong, Penny. Relieve, Relax, Revive (re/given). Charles H. Scott Gallery, May 8, 2010.

© Penny Leong, 2010.

To contextualize the objects and their containers, a text archive documents the period of time during which some of the objects re/given were gathered. The text archive was presented as eight documents in tabloid format hung on the wall (Fig. 30). Each tabloid document represents one of the eight categories of giving from which the text fragments are selected and grouped accordingly. The length of each document determined by the number of listings of each category reflects the relative proportion of the ways of giving, some being more prevalent than others. For instance, the document for “Forsaking keeps” is shorter, reflecting fewer listings pertaining to this category (defined as things that people still value for themselves but decide to give away). This contrasts to the category “Fixings” one of the most common ways of giving, that is, the giving away of broken goods. Each tabloid document is titled with the Craigslist header, date of archive, and the

category of giving in which the posting excerpts are categorized (e.g. "Craigslist > Vancouver, BC > Free Stuff > (April 1 - 7, 2010) > Forsaking keeps").

The participatory component of the installation involved a pre-scheduled event in which the public was invited to come to the gallery to receive the objects, which were offered for free, on a first come, first served basis. The event, (*re/given*), occurring over a three hour duration was scheduled mid-way through the exhibition show at which time I was present to re-give the objects and to document the event.

The event was announced on white business cards that specified the time and date along with links to the project's blog and the Craigslist posting in "Free Stuff" where the objects and the re-giving event were described. The cards were distributed throughout the school and made available during the show at the Charles H. Scott Gallery as a take-away item. The cards were casually placed on a chair (an item also acquired for free but not part of the *re/given* objects) to demarcate the temporal and physical space of the participatory event. Participants upon receiving a *re/given* object were asked to write their signature on the reverse side of one of the cards (which are printed with the word "*re/given*") and to leave it in the box that originally held the object. The signed cards serve as a trace of the exchange.



Fig. 30 Text archive on wall. Leong, Penny. Relieve, Relax, Revive (*re/given*). Charles H. Scott Gallery, May 8, 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

Chapter 2 Findings

“The tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices.” (de Certeau, xvii)

2.1 Valuable Sheddings of Excess

I reevaluate the things that people cast away, what I like to refer to as valuable sheddings of excess. When I describe them as valuable, I am referring to their surplus value that is generated from the kinds of social values that enacted through their free circulation between givers and receivers in Craigslist “Free Stuff”. It is not what you give but how you give. This may be the reason why even the most damaged and decrepit things or the most absurd things (like a ball of duct tape) are offered for free. The only thing that does matter

is that they are given and received. Perhaps these used goods as excess may be better thought of as tokens of exchange, indicating a move towards a pre-capitalist society without monetary currency. Rather, what is enacted through these free offerings, are the social relations that reinforce the value(s) that we share around this excess.

Jean Baudrillard defines wastage as everything in excess of need, which means that everything offered through Craigslist regardless of its quality, would be defined as wastage (45). If we are to think of the things that people give away for free as wastage, what does it mean to recirculate them through acts of giving? Put another way, what does it mean to keep wastage in circulation through giving? As opposed to thinking of wastage as depletive or worthless, perhaps wastage through these gestures of giving may be thought of as productive within the social as facilitating connections between strangers.

This inquiry into the possible revaluation of wastage leads to the question of what is being enacted through the free offer? I believe that the answer lies in the enacting of value(s) between one person and an/other that becomes temporary bonds between strangers. These values can be conditions of use; for instance, the man who gave me the boxes and told me that he ran out of things to put in/side them, is in fact, enacting a value he holds towards the excess of the boxes. Whatever the reason for giving, it is not so much about the object given, but the language that shapes the exchange. It doesn't matter that the flashlight can't turn off and that the red flasher keeps blinking; the owner still describes it in her posting as "Wonderful ...", I hear the word "won / der/ fully" and it doesn't matter that the black plastic flashlight without its double AA batteries feels as insubstantial as the

plastic it is made from. For me, won/der/fully marks the object's quirky one/ness and the sharing of this person's value for the flashlight becomes a condition of giving – receiving this condition of “Wonder/fully On” is an acceptance of this person's value for it, and as such, bonds us into a stranger gift. Value is inherently consumptive and sharing the word “Wonderful...” I think, is akin to sharing this consumptive value of the flashlight's “wonderful” but quirky nature.

These are consumable values that are transacted through the sociality of strangers. Even if these connections are momentary, they are substantiated through the value(s) of thrift, generosity and fairness that emerge through the different ways of giving in the form of obligations such as these conditions of use that people place on their free offers.

The offers through Craigslist may be seen as a different kind of consumption as an “everyday practice” of social production. Such everyday practices are what de Certeau would call “tactics” and “ways of using.” Among many other things, what I find valuable about de Certeau's approach is that he imparts individuals with the agency to carve out their own ways of making and doing, though they remain bound by the capitalist modes of production.

I believe that there is a personal accountability and responsibility for the things that we discard. Rather than thinking about consumption motivated by commodified needs and desires that in turn mark these used goods as wastage, can we value these discarded, broken objects through the other? Is it reliance on an/other that makes it possible for us to preserve

the abject and simultaneously to free ourselves from it? In the end, I believe that we seek to redeem through these acts of giving the endless cycle of consumption and wastage and ultimately it is trust in the other that makes this redemption possible.

However, there are risks in trusting a stranger. When I think of what it takes to invite someone you don't know to enter your home, this trust, is in itself a gifting to an/other, a gift that is concealed through the pragmatics of the exchange. What is significant and valuable with de Certeau's approach to consumption is that the individual, through everyday tactics is reframed and given agency over their own consumption. The woman who gives away her red coat to an/other voices concern for the unknown other as she gives away her coat: it's not waterproof but she says, it's "warm".

2.2 Stranger Gifts

“A gift that cannot move loses its gift properties.” (Hyde, The Gift 9)

Lewis Hyde defines the true quality of the gift as one that circulates. He tells the story of a band of Bushmen in South Africa in which each woman was given cowrie shells enough to make a short necklace. They had been given as a going-away present by Lorna Marshall and her husband who had been living with them. The Marshalls returned to find that all the shells had been given throughout the community. The shells had become ways of sharing that went beyond two people and instead reinforced feelings of community (96).

In another segment of his book, Hyde also describes the preference to remain anonymous in big cities through the common behavior of strangers averting each other's eyes in passing. He explains that this behavior is not motivated by estrangement but rather as a way to mitigate "excessive human contact" (116). I wonder if we could think of the free offerings made in Craigslist as a medium for re-connection that at minimum is a kind of acknowledgement: here I am and here you are, stranger.

Even a "free" offering comes with a minimum condition of trust in the stranger which I believe actually functions across all offers made in Craigslist "Free Stuff". Perhaps there is no such thing as a completely free. Shifting levels of giving are what make the free offers so ambiguous and I propose, a strange kind of gifting.

A strange gift, shift-shaping through the re-giving of value(s) is often concealed under the guise of the free offer. The strangeness of the gift does not, I think, reveal itself easily and only perhaps when you focus less on the actual thing given and more on the conditions of giving, using and taking. In a society of mass consumption, accustomed to commodity fetishism, this is not how we customarily consume. The ambiguous gift emerges when conditions mediate what is given, enacting a weak form of social bond.

2.3 Emergent Value(s)

Value(s) are explored concurrently through both my study of how people give through Craigslist and my material exploration of the boxes. Within the context of the acts

of giving in Craigslist, use values refer to socio-cultural and ideological values that are produced through individual and social bodies (i.e. Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff”). Within an artistic context, use value(s) refers to my tactical creative use of the boxes as a form of representation which in turn, translates to conceptual, formal and aesthetic value(s) (e.g. boxes and cardboard).

2.31 Value(s) through Giving

A number of values can be discerned through the language of Craigslist “Free Stuff” postings. What I find intriguing is that the process may be thought of as a way to cope with excessive consumption.

While reasons for giving are numerous and vary according to individual circumstances, there are common motives that emerge through the free offer: 1. self-interest, identified here as the desire to rid oneself of the burden of keeping something one no longer needs or wants (*Please take this off my hands*); 2. goodwill towards strangers that is the desire to share with others (*I can run it to you if you are close by*); 3; thrift (*there’s still a lot of use left in this, hate to throw it out*); 4. egalitarianism as the belief of equality for all regardless of race, culture, status (*free for all; first come, first served*); and 5. environmental ethics, expressed here as taking responsibility for one’s consumption by reducing our negative impact on the earth (*Save me from the landfill!*).

All of these motives support an ethic towards the other: the trust in an/other, which is

at minimum, the trust in strangers to fulfill the promise to take away their unwanted item at the agreed upon time and at maximum the trust to open one's space to a stranger (*We won't be home but you are welcome to come by to take it away*).

However, there are other attitudes that can reveal a mistrust towards the other that serve to preserve the anonymity and social standing of the giver. These less socially acceptable values are not so apparent but exist alongside the socially sanctioned values of goodwill, egalitarianism and thrift: these are the values of social status between giver and receiver, with the former, probably being positioned with greater power and status. Through the giving, there may be reinforcement of social status of those who are doing the giving.

2.32 Value(s) through Artistic Process and Representation

Aesthetic and formal values emerge in the liminal gap between repurposed art and commodity. The original owner's reason for giving away the boxes: *I ran out of things to put inside them*" became a parameter of their exploration in the studio. I adopted this purpose, to store and transport things as a constraint both materially and metaphorically. Likewise, the found text, "Relieve, Relax, Revive", printed on the boxes also informed how I explored the materiality of the boxes through different stages of value from cardboard matter (e.g. fan sculpture and rotunda) to a metaphor for storage (e.g. room). In the majority of the iterations, the boxes signified Modernist values and capital commodity as repetitive, rectangular box forms.

When I decided to give away the collected objects, I decided to use the boxes as open containers to display the offerings. Additionally, the wrapping of the boxes into “plinths” maintained the shape and uniformity of the boxes but concealed the cardboard material; this treatment diminished their utility value as storage boxes. By wrapping the boxes, their meaning is altered from mundane packaging material to forms that echo the formal aesthetic of the Modernist white box gallery. What results is a playful conceptual pun of “box” and “white box” gallery.

By offering the boxes within an art gallery context in these various forms, I am hoping to enact an ambiguity of what is being offered – a gift, art object, used commodity or a combination of all three? This ambiguity reflects the complexity of how gifting often operates in Craigslist when used objects are mediated through values that may or may not be clear. Although this subject goes beyond the scope of my paper, I believe it is important to acknowledge that within the context of art, this ambiguity of value(s) of what art is, reflects the reality of art as a commodity, which in turn, calls into question of who gives and who receives and overall, how art is situated socially within the larger context of the everyday world.

2.33 Mutability of Values

A question that I think poignantly demonstrates the mutable nature of value is this: How does commodity value transmute into the value of art (as representation); for instance,

I wonder how by re-contextualizing and re-purposing the objects both the boxes (as a container for the other objects, as surfaces for the mappings and inscriptions and as empty, white paper wrapped boxes constructed into “plinths”) and the other contained objects within an art context, these otherwise everyday objects would shift in value? And what kind of “use” values would the objects hold and for whom? The gestures of giving and receiving these everyday objects may transform them from object matter to social matter. For instance, as social objects these otherwise familiar objects (manual juicer, glass vases, flashlight) become through their giving, ways of sharing conditions of their use through the text fragments of the objects’ original postings. The receivers of the objects could adopt the objects and perhaps even the value(s) that are transacted through them, for their own use. Part of what is re-given is the possibility of revaluating these objects from discarded objects to something worthy of another person’s attention and care.

I think of emergent value(s) as value(s) that are necessarily mutable. The kinds of value(s) that emerge through these everyday commodities, be they the tactics of use of the boxes within the studio as artistic production or with the other objects through their representation and re-giving within a gallery context as part gift and part commodity, are dependent on the circumstances of their use and exchange. While I recognize that the nature of value(s) is their ability to coalesce into stable forces becoming part of the social and cultural discourse that shape our everyday lives, I do, however, also recognize that values are dynamic and that they can shift through the circumstances of their emergence and the way they are carried forth, in this case, through the personal possessions that people offer to strangers for free. So, rather than try to pinpoint value as solely monetary or

commodity, or as socially produced ethics of trust or thrift, the thesis treats values as mutable and potentializing through the nature of their exchange. Within the framework of the boxes and the other used, nearly discarded, objects gathered for free from Craigslist, exchange value and “use” values shift, migrating from commodity to social object. This movement or transience of values between exchange (as commodity) and use (tactical consumption) values becomes inherent when employing a mass commodity such as cardboard boxes as a readymade material. Whether in the studio as a tactical play of boxes (my own and others), as representation in the gallery in the form of participatory social objects, or circulating in the everyday social world of Craigslist “Free Stuff”, value(s) shift between commodity and the social, materializing in these everyday objects.

Alternative economies such as Craigslist Vancouver’s “Free Stuff” network may be thought of as spaces for social interventions into dominant modes of market exchange which de Certeau considers “guileful uses”. Tactical uses emerging as individual values may be shared through these free transactions, forming bonds as “gifts.” Values such as generosity and trust, for instance, are transient and durational, residing only temporarily in the objects and lasting only as long as the exchange.

The fact that these objects, despite being damaged, are still recirculated attests to the mutable meaning of value. Beyond monetized exchange, the thesis considers value as an emergent form produced through the acts of social exchange, in this case, facilitated by the gestures of people giving away their used possessions to strangers. The underlying premise of value(s) as emergent is based on two inter-related phenomena, both of which are

discussed below: the mutable nature of value(s) as discussed by Nigel Thrift in Capital, and the alternative form of consumption by the individual, as everyday acts of “uses” and “tactics” posited by de Certeau in his essay, “‘Making Do’: Uses and Tactics” that appears in his book The Practice of Everyday Life.

In the era of capitalist, globalized economies when everyday values like trust, confidence, desire are commodified and sold back to us in the form of products to consume, the question of how we value and know what we value is increasingly unclear. What is clear, however, is the growing immateriality and ephemerality of value, what is described as “the growing realm of the insubstantial” (Cumplings and Lewandowska_103) with important effects – “all the way from currency to the invention of new forms of imagination” (105). In a discussion of the artist project, Capital (Cumplings and Lewandowska) an extensive project that explores the venerable institution of the Tate Gallery and its curatorial and administrative practices that underwrite, preserve and cultivate the value of art, the idea of the “insubstantial” is explored as the abstraction of all kinds of things that go unnoticed in our modern world and that within the “insubstantial” we “live on the edge of consciousness, half-noticed, diaphanous ...” (85). The “insubstantial” is equated to “spirit worlds” of belief and knowing and the slippery and immaterial phenomenon of value and money, two inter-related things that are increasingly “insubstantial” (85).

Indeed a word search of “value” through the free online search of the Compact Oxford English Dictionary reveals just how indeterminable and “insubstantial” this word

can be: book value, face value, nominal value, balance, index, rateable value, value-added tax, appreciate, appreciation, equity, error, market value, prize, rebound, Eurobond, VAT, Zen, Absolute, Acid Text, Add, Amount, Assess, At, Revalue, Sentimental, Street Value, Valorize (“Value”).

Similarly, a search of the meaning of “value” generated at least five meanings: 1. the regard that something is held to deserve; importance or worth; 2. material or monetary worth; 3. (values) principles or standards of behavior; 4. the numerical amount denoted by an algebraic term; a magnitude, quantity, or number; 5. Music the relative duration of the sound signified by a note (“Value”).

What this demonstrates, is how value is insubstantial through language’s own generativity. Perhaps one of the reasons why we give away decrepit objects is that they have values that cannot be accounted for. This excess of value, like language which overfills denotation, cannot be pinned down by finite market measurement. Rather, alternative ways of consumption and therefore revaluation of what is considered valuable are more appealing. When considered from the standpoint of de Certeau’s idea of individual tactics of use, these ways of consuming, occur through emergent bodies such as Craigslist “Free Stuff” that are responsive to these “insubstantial” and “diaphanous” effects of living.

2.4 Tactics

“As unrecognized producers, poets of their own acts, silent discovers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality, consumers produce through their signifying practices something that might be considered similar to the ... ‘wandering lines’ (de Certeau xviii)

I consider the users who post their unwanted things on Craigslist as these “unrecognized producers” and “poets of their own acts” (xviii). De Certeau defines tactics operating in a place that “belongs to the other.” He further explains: “A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance” (xix). I think that applying de Certeau’s tactics accurately frames Craigslist as a space of indeterminacy through which the emergent acts of gifting that obligate a stranger in some way or another, provides ways to reevaluate these discarded goods into social matter.

2.41 Tactics of Consumption

The ‘making’ in question is a production, ... a hidden use, because it is scattered over areas defined and occupied by systems of ‘production’ (television, urban development, commerce, etc.), and because the steadily increasing expansion of these systems no longer leaves ‘consumers’ any place in which they can indicate what they make or *do* with the products of these systems. To a

rationalized, expansionist and at the same time centralized, clamorous, and spectacular production corresponds *another* production, called “consumption.” The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order. (de Certeau xii - xiii)

When someone gives away his washing machine or collection of car magazines, he is re-directing both the objects of production and the mode of operations of the dominating Capitalist system. By virtue of the fact that mass-commodities are being circulated through a system made up of consumers, Craigslist is a network embedded within a Capitalist infrastructure. It utilizes the mode of operations of circulation of Capitalism, but subverts it through re-circulation. Craigslist is an alternative system of consumption, a free economy reliant on individually produced acts that circulate the excess of capital consumption. Broken, abject, out-of-fashion objects are described by their owners as unique things with their own conditions of use or offerings grafted on them. The red coat is described as not waterproof but “warm” as if anticipating the body of whoever will be wearing it next. The way in which people describe their used things also appears like consumer advertising but the content is not the selling of a lifestyle, but a sharing, directly or inadvertently, of how an object is broken or in excess, or otherwise requiring being given away. For instance, with a half bag of hamster food along with its cage the giver tells us without needing to that, the hamster probably died. Likewise, the woman giving away a bag of fabric scraps suggesting they would be “good for a craft project”, is seeking a particular kind of recipient

who likes to sew.

These are ways of consuming and producing that are not operating outside of capitalist modes of consumption but are actually infiltrating it, re-purposing the processes and infrastructure of capitalism for their own ends: to re-circulate used goods not from shop to customer, but from individual to individual, giver to receiver. These may be considered what de Certeau refers to as “*ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order,” (xii -xiii) while mimicking the dominant structure. The network has in its mesh creases and folds where these acts of giving take place, and their associated value(s) of consumption emerge.

2.42 Tactical Ways of Speaking and Reading

De Certeau recognizes how to “make do” within circumstances. He considers the everyday “enunciation” as an “act of speaking” in which “it effects an appropriation, or reappropriation, of language by its speakers...” (xiii). The way in which people write their postings can be considered an act that reappropriates the language of commodity advertising. Out of these enunciations, these givers as “unrecognized producers”, use a Craigslist code - *free for all; first come, first served; come and get it*. This enunciation “posits a *contract with the other* (the interlocutor) in a network of places and relations” (xiii).

De Certeau suggests that reading “is anything but passive ... ” (xxii) and instead

considers reading as a form of “silent production” and a “drift across the page” (xxi). Furthermore, he explains that through the act of reading, a reader “insinuates into another person’s text” (xxii) and takes with her ruses of pleasure and appropriation. The everyday language of Craigslist may be thought as an intersubjective language through which the reader “pluralizes” himself by which de Certeau means the reader places himself into the text and “slips into the author’s place” (xxi). Applying this within the context of Craigslist, I, as a potential receiver, read a posting and imagine myself, wanting and using the object being offered, from the perspective of the person giving it. This way of reading, which de Certeau describes is how text is “habitable, like a rented apartment” (xxi) and how it “transforms another person’s property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient.” (xxi) When applied towards Craigslist, this may explain how value(s) are shared between giver and receiver through the language of Craigslist postings.

I consider the same tactics of reading may also apply to the conversations I have with givers through email, telephone or in person. These are engagements that de Certeau would identify as “speech situations” (xxii). He states: “... the art of conversationalists: the rhetoric of ordinary conversation consists of practices that transform ‘speech situations’, verbal productions in which the interlacing of speaking positions weaves an oral fabric without individual owners, creations of a communication that belongs to no one “ (xxii).

Indeed, the nature of the internet means that if you write something, take a photograph and then post it online in Craigslist, you are offering the used object for public display and consumption (xxii). When I repurpose people’s text and images into a blog or

as print photographs, I consider myself intervening into this “oral fabric” of Craigslist where things are offered for free and where there are “no individual owners”. There is also a real sense that a conversation is circulating among the postings within this social world. It is a conversation that is activated through the experience of reading the postings that does not require one to actually speak to the authors of the postings. De Certeau defines conversation as such: “Conversation is a provisional and collective effect of competence in the art of manipulating ‘commonplaces’ and the inevitability of events in such a way as to make them ‘habitable’”(xxii). Craigslist “Free Stuff” is in effect a place for collective conversation that carves out a non-monetized space out of the “inevitability” of market economy, thereby making it “habitable”. This “habitable” online space where things are given away for free is generated through the very language that is produced by its users.

De Certeau also considers the “‘ways of operating’ [that] constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production” (xiv). In terms of Craigslist users, this space is the highly commodified space of the internet in which social networks are sites of individual tactical consumption. It is accomplishing what de Certeau considers the “re-use of marketing structures” as part of “making do” (xv).

2.43 Tactical Operations through Art

In addition to providing relevant ways to appreciate Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff” as a social world and the kinds of giving that happen within it, de Certeau’s tactics

also plays out significantly in own research and practice. How I re-purpose everyday language (in Craigslist postings) and the things that people discard for artistic material, can be clearly articulated through de Certeau's tactics as "ruses", "appropriation" and "improvisation" within established orders or systems (xxi). These "poetic ways of 'making do'" which he terms "*bricolage*" as "the artisan-like inventiveness" (xviii), may be used to describe my re-purposing and re-mixing of found language and materials.

Additionally, the collaborative and participatory elements of the project such as extending the free offer of things collected back into Craigslist Vancouver's "Free Stuff" that infiltrates into online space of Craigslist and the physical space of the gallery and involving the gallery public to participate in acts of giving and receiving may also be considered tactics of use within an artistic context.

Chapter 3 Object Matter

I consider my studio process with the boxes as a series of experiments that challenge their "object matter", a term that I use to describe the way in which physical things are mediated through visual and textual languages. As language, object matter encompasses the socio-cultural realm through the semiotics of objects that largely informs the way we use and value material things. Here, I am referring specifically to the ways in which object matter is transacted through socio-cultural systems of language that transforms physical things into social matters. Within the context of the used goods that are given within Craigslist, material objects become social objects through the emergent value(s) of trust or

environmental ethics. The acts of giving, mediated through language and tactics of use, transform physical matter to social objects.

The way I materialize the online world of Craigslist Vancouver's "Free Stuff" into a physical presence of used objects in the gallery space may be thought of as bringing forth a tactility to these otherwise virtual objects experienced only in images and text. Tactility can range everything from a tactility of language as mediated through the body such as the case of how an individual in Craigslist describes a particular way of using the objects to handling the physical objects through its transfer of hands, from giver to receiver. It can also be in the way a giver shares her own tactile experience, of the object she is giving away. For instance, the original owner describing her red coat as "warm" uses descriptive language and if not tactile is nevertheless inviting to touch tactility of language where "warm" is bodily, described by the giver and anticipated for an/other. Here, I am considering de Certeau's idea of "tactics" of use as a tactility of language mediated through the body. Tactility may also be as simple as physically handling the objects.

I consider both the tactics of language and the "tactility" of use as the immaterial effects of the free transactions. In both the research investigation of giving and also in my studio exploration into the materiality and representation of the boxes and the other objects that I've collected, I consider the mediation of objects through language. With the actual object placed in open cardboard boxes, I intend for the things to be touched. Within the visual research and the studio project, I explore ways in which to materialize the traces of the immaterial effects of giving and receiving of the objects into physical matter. I do so in

the following ways: 1. in the physical objects of the boxes and other items collected, 2. photographs of the objects in the site of the pick-up; and 3. written inscriptions of excerpted postings onto cardboard, objects or tags.

The term is referenced by other scholars, such as Bill Brown in his book, The Object Matter: A Sense of Things in which he defines “object matter” (in literary texts) as “an understanding of the phenomenal object world through which human subjects circulate” (18). His other questions are “What are the poetics and the politics of the object? How do objects mediate relations between subjects, and how do subjects mediate the relation between objects?” (18). Another scholar, Bruno Latour, also speaks about the importance of physical matters having political and social “matters of concern”:

Where matters-of-fact have failed, let’s try what I have called matters-of-concern. What we are trying to register here ... is a huge sea change in our conceptions of science, our grasps of facts, our understanding of objectivity. For too long, objects have been wrongly portrayed as matters-of-fact. This is unfair to them, unfair to science, unfair to objectivity, unfair to experience. They are much more interesting, variegated, uncertain, complicated, far reaching, heterogeneous, risky historical, local, material and networky than the pathetic version offered for too long by philosophers. Rocks are not simply there to be kicked at, desks to be thumped at. ‘Facts are facts are facts’? Yes, but they are also a lot of other things in *addition*. (9 – 11)

I share both of these scholars' perspectives towards physical objects as social matter: in particular, Latour's idea of objects overflowing their materiality through experience that finds parallels in Brown's idea on the mediation of objects through the subject. I also acknowledge the mediation of objects through the body as physical tactility and reconsider object matter through De Certeau's tactics, extending object matter as ways of using and ways of perceiving the objects bodily that emerge through language.

Distilling and manipulating the language or the object matter of the things I collect from Craigslist is part of my investigative process into the ways people give. The play of language that I apply to translate my Craigslist experiences of the free transactions and my deliberate interpretations and selections of excerpts of postings, emails and other social exchanges are a process that I use to develop the textual mappings. Much of this play works with riffing and puns. However, this play is based on factual data around the exchanges. In other words, I do not invent like a storyteller; rather I think of my method as a translation of factual details around the exchange. How play enters is through the overflow and ambiguities of language that on a literal level is factual, but through puns or the overflow of language, these facts can gain a multiple meanings, without sacrificing a facticity. I consider the conceptual poetics of Duchamp and the concept of indirect discourse as very useful tools in achieving a kind of tension between fact and ambiguity, literality and pun, that I try to bring through the textual mappings.

3.1 Conceptual Poetics

Marcel Duchamp's Conceptual approach to language and materiality is an important influence in my work. In terms of language, I am particularly receptive to his tactical punning of words that often make their way into the titles he gives his works. In describing Duchamp's penchant towards language as a visual medium, in particular his way of labeling his readymades, Marjorie Perloff states: "Indeed, in classifying Duchamp as belonging to the visual arts (the normal procedure), we overlook, ... the verbal dimension of the readymades themselves (their titles, inscriptions, verbal context) and not only the well-known puns ..." (87).

According to Perloff, the language of Duchamp may be thought of as visual work, describing it: "as its visual material, letters, words, and sentences" (88). Sometimes the instability of language can be circumstantial and sometimes it can be deliberately tricky, as with Duchamp's Fresh Widow (1920) (Fig. 31). Duchamp turns literal description of a work into a misalignment of meaning but what would otherwise be a retains an alignment of syntax, as "French window" becoming "fresh widow".



Fig. 31 Miniature French window, painted wood frame, and panes of glass covered with black leather, 30 1/2" X 17 5/8", on wood sill 3/4 " X 21" X 4". Duchamp, Marcel. Fresh Widow. 1920. Katherine S. Dreier Bequest. © Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art © Estate of Marcel Duchamp / SODRAC (2010), used by permission, The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY and Estate of Marcel Duchamp / SODRAC (2010).

I am also influenced by Duchamp's use of verbs. For example, in a note for his work Large Glass, he provides it with the subtitle, "Delay in Glass" as a way of avoiding the description "a glass painting" or a "glass drawing" (85 – 86). His idea was that the word "delay" was a way of suspending the work's reception not so much through different meanings of language but through its ambiguity. He explains: "The verb was meant to be an abstract word acting on a subject that is a material object, in this way the verb would make the sentence look abstract'" (Duchamp qtd. in Schwarz 457 qtd. in Perloff 89).



Fig. 32 Bagged vases on front porch for pick-up. Bagged vases: Must pick-up today. 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

This abstraction of language through pun or the use of verbs to transform language into a “material object” that can be experienced by the person receiving it as tactile language, is central to how I interpret and manipulate the found text of Craigslist. For instance, I use puns to reconfigure proverbs, which are then used as category titles that reference the ways people give. It is a linguistic strategy that I utilize to imply the contradictory nature in the acts of giving. To provide an example, the posting fragment, “must pick-up today”, interpreted through the category definition of “Must,” refers literally to the active condition indicated by the auxiliary verb “must” but may also allude to the adjective, “musty” as in the state of storing unused things in bags and cupboards (Fig. 32).

I also experiment with Duchamp’s concept of delay in the captions I give to photographs of objects taken in situ at their pick-up location. For example, the photograph

caption for a bag containing glass vases that was left on the front porch reads as: “Bagged vases: Must pick-up today” and is composed from text exchanged with the giver through email and the state of the vases as evidenced in the photograph. The aim here is to lend enough ambiguity in the text that can “delay” its reading: “Bagged vases” could mean “bagged” as in tired?; “must” as in “musty things”?; or “must” be picked up? By manipulating the everyday language that articulates these free transactions through poetic play I hope to situate language within this zone of delay which in turn may capture the complexity of the value(s) and social relations that are produced.

I like how the banality and literalness of postings seem so pragmatic yet can also mean more than it initially appears. Tone can be interpreted in many ways. For instance, “You have to bring two people to help you move it. I won’t help”, states an obligation. Perhaps this is imperious, or perhaps the giver is disabled. The possibilities of meaning always exceed the text.

This tactical production of language also influences my reading of the postings of Craigslist and subsequently how I decide to excerpt the text into fragments that are used as source materials initially for shipping labels, and now directly written or transferred onto the objects and boxes. By virtue of the fact that most people who write their posts do so in a pragmatic manner (i.e. serving the purposes of offering their free things), the language they produce can therefore be understood quite literally. This literal quality of the text makes it appear as if there is no personal investment but, in fact, there is. Take the simple condition of an offer: “Must take away today!”; here, “Must” is an order and may imply a

certain aggression and power relation between the giver and receiver in that the receiver is in the weaker position, of having to comply to this condition. It could also signify a desperation or instability in the giver's situation. Mauss and Hyde both speak about the social power relations implicit in the act of giving where offerings through their stated conditions become more like gifts of obligation, rather than free offers with no restrictions.

In summary, I am experimenting with the language of Craigslist to explore its social sphere. I excerpt and manipulate postings in ways that may reveal or generate unexpected meanings. I think of Duchamp's playful use of language an important influence in my approach.

These categories are guides for my reworking of language and give context to the excerpted posting fragments and photograph captions. I repurpose the dictionary format of exploring the generativity and multiple meanings of words (Fig. 33). The excerpted fragments of the postings enter the text and are meant to slip up the formal meanings of the word. Here, the category "Pickings" refers to a condition of giving represented by phrases such as "free for pick-up only", in which pickings may refer to the action of "picking-up" the free item but simultaneously may also mean the state of "pickings" of objects that are no longer intact but fragmented into bits and pieces.

Pickings

pick·ings

n.

v. intr.

1. The act of one that picks.
2. Conditional pickings: Pick up in alley before it rains. Pick-up only.
3. Parts of things or collections; fragments of wholes, sometimes of unknown origin or use: You're welcome to pick through the stuff but don't know what it's all for.
4.
 - a. Leftovers. Left over from previous use; often used in the plural: Party favors!
I have a lot of leftovers from our New Year's party, come and get it!
 - b. A share of spoils: spoiled goods: I have all these extra tickets that I won but can't use; come and pick up tonight!

Fig. 33 Screen capture of “Pickings” category. Inside Free (project blog). May 20, 2010.

© Penny Leong, 2010.

<www.insidefree.org>

3.2 Indirect Discourse

“Language is a map, not a tracing” (Deleuze and Guattari 77). The mapping of text and images that describe the free transactions of the used objects may be viewed as ways in which language is produced as “indirect discourse”. Defined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, “indirect discourse” is the “first language” and “consists not in communicating what one has seen but in what one has heard, what someone else said to you” (76). They further explain that

language “always goes from saying to saying.” In other words, it is the movement of language and the resulting difference and open-endedness of language, rather than a point of origin coming from the authority of a writer. The following quote illustrates their ideas of how language opens up through passing from one person to another: “Language is not content to go from a first party to a second party, from one who has seen to one who has not, but necessarily goes from a second party to a third party, neither of whom has seen” (77). For instance, when I read someone’s posting even though they aren’t addressing me directly, I feel that they are. I understand this as a form of indirect discourse. In a similar manner, I experience the text of people’s postings and emails as if they are “talking” to me directly.

The “spoken” exchanges between the givers and myself as receiver of the free items are directly transferred or inscribed as text onto the cardboard surfaces; While the givers’ words may be directed at me, these “spoken” exchanges are meant to be shared and experienced intersubjectively, a term I am using in the general sense to mean how two or more people can share a feeling or a thought. Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of “indirect discourse” relies on intersubjectivity that is extended to mean not only how one can mutually share ideas with another, but one that is based on a subjectivity that is not located strictly within an individual body but one that is transient and shared within a social body.

While I think of the content of these textual mappings - what I read in people’s postings, the kinds of verbal exchanges that I have with givers, the micro-events that unfold when I arrive at the destination, and the factual details like routes taken to the pick-up

location - as factual and objective, I also think that there are slippages of the personal and individual within these mappings. These slippages are what makes producing these mappings so interesting to me.

“Indirect discourse” may also provide a way to describe how I think of my role in the mappings – not only as a receiver who translates what I see and hear, but also as somebody who selects what to reveal out of the words that givers write and “speak” through their postings, emails, telephone calls and face-to-face dialogue. I realize that this filtering process makes the translations of the transactions somewhat subjective but I also think that readers of these mappings may also “experience” the journeys that navigate the terrain of Craigslist “Free Stuff” alongside his own memories and singular modes of being.

Fundamental to understanding Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of “indirect discourse” is what they term, “order words”: “Order-words do not concern commands only, but every act that is linked to statements by a ‘social obligation’. Every statement displays this link, directly or indirectly. Questions, promises are order-words” (79). The way people write their postings on Craigslist – *must pick up by Saturday; free for all* - can be thought of as “order-words” that are produced within a social system that has its own codes of social behavior and expectations of the other. The fragments that I excerpt from people’s postings and the words I exchange and hear from givers, can be understood as “order words” whose patterns reveal ways of being within this particular social world. One of the things that I find fascinating about the social world of Craigslist is the way people use language to describe the things they are giving away, the reasons that motivate them for

giving as well as the conditions that they set for their receiving.

As a “collective assemblage” Craigslist ““Free Stuff”” as a community becomes a site of production for the acts of giving and receiving of used personal objects and the kinds of relations that are formed through them. For instance, how I relate with the strangers that I meet through Craigslist is informed by ways they word their offering (in the postings) that comes with its own code of propriety. An offer that is described with a tone of generosity may mean the person is more congenial as opposed to one who has stated strict limitations of the offer. Put another way, these “feelings” towards the other arise through language acts. The transmission of what people write in their postings and the words that are exchanged through email and in-person contact, have a redundancy or generativity that goes beyond mere communication, but may be viewed as reproductive in their potential, translating into actual acts of giving and receiving. The words you say become the actions you take. Or in the case of Craigslist posting, what you give is how you give and thereby the object is in paradox, insignificant, valued only through their transaction. For Deleuze and Guattari, language produces the acts of being, change and difference in the world. For myself, collecting what people write and what they say to me reveals how language operates as a dynamic terrain for these transactions of giving and receiving to take place, the ways in which we negotiate with strangers. The person who writes, “come and get it I’ve left it in the alleyway by the trashbin”, inadvertently establishes a condition of giving that places the receiver in a somewhat compromising and weaker position. By placing myself in the position of both receiver and giver of the used objects that I’m collecting, I am being situated in unknown and potentially uncomfortable

terrain where language is the front lines of meeting the other, skirting between the public and personal, the collective and the private, congeniality and indifference.

How this transversing of language reveals and challenges our relations and assumed values towards the other, as the stranger, is what I feel is most worthwhile and potentially satisfying in my journeys in gathering these used, apparently worthless objects. What I find promising is that even though the cardboard boxes and the other used things I have gathered are on the verge of obsolescence, they can through their transaction potentially produce small yet significant connections between strangers. Take for example, the giver, Amy, who was one of the more congenial people I met, inviting me into her home and introducing me to her husband, Sunny (Fig. 34). These are gifts of relating, of possible connection between two people, who otherwise may not know each other.



Fig. 34 Giver of Wedding Souvenir. Amy. 2010. © Penny Leong, 2010.

These gifts of the social resonate in ways that are often concealed or taken for granted by the nature of the familiarity of language. In a way, Craigslist “Free Stuff” exemplifies an example of the everydayness of giving and receiving, here, transacted through the common objects that we surround ourselves with, that one day we may no longer want. They are transacted through the everyday language that hums through as posting titles, descriptions, email and person-to-person verbal exchanges. Like the objects that people cast off and give away it includes redundancies that are the excesses of language, which may be understood through Deleuze and Guattari’s idea that information is the “minimal condition”. They explain: “We are saying that the redundancy of the order word is instead primary and that information is only the minimal condition for the transmission of order-words” (79). I think it is perhaps through this idea of redundancy that makes language overflows that I translate the postings. Whether I translate or excerpt directly from the language of Craigslist (e.g. the fragments of postings) it is by “reading” between the lines that I try to distill the kinds of emergent values of giving and receiving. On the other hand, there is the information level of people’s postings that describes the object and the condition to take it. Implicit in this language is its redundancy, which in the context of Craigslist “Free Stuff”, can be thought of as containing the potential for these freely offered objects to enter trans / actions of the social.

Deleuze and Guattari propose redundancy in language as order-words that mean more than they “say”; in other words, it is language spilling over itself in which its nuances and inherent meaning can only be understood within their particular social context. They

state:

Redundancy has two forms, *frequency and resonance*; the first concerns the ‘significance’ of information, the second (I = I) concerns the subjectivity of communication. It becomes apparent that information and communication, and even signifi-ance and subjectification, are subordinate to redundancy. ... Both [signifi-ance and subjectification] depend on the nature and transmission of order-words in a given social field. (79)

In the context of Craigslist “Free Stuff”, then, the order-words that are in the postings and verbal exchanges with the givers, become meaningful through the context of giving and receiving. Another way to consider the “Free Stuff” postings is that they provide the context and the frame for the carrying of the order-words that generate relations with the other / stranger.

These ideas of “indirect discourse” may be applied towards understanding how I produce these textual mappings, inscribing facts that while interpreted through my own experience of them could also be read intersubjectively. However, unlike Deleuze and Guattari, I do not think that language excludes all elements of identity and self-expression but rather that within social worlds, they become individuated expressions that are framed as a code and therefore understood as such within it. So, for instance, when someone writes in her posting, “free only to those who really need it”, this “order-word” recalls all other related order-words that are in other postings that circumscribe the giving. Value(s) embed

and are practiced through these “order words”. Certain value(s) are more embedded in the linguistic code of Craigslist; take for instance, values of social welfare and egalitarianism are certainly popular reasons for giving on Craigslist. Equally, so are environmental concerns: pleas such as “please keep me out of the landfill” are commonly seen in postings.

Out of this community or what Deleuze and Guattari would call a “collective assemblage,” language exchanged in these transactions produces actions within a particular social field. This has to do with the production of actions and relations through “indirect discourse.” They explain: “Indirect discourse is not explained by the distinction between subjects; rather, it is the assemblage, as it freely appears in this discourse, that explains all the voices present within a single voice ... “ (80). Within this collective assemblage of Craigslist Vancouver’s “Free Stuff” network, “indirect discourse” is shared collectively as a social body. Actions speak louder than words. This is true. Yet it is equally true that in Craigslist “Free Stuff”, it is the words through which acts of giving and receiving materialize.

Chapter 4 Artistic Context

As an artist and writer, my interest is in the processes, forms and mediums of the digital. My focus on the digital medium has made me particularly sensitive to how technology interweaves and infiltrates into the everyday. This has evolved into my current investigation of how the digital and the physical world mesh in material ways through textual and visual representation. One of the ways I explore the interstices of the digital and

physical is by recontextualizing media, transcoding digital to analogue matter in order to slow down media and to discover their effects on us.

Materializing an online world such as Craigslist is a way to explore the effects of media in our everyday, material world. Craigslist “Free Stuff” that exists by virtue of its “stock” - physical things in the form of used goods that are recirculated through a network - is an ideal digital space to materialize and study how online phenomena are realized in tactile and socially engaging ways.

My work often takes the form of installations based on found materials, objects and text. The activities of my practice involve finding, collecting and documenting found materials along with re-purposing and re-contextualizing them within an artistic context. The use of found text, often re-purposed and re-contextualized into mappings, also figures prominently in my work. My installations often involve a participatory component, which aligns my work historically with socially and politically minded artists of the 1960’s who produced happenings, interventionist events that usually took place within public spaces. My use of Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff” to post the objects being re-given and to announce the participatory event extends from early internet artists who re-purposed digital space to critique or comment on social phenomena.

The following section, divided into these various elements of my practice, “Text and Mapping”; “Art as Documentation”; “Participatory Practices” and “Internet Art Influences” discusses some of the artists and their projects and how they inform and inspire my work.

4.1 Text and Mapping

How I employ language and everyday objects as a material situates my work within Conceptualism that emerged out of a radical shift in art and representation notably through Marcel Duchamp who at the turn of the 20th Century introduced the readymade - the use of common, mass-produced objects to represent ideas rather than expression in art. My examination of language and use of text as visual representation falls within the realm of conceptual art and language in which the idea is more important than the art object and words are the primary medium. A contemporary artist that I have an affinity with is Mel Bochner and his use of text as visual representation in which the words become the work itself, be it a painting, drawing or light installation. For instance, his piece titled Language is Not Transparent (1969) transfers the words that also serve as the title of the work by rubber-stamping them onto graph paper (Fig. 35). Both the physical act of stamping onto the surface of the paper and the materiality of the ink and paper transform the words into a tactile medium. I think that the tactile effects that result from my transferring rubbings of text onto the cardboard boxes may be compared to Bochner's.

Text along with a visual rendering of the spatial details of the exchanges are also incorporated in the form of mappings. Kevin Lynch, a renowned urban planner and writer who is esteemed for his innovative theories concerning the sustainability and values of everyday human environments is a source of knowledge and inspiration on how I conceptualize the mappings that I produce. Specifically, towards the way in which I map

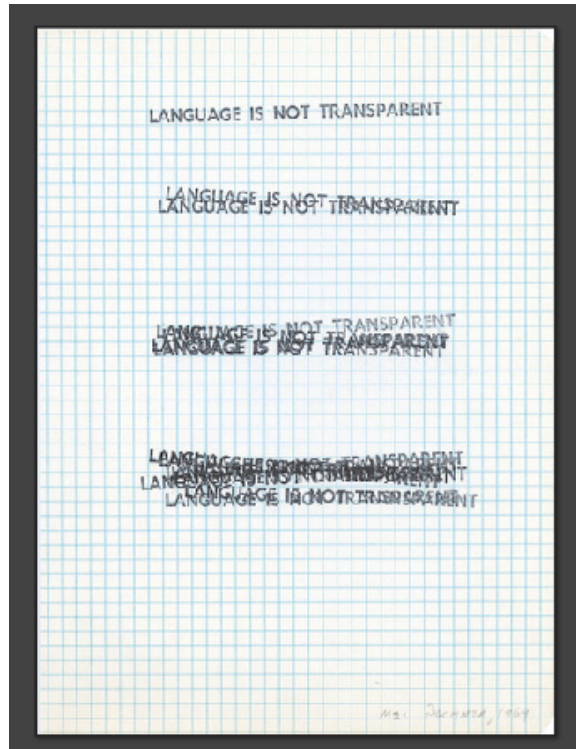


Fig. 35 Rubber stamp on graph paper (9.75 X 7.125 inches). Bochner, Mel. Language is Not Transparent, 1969, used by permission, Mel Bochner. May 20, 2010.

<<http://www.melbochner.net/>>

my own recollected experiences of the free transactions, transcribing the micro movements and observations that define the spatial aspects of the one-on-one exchanges. I am especially informed by Lynch's use of mapping that describes everyday human habitats and movements that often take on a personal dimension - everything from a layout plan of his own vegetable garden to his early travel journals completed during a one year residency (1952 - 1953) in which he visited the cities of Florence, Venice and Rome. During his time visiting the cities, Lynch recorded his experiences in a detailed log and mapped the micro-elements and flows of his journeys. Elements such as dogs on a street, traffic and gates are

evidenced in the maps.

Other artists such as Denis Wood, a DIY cartographer who is also an artist, writer and teacher, inform the way I consider mapping as a way to visually document the everyday and unveiling the more hidden social spaces or phenomenon. Wood's atlas project which he began in the mid-1970's and titled Dancing and Singing: A Narrative Atlas of Boylan Heights, is an extensive mapping of his neighbourhood of Raleigh, North Carolina and is described as containing "diverse examples of creative place-inspired maps, including maps of night, crime, fences, graffiti, textures, autumn leaves, routes, the underground, lines overhead, stars and jack-o-lanterns" (Fig. 36). Wood describes one of the goals for his mappings in the atlas as mapping the "particular":

"Certainly we wanted to use the mapping to help us figure out what a neighborhood was, but we also wanted to use the mapping as a kind of organizational tool, as a way of bringing the neighborhood together and helping it to see itself. ... I wanted the atlas to read almost like a novel." Through what he considers the narrative structure of atlases, he advocated "making explicit what is usually implicit." (Wood qtd. in Krygler)

He further adds: "The atlas was going to be three sections, corresponding to what we'd decided neighborhoods did. This was to transform universal stuff – things in general – into particular things, into the ding an sich. And vice versa." (Wood qtd. in Krygler)

Their idea of mapping jack-o-lanterns and autumn leaves is about mapping the

ephemerality of the everyday that in the rush of modern life often goes unnoticed. I think that my mapping of the everyday gestures of “unrecognized producers” - people who give their used goods to strangers – work in similar ways, revealing what would otherwise remain largely concealed or at least, unrecognized.

4.2 Art as Documentation

The activities of collecting, storing and archiving found objects place my practice within the field of art as documentation in which the lines between art, research and archive are often blurred. In particular, my work involves gathering text and visual information that are recontextualized and presented in an art gallery context to produce a critical space of discourse around a particular subject; in the case of the thesis project, around a social world.

Historically, my use of mundane, everyday materials or excess detritus extends from a period of mid-twentieth century artists such as Robert Rauschenberg who used trash and debris in sculptural works he called “Combines”, as a response to the commodified world in which the body, thought and spirit itself were up for grabs. My interest in people’s used goods that end up in Craigslist is a similar response to mass consumption and commoditization.

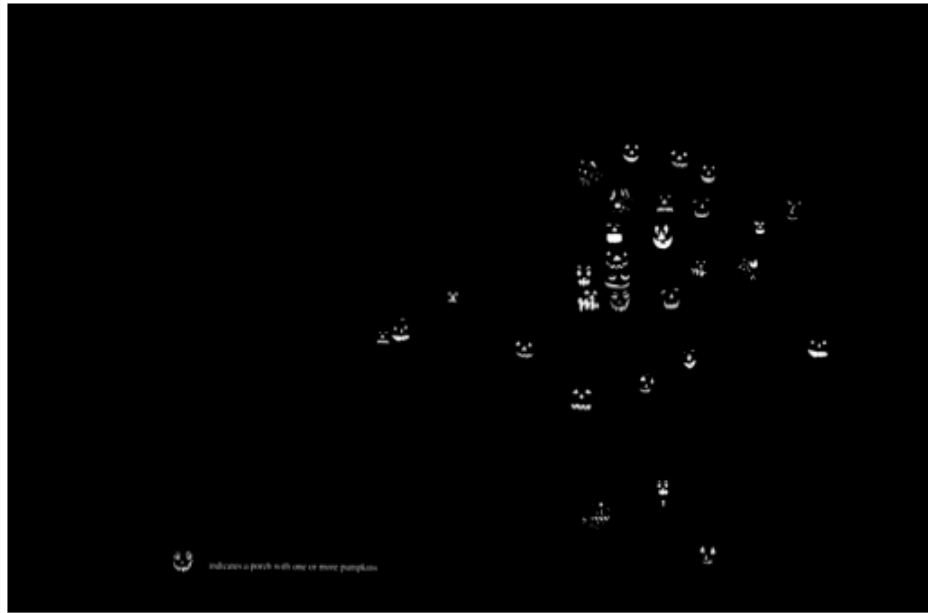


Fig. 36 Screenshot of Jack-o-lantern map (pumpkins on porches distributed within a neighborhood). Wood, Denis, Jack-o-lantern map, 2008, used by copyright license, Creative Commons, (<https://creativecommons.net/>), Making Maps. May 20, 2010. <<http://makingmaps.net/2008/01/10/denis-wood-a-narrative-atlas-of-boylan-heights>>



Fig. 37 Installation at the Offenses, Kulturhaus, Linz. Bott, Karsten. One of Each, 1993, used by permission, Karsten Bott. 15 March 2010. <http://edu.warhol.org/app_bott.html>

Contemporaneously, I identify with artists who collect everyday objects and present them as readymades in the form of a document. Artists include Cathy Busby and Karsten Bott who collect and re-present data and objects gathered from social worlds. Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska and their collecting of everyday objects to examine values and materiality are also important influences.

4.21 One of Each, (1993) Karsten Bott

In his installation *One of Each*, Karsten Bott presented everyday objects, both new and used on the floor of a gallery space, and grouped them according to his own archiving system (Fig. 37). I'm interested in his work because of the way he subverts the archive to offer fresh relationships to everyday objects. He challenges the conventional categories of use of the objects by placing them into ambiguous spaces. While I share in the way he co-opts the archive and museological space to expand new meaning in everyday, banal objects, I differ in the way I categorize objects according to the way they are offered whereas he archives them according to use. I also differ in the way that I represent the materiality of objects. As opposed to presenting them in full view which he does by setting them out on the floor of a gallery space. I prefer to represent them in a less direct fashion through the ways in which language and texts operate in their offering.

4.22 Capital (2001) and other projects, Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska

“Most of our material world, like the iceberg, lies beneath the threshold of our comprehension.” (Cummings qtd. in Cummings and Lewandowska_9)

Two artists whose work explores similar ideas to my own around materiality and value(s) of everyday objects are Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska. Their projects often assemble objects, presenting them as information spaces.

Their studio is described as a “space set aside not for the making of objects but for their study and speculation” (Cummings and Lewandowska_9). These artists collected an assortment of everyday items like plastic toys, children’s toys and old kitchen utensils, removing them from their original context. The ways in which they “staged” these objects in their studio was a way of ordering them in particular ways for the purposes of examining how value(s) change according to use, context and the way they are distributed (i.e. exchanged) (9). Their work also engages with the “connections and meanings vested in objects through their associations and relationships” (7). I share this perspective towards galleries and consider my work functioning within the gallery space as expanding this “hub” into new audiences.

With their project, Capital (2001) I am interested in how they explored the act of gift and exchange within a discursive art context, producing printed matter as objects to give to audiences. As part of the Contemporary Interventions program at the Tate Modern (2001)

that offered annual commissions for artists to “comment on the core practice of the museum,” Capital is described as “an artwork, ... triggered by an act of giving” (7). Through the project, which developed over a few years, the artists produced a variety of research materials, which they used to engage ideas of giving within a museum context. Specifically they were interested in juxtaposing the Tate and another British institution, the Bank of England, in order to delineate a new territory between the two, making “visible their operations, systems and secrets” (12). They took photographs of the two British powerhouses both “established by the act of giving” and assembled them together with archival material and commissioned texts (13). Together these materials were brought together into a limited edition book which was given to visitors to the Tate by a gallery official. Some of the questions the artists wished to provoke through this gesture was: “What does it mean to give and receive in these circumstances? What is asked for in return? What value can be given to the work of art and what values or meanings will it gather or discard, as it moves from the gallery and into the wider world of its new owner?” The importance of the gesture in their project is described as such: “*Capital*, the gift, is thus a gesture as much as a thing” (13).

Two of their projects that I find comparable to the way I use the everyday objects as an archival index into a social world, are Lost Property (1998) and Stock List (1951) (Documents 2000).

Lost Property (1996) is a book documenting things that people lost and were picked up by the Transport Lost Property Office over the course of one day (Fig. 38). Even though

the items were a mix of people's lost belongings, they effected meaning as a collection out of a "shared experience". Because there was no way of knowing the identity of those who used to own these belongings, the objects themselves were able to resonate, not as individual possession, but through a subjectless experience of how we emotionally invest in objects.

The artists represented Stock List (1951) as an existing archive of the Design Council comprised of products and machinery chosen to "promote officially endorsed British design". The artists described this archive of objects as "'an extraordinary poem to materiality composed by Britain's post-war ruling classes'" (10).



Fig. 38 Front and back covers of the publication, Lost Property. Cummings, Neil and Marysia Lewandowska. Lost Property, 1996, used by copyright license, Creative Commons ShareAlike 2.5 Generic (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/>). Chance Projects: an archive of the collaborative work of artists Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska. 1995-2008. 14 March 2010.

<<http://www.chanceprojects.com/node/12>>

What I find engaging about both Lost Property and the artists' representation of Stock List (Documents 2000) is how they assemble collections of objects or materials from social worlds or phenomena and represent them as a direct material index through an archive form.

4.23 The North End (2006 - 2007), Cathy Busby

Another artist who works in the form of the archive as an index to community or social phenomena, is Canadian artist, Cathy Busby who explores social worlds by collecting materials produced within it or by documenting it herself for source materials. She then uses these materials to produce printed matter in the form of books that she gives away or sells in limited edition copies.

For instance, in the project The North End (2006 - 2007), Busby gathered posters promoting music art and political events in her neighborhood, the North End of Halifax, and reproduced them into book form (Fig. 39). She describes the ephemeral and transient text and graphics of the posters as “markers of this lively community” (Busby). In another version, she papered the walls of a gallery with the actual posters that she initially gathered on her walks through her neighborhood. She describes her artwork as “installations and printed matter that are concerned with the way language influences attitudes and action” (Busby).

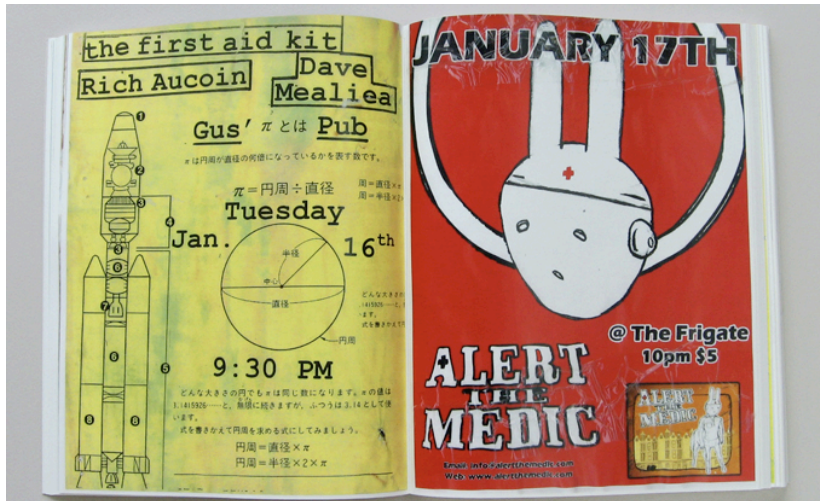


Fig. 39 Busby, Cathy. The North End Vol II, 2006 - 2007, used by permission, Cathy Busby. Art Metropole, Toronto, 2007. 14 March 2010.
<http://www.cathybusby.ca/northend_toronto.php>

Like The North End, Craigslist Vancouver’s “Free Stuff” network is also a social world except that it exists online. I find connections with Busby through the ways I represent this world as a living archive based on gathering and documenting textual fragments of people’s postings and the physical goods offered through Craigslist. However, rather than solely preserving the original content of the found text, I reformulate by playing with the written and spoken languages of the transactions. I also reproduce the found postings and images into different mediums (e.g. paper and cardboard boxes).

4.3 Participatory Practices

The nature of participatory practices often calls upon artists to take upon a variety of

roles in the work. Through the research and execution of the free exchange both in the field and eventually in the gallery space, I take on a multiplicity of roles in the work. By setting up a situation for the free transaction to take place, I consider my role a facilitator. An artist who comes to mind is Joseph Beuys who opened the way art can be used to produce social action. I find Miwon Kwon's description of how the shifting roles of artists from maker of things to facilitator of exchange particularly apt in this context: "The artist as an overspecialized aesthetic object maker has been anachronistic for a long time already, What they provide now, rather than produce, are aesthetic, often 'critical-artistic services'" (qtd. in de Oliveira, Oxley, Petry 108). If there are services that I provide through the installation, it may be the facilitation of re/giving people's unwanted goods to an/other. By re-giving the used objects, my role expands the circle of giving beyond the initial two people, which according to Hyde marks the true quality of the circulatory nature of a gift.

I am interested in opening up the gallery to different audiences and to bringing in the everydayness of popular culture into the gallery, thereby blurring the line between art and life. This intent is rooted in the early 20th century avant-garde movement, that challenged the ideas of what art is by cleaving open its realization beyond the exhibition of objects into the ephemeral terrain of performance and events. What grew out of this newly charged space were happenings led by artists such as Allan Kaprow who during the late fifties and sixties most notably in New York city used props and public participation to realize theatrical events in public open spaces that followed either planned or open-ended scripts and left no traces except their documentation (Lynton 319). I believe my work is located within this territory that is still charged with potential to disrupt the familiar systems that in

the context of this work are those of monetary exchange and the anonymity that accompanies such transactions.

Historically, participatory practices owe a great debt to German artist Joseph Beuys for his use of the everyday (both objects and situations) and the participatory nature of his projects. His work was driven by his belief in the rights of the everyday individual and was often critical of the inequalities of capitalism. Most of all, he believed that each and every one of us possess creativity but it is how we use it to the benefit of society, that makes the difference.

In Wirtschaftswerte, Beuys employs art to stage everyday interventions. The work is an installation of mostly packaged foodstuffs along with everyday, functional items stored on metal shelves in an L formation in a gallery. He signed these products raising them to status of art. Through the title, “Wirtschaftswerte”, (meaning economic value) he carved out a discursive space in the gallery that produced an alternative economy to the capital economy. “By dint of his particular economy, the concept of art was also extended beyond traditional barriers of privilege into the direction of social processes” (Schaffner 263).

I share in Beuys belief in the creative production of the everyday individual despite the dominating systems of capitalism that are predicated on mass consumption. I believe art can potentially produce a shift in perspective and it would please me if the used objects that I collect, re-present and give away within a gallery context could offer a way of considering the object as individual forms of production within the social. In other words, it

is about recognizing the individual producers within these social economies and how ultimately these spaces depend on the trust between strangers. It is about valuing connections with people we do not know even if these engagements are only temporary.

4.4 Internet Art Influences

I locate my work within internet art through the kinds of interventionist tactics that artists use to mark a new and different kind of terrain that was meant to rupture established, hegemonic spaces, especially those of commodity and ideological systems. Internet art itself is indebted to the interventionist art forms of Happenings, land art and mail art of the 60's and 70's that strived in some ways to open up new terrain for social connectivity across networks, that were often rogue and rhizomatic in nature.

4.41 Blackness for Sale (2001), Keith Obadike

One such internet-based project that compares to my re-purposing of online space for the exploration of social practices, is Keith Obadike's work, Blackness for Sale (2001) in which he sells his blackness through the shopping site Ebay (Fig. 40). This was an interventionist into an online space to bring attention to the commodification and marketing-based valuation of blackness. His posting was removed in less than week by Ebay management for violating vending rules (Greene 185).

While Obadike's work differs significantly in theme from my work, the way in which

the artist aims to create interventionist spaces into eBay can be comparable to my own tactics of making interventions into social networking sites such as Craigslist and Polyvore.

A full citation of the original source of the material, Figure 40 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed is a screenshot of the “product” details (item description, price, time of offer) of Keith Obadike’s Blackness for Sale (2001) item as it appeared on eBay, an online shopping site where he launched the work.

Fig 40. Obadike, Keith. Blackness for Sale. 2001. March 14, 2010.

<<http://obadike.tripod.com/ebay.html>>

4.42 King’s Cross Phone In (1994), Heath Bunting

A work that materializes digital into physical space is Heath Bunting’s King’s Cross Phone In (1994) in which he set up timed events where people made telephone calls into public telephone booths around London King’s Cross station whose numbers were listed on a website. The result was a participatory and collaborative telephone conversation in the physical location of square. It was about “replacing a passive consumption medium (the website) with engaged response (making a call, chatting with a stranger)” (34 Greene).

This interventionist tactic is really about a remapping of terrain which is an important form within digital technology: “Indeed, the contemporary proliferation of experimental mapping can be seen as a convergence of several factors: an interest in engaging particular institutions and phenomena; the development of sophisticated data-processing tools that make these engagements possible; a trajectory away from the internet medium as a focus, towards tactics; and a desire to create representations that can shape and visualize emergent

collectivities and territories, since as Jean Baudrillard suggested, ‘the map recedes the territory’” (Greene 181 - 182).

At this juncture when mass media communication seems to be all-pervasive in our physical world, materializing the online social world of Craigslist into physical space seems important and valuable. In a sense this may be seen as a mapping of physical space based on a social world that exists online. Perhaps it’s a way of claiming the experience of the real, only this time, the real is that which exists online.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

“... to emerge from self, to give, freely and obligatory. We run no risk of disappointment.”

(Mauss 71)

My aim with the thesis and project is to explore the social world of Craigslist Vancouver “Free Stuff”, studying its everyday language and used objects that circulate through its online network. One of the central questions that I examine through the study of the postings and my partaking in the free transactions are the kinds of value(s) that emerge through these acts of giving. Another way of posing the same question is: What motivates people to give away their used possessions to strangers?

I have found that there are emergent values such as generosity, thrift and fairness that are revealed through the ways people give their used belongings to strangers. By studying the mediation of these used objects through the visual and textual language of the postings and the dialogue exchanged in the interactions with givers, I examine these values. I found that value(s) emerge through ways of giving that may be socially engaging, even forming temporary bonds between strangers. I shared my experiences of Craigslist "Free Stuff" by presenting some of the objects that I received along with the excerpted language of postings and dialogue with givers through a participatory installation that is part document and part event.

What initially intrigued me about Craigslist “Free Stuff” is the brokenness and

decrepit quality of the things being offered for free and the possibility of revaluating the object through giving. I wanted to offer a way to reconsider these nearly discarded things not within the dominating systems of capital consumption but through individual forms of consumption and singular forms of production. These are the everyday practices that people use to carve out their own spaces prescribed not by dominating systems but by individual creativity, what de Certeau calls the tactics of use. This idea is central to the ways in which the thesis re-positions the object into something worthy of our attention, examining the gestures of their giving and the values that are revealed through these free offerings. However, no matter what kinds of values are transacted through their giving, I find that mostly what motivates people to give away their used goods is a chance to redeem the excess of consumption. Part of this redemption requires the reliance on strangers to receive things one no longer wants or needs.

By materializing the online world of Craigslist “Free Stuff”, the individual tactics of consumption realized through the giving of one's used possessions are brought to light through mappings and text that describe these transactions. What would otherwise be unrecognized or unmapped is articulated into mappings of private, mostly domestic spaces that are at once familiar yet also unknown. These mappings could be considered new forms of knowing or micro-ontologies that generate micro-effects that exist on the margins of cultural discourse. The everyday language that people use in their postings to describe their unwanted goods tell how they position their offerings and how they feel about the excess of consumption. It may even reveal how they value the other. When one participates in the transactions, taking the risk to enter strangers' homes and to meet givers face-to-face,

deeper layers unfold. Within these folds are the particular circumstances of everyday lives through which the unwritten and unrecorded consumption and use of things by individuals are revealed.

The initial question of my research around value(s) leads into another question concerning what is at stake in these offers. I realize that through my own role as both receiver and re-giver of these objects that the answer lays in the larger framework of trust in the other, the stranger. There are further implications of this trust that have to do with a sense of belonging and what constitutes the meaning of community. Could less organized, spontaneous meetings between strangers that occur in unpredictable, risky spaces such as those that exist in the Craigslist "Free Stuff" network be valued as formations of community? Perhaps this question is especially relevant in urban environments where populations are more mobile, anonymity prevails and communities tend to coalesce around more formalized gatherings around special interests such as industry events, community forums, festivals and charity events.

Reflecting on the outcome of the final project, I feel I can more adequately address these complex and open-ended questions around the value of trust and community. At the re/given event that constituted part of the final project, I offered eight objects that I had collected, mapping their transactions in the boxes that contained them. I was present to meet and to personally give away the objects to receivers. During the week preceding the event, people responded to the Craigslist posting that I had made, sending me email and expressing interest in some of the objects. The offers were made on a "first come, first

served basis" and so people could only receive the objects if they came to the gallery at the prescribed date and time. By the end of the three hour event, I had met three different people and given away three out of the eight objects. My relations with the receivers were quite pleasant and I found that the objects acted as a social conduit through which strangers could comfortably divulge something about themselves. For instance, the receiver of the IBM Selectric typewriter was a fourteen-year-old who revealed to me that he owns two other typewriters that he takes to school. I asked him why he took a typewriter and not a laptop to school and he replied by saying that computers with their multifunctional access to the internet and email were too distracting.

The installation also opened up other avenues of inquiry that, although not central to the thesis, are worth addressing. For instance, I am interested in how presenting these used objects and text in a gallery context may upgrade their value as artistic representation. I am also curious to know how facilitating the free offerings in an artistic context may extend the questions around giving and trust towards the value of art as social document and event.

Following the *re/given* event, I had left some cards that announced the event. This effectively made the condition of offering associated with the remaining objects somewhat ambiguous. The gallery sitter informed me that in the days following the event, people asked if they could take the objects. One person did take a pair of Wellgo pedals, and as the other receivers who attended the event had done previously, left a signed card in the box that had contained the object. I was slightly surprised but also delighted that somebody was willing to take the risk of taking away an object from a gallery, especially since I wasn't

present and there was a sign at the front desk telling people not to touch objects in the gallery.

The fact that another object was taken after the official event, may reveal the uncertain nature of ownership of free goods and that the perceived value of these objects as abject goods may not have changed. Could this state of the abject translate into a greater likelihood that they would be taken? I think so. On the other hand, the objects when displayed in boxes along with the mappings of their receiving, provoked a curiosity among visitors to examine them slowly and up-close. I believe that this attention does elevate the abject beyond their apparent worthlessness and instead as objects that are embedded with value(s) through their exchange.

As an artist and researcher my practice is situated in the arena of social practices and involves collecting objects, documenting these everyday acts of giving and receiving and inviting the public to take part in their exchange. Through these ways, I hope to reveal the "unrecognized producers" who employ the tactics of free exchange to re-circulate and redeem their cast-aways. Another intention of my project is to offer ways to re-imagine the abject beyond that of used commodities and rather as consumption that is productive within the social. What is unveiled through the social relations between giver and receiver, therefore, are emergent value(s) that are often carried by the singular and micro-stories that are exchanged.

How we may reevaluate excess and the abject within a social discourse articulated

through the objects and their exchange with the other may also be considered one of the fruitful outcomes of giving. I like to believe that these gestures of giving mean that wastage is not put aside, forgotten or discarded but that they point to a willingness to be responsible and accountable for the things we produce and consume. I also believe that the recycling of our unwanted possessions through trust and connection with strangers, even if these connections are temporary, is to be valued.

Community or a sense of community may also be produced through the random and chance connections that can be made with other people we do not know and perhaps not even have a strong affinity with. Community is not just the formal ritualized gatherings that in capitalistic, more affluent societies tend to be more entrenched within political and economic interests. I think community could be transitory and immediate, gathering and dissipating. Perhaps the givers and receivers on Craigslist Vancouver "Free Stuff" do not so much form a community but through the acts of giving generate potential formations of community, producing a sense of coming together and general belonging to society. It involves stepping out from the comfort zone of our individual and personal spaces and entering into the unknown and risky relations of strangers.

These encounters may be thought of as the everyday practices of trust in the other that become part of these larger networks and relations that constitute community. I think social relations are reliant on these ephemeral connections. These temporary bonds may simultaneously serve as reminders that how we give to strangers is how we give to society at large. Ultimately, what is at stake is our reliance and trust in the other that can produce a

sense of community and belonging. These connections, immediate or more lasting, reevaluate and even redeem the abject through the other in these everyday practices. These are the tactics of consumption by individuals, valued for these reasons and therefore worthy of our attention.

Works Cited

- “Artists Past and Present: Karsten Bott”, The Andy Warhol Museum, a Museum of Carnegie Institute. 2006 – 2009. 24 Feb 2009,
<http://edu.warhol.org/app_bott.html>
- Baudrillard, Jean. The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1998.
- Brown, Bill. A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Busby, Cathy. The North End Vol. II, 2007. Art Metropole, Toronto. 18 Jan 2010.
<http://www.cathybusby.ca/northend_toronto.php>
- Cummings, Neil and Marysia Lewandowska. Capital: A project by Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska. London: Tate Publishing, 2001.
- de Certeau, Michel. The Practice of Everyday Life. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- De Oliveira, Nicolas, Nicola Oxley and Michael Petry. Installation Art in the New Millennium: The Empire of the Senses. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003.
- Duchamp, Marcel. “The Creative Act.” Session on the Creative Act. Convention of the American Federation of Arts. Houston, Texas: (April 1957) 02 March 2010.
<www.cathystone.com/Duchamp_Creative%20Act.pdf>

- Greene, Rachel. Internet Art. London; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004.
- Henderson, L. Dalrymple. Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Hyde, Lewis. The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World. New York: Vintage Books, 2007.
- Hyde, Lewis. Trickster Makes this World: Mischief, Myth, and Art. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.
- Krygler, John. "Denis Wood: A Narrative Atlas of Boylan Heights." 10 January 2008. Making Maps: DIY Cartography: Resources and Ideas for Making Maps. 8 May 2010. < <http://makingmaps.net/2008/01/10/denis-wood-a-narrative-atlas-of-boylan-heights/>>
- Latour, Bruno. "How to Make Things Public." *Atmospheres of Democracy*, MIT Press, 2005: 9 – 11. May 26 2009.
- Leong, Penny. Inside Free. Project blog, Inside Free. February 9, 2010. May 3, 2010. <<http://www.insidefree.org>>
- Lynton, Norbert. The Story of Modern Art. Oxford: Phaidon, 1998.
- Mauss, Marcel. The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies. London: Cohen & West Ltd., 1966.
- Perloff, Marjorie. "The Conceptual Poetics of Marcel Duchamp." *21st-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics*. (2002): 78-114. 23 March 2009. <epc.buffalo.edu/authors/perloff/21/21_duchamp.pdf>

Polyvore. 2007. February 9, 2010.

[<www.polyvore.com>](http://www.polyvore.com)

Schaffner, Ingrid et al, eds. Deep storage: Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art.

Munich; New York: Prestel, 1998.

“Value,” Compact Oxford English Dictionary. 2010. March 23, 2010.

[<http://www.askoxford.com/results/?view=dict&freesearch=value&branch=13842570&textsearchtype=exact](http://www.askoxford.com/results/?view=dict&freesearch=value&branch=13842570&textsearchtype=exact)

Works Consulted

Banerjee, Tridib and Michael Southworth. City Sense and City Design: Writings and Projects by Kevin Lynch. Cambridge: MIT Press. 1996.

Barthes, Roland. The Semiotic Challenge. New York: Hill and Wang, 1988.

Baudrillard, Jean. The System of Objects. London; New York: Verso, 2005.

Bennett, Tony et al, eds. New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Jameson, Fredric. Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.

Molesworth, Helen Anne. Part Object Part Sculpture. Columbus, Ohio: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.

Purves, Ted. What We Want is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005.

Sudjic, Deyan. The Language of Things. London: Allen Lane, 2008.

Wah, Fred. Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity, Critical Writing, Edmonton, Alberta: NeWest Press, 2000.